

**THE AGE**

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## **Thousands line up to hug Indian holy woman**

**by Victoria Gurvich**

Hugging is certainly something Mata Amritanandamayi has mastered.

Known as Ammachi, or Amma, her followers say she has hugged many millions of people around the world and last week she was in Melbourne hugging several thousand more.

Revered by many as a living saint and an Indian holy woman, she has been coming to Australia since late the 1980's and last week's venue was Melbourne's Kingston City Hall.

Ammachi has started many charitable projects in India. She is the head of an international charitable trust that provides medical services, education and pensions for destitute women.

She travels the world giving her legendary hugs to spread love and compassion.

The diminutive woman of 48 waded through the Kingston City Hall on her way to the stage with a radiant smile, which barely left her face all night.

After speeches, music and meditation, queues formed. Ammachi sat on a comfortable chair and strangers knelt before her to receive her darshan, or healing hug.

She spent several seconds with each person, often whispering into their ears. Many were visibly moved by the experience; some were in tears.

Asked by The Age why she hugs people, Ammachi, who speaks little English, said through Swami Amritaswarupananda, the question was like asking why the sun shines, or a river flows.

Humanity lives for love, she said, and life is for love. Only by sharing love can we awaken or can our awareness level grow. Asked if she ever tires of hugging, Ammachi said that in more than 30 years of hugging, she has never cancelled a program because where there is love there is no exhaustion.

Peter Button, 69, and his wife Anne, 58, from the Basin, attended the Wednesday program.

He said it was a great experience to find a person prepared to give love to anybody and everybody.

She said: "There seems to be so much strife in the world at the moment, it seemed like a nice thing to come and join with a whole lot of people and express love and peace".

**(Courtesy of The Age) [www.theage.com.au](http://www.theage.com.au)**