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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.'*

Printed and Published by Swami Jnanamritananda Puri on behalf of M.A. Mission Trust, Amritapuri P.O., Kollam, Kerala 690 546, India. Printed at Amrita Offset Printers, Amritapuri P.O., Kollam, Kerala 690 546, India. Published at M.A. Math, Amritapuri P.O., Kollam, Kerala 690 546, India. Phone: (0476) 289 6278/7578/6399. Matruvani Office Phone: 08589003341 Editor: Br. Brahmamrita Chaitanya  
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**August 2021 3**

# Efficient Action

Children, stress is now a common problem that affects even small children. When a machine becomes overheated, it will malfunction. In the same way, tension adversely affects our mental capabilities and efficiency. It is natural to become stressed in unfavourable circumstances or when faced with danger. But if we are always stressed, it will impair our very functionality. Frequent stress not only affects our ability to act, it also causes all kinds of diseases. But if the mind is calm and peaceful, we will be able to think clearly and assess situations properly.

Once, a farmer lost his watch in a haystack. He was very fond of his watch, which his grandfather had given him as a birthday present when he was a child. He rummaged through the haystack for a long time. Failing to find his watch, he became disheartened and stopped searching. There were children playing football nearby. Approaching them, he asked them if they would help him find his watch. The children combed through the hay-




To relieve tension, enjoy the beauty of nature, appreciate music, or take part in relaxing activities. Spending time with friends and small children also helps.

stack but failed to find the watch. When the farmer had almost given up hope of finding the watch, one of the children came up to him and asked for another chance to find the watch. The farmer agreed. The boy went into the barn where the hay was stored. A few minutes later, he came out with the missing watch.

The farmer was astonished. When he asked the boy the secret of his success, the boy said, “For some time, I just sat still on the floor and listened carefully. In the silence, I heard the ticking sound of the watch coming from one corner of the haystack. Then it was easy to find the watch.”

This story clearly shows how a calm mind can think clearly and find solutions to problems easily.

There are many ways to relieve tension. We can enjoy the beauty of nature, appreciate music, and take part in games and activities that relax the mind. Spending time with friends and small children can also help to reduce tension. Slow and regulated breathing, yoga postures like the *shavasana* (corpse pose), and meditation are especially beneficial in alleviating tension and becoming relaxed.

But more important than all these is adopting a healthy approach to life. We must cultivate an awareness that will help us maintain an inner balance at all times instead of soaring in victory or sinking in failure. If we do so, our mind will become calm and peaceful, and we can become more efficient in action. 



# Journey of a Lifetime

by Swamini Samadamrita Prana

I was an ordinary girl from Mumbai: studious, ambitious and fun-loving. In 1989, children from my neighbourhood were taken to see a 'Mataji' ('Holy Mother') from Kerala who gave hugs and candies. I watched Amma sing bhajans, but left before the program ended. My mother bought Amma's biography and books of teachings, and began sharing devotees' experiences

with my brother and me. I soon became interested in Amma, and began attending every program. I was also attracted by the serene personalities of Amma's disciples. I no longer wanted to be a doctor, but one of those disciples. I started doing spiritual practices, reading Amma's books, and following her teachings. My school friends saw the change in me. An old friend recently recalled how I used to chant my mantra during our 45-minute walk together to school and how I would speak only about Amma. She said that she used to admire my focus. That is the transformation Amma can bring into ordinary lives.

When I asked Amma if I could join the ashram, she told me to complete my education. She said that to serve the world, one must be properly equipped. "I can get thousands of people to sweep. The world judges a person with the yardstick of educational qualification. The world does not

acknowledge an uneducated person, whereas it will respect people with a postgraduate degree, or a doctor or engineer."

After two years, when I completed my 12th grade, Amma allowed me to join the ashram in 1991, but she told me to enrol for a degree in a local college. I agreed. I just wanted to be with Amma. Going to college was just an excuse to be with Amma in Amritapuri, to do *sadhana* (spiritual practices) and *seva*.

There were different types of *sevas* — sand *seva*, cow dung *seva*, septic tank *seva*, bathroom cleaning *seva*, firewood *seva*, brick *seva*, kitchen *seva*, canteen *seva*, dish washing *seva*, sweeping *seva*... We would go to college, study, and do our *seva* and *sadhana*. We would stay up at night, participate in ashram activities, and go to college the next day without much sleep.

Once, Amma found many unused objects lying behind

the *kalari*.<sup>1</sup> She began to clean up the place. We started helping her. Suddenly, I found myself face to face with Amma, who said, “You people have to become mothers tomorrow...” and Amma began a discourse on *shradha* (faith and attentiveness) and its importance in spiritual life. I spaced out on hearing ‘Become mothers tomorrow.’ Was Amma hinting that I would get married and have children? Fear gripped me! Reading my thoughts, Amma said, “When I say mother, I did not mean that you will marry, have children and become a mother. You will become mothers of the world.”

I obtained permission from Amma to sit behind her during darshan and study. This way, I could study and, at the same time, be with Amma. Actually, I was not interested in studies at all. The lectures in college

were in Malayalam, which I did not understand as I am not a Malayalee; my mother tongue is Tamil. I used to sit in the last row, keep Amma’s photo on the desk, chant my mantra, and meditate with eyes open, looking at Amma’s photo. One day, my lecturer stood beside me. I did not even realize his presence. Seeing what I was up to, he yelled at me.

I failed three examinations in the first year of my degree course. It was the first time I had failed in my life. I went to Amma, who was carrying a bag of sand on her back. She asked me, “How did you do in your exams?” I told her that I failed three papers. Amma dropped the bag of sand and glared at me. She said, “The world will blame me for having ruined your future. Have you come here to bring me disgrace and shame? I have lost faith in you.” She stopped her seva and went to her room! I was devastated.

.....  
1 Ancestral shrine, where Amma used to give Devi Bhava and Krishna Bhava darshan.

In Mumbai, I used to do sadhana, attend every one of Amma's programs, and still pass all my examinations, by Amma's grace. I was just a devotee then, whereas I was living with her now. I should have passed. I should have received more of her grace.

I did not know it then, but Amma's scolding was a form of divine grace. She began to shoo me away whenever she saw me; it was 'shoo at sight.' I thought Amma hated the sight of me. But after shooing me away, Amma would tell others, "She's very intelligent. She used to get good marks. Now she is not studying. She's following me. That's why I'm being strict with her."

I began to focus on my studies. I led a balanced life of seva, sadhana, *svadhyaya* (scriptural study) and academic studies. I also spent time with Amma. I passed my examinations with decent grades.

Amma once told me, "You will wonder why Amma is

being so hard, so strict, why she is scolding you all the time. When you grow up and look back, you will realize why Amma did it and how much she loves you."

Yes, it's true. Back then, I used to feel miserable all the time, thinking that Amma did not love me, how unfortunate I was, etc. I would be so focused on figuring out how best to win Amma's love.

After I completed my Bachelor of Commerce degree, Amma told me to pursue post-graduate studies. Later, she asked many of the brahmacharinis to pursue the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) course. Before our exams, Amma called all of us to her room and gave each one of us a mango from the mango tree adjacent to her room. All of us passed the exams. We call it the '*Manga B.Ed*' meaning 'Mango B.Ed'. Amma gave us the '*jnana pazham*' — the fruit of knowledge. Her prasad is now helping us fulfil her mission of



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imparting value-based education to society. Most of us are now principals in various Amrita Vidyalayam schools.

Around 1999, I injured my back. For almost a year, I was bedridden. I could not even get up, let alone be with Amma. I stopped singing with Amma and the swamis, touring with Amma, and doing seva. I was unable to sit for even 10 mantras of the *Ashottaram* (108 attributes of Amma), never mind the *Lalita Sabasranama* (1,000 names of the Divine Mother) during the morning archana. I would lie down in the hall and chant. I began to feel guilty and wondered if my devotion and desire to do sadhana had decreased. I was in physical pain and mentally agonized. When Amma returned from her World Tour, I told Amma tearfully, "Amma, my back is hurting..."

Before I could finish, Amma said aloud, "Your disc has slipped," and told me to consult a doctor in Nairs' Hospital, Kollam. She said I had to undergo traction. When I hesitated, she reprimanded me: "Just do what I say! You don't want to undergo a spinal surgery, do you?"

An MRI revealed that it was a second-grade protrusion. If I was not careful, I would soon have a prolapsed disc. Then, the only option would be surgery, which was highly risky. How did Amma know all this without even a simple examination or an MRI report? The answer can be found in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

*sarvabbutasthamatmanam  
sarvabbutani catmani  
ikshate yogayuktatma  
sarvatra samadarshanab*  
The person of spiritual insight, established in

same-sightedness, sees the Self as residing in all beings and all beings as resting in the Self. (6.29)

In 2001, Amma sent me to console the victims of the Gujarat earthquake. In the places I visited, I realized that people who lost everything were still positive and clinging to God with faith. Such was their surrender. They had no complaints. I realized that Amma had sent me there not to help them but to learn a big lesson of life. I prayed and I taught the Gujaratis to pray thus: "*Shakti do jagadambe, bhakti do jagadambe, prem do jagadambe, vishwas dekar rakshakaro amriteshwari ma*" — "O Mother of the Universe, give me strength, devotion, love and faith, and thus save me, O Amriteshwari!"

In 2003, I was posted to Mauritius. When Amma told me to go there, I expressed fear and insecurity. Amma said,

"Just go. Things will happen. Amma is with you."

Mauritius is beautiful and known as paradise on earth. People are loving. The ashram there is also beautiful. Yet I used to feel homesick, missing Amma and Amritapuri. At night, I would walk about, chanting my mantra and listening to bhajans. At the altar, there was a beautiful photo of Amma smiling. Looking at the photo, I would ask her, "You call yourself a mother? Do you have love or compassion? You have not even bothered to inquire if I am dead or alive, happy or sad!"

One day, as I was looking at the photo and talking to Amma, I felt as if I received an answer from the photo: "I know you are okay. I am with you, protecting you."

I was staying all alone. The temple was on the ground floor. My room was upstairs. Anyone who came to the temple could go upstairs. I felt vulnerable and unsafe. Amma

called me, and I told her about how unsafe I felt. She said, "Lock the iron gate at the stairs leading up."

I told her, "There is no gate!"

Amma said, "Look carefully: there's a white iron gate. Keep it locked. No one will be able to go upstairs."

After the conversation with Amma, I looked for the gate. To my surprise, there was an iron gate, painted white to camouflage it with the wall.

One day, a woman devotee took me for a house visit to her friend's house. Her friend, a man, said, "Brahmachariniji, I want to ask you something. You stay alone in that place. What if someone enters the temple while you are doing puja and tries to assault you?"

I was shocked! No one had ever asked me such a question. Praying to Amma, I answered, "My faith is that such a thing will not happen to me."

But the man persisted. "I know that you believe in your Guru and God. Nevertheless,

something like that might happen. After all, you are alone there and people know that."

I was annoyed and repeated, "My faith is that such a thing won't happen to me."

But the man kept repeating the same thing and I kept giving him the same answer, more emphatically each time. The devotee who took me to the house scolded the man and we left the house. The devotee then apologized profusely for his behaviour.

One afternoon, while I was doing the noon puja, four men who looked like thugs came to the temple. They did not look at the deities but at me. I had never seen these men before. Suddenly, I recalled the question I had been asked during the house visit. My mind began oscillating between fear and faith. I prayed fervently to Amma.

Suddenly, from nowhere, a woman appeared. There was a heated conversation between her and the men. The woman

became furious and started shouting at the men. I concentrated hard and focused on the puja. After a while, there was pin drop silence. I continued and finished my puja. When I stepped out of the temple, I saw this woman cleaning the temple premises. In broken English, she said, “Those men, bad people! Intention not good! I shouted! I got angry! I sent them away! You don’t worry. You are protected.”

I asked her where she was from, as I had never seen her before. She said that she lived far away and rarely comes. She went away soon after that. I never saw her again. No prizes for guessing the identity of that mystery woman!

One day, a man asked me to do *Shani* (Saturn) *puja* for him. He asked, “What percentage of Shani do you remove? What are the rates for removing different percentages of Shani?”

I did not know the answer. Yet, by Amma’s infinite grace,

the knowledge flowed into me and I answered him. I don’t remember what I said because the answer did not come from me but from Amma. He left the temple satisfied. I received a good payment, my first earning for Amma. I wanted to share my joy with Amma. To my surprise, she called and asked, “How are you, daughter?”

I excitedly told her about the earnings. Amma laughed. I then asked about the percentage of Shani that would be removed. Amma laughed and said that the percentage depends on his percentage of faith and surrender.

While I was in Mauritius, I developed high blood sugar and cholesterol levels. At that time, I received an email from one of my ashram sisters writing on behalf of Amma: “Dear daughter, how are you? It has been a long time since I heard from you. Amma is worried about you. How is your health? Are you okay? If there is any

problem, please tell Amma. Only then can Amma save you.”

I replied, “Physically, I’m sick. I have diabetes and cholesterol. Mentally, I’m depressed. Emotionally, I’m broken. I’m fed up! Do not be surprised if I leave this path. I may not be able to hold on.”

Amma asked me to return. When I reached Amritapuri, Amma said, “She came back so soon!”

When I replied that I had done so only because Amma told me to, she denied having done so. I said, “I don’t think I’ve done wrong. A fish out of water is desperate to get back into water. A child who is being breastfed, if pulled away, will cling to its mother’s bosom.”

During a South Indian Tour, I did not get any opportunity to sit near Amma. I was extremely sad and mad at everyone, including myself and even Amma. I decided to discontinue the tour. When I

made that decision, we were having a tea stop, near a big field of sugarcane crops that were so much taller than I. I disappeared among the crops. Somehow, a few brahmacharinis learned about my plan. They informed Bri. Bhavamritaji (who was in charge of us), who set out to look for me. She found me and persuaded me to board the bus, promising that she would give me a spot right under Amma’s nose at the next stop. Amma’s camper was pulling out. She was at the door. As the camper went past me, Amma looked at me with so much pity and love. She told the swamini with her, “She’s sad that she did not get me!”

I became depressed. I cursed my birth and life. I wanted to be like those who are always around Amma, interacting with her on the physical level. As soon as we reached Amritapuri, I wrote out all my sorrows to Amma and then went to her room. The door was open. I stood

there, the crumpled letter inside my clenched fist, hidden under the loose end of my sari. Amma and I stood facing each other, eye to eye. Amma stretched out her hand. How did she know that I had come with a letter?

Amma said, “You cannot complain that you don’t have grace. Do not look at the sun and wish that you could be the sun. Be happy being a firefly. You sing with me. How many people in the ashram get to sing with me? How can you say you don’t have grace? There are people in the world who do not have even one person to love them, whereas so many people love you. Whenever Amma looks at anybody, or talks, laughs and jokes with anybody, you should think that Amma is looking at you, laughing and joking with you. You should have the faith that you are Amma’s darling child.”

I thought, “Yeah, right! Easier said than done. How can I feel happy looking at

others having a nice time with Amma?”

After that, whenever I saw Amma talking to someone, as usual, my mind would wonder who the lucky person was. Then, I would recall Amma’s advice and tell myself, “Amma is talking to me, laughing with me, joking with me. I am her favourite child.”

Initially, I felt cynical about this exercise. But I soon began to realize that my jealousy was diminishing day by day. Eventually, the worms of jealousy stopped gnawing me. I started to enjoy the exercise. I became peaceful. Things changed a lot for me. I began to appreciate life and count my blessings. Amma was opening up the flower of my heart. Had I not received this initiation to practice this kind of visualization, my spiritual life might even have come to an end.

I have been in Gujarat since 2006. Amma made me the principal of the Ahmedabad Amrita Vidyalayam, and Bri-

Atmamrita Chaitanya is the school manager. We also serve as required in Amma's Gujarat Centre.

I once asked Amma, "What karma have I done to be destined to remain physically separate from you? Am I such a sinner?"

Amma replied, "Daughter, I wouldn't call it sin. What's the benefit of physical closeness when it does not serve its purpose? A ladle in a pot of pudding does not become sweet. Similarly, just being physically close to me will not benefit you. Don't be sad, thinking this way."

The truth is that, wherever we are, we should try our best to transform that place into Amrita's Puri, or Amma's abode.

Once, when I returned to Amritapuri from Gujarat, Amma asked me about the dosage of my thyroid medication. I told her that I was taking 5 mg twice daily. Amma said, "Take 50 mg. Don't stop taking this medicine. You should take

it for the rest of your life." Many years before that, while I was still in college, Amma had once told me, out of the blue, "Amma feels you have thyroid. Please go to the Trivandrum Medical College for a thyroid test."

The test proved that I was hyperthyroidic. How had Amma known then? And why was she asking me to increase the dosage now? I called up a doctor, who said that the dosage Amma prescribed was for hypothyroidism whereas I have hyperthyroidism. He suggested that I go for a test. To my surprise, the test showed that my hyperthyroidism had changed to hypothyroidism without showing any symptom; the doctor added that this was not a common occurrence. Amma's words over the years have shown me clearly that not only does she know about our thoughts and emotions, she knows each and every molecule in the body. Her vision is holistic and complete.

During a North Indian Tour, Amma went swimming in River Narmada. The waters were shallow. The entire group followed her, not realizing that there was a big dip in the riverbed. Suddenly, everyone started drowning. The first thought that came to mind was, "Amma, you have ditched me! I am far behind you. You will save only those close to you!"


They say that one who is drowning resurfaces twice, before sinking the third time. I, too, surfaced twice. Just before sinking again, I thought to myself, "Death is certain. What will you do? Chant 'Amma... Amma...'. Think of Amma as you die."

I did that, and suddenly, I found myself thrown on the shore. I was saved! Everyone was saved, for that matter.

Many years later, during another swimming event, Amma asked aloud, "All those who almost drowned in the Narmada, raise your hands!" I raised mine. Amma asked,

"What was going through your minds at that time?" I was among those who answered. Amma looked pleased with my answer.

Having lived with Amma all these years has made me understand that obedience, faith and surrender to Amma are the best protection, no matter how difficult and testing life becomes. Avatars like Amma are omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent. This is why Amma's children are able to experience her presence within and without. This is also why we experience that she knows our heart and feels our pain. Out of utmost compassion, Amma tries her best to alleviate our miseries, which are caused by ignorance. She showers her unconditional love, and gives us both knowledge and strength to overcome our miseries.

There is nothing we can offer in return to Amma. May we all become fit instruments in her divine hands. 



# Deer Stories

by Kasturi Mattern, USA

After meeting Amma in May 1989, I began to develop a devotional relationship with Krishna, thanks to an Amma's bhajan cassette that I bought and which had Krishna songs. I was happy to discover that the iconography associated



with Krishna and Christ was similar. This touched my heart and deepened my sense of devotion to both of them.

In June 1989, I walked into a bookstore in downtown San Francisco. While browsing through a book on symbols, I found an entry for '*kasturi*' or deer. The authors noted that this word rarely appears in symbol dictionaries, but was included here because the deer is a symbol both of Christ and Krishna. Christ is often portrayed in Christian art as a hart or stag, in conformity with the passage in the Song of Songs: "My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh in at the windows, he sheweth himself through the lattice" (English Revised Version, 2:9). As for Krishna, he is often pictured with a deer.

In July 1989, I attended Amma's retreat in New Hampshire and asked her for a name. She gave me the name 'Kasturi.'

I could hardly believe it! Br. Ramakrishna (now Swami Ramakrishnananda), who was translating for Amma, told me that Amma wanted to tell me the story of my name. As I looked up at her with rapt attention, Amma related how Sri Krishna played with his friends, the deer, in the forest, and in spring, when the deer excreted a waxy substance on their foreheads, he would take some of it and anoint himself with it.

I loved this story and felt very close to Amma. For some inexplicable reason, I had been feeling that she was like my sister. I recognized also that Amma had given me her sister's name.

When I returned to the Bay Area, I tried to find the bookstore in San Francisco in order to buy that book, but never found it. Also, I never again found that book on symbols, no matter how much I searched.

The deer is associated with the *anabata* (heart centre) in

the body, and with the air element, which is related to touch. When I met Amma, my husband, Gary, and I were suffering from heart problems, and I believe that by giving me this name, Amma helped us to heal our ailments.

Gary and I spent a lot of time in the mountains and high desert of California. This drew us closer and deepened our love for nature. However, we were sad that we had not been able to have children or adopt them. My parents had lived with us for 12 years, giving us a wonderful feeling of family. But they had passed away and we were grieving. I even wondered, "What's the point of our being married?" When I met Amma, I thought that perhaps I was being called to live with her and serve her mission.

When Gary and I went to see Amma in subsequent years, I still had these questions, but I also felt that she had created a bubble around

the two of us, keeping us safe and together. I began to realize that gentle Gary was even more like a deer than I was, and that there was no way I could ever be Kasturi without Gary. There was a deep connection between us that was tied to the mountains and hills of California, where we sometimes saw deer in the wild, and that connection also kept us rooted in Amma.


In June 1993, Amma visited our humble home in Berkeley and did a puja in the room we had set aside for weekly bhajans. She came with the swamis and a few other people, and we invited a few devotees. After the puja, Amma fed us Indian tea and fruit salad, which Swamiji served like a benevolent uncle. I realized that Amma had provided us with a whole new family. After this, I had no more doubts about my marriage and no longer grieved over the lack of children in our marriage.

We began to do puja regularly in our puja room. After a few years, we began inviting a handful of devotees to our simple puja once a week. Afterward, we would serve tea and fruit, just like when Amma visited.

Not long after Amma's visit, deer began to visit our house and stay in our yard for the day. We had seen deer on the streets and gardens of houses further up in the Berkeley hills, but not down at our level. The deer would come on special days: our anniversary, Amma's first day of programs, or a day when we had some realization about the nature of love, selflessness or spiritual life. Their visits always seemed to mark a special moment.

Nowadays, due to the severe California drought, the deer come more often to our yard, where there are plenty of roses and other plants for them to eat. We also put out bowls of water for them to drink.

When we started the Amrita Book Club a few years ago, I prayed that the way I moderated it would be how Amma wanted it. I wanted some affirmation of what I hoped was service to her and her devotees. After the first Book Club meeting ended, when I stepped out of our side door to shake out the tablecloth, I saw a young but full-grown deer standing right outside the door. She was not afraid of me and did not even move when I stepped in front of her. I felt a bolt of love go through me when I was close to the deer, similar to how I feel in Amma's presence. I could easily have touched her but I simply said "*Om namah shivaya.*" When she did not move, I stepped back into the house.

Amma is healing Gary's and my hearts, using stories and images of deer to do so. *Om hrdayasthayaai namah* — I bow down to her, who resides in the hearts of all beings (*Sri Lalita Sahasranama*, 595). 

# It's in (For)Giving That We Receive

by Amritasri (Holi Birman),  
Australia



**I**n 2017, just as Amma was beginning Devi Bhava at the very last stop of her Australian Tour, I received a message from my aunt: “Your father is in a coma. He has been in the hospital for a couple of days and the doctors are unsure of the exact cause or whether he’ll recover.”

This news came out of the blue, and because my father and I had been somewhat estranged, I was shocked and uncertain about what to do. I had visited him a few times over the years, but our relationship had been troubled, as I had been hurt by him and felt that he had not provided the care that a father should. I sensed that he regretted many of his actions but was too ashamed to apologize. Instead, on the rare occasions we spent time together, he would crack jokes and speak about the weather and superficial matters. I went along, somewhat scornfully, because I did not have the courage to speak up about how I truly felt.

When I spoke to my aunt, she was optimistic and suggested that I hold off visiting my father until he was in better health. I took his photo to Amma. Although it had been over a decade since my father attended Amma's programs, I saw a flash of recognition on

Amma's face. In the early years of her visits to Australia, my dad had been the cook for Amma's retreats. He had also spent time with my mother and me in Amritapuri, India. Amma looked at my father's face for a long time with concern and unfathomable love in her eyes. She then told me to go and see him as soon as possible. At that moment, I had a strong feeling that my father would soon pass away.

Following Amma's guidance, I flew to see my father shortly afterward. He was in a small room in the Intensive Care Unit. Family members surrounded him. A dialysis machine was attached to his body. I spent a few hours watching my dad with my family. Half an hour before I needed to return to the airport, all my family members suddenly had appointments to attend. There was one nurse on watch then. I asked her if I could have some time alone with my father, as this would

be my only opportunity before leaving. She hesitated at first but compassionately agreed to close the door so that we could have some privacy.

After 20 years of unspoken tension and resentment, I took my father's hand. Not knowing whether I would have minutes or seconds, I began quietly chanting the peace prayer, *'Lokah samastah sukhino bhavan-tu'* ('May all beings everywhere be peaceful and happy') for my father. I did this dutifully at first. My mind felt busy and a little heavy, saddened by the recognition that I had missed the opportunity to have a real relationship with my dad. As I continued to chant, a wave of peace swept over me and words of forgiveness began to flow from my heart and lips. Although he was still in a coma, my dad and I shared our first genuine conversation together in almost two decades. I don't know whether he actually heard my words, but for 15 minutes, I felt

his presence more than ever before. Forgiveness flowed through me without effort, without thought, and without a need for it to be acknowledged. In the moment of reassuring him that I loved and forgave him and that he could let go, I realized that we were both transitioning; in that moment, I, too, was letting go.

It seemed that I was giving my father the gift of my forgiveness before he passed away, relieving him of the weight of the tension between us, and of the burden of pain caused by his past actions. Yet, moments before leaving his room, I felt tremendous gratitude. My dad had not fulfilled many of his fatherly duties, and now, days before his passing, his soul was setting us both free, gifting me the opportunity to experience forgiveness.

Amma says, "Try to imagine that everyone who comes to you has been sent by God." She also reminds us to regard

unexpected guests as God. 'Unexpected guests' refers not only to people but also to unexpected circumstances. Therefore, we must be prepared to view any circumstance that we encounter as a venerable guest and receive it happily."

My father's imminent death was the unexpected guest that transformed our relationship and our lives in an instant. I could become remorseful or further angered that my father was leaving before our relationship healed. Instead, by Amma's grace, I was able to visit him before he passed away, offer prayers of peace, and forgive my father. This was such a blessing for me as well.

Amma teaches that when we pray sincerely and selflessly for others, we receive blessings ourselves. This connects beautifully to the etymology of the word 'forgiveness', which comes from the Old English *forġiefan*, meaning

'give up,' and also from the root *ghabbh*, 'to give or receive.' Initially, we may think that we forgive the other person for his or her sake. In fact, forgiveness might more accurately be understood as the act of *giving up* our attachment to our own woundedness. As long as we hold on to past memories, we experience not only the initial wound but the additional burden of resentment and the suffering of being pulled backward.

Amma tells a story to illustrate this point. Once, a man went to a master and told him, "No matter how hard I try, I can't let go of my wounds."

The master replied, "I have a technique to help." He gave the man a sack full of vegetables and said that the man must carry the sack of vegetables and continue to hold it, no matter what. The man tried his best, but after two days, he was ready to give in because of the excruciating weight of the vegetables. The master



urged him to continue, but a few days later, the vegetables became even heavier because they had begun to decay. Eventually, the weight of the decaying vegetables and the rotting juices seeping through the bag were too much for him. Without asking for permission, the man threw the sack away and confessed what he had done to the Master. The Master then pointed out that this was exactly what he had been trying to tell the disciple. When we continue bearing the burden of old wounds, they will fester instead of healing.

The beauty of forgiveness is that it can happen at any time and it is never too late. It does not require any action on the part of the person who consciously or unconsciously receives our forgiveness. Amma urges us to remember that we are not candles that need to be lit by someone else. By awakening to our true nature, we can rise above the conditions that hold us down.

After so many years of being estranged from and judgmental about my father, I found that the power of repeating a prayer of peace for his benefit was enough to relieve me of the weight I had been carrying. Through prayer, my thoughts subsided and with them the burden of my memories, expectations and obligations. My mind, which had clung to its own suffering, was pervaded by a deep sense of peace that was not dependent on my father or anyone else.

In the same way that we can experience the subtle vibrations of Sanskrit syllables through their simple utterance, it is possible to experience the essence of a word like forgiveness. As I sat with my father in the Intensive Care Unit, I felt the root word, *ghabbh* (to give or receive), as a direct experience. In that moment, I knew that the gift of forgiveness was its innate capacity to facilitate simultaneous giving and receiving and to dissolve

all boundaries between self and the other. In dissolving regrets from the past and expectations of the future, forgiveness also holds us effortlessly in the present, where only love remains.

She reminds us, “There is no human being who does not possess at least one divine quality. If we can forgive the mistakes of others, the divinity in them will be awakened. So, we should try to cultivate

this attitude. When we perceive the good in everything, we are filled with God’s grace. That grace is the source of all success in life.”

May Amma’s grace and love flow through us, allowing us to forgive others and ourselves for any harm we endure or cause, and to experience life as a gift. May we trust that all circumstances are opportunities to remember and awaken who we really are. 🌸

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*(continued from page 51)*

*Mabatmas* (spiritually illumined souls) like Amma demonstrate this equal vision in each and every movement. In the song *Ananda Veethiyil*, she sings, “*ellamentatmaven-northu*” — “I realized that everything was my own Self.”

This does not mean that Amma is blind to our shortcomings; she sees them clearly. But she is able to love us in spite of our weaknesses, forgive us for our mistakes, and guide us along the right path

because she also sees the pure self in us. To reach this exalted state, we must practise intense spiritual disciplines. They will also help us maintain the equilibrium of our mind during our interactions with the world.

We can find many such pearls of wisdom in Amma’s teachings. Delving into her words gives us peace in life and helps us progress spiritually. Let us reflect upon Amma’s teachings and try to assimilate their essence in our lives. 🌸

# See Things For What They Are

by Br. Ajai Kumar, India

**A**mma's teachings are expressed in simple language, but the principles are profound. Even her casual utterances have great depth. The more we reflect on them, the more the depth and vastness of her vision will be revealed to us.

Amma's words are like a test paper. If we have studied the previous years' test papers, we will have a good idea of the kind of questions that will be asked. But if we sit for an examination without adequate preparation, we might become dumbfounded on seeing the questions. Likewise, one

who reflects on Amma's words constantly will know how to face situations in life. Otherwise, we might find ourselves defeated by them.

One of Amma's teachings, which she repeats often, is, "See an elephant as an elephant and a frog as a frog. Do not see an elephant as a frog or a frog as an elephant."

What does she mean? Is she talking about elephants and frogs? No. Amma's point is that we often do not perceive an object to be what it is; instead, we inflate or belittle its worth.

The frog is small. If we mistake it for an elephant, there is clearly something wrong with our eyes. So, too, if we mistake an elephant for a frog. The problem is not with the eyes but with how our intellect evaluates what is seen. Likewise, being unable to see a person for who he or she really is a defect in perception.

I know a married couple. Even before they got married,

there were minor problems between them. Within a year of their marriage, the problems escalated. The wife could not get along with her mother-in-law whereas the husband was devoted to his mother. The quarrels between the spouses became so intense that the relationship broke down. The husband wanted a divorce, but the wife wanted to save the relationship. She apologized. The couple continued to live together. Before marriage, their expectations had been unrealistic. The understanding that reality differed from expectations led to a truce. Each understood the flaws and foibles of the other and tried to adjust to them. They also tried to correct their own mistakes.

Often, we do not understand the true nature of things and instead superimpose unreal attributes on them. For example, if we like someone, we will magnify his good qualities a thousand-fold. If that liking turns to hatred, his

negativities will be magnified a thousand-fold. This happens regularly, and this is what Amma means when she tells us not to see an elephant as a frog and vice versa. Because of this mental trait, we do not see the reality. We waste our time finding fault and blaming others, with the result that we are never at peace.

No one is perfect. Before we judge others, let us remind ourselves that they can also find fault with us. Everyone has good and bad qualities. Knowing this, we will not have unrealistic expectations of others. We will then be able to live in harmony with others. If someone tries to harm us, we will not react emotionally if we see that his actions stem from ignorance. Instead, we will be able to forgive him. This mature response will bring about a transformation in those who try to hurt us.

In telling us to see an elephant as an elephant and a frog as a frog, Amma also

implies that we must try to accept every situation that comes our way, regardless of whether it brings joy or sorrow. If we can cultivate this attitude of acceptance and stop resisting, we can remain calm and composed even in the midst of challenging situations.

There is a state known as *sarvatra samadarshanah* — having equal vision all the time. In this state, one sees the unity behind diversity. Thus, we do not just see the outer form of the elephant or the frog but their inner Self, which is the same. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna says:

*sarva-bhuta-stham atma-  
nam sarvabhutani chatmani  
ikshate yoga yukatma  
sarvatra sama darshanah*  
One who is established  
in God-consciousness  
sees, with an equal eye,  
all beings in God and  
God in all beings. (6.29)

*(continued on page 28)*



## Sarpa-Satra

by Sanoop Sadanandan, India

When Uttanka was on his way to meet the Paushya king and queen to ask the queen for her earrings, which his Guru's wife wanted, Takshaka, the serpent king, created many obstacles for him. For this reason, Uttanka began to harbour a desire to take revenge against Takshaka.

Uttanka went to Hastinapura to see King Janamejaya, who had conquered Takshashila and was living in great

splendour. Uttanka recounted in detail the glories of the king's late father, Parikshit, and then asked the king why he had not yet punished Takshaka, who killed his father. Uttanka suggested that the serpent king be burnt by offering him in a ritual sacrifice. Hearing this, King Janamejaya's mind started brooding thoughts of vengeance.

The king asked the priests if there were Vedic rites that sanctioned the ritual killing of Takshaka. They told him about the divinely ordained '*sarpa-satra*' (serpent sacrifice). Hearing this, the king decided to go ahead with the sacrifice.

While the *yaga-shala* (venue of the fire sacrifice) was being built and other preparations were afoot, the master architect saw certain omens portending obstacles to the successful completion of the sacrifice. To prevent problems, the king fortified security around the venue to ensure that no unauthorized person

would be allowed into the *yaga-shala*.

The *sarpa-satra* began. Kings, sages and scholars were in attendance. In separate spaces designated for the purpose, scriptures and spiritual topics were discussed. Sage Vyasa and his disciple Vaishampayana graced the function. At the Guru's behest, the disciple narrated the *Mahabharata*.

As the *sarpa-satra* continued, innumerable snakes in many shapes and colours began writhing and hissing as they fell into the sacrificial fire. The smell of the burning flesh of snakes filled the air.

Faced with the imminent extermination of his species, one of the serpent kings, Vasuki, approached his sister, Jaratkaru, and told her that the time had come for her to deliver her son, Astika. Vasuki said that only her son could save their race from total annihilation, for the boy would have immense spiritual power and high intelligence, and be

a dedicated adherent of dharma.

Vasuki's words proved to be prophetic. Even at a young age, Astika was mature, wise, humble, innocent, fearless and totally detached. Entrusted with the mission of aborting the sarpa-satra, he bowed down to his mother and uncle and left for Hastinapura.

Astika was stopped at the entrance to the yaga-shala. So, he sat down at the threshold and began glorifying the sarpa-satra and its participants. He sang songs supplicating God for the successful completion of the sacrifice. Hearing him, everyone felt impressed by his devotion and scholarship. Janamejaya personally came to welcome him, and said that he was ready to do anything for him. Astika, who was waiting for this opportunity, asked the king for a *dakshina* (honorary). The king was ready to give Astika anything.

In the meantime, the sarpa-satra had reached its peak. Snakes were falling continuously into the fire. Takshaka, who was being drawn towards the sacrificial fire pit, sought refuge with Indra, king of the gods. Seeing this, the priests tried to draw both Indra and Takshaka to the satra.

That was when Astika entered the scene, asking for dakshina. He asked that no more serpents be sacrificed. Hearing this request, Janamejaya balked. However, as a king and a man of dharma, he felt that he ought to honour his promise. He ended the sarpa-satra and pardoned Takshaka, who begged for forgiveness. The king then gave appropriate gifts to the priests.

As Astika had come with the noble aim of saving his race and had succeeded, King Janamejaya prostrated wholeheartedly to him. The king then invited him to attend the

*(continued on page 38)*





# The Magic of a Hug

by Rachna Chhabria, India

It was the spring of 1963. Several children were walking from their village, Parayakadavu, to their school in Srayikkadu, a nearby village.

Nine-year-old Sudhamani, whose name means ‘ambrosial jewel,’ was trailing behind, her eyes glued to the plants on the road. They looked lifeless and the flowers looked wan.

“So sad,” said the gentle and kind-hearted Sudhamani. She went to the plants, kissed them and whispered sweet words to them.

“Hurry up, Sudhamani, we’ll be late for school,” her older sister Kasturi said.

Sudhamani ran behind the group.

“Finished talking to the plants?” her younger sister Sajani and younger brother Suresh asked in unison.

Sudhamani nodded.

When the children were returning from school that evening, Sudhamani pointed to the plants. “Look!” she said delightedly, “the plants and flowers look healthy.”

“That’s the magic of your touch,” her younger brother Satish teased. He was holding the hand of their youngest brother Sudhir.

Sudhamani walked to the plants and caressed them.

When the children reached home, they saw their father Sugunanandan-acchan and

several other men studying the withered mango tree in the yard.

“Accha (Father), what happened?” asked Sudhamani, running towards her father.

“Some disease has infected the tree,” Sugunanandan-acchan said grimly.

“It looks so lonely,” said Sudhamani and wrapped her arms around the tree. “Get well soon, my precious,” she said and kissed the trunk.

Then she hurried into the house to help Damayanti-amma, her mother, prepare the evening meal.

The next morning, when Sudhamani was leaving for school, she ran towards the tree. Hugging it again, she whispered soothing words to it.

Within a few days, the mango tree sprouted tiny blossoms. The family members who had given up on the tree stared at it in awe.

“Moo,” said the family cow, ambling out of the shed. The

family members looked at the cow. For some reason, she had stopped giving milk; she had also stopped eating.

“Why aren’t you eating, you naughty girl?” Sudhamani patted the cow’s flanks. Placing a bundle of grass before the cow, she said, “Eat or else Damayanti-amma will get angry!”

The cow stared at Sudhamani. Then, to everyone’s amazement, the cow lowered her head and started chewing the grass. The next morning, the cow’s udder was overflowing with milk.

Soon, word spread in the village that Sudhamani had the healing touch. Villagers started visiting Sudhamani’s house to tell her their problems and brought with them their plants, animals and children.

“*Kunju* (little one), my goat isn’t feeling well,” the grandmother living nearby said, laying her goat before Sudhamani.

Taking the goat into her arms, Sudhamani lovingly

caressed it. She then kissed the goat on its head and handed it back to the old woman.

“Sudhamani, my *tulasi* (basil) plant is wilting,” another woman said, carrying a pot in her arms.

“You should water it with love,” Sudhamani replied, caressing the plant.

“Kunju, my knee is hurting,” an old grandfather said through decayed teeth.

“Accha, tobacco is bad for health,” Sudhamani rebuked him. “Half your teeth have gone. If you’re not careful, the other half will go, too.”

The grandfather laughed, “I don’t know why I forget everything when I’m with you. Your love dulls the pain.”

“Accha, my love can’t bring your teeth back,” Sudhamani said, pinching his cheek.

Seeing the crowd gathered around Sudhamani, Satish asked their mother, “Amma, what is it about sister’s touch that makes people feel better?”

“Sudhamani’s love is selfless,” she replied. “Selfless and unconditional love has a lot of power, working its magic on people. It gives them the strength to tackle their problems. They also feel better, knowing that someone loves them so much.”

Every evening, people turned up outside Sudhamani’s house to spend time with the kind, sweet and cheerful girl.

Sudhamani would talk to them, console them and hug them. They would return home feeling better and

emboldened to face life’s problems head-on.

As word spread of how Sudhamani had the healing touch, people from all over the world started visiting Sudhamani to experience the magical touch of unconditional love. As the years passed, an ashram was established in that place, and Sudhamani came to be known as Sadguru Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, or simply as Amma, the hugging saint. ❧

*This is a fictionalized story based on the life of Amma.*

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*(continued from page 34)*

*Ashwamedha Yajna* (horse sacrifice) that he was planning to conduct and sought his blessings for the successful completion of the yajna. Astika accepted the invitation, bade farewell to all, and departed for his home.

When he reached home, Astika was given a rapturous welcome. Many serpents gave

him precious gifts to express their gratitude for saving their race from extinction. Astika lived for many years and was finally liberated.

It is said that those who daily sing this story of the virtuous Astika will be free from the fear of snakes and be successful in their endeavours.



## GURU PURNIMA 2021



A true disciple does not set aside any particular day to pay homage to the Guru but strives to honour her by constantly remembering her and following her teachings implicitly and explicitly. That said, commemorations are necessary because they are reminders. Guru Purnima is an occasion to renew our commitment to the spiritual life and to deepen our faith in the Guru, who embodies the Truth we seek.

Guru Purnima also marks the birthday of Sage Vyasa, the compiler of the Vedas and author of the Puranas and Brahmasutras. It is only fitting that Guru Purnima be associated with this sage of deep spiritual wisdom.

But during this year's Guru Purnima observances in Amritapuri, Amma remarked, "Veda Vyasa is not our first Guru. Kala is!"

Kala is a loaded term. It means time and connotes mortality. It is, in fact, one of the epithets of Lord Yama, the God of Death. 'Mahakala' is one of the names of Lord Shiva, the personification of cosmic destruction. Kala also means black or dark. Kali, the feminine form of Kala, is derived from this word.

Why did Amma suddenly refer to Kala as our first Guru? Is it because the spectre of death is looming larger than ever before, given how the scourge of the coronavirus has been spiriting away lives all over the world? Was it to remind us of the swift passing of time, to urge us to use our time wisely so that we can move closer towards our highest destiny — Self-

realization — and to make us more aware of the vital importance of living in the present moment? Or was it to hint that we have Mother Kali with us as our Guru?

A Guru comes into being only when there is a disciple. Lord Krishna was Arjuna's friend until the Kurukshetra War, which almost broke the latter's spirits. On the brink of a nervous breakdown, Arjuna surrenders completely to the Lord and begs him for help. That is when Krishna, the bosom buddy, became Lord Krishna, the Guru. Seeing his surrender, the Lord unveils his cosmic form and reveals, "*Kalo'smi*" — "I am Time" (*Bhagavad Gita*, 11.32). Arjuna sees that the mysteries of creation, sustenance and dissolution play out in the Lord and beholds the awe-inspiring majesty of divinity. It is in such rare and transcendental moments that the disciple glimpses the oneness of God and the Guru.

Similarly, there was a time when some devotees thought that the divine 'possessed' Amma only during Devi Bhava and that she was an ordinary, albeit charming,

lass at other times. Today, the idea seems quaint, even hilarious. But have we really understood Amma? Most of us are like Arjuna before his surrender. We regard Amma more as a mother than a Guru. As she often says, “There are no Guru and disciples here, only mother and children.”

She says that our relationship with her is an expression of *sakhya bhava*, the attitude of regarding God as a *sakhi* (friend). A true friend is a confidante, someone we will open our heart to and disclose everything, even things that we might not tell our parents or spouse. That is the beauty of intimate friendship. Amma knows everything, but by sharing everything with her, our heart opens up to the divine. Doing so will purify us in due course. Perhaps, this is what Swami Amritaswarupananda (Swamiji) meant when he said in his talk that the Guru is unlike a teacher in that a teacher *informs* us, whereas the Guru *transforms* us.

When Amma arrived on the stage after his talk, the devotion surging in the hearts of both the

ashram residents and those watching the function online reached a high-water mark. Just as the full moon causes tides to rise high, the *puṇnima* (full moon) of Amma’s love exerts a pull her children all over the world strongly feel. In the dark night of separation from Amma, the splendour of her divine compassion must have been even more apparent. As Swamiji performed *pada puja* (ceremonial washing of the feet) to Amma, many shed tears of love and devotion.

Before her pre-recorded Guru Purnima speech was played, Amma asked everyone to pray for world peace by chanting ‘*Lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu*’ (‘May all beings everywhere be peaceful and happy’) 54 times. Moments after the chanting started, it began drizzling. Was it a sign from heaven, nature’s heralding of better times ahead? The Guru, who is one with God, can alter the course of destiny. However, divine grace flows only to the deserving. Perhaps, what Amma and nature were trying to convey through the shower was

that praying *and* acting for world peace can make it a reality.

In her speech, Amma said that the outer Guru awakens the inner Guru, and that both disciple and Guru are in us. To awaken our inner Guru, we need to cultivate surrender. However, Amma said that most of us find it difficult to surrender because we cling to our likes and dislikes, and thus continue giving importance to our body and mind.

To explain the dangers of pampering the ego, Amma recounted an incident from the *Mahabharata*. After the Kurukshetra War, Lord Krishna ordered Arjuna to dismount from the chariot. But Arjuna did not like being bossed about; clearly, his ego had not relinquished its grip in spite of all the advice he had received from the Lord. Instead of doing as told, Arjuna asked

Krishna for an explanation. Krishna said that he would offer one after Arjuna obeyed him. A disgruntled Arjuna alighted from the chariot; Krishna then dismounted. The very next moment, flames engulfed the chariot, reducing it to ashes. Krishna explained that his presence in the chariot had protected it and Arjuna from being razed by the powerful missiles fired by the enemies. Hearing this, the disciple was chastened.

Likewise, Amma's presence in our hearts is a protective shield. No matter where we might be, let us try to walk the path of *dharma* (righteousness), love and service. This is the only way to follow Amma. It is also the best way to honour our beloved Guru and Mother. ❧

— *Br. Madhavamrita Chaitanya*

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