





Thousands queue for 'hugging saint'

 [Print page](#)  [Email this](#)  [Permalink](#)  [Share](#) 1

By Alison Caldwell

Updated April 12, 2012 20:55:43

Thousands of devotees will be flocking to Melbourne's Sandown racecourse over the next two days for spiritual fulfilment in the arms of India's so-called "hugging saint".

Mata Amritanandamayi is known to her followers as Amma, which means "mother".

Despite being born into an Indian family of untouchables, it is estimated Amma has hugged more than 31 million people around the world.

As part of her visit to Melbourne, Amma is hoping to raise money in support of a humanitarian aid campaign.

She will be hugging people for 20 hours a day in four-hour shifts, and, speaking through a translator, she says she never runs out of energy.

"I'm not like a battery that dies away after being used for some time. I'm eternally connected to the power source," Amma said.

"So until now I could offer myself to people but I don't want to say anything about the future - I live in the present moment."

The 58-year-old spiritual leader was raised in a fishing community in Kerala in southern India, the eldest daughter of a low caste family.

She stopped going to school when she was nine to help raise her siblings. She preferred a life of meditation to marriage and began hugging devotees at a young age.

She founded an ashram in the 1980s, which now receives more than \$30 million a year in foreign donations.

In 1993 she was the president of the centenary parliament of world religions in Chicago and in 2000 she spoke at the United Nations in New York.

"We live in a world where people are becoming more and more addicted to technology and science and it's a quick-fix world," she said.

"So we should not forget the real purpose of life, the real purpose is to experience love and to share it with others, and we should also lovingly consider the people around us, the world, the environment, nature.

"At the same time you should find some time to look within and find who we are.

"We are self-luminous like the sun. We have the power within. We have the capacity to shine like the sun."

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-04-12/thousands-queue-for...>

Dedicated devotees

On Thursday's gathering, Amma's followers sold CDs, DVDs, books and pamphlets, with the money going to her charity, Embracing The World, which has helped build homes for the homeless, medical clinics and orphanages.

"Love must be expressed. Amma says in today's world people find it extremely difficult to express love even though love is our true nature," she said.

The charismatic Amma is not affiliated or aligned with any religious organisation.

Her most devoted followers dress in orange and describe themselves as disciples.

Devotees Siva and his wife Rajes came from New Zealand with their three children to be hugged by Amma.

"When I was just next to Amma I was feeling a lot of vibration, there was a lot of things that I wanted to ask," Siva said.

"Sometimes when we come here we want to say some things to Amma, we want to ask things to Amma but a lot of things just go blank - we already have an answer.

"And I think the last word that I uttered to her was: 'I always have your blessings, Amma'."

Rajes added: "She said 'I love you my child, I love you my child'."

Special energy

The majority of today's gathering were not Indian.

Visitors Michael and his friend Dorotka are from Poland, and just wanted to "pop in".

"We believe in love. And me and my friend because [we had] a day off...decided that it [would] be great to just pop in and have a look," Michael said.

Dorotka says they believe Amma would give them "some special energy".

"We were just waiting in the line to come close and get this special hug," Dorotka said.

After conducting a retreat in Melbourne this weekend, Amma will visit Sydney next week, then Brisbane and the Gold Coast.

She has been visiting Australia since 2004.

Her 2003 trip was cancelled due to the SARS outbreak, a genuine concern for someone who has been known to hug 40,000 people in a day.