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Some articles use the masculine pronoun when referring to God, in keeping with convention and to avoid the clumsiness of constructions such as 'He or She' or 'Him or Her.'

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Value of Time

Children, we live in a frenetic age. We barely have time to catch our breath as we rush from one task to another.

“Don’t just sit idle. Do something!” Since childhood, we have heard our parents and teachers say this. But the time has now come for us to think, “Why not sit still for a while instead of doing something?”

Excessive speed in anything kills its beauty. It is like forcibly opening the petals of a rosebud; we will only rob it of its fragrance and beauty.

Most of the things we pursue will not give us happiness. Not only that, they will take away whatever happiness we had. Some people come with their families to the beach to watch the sunset, but spend their time chatting on their mobile phones instead. Hence, they are not able to appreciate the beauty of the ocean or the glory of the sunset.

Even at home, many people spend their time on Facebook, and neglect to look at the faces of their wife or children sitting right beside them.

The wife might be sad over something or the children might be feeling troubled, but the husband or father will not have the time even to look at their faces.

Once, when a man returned home from work, he saw his five-year-old son waiting for him. The boy asked, "Dad, how much do you earn for one hour's work?"

The man replied, "Three hundred rupees."

"Dad, please give me ₹200!"

Thinking that his son wanted the money for a new toy, the father became irritated. "I don't have time for your childish nonsense. Don't speak another word to me!"

The son silently went inside his room and closed the door.

After a while, the father felt that he ought to have been

more loving and patient with his son. He opened the door to his son's room and asked, "Son, have you slept?"

"No, dad, I haven't."

"Hope you're not feeling sad because I became angry with you earlier. Here's the ₹200 you asked for. Son, why do you need this money?"

The boy's face lit up with joy. He took out a hundred-rupee note from under his pillow. Holding out ₹300 to his father, he said, "Dad, here's ₹300. Will you please spend an hour with me?"

In the midst of your busy life, do not forget to look at the world around you. Share some love, kindness and joy with your family, friends and colleagues. Live in the present moment. Enjoy life.



In the midst of your busy life, do not forget to look at the world around you. Share some love, kindness and joy with your family, friends and colleagues.

Who Recognizes Divinity?

by swami amritageetananda
puri



In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna declares,

*avajananti mam mudhab
manushim tanumasbri-
tam*

*param bhavam-ajananto
mama bhutamabeshvar-
am*

The dim-witted fail to recognize me when I assume a human body. They do not realize my supreme nature as the Lord of all created beings. (9.11)

Many years ago, when Amma and the ashram residents went to Mathura, the birthplace of Lord Krishna, we visited the very prison where Mother Devaki had given birth to the Lord. There was a priest there, holding a floral garland. When she reached him, Amma bent her head down so that the priest could garland her. I was right behind Amma. In spite of my gesturing to him, he did not garland Amma, who then walked on. He tried to garland me just because I was a sanniyasi. I brushed him aside and followed Amma, saddened and irritated by the priest's foolishness. Though he was seated at the very spot where Sri Krishna had been born, he had obviously not gained either enough *punya* (spiritual merit) or mental purity to recognize divinity in flesh and blood! That is why the Lord says that the deluded majority do not recognize God in a human form.

That year, during Amma's programs in New Delhi, a few

of the ashram's senior swamis and I went to the venue early to arrange Amma's reception. While waiting for Amma to arrive, I noticed an elderly gentleman among those who had gathered to chant Vedic mantras to welcome Amma. He approached me and asked me a few questions about Amma, and I answered him as best as I could. When Amma arrived, this gentleman started to lead the chanting. The procession made its way to the stage. I sat in the first row of the audience; the gentleman sat next to me. He observed Amma closely for some time. Suddenly, he seemed to lose all self-control and started crying out, "*Amma, Amma, Taya!*" The volunteers came running and tried to remove him. But he calmed down and said, "Don't think I've gone crazy!" He then said, "You see a dark woman in a white sari, but I see Kamakshi-amman¹


.....
¹ Mother Kamakshi, a form of the goddess enshrined in the Kamakshi Temple.

wearing a red sari, gold ornaments on her hands and neck, and a crown on her head, the same Divine Mother I've been worshipping for 30 years!"

On another occasion, we were at Tatanagar in Jamshedpur for Amma's program. There was a morning program at a Hanuman temple situated on top of a hillock. Halfway up the hillock, there was a Kamakshi-amman temple. While Amma was giving darshan at the Hanuman temple, members of the Kamakshi-amman temple committee came to see Amma and requested her to grace their temple with a visit. Amma agreed to go there after her darshan ended in the Hanuman temple. A few of us went to help the Kamakshi-amman temple group prepare to receive Amma.

Amma arrived. I was standing on the right side of the priest who was worshipping the idol of Kamakshi-amman with flowers. Amma

and her followers were walking towards the idol from the left side of the priest. When Amma reached the shrine, the priest continued chanting mantras but started offering flowers at Amma's feet instead of the idol. Needless to say, those in Amma's group were delighted by this sight. Later, we learnt that the temple committee members had been annoyed with the priest for offering flowers at Amma's feet and demanded an explanation. He joyfully said, "I was chanting mantras and offering flowers to the idol of Kamakshi-amman when I saw Amma walking towards me. When she came near me, I saw Kamakshi-amman herself standing beside me in flesh and blood. Thrilled by this vision, I offered flowers to the original Kamakshi-amman instead of her idol."

Those who have done enough worship with faith and devotion can see the divine form of Amma. 



SATSANG

Surrender

by Br. Mukundamrita Chaitanya

The *Bhagavad Gita* explains succinctly how one may gain Self-knowledge.

*tadviddhi pranipatena pariprasnena sevaya
upadeksyanti te jnanam jnaninastva-
darshinab*

By humbly submitting to the wise, by asking them questions, and by serving them, they, who have realized the Truth, will impart wisdom to you. (4.34)

The *Mundakopaniṣad* hints at the fullness of Self-knowledge:

*kaṣmin nu bhagavo vijñate
sarvam idaṁ vijñatam
bhavati iti.*

What is that, knowing
which, everything
becomes known? (1.1.13)

Lord Krishna also declares,

*na hi jñanena saḍrśham
pavitramiḥa vidyate*

In this world, there is
nothing as purifying as
divine knowledge.

(*Bhagavad Gita*, 4.38)

The Guru imparts knowledge that cannot be taught. Through silence, she imparts what cannot be explained by words. Only a disciple who is humble, dedicated and surrendered can receive this knowledge. To awaken that knowledge, the disciple should have an inner tuning with the Guru.

In the *Mahabharata*, Ekalavya learnt archery from his master Dronacharya in this way. He made an idol of his

Guru, worshipped it, and was able to master all the intricacies and techniques of archery without even once interacting physically with his master. If we truly love our Guru, all knowledge will flow into us. If we have humility, dedication and purity, we will receive the Guru's grace. A toddler is surrendered to its mother; it understands that it can do nothing without its mother's help. What the Guru does is to shatter the false notion that we can accomplish certain things through our skill. She helps us realize that we can do nothing by our will alone.

Anything of the external world can be taught and learned. But only a Guru can bestow knowledge of eternity. The Guru does so in silence; through long contemplation and meditation, the disciple understands her teachings.

When a spiritual master was asked who his relatives were, he said,

satyam mata pita jñanam

*dharmo bhrata daya sakha
shantih patni kshama
putrah shadete mama
bandhavah*

Truth is my mother,
knowledge is my father,
righteousness is my
brother, mercy is my
friend, calmness
(peacefulness) is my wife,
and forgiveness, my son.
These six are my near
and dear ones.

These are also the qualities that a spiritual aspirant must cultivate. Divine knowledge dawns only in righteous hearts. The disciple should be humble enough so that the river of knowledge flowing from the Guru reaches him. More than physically prostrating before her, what matters is the state of a disciple's mind; that is the truest offering at the Guru's feet.

The disciple can tap into the wisdom of the Guru through humble queries. From the question, the Guru can under-

stand the disciple's state of mind. She can then remove his negativities and lead him to the right path. That is why many of the Hindu scriptural texts are in the form of dialogues between master and disciple. Gradually, the disciple becomes elevated to the Guru's plane.

Years ago, an engineering graduate asked Amma, "Is there a God?"

Amma replied, "It is like asking (with the use of one's tongue) whether the tongue exists. Son, what is it that you seek?"

The young man replied, "If there is a God, I'm so angry with him that I want to kill him!"

"Why?" asked Amma.

"In this world, millions of people are suffering from disease and poverty while others enjoy good health and wealth. Every being in the creation is food for another in the food chain. How cruel the world is! I'm so angry with God, whose

creation is so cruel, that I want to kill him!”

Amma said, “Amma likes you very much. You are not angry with God for selfish reasons but because of compassion for others. God doesn’t punish anyone. It is we who punish ourselves. It is the wrong thoughts we have and wrong actions that come back to us as bad karma. Every action has an equivalent reaction.”

The young man’s next question was “Are you God?”

Amma replied, “I’m a crazy girl! I’m here because nobody has put me in jail. Amma is not saying that you should believe in God or Amma. It’s enough if you believe in yourself.”

Like a tree lying dormant inside a seed, there is divine consciousness in every sentient and insentient object of the universe. With the right knowledge, prayers, actions and thoughts, we can uplift ourselves to the state of the divine. Through *sadhana* (spiritual practices) and with the

Guru’s grace, we can awaken our divine qualities. God incarnates to help us do so.

When the young man who asked the questions realized that Amma was the personification of infinite divine virtues, he joined her ashram. The young man later became Swami Purnamritananda Puri.

Seva is not just physical work. Truly serving the master means living according to her teachings and striving sincerely to bring about a change in ourselves.

After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha attracted many followers, including many of his relatives. One of them was Ananda, the Buddha’s first cousin. Ananda told the Buddha, “Lord, I have one prayer: I want to be with you and serve you all the time. I will take care of all your needs.”

The Buddha agreed but said, “You shouldn’t impose any condition on your Guru. Doing so will obstruct your spiritual growth.” Thereafter,

Ananda was always with the Buddha. By the Lord's grace, many disciples attained Self-realization. Ananda was witness to this as he was always with the Buddha. One day, a 17-year-old disciple who had started to live with the Buddha just a year before attained *bhava samadhi*, a state of devotional ecstasy. Seeing this, Ananda was shattered. He fell at the Buddha's feet and cried. "Oh Lord, this kid came barely a year ago, and he has attained that divine state. Many others have also attained that state by your grace. I've been with you every moment of the day for 46 years. Why haven't I received even a taste of that divine state?"

The Buddha smiled and said, "Dear Ananda, you were only looking after my physical body. You did not assimilate any of my teachings. You thought of me as this body. You thought gaining that spiritual state was a kind of barter.

I attained that state through my own effort and inquiry. You, too, can attain that state in a similar way."

He continued, "Become a light unto yourself. You will understand the truth if you surrender to the light within. It is the light of knowledge. It is the true nature of all beings. It is the light of all lights."

Amma has blessed us all with different divine experiences at some point in our lives. I first met Amma in Kodungallur in 1988 during the Brahmasthanam Temple festival there. After that, I started visiting Amritapuri regularly. In 1992, I joined Amritha ITC (Industrial Training Centre) in Puthiyakavu as a teacher. In 1995, by Amma's grace, I joined the ashram. Amma asked me to do seva in the printing press. I serviced and maintained all the machines with Br. Babu (now Swami Dharmamritananda). He took care of the mechanical section whereas I took care of the

The disciple can tap into the wisdom of the Guru through humble queries. From the question, the Guru can understand the disciple's state of mind. She can then remove his negativities and lead him to the right path. That is why many of the Hindu scriptural texts are in the form of dialogues between master and disciple.

machines' electrical and electronic parts.

One morning after archana, Br. Sreekumar (now Swami Gurupadasritananda) asked me to go to the press immediately as the cutting machine was not working. There were only two days left for the next posting of the *Matruvani* magazines, and this was the only cutting machine. When I turned on the machine, I heard strange sounds coming from the machine's motherboard. As the machine was made and programmed in Japan, I was not sure how to repair it. If we called a professional service

engineer, we would have to wait for at least a week. The service fee would also be astronomical. I spent the whole day fruitlessly trying to figure out what the problem was. All those who were helping me went for the evening bhajans. Feeling totally helpless, I prayed to Amma, "What should I do Amma? I have failed to solve the problem."

Suddenly, Amma walked into the press! She asked, "Son, are you here alone? What happened to the machine?" I explained all that had happened. She peered into the machine, and said, "It's full of dust."

Amma wiped something on the motherboard. Then, gently patting my chest, she said, “Don’t worry, son. Try again. It will become all right.” Saying so, she walked away.

Amma’s words and touch infused me with new energy and enthusiasm. I sat silently for a while. Then a thought came to mind. Why did Amma touch just one board when there were 18 similar ones in the machine? I decided to focus on the board that Amma had touched. Although it was difficult to dismantle it, I somehow managed to do so. When I checked it, I saw, to my surprise, that there was a contact missing on the board. I rectified it and the machine started working! With just

one glance, Amma had figured out what I had not been able to, even after eight hours of hard work.

The next day, I went to Amma and told her that the machine was working. Acting as if she did not know anything, she asked, “What was the problem?”

I answered, “What Amma indicated was the problem.”

Amma smiled and said, “I just looked over the machine, that’s all.”

If we try to do our work sincerely, dedicating all that we do to Amma, she will always help us; that is what I learnt from this incident. May she always act through us. May her grace protect us all.



Dear Readers,

Share your experiences or poems, and inspire thousands. All submissions are subject to approval and may be edited. Email your submission to matruvani@amritapuri.org. By submitting your artwork or article, you give your consent to have it published.

Her Protective Arms



by Manjula (Hélène Renelleau), France

After we returned to France from Amritapuri in March 2020, my husband and I started building a wooden house on an isolated piece of forest land in southern France. We added *vibbuti* (sacred ash), Devi Bhava water and flower petals, and some sand from Amritapuri

to the cement of the foundation. We also wrote Sanskrit mantras on the foundation walls and 'OM' on each pillar. The construction went well.

One day, during a heavy rainfall, we went to work on the roof to install the rain guard sheet. We were worried that the rains would damage the wooden roof, which would then take a long time to dry. Seeing how tense my husband was, I teased him. Of course, he did not like that at all. In a moment of inattentiveness, I started walking backward and fell through the chimney hole, which we had forgotten to close.

I recall seeing myself falling. It was as if time had slowed down, and I was able to witness my own fall. There was no thought in my mind other than 'I am falling.' I went crashing through the floor beams of the first floor and landed in the basement. I fell six metres and landed in the gap between two big rocks;

the gap was just wide enough for my body to fall through without being scraping by the rocks. I had miraculously fallen on the only patch of ground where there was no rock, concrete or tool.

For a few seconds, I struggled to breathe, and my thought was, "Come on, breathe!" When my breath returned, my first words were "Amma! Amma! Amma!" I was calling out to her as loudly as I could, and I just could not stop calling out. I started feeling an intense pain on the left side of my body. So, I visualized the cells on that side as being vibrant with golden light, just as Amma guides us to do so during the White Flowers of Peace meditation. As I did so, I felt a soft but immediate healing. A clear thought arose that I had broken one rib.

The hardest part was to remain focused on my breathing. My husband was panicking. As we waited for the

Regulating the breath calms the mind and provides relief from pain and stress.

emergency medical team to arrive, I asked my husband to chant his mantra and to focus on breathing slowly, along with me. Somehow, I knew that doing so would take my attention away from the pain. When my mind wandered off for just a moment, the pain would become unbearable. This was a big lesson for me: that regulating the breath calms the mind and provides relief from pain and stress.

The X-rays revealed that I had indeed fractured just a rib. This had brought about a mild case of pneumothorax, air in the pleural cavity. If the volume of air between the lungs and chest wall had been any larger, my lungs would have collapsed. The doctor said that both would heal by themselves after a month's rest. My family and friends called it a miracle.

Not long before, I had joined a WhatsApp prayer group that a friend in Amritapuri had created during the lockdown to help the people suffering in the world. Before I was taken into the ambulance, I asked my husband to tell my friend to pray for me.

Within a few hours, many of my friends in Amritapuri had heard about the accident. In the days that followed, I received dozens of messages of loving support from them. For me, this was the most fascinating part of this experience. I realized that Amma was the Mother of all because she was making us brothers and sisters.

In one of the messages I received, I learnt that before anyone had told Amma about my accident, she had sung a Krishna bhajan that had my name in the lyrics. Hearing this, I could not hold back my

tears. Amma knows how much I love Krishna bhajans and how much they open my heart. Once again, I was fascinated by how her *lilas* (divine play) always reveal her all-knowing nature and infinite love. My friends were also relieved; they knew right then that I would be fine.

While I was in the hospital, I asked my husband's brother to show Amma my photo and to tell her what had happened to me. That very day, he was able to do so right after bhajans. I was happy to hear this. I knew that because of the restrictions that had been put in place in the ashram, it was not easy to get close to Amma, but he had been able to do so by her grace. Amma had taken the photo and kissed it tenderly several times. She then said in English, "If full rest, okay. No problem." Her message moved me to tears. I realized that if I just sat, chanted and read for at least a month, I would be fine, by her grace.

All the nurses and caregivers at the hospital were loving. I was drawn to one in particular. She was an elderly woman from Reunion Island. One day, she noticed my mantra ring and asked me about it. When I showed her my archana book, she blurted out, "Oh, Amma! Every year I go and see her in Barcelona and have her darshan. I love Amma so much!" So, that was what we had in common: our Mother, Amma.

A week before the accident, a pregnancy test revealed that I was expecting. My husband and I had been trying for a few years to bring a child into our lives and we were even ready to stop trying. During the last Europe Tour, we had asked Amma if we should keep trying, and she had said yes.

After the accident, while I was at the hospital, I asked if I could take a look at the ultrasound scan; I wanted to see the foetus. My husband and I saw a tiny being, looking more like a sea horse than a human baby,

looking snuggled and well protected. It was two months old. I was impressed by the strength of new life.

That period of rest after the accident enabled me to be gentle with my body during the first months of pregnancy. I am grateful for this opportunity, as otherwise, I might have encountered some difficulty during the pregnancy.

Sometimes, I still wonder why I had to undergo this accident, and my mind is ready to come up with many reasons. But what I know is that the mishap took me closer to Amma. May all the moments of our life take us ever closer to God. Thank you, Amma, for being in my heart. Please remain there always! 🌸

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Forgiving

by Bri. Sandramrita Chaitanya

In chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna enumerates the qualities of a true *bhakta* or devotee in verses 13 – 14. One of those qualities is forgiveness. A *kshami* is one who is forgiving by nature. All *avatars* (divine incarnations) manifest this quality. When Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, He said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Lord Krishna granted liberation to the hunter whose arrow wounded Him mortally.

Throughout her life, Amma has been conveying the message of forgiving through Her actions. She went to the hospital to visit a cousin who was dying, even though he had tried to kill her. She forgave the villagers who used to throw stones at her. After the 2004 tsunami, she built houses for people whose homes had been shattered, including those who were hostile towards the ashram.

As Swami Ramakrishnananda says in his book *Amritashtakam*, what is natural for a *mabatma* (spiritually illumined soul) or avatar is a *sadhana* (spiritual practice) for us. When someone hurts us, we may sometimes find it difficult to forgive. Amma says that some women tell



her, “My husband left me for another woman. I’ll never forgive him.” Forgiveness can indeed be difficult in such circumstances.

How can we learn to forgive when we are deeply hurt?

If we want peace and happiness, we must accept what happened and forgive the person or people concerned. We have no other choice. Other-

wise, it is like letting a wound fester instead of treating it. We cannot start a new chapter in life and find happiness unless we move on.

The wise say that only the ego can be hurt. We suffer because we identify with our emotions and thoughts, i.e. with the mind. The mind belongs to the ego. Losing something we are attached to —

something or someone dear to us — creates suffering. In order to forgive, we must go beyond the mind, beyond our attachments and expectations. The problem is expectations. We expect people to fulfil them; if they do not, we become angry. But life is unpredictable, and so are people. The only way ahead is to adapt to change. In the example of the woman whose husband left her, unless she accepts the situation, she cannot get on with her life. She might want to consider finding a job (if she was financially dependent on her husband earlier) or channelling her energy into positive activities such as yoga, for instance, instead of brooding over the past. Then it becomes easier to detach oneself from the past and to forgive.

I know two devotees whose husbands left them. One of them became depressed and has not emerged from that depression even after 10 years. The other decided to take the

reins of her life in her own hands. She embarked on a career and was very successful. She also chose to allow her two sons to maintain their relationship with their father. Now, her grandchildren express appreciation when their grandpa and grandma collaborate to buy them presents.

What makes us suffer is attachment to something or someone whom we think will give us happiness. But the sages tell us that happiness is within and that nothing external can bring us lasting happiness. How can we find this happiness? Luckily, we have Amma to guide us. She has given us many spiritual practices such as *archana* (chanting of the names of God), meditation and bhajans. We can try to find some peace through these practices, and by reflecting on her spiritual teachings. To find happiness, it is always best to turn to God, our eternal companion and the very source of bliss.

Acceptance

Amma says that surrender is acceptance. Accepting any situation as a gift from God is the sign of a true devotee.

In *On the Road to Freedom* (Volume 1), by Swami Paramatmananda, he mentions how his first spiritual master, Ratnamji, broke his hip after being knocked off by a motorcycle. When Swami Paramatmananda (Nealu at that time) went to see him in the hospital, he tearfully exclaimed, “This is terrible! How could such an accident happen to you?”

Ratnamji smiled and said, “Accident? Is there such a thing? Is birth an accident? Is death an accident? It is all Ramana’s sweet will for my spiritual good. For a devotee of God, there is no such thing as fate or accidents. Whatever happens to him is happening by the gracious will of his Beloved, who is ever busy trying to take the devotee back to himself. We should be happy in whatever situation he places us.”

Here, we can see that there is no question of forgiving the one who caused the accident, because he was only an instrument enabling God’s will.

Having put Ratnamji’s leg in traction, the doctors did not pay him any more attention. The plaster rubbed the skin off. Seeing the wound and the suffering that his master had to endure, Nealu became angry. He could not understand how these doctors could be so indifferent. But Ratnamji told him not to get angry and said that they were just ignorant.

This is another example of forgiveness: understanding that the other person is ignorant. Ignorant of what? Of the supreme truth that we are all one, that we are all manifestations of the one divine consciousness. This is how I understand Christ’s words: “Forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” As Amma says, once you know the Truth, you can only love and serve all creatures, because nothing and

nobody is separate from yourself. Then, there is only love and bliss. Sanatana Dharma¹ holds that the root of all suffering is ignorance — ignorance of the Truth. Human life offers a precious opportunity to know the Truth.

If we get angry with someone and do not forgive him, we are affirming the delusion that he is separate from us. Amma gives the example of the finger that accidentally pokes the eye. Instead of punishing the finger, we rub the eye gently with the same finger. Both the finger and the eye are part of the same body. Likewise, we are all sparks of the same divine consciousness. Once we know this, we can only forgive. This is how mahatmas face the suffering that others inflict on them.

Everything is Karma

Amma says that everything we experience in life is karma,

¹ 'Eternal religion,' the original name of Hinduism.

the consequence of past action. Good actions bring happiness, as they are in harmony with the law of the universe, and bad actions bring suffering. If someone hurts us, in a sense, that person is not responsible; our own karma is. If that person had not been instrumental in bringing us the fruit of our karma, someone else would have been. As Amma says, we are responsible for our thoughts, words and actions. We create our own destiny. We cannot blame anyone else if something goes wrong.

Once, to apply for a PAN (permanent account number) card, I went to an authorized agency in the village. The staff, unfamiliar with Western names, did not do it properly. There was another problem: the name on my bank account had to be the same as my passport name. As I have three Christian names, it was considered too long for the bank system. Finally, an Indian

lawyer, who is an ashram resident, accompanied me to the bank and persuaded the officer there to change my name. After that, the chief policeman in the ashram kindly accompanied me to a government office in Kayamkulam, where everything was finally sorted out.

When I went to the astrologer, he said that Rahu was in my 12th house, which was causing the difficulty in such bureaucratic matters. So, I understood that this was my karma. There was no point in blaming anyone.

Many years ago, I heard about a woman who could see into past lives. As a child, she had received only hatred from her mother. Later, through her power of clairvoyance, she saw that she had persecuted her mother in a previous life to the point that she had been burnt as a witch. She was experiencing the fruits of that bad action many centuries later. In her present life, she was helping

people and using the money she earned to help the poor.

Compassion

When I encounter people who are unkind, I find that it helps to understand their background. Often, they have suffered greatly. If we understand that suffering, then we can feel compassion and forgive them.

My own mother was not loving, and I suffered as a result. Later, when I understood how much she had suffered in her childhood, I was able to forgive her. Her father was abusive, and her mother could not protect her children, as she was herself suffering. My grandmother became depressed for a year when she turned 50, and my mother, who was only 15 then, had to take care of her. In a sense, she had to become a mother to her own mother. How could she give something she had not received?

I found a remarkable example of forgiveness in a book by

Immaculée Ilibagiza, a woman who survived the genocide in Rwanda. The massacre lasted for three months. Most of the people in her tribe were killed. Her parents and all her siblings, except for a brother who was abroad at that time, were also murdered. She survived only because a pastor hid her and six other women in a toilet, the door to which was hidden and blocked by a cupboard. They remained in captivity for about three months. The women took turns to sit on the floor because of a lack of space. They did not get much food. The murderers were searching for these women, especially for Immaculée. Later, she learnt that the leader of the murderers wanted her parents' property; that is why he wanted to kill her. Throughout her captivity, she was immersed in the remembrance of Lord Jesus and had many spiritual experiences. After the genocide, Immaculée saw the leader of the murderers in prison. He looked

so miserable that she could not help but forgive him. She felt compassion for this man, who had been led to commit atrocious crimes by his greed, one of the vilest tendencies human beings can harbour.

Forgiving Oneself

In the Old Testament of the Bible, there is the famous story of Cain and Abel. Cain kills his brother Abel, and then, sees an eye watching him. He is afraid. He tries to flee, but everywhere he goes, the eye is watching him. He finally goes into a tomb. But the eye follows him there, looking at him. We can interpret this eye as the eye of God or the eye of his own conscience.

Amma tells the story of a Guru who summons two of his disciples, gives them a hen each, and tells them, "Go to a place where nobody can see you and kill the hen." The first disciple returns soon with the dead hen. He killed it in a cave where nobody saw him. The

second disciple does not return for a long time. When he finally comes back, the hen is still alive. He explains to his Guru that no matter where he went, even where there was no one else, he was witness to his own actions, and hence could not kill the hen. This, too, was his own conscience watching him.

Amma has consoled many people suffering from guilt. She says that continuing to suffer for mistakes done in the

past is not helpful to anyone. It is better to use our energy to do good deeds that benefit us and the world. It is the most practical way to atone for our mistakes.

While it might at times be difficult to forgive, there is no other way to find peace and happiness. May Amma give us all the strength to forgive others when they hurt us, and to be careful not to hurt anyone.



National Award for Dermatology HOD

Dr. Jacob Thomas, Professor and Head, Department of Dermatology, Amrita School of Medicine, Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS), Kochi, received the Dr L.K. Bhutani Award for Excellence in Teaching and Research. The award was instituted by the Indian Association of Dermatologists, Venereologists and Leprologists (IADVL). Dr. Jacob Thomas is the first recipient of this award from Kerala.





Chapter 16: Yoga of Discerning Between the Divine and the Demonic

by Prof. V. Muraleedhara Menon, India

Karma (action) is *bhakti* (devotion), which is *jnana* (knowledge). We should not split them up. Do we separate the sweetness, size and thickness of a confectionery item? We don't. When we can express karma, bhakti and jnana perfectly in all

our actions, we have attained *Purushottama Yoga*, the supreme yoga.

When we start doing the *sadhana* (spiritual practice) needed to attain this ultimate state, certain virtues will begin to manifest themselves in us. The Lord calls them *daivi sampatti* (divine qualities); their opposite is *asuri sampatti* (demonic qualities). Like the warring Pandava and Kaurava armies, the divine and demonic forces are always arrayed against and fighting with each other in our minds.

The real war is the one waged by the mind. The general of the divine forces is *abhaya* (fearlessness). Without it, no other virtue can flourish. All other virtues come from *satya* (truth). To attain *satya*, one must cultivate fearlessness. The leader of the rear guards is humility. This is a truly brilliant deployment of troops.

The Lord enumerates 26 virtues. Apart from fearlessness and humility, most of the

remaining 24 virtues are synonyms of *ahimsa* (non-violence). These virtues come under the rubrics of *ahimsa* or *satya*. We must forge ahead, nourished by truth and protected by the armour of fearlessness and humility.

The generals of the demonic forces are pride and ignorance. Together, these two wreak havoc on our lives and defeat us all the time; isn't this our experience?

Truth and non-violence are eternal. They should spread from the individual to society, and from society to the country. The history of how non-violence evolved is worth studying. The non-violent man began thinking about how he could escape his tormentors. The *kshatriyas* (ruling class) evolved to protect the community. But instead of protecting, they became predators. This was why Parashurama, who was essentially non-violent, slaughtered the *kshatriyas*. But his violence, aimed at ushering in non-

violence, only exacerbated the violence. During the reign of Sri Rama, the Brahmins were totally committed to non-violence. To protect themselves, they sought refuge in the kshatriya king, Sri Rama. Though they abjured violence, their repudiation was effete as they relied on others to protect them.

The wise people conducted a third experiment. They adopted non-violence itself as their armour, without seeking outside help. This experiment in non-violence was individualistic. But when the community was besieged by violence, the wise people could only watch helplessly. Their experiment might have succeeded among individuals here and there. However, at the level of the community, the experiment failed.

We are now carrying out the fourth experiment. All these experiments are phases in the evolution of non-violence. Even the current

experiment of practising non-violence at the communal level is imperfect and still evolving.

Man, who used to kill animals and eat their flesh, gave up meat after a long time. Those who found it difficult to give up meat made it a ritual offering in *yajnas* (religious fire ceremonies) so that they could eat it thereafter as consecrated food. But after the Buddha condemned that practice, the practice of meat eating declined.

Is it a small thing for millions of people to give up meat eating? Experimentation in this field — for example, in the matter of drinking the milk of animals — must continue.

Let us foster divine qualities and give up demonic qualities. The three features of demonic qualities are demonic power, culture and wealth. Each group considers its culture superior and feels obliged to promote it everywhere — this is a universal phenomenon. The Brahmins consider their culture to

be the noblest. The Muslims believe that the Quran is the only truth. The Christians hold that Christianity is the only way to salvation. Each group desires to see its culture spread throughout the world.

One can see the influence of power, culture and wealth in today's expansionistic and powerful nations. These are also the very forces driving them to gain more wealth and power.

There was a time when Brahmins enjoyed lordship and authority in society. They were respected everywhere for the wealth of their knowledge. Then came the age of the Kshatriyas, who were proud of their power, not knowledge. In the age of the *Vaiśhyas* (traders), satisfying one's hunger is of utmost importance. Wealth is glorified. This age, too, will pass. These are all different varieties of demonic qualities.

In short, demonic qualities are nothing but *kama*, *krodha* and *lobha* — desire, anger and

greed. Anger and greed are born of desire. If circumstances are conducive for satisfying desire, greed arises. If not, anger rears its head. If we are led by *kama* and *krodha*, we will end up devouring each other, no doubt about that. The *Bhagavad Gita* advises us to stay away from these three. In this chapter, the Lord calls them the three gates to hell. How wide the way to hell, and how narrow the path to the Truth!

How can we escape from the clutches of *kama*, *krodha* and *lobha*? By heeding the Guru's words. *Mahatmas* (spiritually illumined souls) are living proofs of sense control. We should also try to exercise sense control and avoid negligence and carelessness. Following the teachings of the Guru helps us cultivate divine virtues, which pave the way to spiritual liberation. When that happens, the world will benefit from our mere presence.

(continued on page 36)



Janamejaya

by Sanoop Sadanandan, India

Sage Ugrashravas, who was narrating the *Mahabharata* to eager ascetics, told them that he had been living in King Janamejaya's palace to participate in the *sarpa-satra* (snake sacrifice). The ascetics wanted to know more about the *sarpa-satra*.

Ugrashravas said, "Janamejaya was the son of the great King Parikshit.¹ The *sarpa-satra* was held in Takshashila. Let me first recount how Janamejaya conquered Takshashila.

“Once, Janamejaya was performing a *yajna* (fire ceremony) with his brothers, Shrutasena, Ugrasena and Bhimasena in Kurukshetra. A puppy strayed into the venue. Seeing it, Janamejaya’s brothers beat it and chased it away.

“The puppy ran wailing to its mother, Sarama, who asked if it had done some mischief. Whimpering in pain, the puppy said, ‘No, mother. I did not lick the *bavis* (rice cooked for the *yajna*) or even look at it. The men beat me up for no reason.’

“Sarama, who was a heavenly dog, felt disturbed and decided to find out why the men had acted so cruelly. She went to where the *yajna* was being performed and asked, ‘Why did you beat and chase away my child even though it had done no wrong?’

“No one bothered to acknowledge her, let alone listen to her grievance. Pained by the

callous treatment meted out to her child and angered by the indifference of the humans, Sarama cursed Janamejaya and his brothers: ‘You, who beat and drove my child away without reason, thus instilling fear in it, will suffer from causeless fear!’

“Hearing Sarama’s curse, Janamejaya became apprehensive. Fear arose in him even though his name means ‘one who makes his enemies tremble with fear.’ When he returned to Hastinapura after the *yajna*, he found that all his self-confidence had disappeared completely. As he and his brothers had done wrong, he was sure that Sarama’s curse would materialize.

“The king decided to atone for his sin. Sage Shrutashravas, who had heard about the king’s predicament, prescribed certain rituals as penance. He also agreed to send his austere


1 Parikshit was the son of Abhimanyu and the grandson of Arjuna, the Pandava prince, and Subhadra, Lord Krishna’s sister.

son to perform the rituals, which would nullify the effects of the king's sins.

“Somashravas, son of Shrutashravas, was born from the womb of a serpent. A great ascetic who possessed *siddhis* (occult powers) and deep knowledge of the scriptures, Somashravas was known for observing a certain principle: he would grant whatever a truth-seeking and virtuous Brahmin sought from him. Shrutashravas told Janamejaya that he could take Somashravas with him to perform the remedial rituals if his son was allowed to honour his customary resolve.

“The king returned to his kingdom with Somashravas.

Janamejaya told his brothers about what had transpired between him and Shrutashravas, and also said that he had accepted Somashravas as the priest who would conduct the penitential yajna. Subsequently, the yajna was done under Somashravas's supervision.

“With a mind purified by the rituals, Janamejaya began attending to the affairs of his kingdom with renewed vigour and enthusiasm. Having regained his lost self-confidence, the king began expanding his kingdom by conquering neighbouring countries. His campaign of conquests led him to Takshashila, which also came under his rule.” 

(continued from page 33)

Unless we learn the art of living in the world with detachment, we will not enjoy bliss. We must remain unstained, like the lotus leaf. The wise live without attachment to anything and revel in

bliss. For them, this vast universe is as nothing. Let us try to cross the ocean of *samsara* (cycle of birth and death) in the boat of divine qualities.



(to be continued)



Amritapuri as Gurukula

by Kamala Joy, U.S.A.

Om bhuyo gurukulavasa shikshanotsuka medhase namah
Salutations to Amma, who is keen on re-establishing the
'gurukula' way of education.
(mantra 90 of Amma's 108 attributes)

Every Tuesday after Amma serves lunch prasad to all 3,500
or so devotees in the hall, there is a satsang and two short
Sanskrit talks. And then the young children fiercely jockey for

a position around Amma as they chatter excitedly, raise one arm and use the other to tap Amma on the thigh, knee or shoulder to get her attention. One or two of them will be selected to present a talk in Sanskrit.

Almost every evening during bhajans, Amma will pause to conduct a pop quiz: “What is the meaning of this line from this bhajan?” Or “Why was Bhishma’s oath to his father adharmic whereas Rama’s oath to his was dharmic?” If you’re sitting close enough to the front, you can see many little hands go up.

Most of the children are under 10, and many are as young as three or four. The selected child will take the microphone and address Amma and the entire hall with no sign of nervousness. Some will spice their answer with quotes or stories from the *Bhagavad Gita*. Some even connect their answer to their own experiences. For example,

four-year-old Amritavarshini shared how upset she was when Amma did not call on her one week, after she had practised so much, and how she had then realized the depth of her attachment to being called upon to speak. Six-year-old Lalita, in a widely shared YouTube video, describes how the demons of anger affect her and how she works to subdue them using spiritual principles.

If it is a Tuesday, the selected kids will present a five-minute talk in Sanskrit from memory, usually without hesitation or stumbling. The talk would have been sent to the multimedia group earlier, so that English and Malayalam translations can be displayed on the screens in the hall. Watching the children speak on profound subjects in an ancient language is amazing.

What’s even more incredible is that there are children who prepare such a talk every

Amma is raising the ashram children here with infinite care and wisdom, ensuring that they are prepared to contribute to society as they grow up.

week in addition to doing their regular schoolwork and participating in extra-curricular activities that include classes in Vedic chanting, tabla playing, Sanskrit and the *Bhagavad Gita*. You can hear the children's Vedic chanting classes in the Kali temple, but this does not prepare you for the impact of seeing them chant from memory for an hour. Amma is raising the ashram children here with infinite care and wisdom, ensuring that they are prepared to contribute to society as they grow up. Their parents watch and strive to emulate Amma's approach.

In ancient times, life in India was based on the four *ashramas* (age-based stages): *brahmacharya* (student life),

garbhashtya (householder life), *vanaprastha* (retired life) and *sannyasa* (life of renunciation). During the brahmacharya phase, students lived in the Gurukula, which literally means Guru's clan. Here, they received a holistic education while living in the Guru's or teacher's house. It was a value-based education system that prepared students for all fields of life.

The contemporary education system presents a stark contrast and is characterized by a lack of investment in personality development, cultivation of a moral conscience, and ethical training. Without these, children have no compass to help them direct their thoughts and actions. Over time, this has led to many of the problems

the planet faces today. The lack of respect for nature has led to climate change and widespread pollution. The lack of attention, love and values in individuals has led to widespread mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety and suicidal tendencies, even among very young children. At a societal level, we are obsessed with accumulating wealth and possessions, but have forgotten how to laugh, cry, sing and play with each other.

Increasingly, there is a disconnect between parents and children. The parents might be physically present with their children but are often absent emotionally and spiritually. Perhaps, parents are also locked in a world of misery and suffering from a lack of authentic connection. As a result, children also experience intense isolation and lack of love. The old system of lovingly imparting values to children is disappearing.

Amritapuri produces engaged, confident, vibrant children and adults. I am continually struck by the pure intelligence and happiness that shines from all the young people, as well as many of the middle-aged and older people who have spent significant time in Amritapuri. People here have a frank, easy-going and joyful mindset. In their presence, I always feel safe, comfortable, liked and engaged. Because I was raised in difficult circumstances where I needed to be hyper-vigilant, these attributes are especially noticeable. The people Amma raises are also significantly accomplished. Many go on to earn a PhD, and they casually juggle major seva activities with teaching, publishing papers, *sadhana* (spiritual practices), and plenty of laughter. When you see them with their parents, you sense connection, love and respect. When you see them with Amma, you see deep love


and trust. Such love, trust, respect and connection are not common in our world today.

At Amritapuri, signs of Amma's Gurukula approach are evident everywhere. The renunciates and householders interact with her in ways that repeat and reinforce loving personal lessons. During the daily satsangs, we hear stories of how personal and profound this training has been for each person. Somehow, Amma manages to create deep and lasting memories with thousands. Yet, when someone tells one of the stories, she always remembers it, often picking up the mike to add a detail that even the teller has forgotten!

What Amma is doing in Amritapuri and beyond is nothing less than revolutionary. She is raising a generation of people who are grounded in *Dharma* (righteous living). She is also shaping people like me, who met Amma as adults and have experienced a vast

transformation in themselves and in their ability to effect good in those around them and in the world.

One might ask whether some ancient system of morals and values has any relevance today. I wonder the opposite: how could it not? The world is clearly and dangerously out of balance at every level: individual, familial, societal, cultural, economic, environmental and planetary. Everything that is unbalanced seems to be easily traceable to a lack of values and value-based education.

Amritapuri's Gurukula system provides a ray of hope and a ready example for others to implement to turn the situation around. I believe Amma is creating something like an army of loving and capable people who want only to use their talents and education to build something wonderful, and who will do this while laughing, playing, dancing and singing. 



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