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Mother of a saintly hug that's one in 11 million

by Helen Pitt – Religious Affairs Writer

The Hindu spiritualist Ammachi must have hugged more than 11 million people.

She added more than 100,000 to her hug tally this year on her 43rd birthday, when devotees from across the world make a pilgrimage to her fishing village home in southern India.

This weekend, more than 3,000 Sydneysiders joined the queue for one of the trademark bear hugs from the woman known as a saint in India.

Ammachi was at North Sydney Girls' High School as part of a 10-day tour – her sixth - to Australia. Her hugs, known as “darshan”, are a Hindu blessing said to have restorative powers for spiritual healing. “The hug is like any relationship – it is direct physical contact”, one of her followers, Mr James Conquest, a Melbourne barrister, said.

Ammachi, or “Mother” as she is known to her followers, radiates warmth and understanding, and her hugs are a transferral of that warmth according to Mr Conquest.

“Her message for Westerners is she can help us have some degree of calmness of mind to help us be happy and useful people”, he said. The “back to basics” approach preached by Mata Amritanandamayi as she is known in India is said to be the essence of compassion.

She will continue her tour on the Gold Coast today and in Melbourne later in the week.

(Courtesy of The Sydney Morning Herald) www.smh.com.au