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THE SEEKER: In search of truths and Truth

# Hugs all around

Tribune staff report  
Published July 6, 2007

Are hugs an expression of faith?

Millions of people crave and believe in the healing power of a hug. That's why Mata Amritanandamayi, better known as "Amma" or "the hugging saint," draws thousands of followers at appearances, including this week in Oak Brook. Amma blesses each member of her audience with a healing embrace.

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It is estimated that the holy woman has given more than 26 million hugs in this role since she was a teen. She has received and hugged more than 40,000 people in a single sitting. She does not turn people away or charge a fee. And she does not require recipients to abide by her Hindu faith.

"There is no harm in having many religions and faiths," she has said. "But it is harmful to think they are different, and that one faith is higher and another lower."

In a speech to the United Nations in 1995, Amma described the real source of world conflict as "lack of awareness of our true nature."

Her humanitarian efforts include more than hugs. With official NGO non-governmental organization status granted by the United Nations, Amma oversees aid to the needy and educational institutions for the underprivileged.

Mother's Kitchen, the North American arm of Amma's charity, runs soup kitchens in more than 30 American cities including Chicago.

If you need a hug, you can catch Amma on Friday at the Oak Brook Hills Marriott Resort, 3500 Midwest Rd. in Oak Brook. Morning sessions begin at 10 a.m. and last through the afternoon. Evening sessions begin at 7:30



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p.m. and last into the night.

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