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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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## True Friend

Children, change is the nature of life. Both good and bad things can happen in life without any warning. Nothing lasts forever in this world. Today's friend can be tomorrow's enemy. God is our only true friend. No matter how many relatives and or how much worldly wealth we may have, they can never give us lasting happiness. Therefore, we should cultivate an inner bond with God alone.

One waters the roots of the tree, not the branches. Only then will the water reach all parts of the tree. Similarly, by loving God, we love all of creation. Thus, we will not become enslaved by excessive attachment to anyone even while leading a family life.

Many of us know the story of the mud-ball and the dry leaf who played hide and seek. Though it is a story for children, it conveys a profound meaning. While the mud-ball and dry leaf were playing, suddenly, the wind started blowing. The mud-



ball began to worry: “Oh no! The dry leaf will be blown away!” To save the dry leaf, the mud-ball sat on top of the leaf. After some time, it started raining. The dry leaf covered the mud-ball to prevent it from being washed away. After a while, there was both rain and wind. What happened? The leaf was blown away and the mud-ball was washed away.

Our life is also like this. When we depend on others, small gains and victories might come our way. But no one will be able to help us in a major crisis. Our only refuge and saving grace then will be surrender to the divine. Only surrender ensures lasting peace and contentment in life.

This does not mean that we should not love our spouse or children or that we should

regard them as strangers. We must love and protect them but must never forget that God is our only true friend. Everyone else will leave us sooner or later. Therefore, let us depend on God alone, considering all difficulties we face in life as fuel for our inner growth. If we do so, we can enjoy peace and happiness in family life also.

Depending on God does not mean that we will not face sorrow or difficulty in life. We will, but the difficulties will be greatly reduced. Not only that, even amidst difficulties, we will be able to retain our self-confidence and contentment.

It is enough to catch the queen bee; the other bees will follow her. Similarly, if we depend on God, both spiritual and material prosperity will come our way. 🍷

When we depend on others, small gains and victories might come our way. But in a major crisis, our only refuge and saving grace will be surrender to the divine.



# The Blessed Crow

by swami paramatmananda puri

In the *Sri Ramacharitamanasa*, Tulasidas's rendition of the *Ramayana*, there is a story about a crow named Kakabhushundi who comes to see Lord Rama's childhood *lilas* (divine play). In fact, his greatest happiness is to be chased by the Lord Himself in the form of a little boy. We may find it difficult to believe that a crow could have the knowledge and intelligence to do

this, but in fact there was a similar crow devotee of Amma who used to visit her.

On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, Amma would give Bhava Darshan in the *kalari* (old temple). She would sing bhajans, sitting on the veranda in front of the temple, before going inside. At that time, a crow would be seen perched on Amma's house and facing the *kalari*. It seemed as if it was also listening.

One day, Amma was sitting on the veranda of the temple with her back to the wall. A devotee had brought her a small bag of 'mixture:' a combination of roasted peanuts, lentils, peas and other dried legumes spiced with salt and chilli. Amma spread it out before her on the cement floor, as was her habit, picked up a few pieces, and ate them. Just then, some crows came over and started to peck at the food. One of them started fighting with the rest, trying to prevent them from eating any of the

mixture. He finally succeeded in chasing them away and then sat there calmly looking at Amma without eating anything himself. Amma stared at the crow, which had an unusually gentle face.

"For some reason, I feel a lot of affection towards that crow. Please give him something to eat," Amma told me. I went over to give him some mixture, but he jumped away from me and into Amma's lap. He then sat there for quite a while, to Amma's amusement. Finally, he jumped up again, pecked at Amma's nose ring, and flew away.

The next day, I was lying down on a mat, resting by the side of the backwaters. The same crow came over to me and jumped onto my belly. He just sat there for as long as I kept still. I then patted him on the head. He did not object to this. This was unusual behaviour for a crow, for crows are generally fearful of people or aggressive.

“For some reason, I feel a lot of affection towards that crow. Please give him something to eat,” Amma told me. I went over to give him some mixture, but he jumped away from me and into Amma’s lap.

The next day, I found him floating on the water in the uncovered tank above Amma’s room. I fished him out, placed him on the ground near the backwaters, and lit a fire in order to give him some warmth, as he was still alive and shivering. Seeing the fire by the waterside, Amma came over to

find out what was happening. Coming near, she picked up the dying crow and stroked it gently, whereupon it died at once!

Blessed crow! Would that we could also have the great good fortune to die like that, in the hands of the Divine Mother! 🌸



# The World Belongs to the Compassionate

by swami amritageetananda puri

**W**hy do people go to Amma? This is a question that is asked quite often. I am reminded of an incident from the life of Sri Buddha. Siddhartha, as he was known before he became enlightened, was once strolling in the palace gardens when he suddenly heard the sounds of fluttering wings. A bleeding crane fell at his feet. The very embodiment of kindness, Siddhartha picked the crane up gently, caressed it, and started walking towards his palace to treat the wounded bird. As he was walking, his cousin Devadatta ran up to him and claimed that the bird belonged to him; he had shot it down with his bow and arrow. Siddhartha refused to give him the bird. He took it to the palace and nursed it back to health. Devadatta came again and demanded the bird. Siddhartha firmly refused, knowing that



Devadatta would harm the bird. Finally, they went to the court, where, with the king's consent, a wise minister said, "Let the bird decide who its owner is. Let the two princes stand apart on either side of the hall and the bird be kept in the middle. Let us see what the bird does."

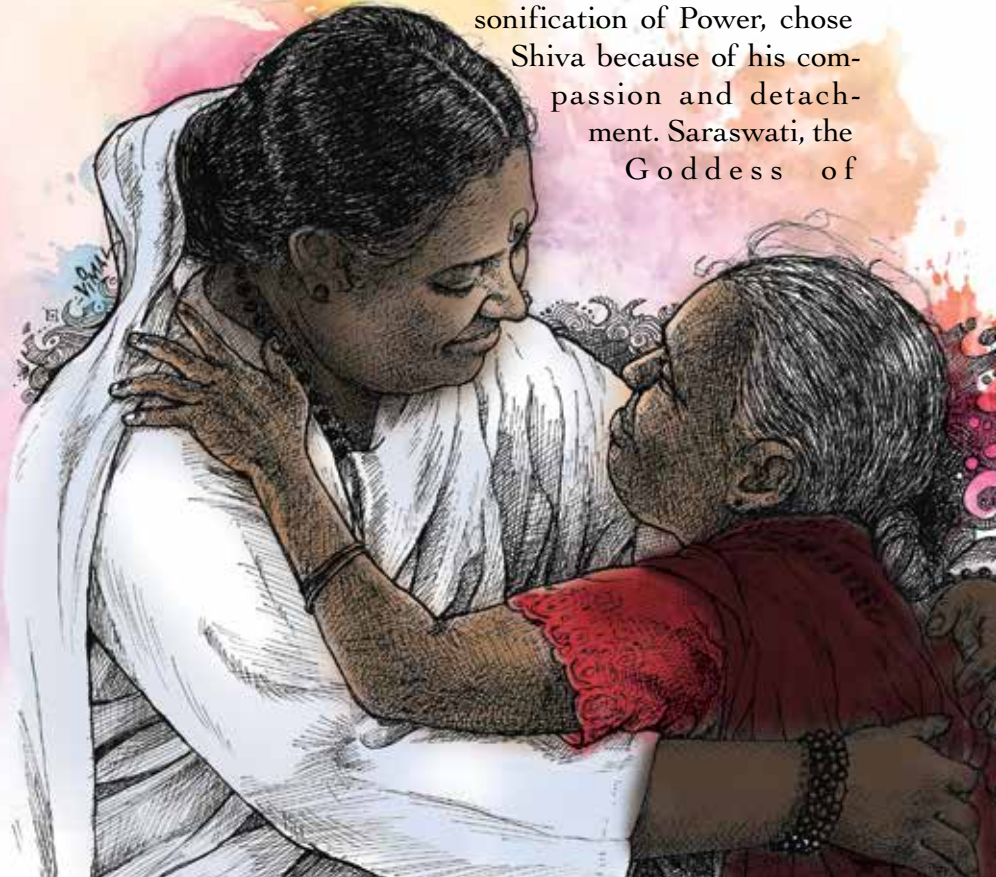
The crane moved straight towards the compassionate

Siddhartha, leaving Devadatta frustrated and humiliated!

To return to the question, why people go to Amma, it is because they are drawn by her ever flowing and overflowing compassion.

Truly, the world belongs to the compassionate! Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth, chose Vishnu because of his infinite compassion. Shakti, the personification of Power, chose

Shiva because of his compassion and detachment. Saraswati, the Goddess of



Knowledge, chose Brahma because of his compassion and creative mind. From time to time, the Supreme incarnates on the earth in a human form. As she has a pure and creative mind, infinite compassion and total detachment, knowledge, wealth and power follow her.

Recently, I was talking to a few students and doctors from Amma's Ayurveda College. Ayurveda is part of the Rg Veda. The Vedas contain the *Purusha Suktam*, which declares,

*purusha eva idam sarvam*

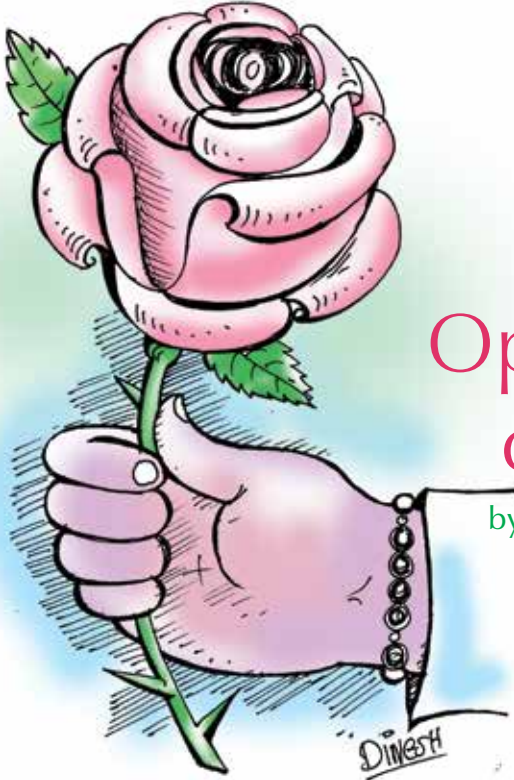
Everything around us is a manifestation of the Supreme.

What should a doctor's attitude be towards a patient? If the doctor is of a spiritual bent, he would try to elevate his work into worship, and think, "Here is a manifestation of the Supreme. This is a wonderful opportunity to serve the Lord!" Such thinking fosters compassion in the doctor. As a spiritual

doctor, Amma has compassion for all.

The Ayurveda medical students and doctors were telling me about how Amma had met them after a conference. During the meeting, she asked them questions that revealed her deep knowledge of Ayurveda. She also stressed the need to do more research in Ayurveda. Amma then called the ashram's allopathic doctors to join the meeting and said, "Children, both the Ayurvedic and allopathic doctor-children should sit together and discuss how to cure complicated diseases when they reach an advanced stage." Infinite is Mother's concern and compassion for her children.

As her children, let us try our best to see those in front of us as other children of Amma and be ever ready to serve them. May she fill our hearts with peace, love and compassion, and inspire us to love and serve everyone. 🌸



# Openness of Heart

by bri. niramayamrita  
chaitanya

**T**he Kurukushetra War, which took place more than 5,000 years ago, is still being discussed. What is its relevance today? The battlefield of Kurukshetra is a metaphor for the mind. Amma says, “The fiercest war is that which goes on in our mind. If we win that battle, nothing can ever defeat us.” Arrayed on one side are the smaller forces of virtuous thoughts, and

on the other, is the larger army of unvirtuous thoughts. The Arjuna in us is bound to become dejected sooner or later and feel like giving up. Fortunately, the same *Paramatma* (Supreme Consciousness), who took the form of Lord Krishna then, has incarnated as the Mother of the Universe. This avatar of love and compassion is with us to help us win the battle against our lower nature.

Lord Krishna tells Arjuna,  
*ashocyananvashocastvam  
 prajnavadamshca bhashase  
 gatasunagatasumshca  
 nanushocanti panditah*  
 You grieve for those one  
 need not grieve for, and  
 yet, you speak like a  
 person of wisdom. The  
 wise do not grieve for  
 either the living or the  
 dead. (*Bhagavad Gita*,  
 2.11)

A *jnani* (knower of the Truth) is always equanimous; he is not attached to anything. Look

at the vast sky. It contains everything — the air, clouds, sun, moon, stars, galaxies and so on — but is not attached to anything.

Often, we misunderstand detachment to mean being impassive. What I learnt from Amma is that detachment is a state of mental balance; it is total equanimity. We can see this supreme state of detachment only in *mahatmas* (spiritually illumined souls) like Amma. She embraces everyone and showers love and compassion on each, without any expectation whatsoever. Her only concern is the uplift of all.

I remember a story that Swamiji (Swami Amritaswarupananda) narrated about true detachment. Once, a strong and beautiful horse walked into the stable of a horse breeder. No one knew where it came from. When the neighbours learnt about it, they came to congratulate the breeder. They commented on

how lucky he was. The breeder did not say anything. He just smiled.

After a few days, the horse disappeared. The neighbours expressed sorrow at the loss. The horse breeder just smiled. He did not say anything.

After a week, that horse returned with a few horses, all strong and beautiful. The neighbours congratulated the breeder: "How lucky you are! Now you have a large stable of horses!"

The breeder remained silent but smiled.

A few days passed. His only son went riding on one of the new horses. He fell and broke his hands and legs. The neighbours expressed regret: "How unfortunate! Alas, your only son hurt himself badly!"

This time, the breeder said, "My son fell from the horse and broke his limbs. This is the truth. Time will tell if it is fortunate or unfortunate."

After a week, soldiers came to the village and enlisted all

the able-bodied youngsters to serve in the army, as the kingdom had come under attack from an enemy. The neighbours commented, "How lucky the horse breeder is! Only his son evaded enlistment."

Such is life. It is full of unexpected joys and sorrows, good luck and bad luck. Our mind is like those villagers, constantly murmuring. Amma is trying to make us like the horse breeder: calm and wise. She points out that most people tend to swing towards extremes, soaring like a bird when elated or sinking like a stone when despondent.

Like the seven colours in sunlight, consciousness encompasses seven virtues: love, peace, knowledge, strength, happiness, purity and tranquillity. However, we mistakenly imagine that love, peace and happiness are in objects and people when they are innate. Amma says that we ought to be like a *'tantedi'*. This Malayalam word is usually

used to refer to someone who is bold and fearless. But Amma explains the word this way: “*tante idattil irikkuka*” (remain within oneself). A bhajan that Amma often sings explains how.

*ullattonnum ullilallatilla  
mattengum  
atu kanditanay ullinullil  
cellanam nammal*

That which truly exists is in us. To see it, we must turn within.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna tells a grieving Arjuna that all those he is grieving for are not the ephemeral body but the eternal consciousness. Most of the sorrows we feel are also over transient matters. Separation from Amma also causes us pain. When I was sent to do seva at the Tanur Amrita Vidyalayam (AV), I went for darshan. Whenever I go for darshan, I would note points down on a piece of paper. That day I had written: “Amma, I

want to see you like this always. Even when I am in Tanur, I want to see you the way I see you now. Amma, please come with me!”

Amma read the note and laughed. Then she said, “You should embrace the pillars and coconut trees there and, forgetting everything else, call out to Amma. I was also like that.”

When I heard this, I happily left for Tanur. On reaching the school, I looked at each of the coconut trees. I thought, if I embrace the trees now, what would the children, teachers and parents think? They might wonder, “What happened to madam? She was fine until yesterday.” So, I told myself, “Not now” and went to my room.

That evening, I went to the veranda as usual to do *japa* (repeated chanting of the mantra). Everyone had left and I was alone. After my *japa*, I took a good look at the pillars. Then I went running to them

What I learnt from Amma is that detachment is a state of mental balance; it is total equanimity. We can see this supreme state of detachment only in *mahatmas* like Amma. She showers love and compassion on each, without any expectation whatsoever.

and hugged them tightly, calling out loudly, “Amma! Amma!”

The sharp edges of the pillars pressed painfully into my body. I could not feel the softness, coolness or fragrance of Amma’s body, or the bliss we get when she kisses us. I thought, “Amma tricked me,” and slowly walked back to my room. Later, I thought, “Amma won’t say anything meaningless. It is because of my limited understanding that I have failed to understand her words.”

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna says,

*raso’hamapsu kaunteya  
prabhasmi shashiuryayoh*

*pranavah sarvavedeshu  
shabdah khe paurusham  
nrshu*

O Arjuna, I am the taste in water, the radiance of the sun and moon, the syllable ‘Om’ in the Vedas, the sound in ether, and virility in men. (7.8)

Maybe Amma was trying to tell me to see Her as the quintessence of each and every thing. Another important teaching, one that she always stresses, is *shradha* (attentiveness). The truth though is that however careful we may be, the actions of others can also create problems in our life. To illustrate, Amma says that

even if we drive carefully, another driver who is careless can ram his car into ours and hurt us. I am reminded of an incident that happened in the Tanur AV in 2010.

After a student, the son of a senior teacher in our school, passed his 10th grade examinations, he applied for admission to the 11th and 12th grades in our school. When his 10th grade certificate arrived, we saw that his date of birth was wrong. The staff who entered the details online had made a mistake. To rectify the error, we had to contact the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) Office in Chennai, and the whole process would take a long time.

I got caught up with work and forgot to follow it up. The student sat for both the 12th grade and college entrance examinations, both of which he passed. He also gained admission to a computer engineering degree course in a college near his house. How-

ever, as his 10th grade certificate was not in order, the college gave him temporary admission. He was to produce the correct certificate within 15 days, failing which his admission would be cancelled.

I became tense. The principal of AV Ernakulam, Swamini Bhaktipriyamrita, helped me a lot. She asked the principal of Chennai AV to go to the CBSE office and check if the correction had been made. She also obtained the CBSE secretary's number, which she gave me. I started calling him daily. After a few days, he got irritated with me and told me that he did not like being bothered persistently (especially on his personal phone).

Ten days passed. The 11th day was a Saturday. The student's mother came to me and warned me that her husband was upset. She said that he used to be in the army, drinks a lot, and was blaming her for jeopardizing their son's future by enrolling him in AV.



I did not say anything but looked at Amma's photo, mentally beseeching her for help. The next day was Sunday. I spent the whole day praying to Amma: "O Amma, the school's reputation is at stake. People will say that we ruined the boy's future owing to our negligence. Amma, he's a good boy. Please help him."

On Monday, when the couriers came, I ran to them... but there was nothing. That evening, the boy's mother came to me and said, "My husband will be coming here tomorrow. Madam, please don't blame me if he speaks to you roughly."

The image of a drunken soldier sporting a handlebar moustache rose in my mind. I was so scared that I could not sleep that night.

Tuesday morning dawned. I thought, "If he doesn't get that certificate today, his admission will be cancelled tomorrow." I decided to call the CBSE secretary. I thought it was the day of my doom any-

way. So what if shouts at me over the phone? I called him. He picked up the phone. Before I could speak, he said, "Madam, I have sent the corrected certificate. You will get it today."

I had no words to express my joy. I ran to the puja room and thanked Amma profusely. I arranged with the Post Office to send the certificate to the teacher as soon as possible.

That night, her husband called me to thank me. He said, "Madam, I have regained my faith in Amma. It is only because of Amma's power that we obtained the certificate today."

The next day, he and his family members came to the school. They made offerings of oil, wicks, incense sticks, big packets of almonds, pistachios and cashew nuts, pens and bed linen at the altar to Amma.

In the first week of August, after Amma had returned from her Summer Tour, I went for darshan with this note and

a packet of almonds: “O Amma, by your infinite grace, that boy’s certificate came on time. To express their happiness, his family brought almonds, pistachios, cashew nuts, pens and a bed sheet. I took the pens. I placed the pistachios and cashew nuts in front of your photo during the puja. After the puja, I ate them. The bed linen is waiting in Tanur for your arrival. This packet of almonds is for you!”

Amma read it aloud and burst out laughing. She then ate a few almonds. When Amma came to Tanur in 2014, Amma stayed in our school and used the bed on which that bedsheet had been spread.

This incident taught me that one careless mistake on our part can affect others. In this instance, Amma’s grace alone saved us.

\* \* \*

Let me narrate how we (my two older sisters and I) came

to join the ashram. In December 1986, Amma had a program at the Moothakunnam Siva Temple. I was in 8th grade. As I had exams, I could not go to the temple. After the temple program, Amma visited two houses near our home. We saw Amma for the first time in one of those houses. To our knowledge, the members of that family have not gone to see Amma even once after that. Therefore, we still believe that Amma went there to see us!

Our parents would take us to see Amma whenever she visited places nearby. They also bought Amma’s photos and many bhajan cassettes for us. After one or two darshans, we wanted to see Amma again and again, and we spent long hours listening to her bhajans. When he saw the changes in us, father’s attitude changed. He took away the cassettes and photos. We were strictly forbidden from going to see Amma. As a result, we started seeing her without his knowledge.

Father was working outside Kerala and would come home only once or twice a year. When he was away, we used to pester our mother to let us see Amma; we even went without her knowledge. Sometimes, we would say that we had extra classes or tuition. Mother would say that she was going to visit relatives. Often, we would meet each other in the queue for Amma's darshan! Even though we would lie to see Amma, she would receive us as if she had been waiting for a long time to see us. Every time, she would say, "O, my daughters have come!"

Once, we heard that Amma was going to inaugurate the temple in the Kaloor Ashram. As father was not home, we pestered mother until she gave in. Thinking that we would eat before leaving, we asked her for food. She said, "I'm not your mother, am I? *Your* mother will give you food!"

Hearing this, we also became obstinate and left with-


out eating. We reached Kaloor. After the program and darshan ended, Amma went to her room. We waited downstairs. Our plan was to leave after Amma left. By that time, we were terribly hungry. Suddenly, Bri. Leelavati (now Swamini Matrupriya) came to us and asked, "Why do all of you look so pale? Are you tired? Come, let's go up. There is food for us there."

She took us upstairs. There, we enjoyed a lavish feast with two kinds of *payasam* (sweet pudding)!

When we returned home, we triumphantly told mother, "Amma gave us a feast with two kinds of payasam!"

Even though our parents initially resisted our joining the ashram, eventually, they came around.

In 2005, our mother was diagnosed with third stage uterine cancer. It was an unbearable blow for father and our sister at home.



The doctors ruled out surgery but prescribed 24 rounds of radiation and chemotherapy. Whenever my mother or sister called, I would try to console and infuse confidence in them by telling them stories Amma told us, including the story of the horse trader. I would also visualize Amma sitting near mother and caressing her head and the cancer-ridden parts of her body. Whenever I felt sad, I would resort to this visualization and get some relief.

The treatment started. Although I would inquire how mother was doing, I never asked about radiation or hair loss, which is usually an inevitable side effect. On the last day of her treatment, we went to see her in AIMS Hospital. I imagined that she would be in a pitiable condition and decided that I would not reveal my anguish.

To my surprise, mother was in good shape. There was no hair loss or radiation scars! I felt that Amma must have caressed my mother during her treatment, just as I had visualized. More than 15 years have passed, and mother is still alive, healthy and happy. A million thanks to Amma for her infinite blessings!

To make life meaningful, we should become a tool in Amma's hands. We should see bitter experiences as opportunities to learn valuable lessons. We may make mistakes, but we should be able to correct them and move ahead. Most importantly, we should be able to open our heart fully before Amma. Whatever crisis we face, let us hold on tightly to Amma's holy feet. May Amma bless us with all these qualities.



# The Force

by sadanand (timothy fillion), u.s.a.

Once during a mind-and-body healing session, my mind became quiet and open. Suddenly, spurts of joy began bubbling through my torso. I also experienced a deep feeling of peace. I had never felt like this before. I saw beautiful pastel colours floating before my eyes. All the pain from my body vanished. I started laughing blissfully. After a while, I became still. When I emerged from that meditative state

and looked around, I noticed a potted plant, and felt deeply entranced by its beauty.

No one could explain what had happened. I had touched something beyond the formal scope of the healing method. I wanted to experience that blissful joy again, hopefully forever. I was 19 years old.

I turned to the world's religions for answers, reading the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Tao Te Ching*, the Bible, and teachings of the Native Americans. I also read poetry, engaged in pop culture, and listened to music. But what was true? I only believed in what I could experience directly: a loving and healing universal life force, the essence of all living beings and the substratum of the entire universe.

I eventually tried to make contact with that energy to guide me on my journey. Remembering *Star Wars*, I began to use "the Force," sending my thoughts out in the hope that the cosmos would answer me.

Things did start to flow my way as answers. Life took on a new meaning but soon became confusing. I could not distinguish between my own imagination and reality. I felt lost. I knew I needed a teacher. Although I did not know about Gurus at that time, I felt that someone had all the answers and could help me; someone like Yoda, the Jedi Knight from *Star Wars*. A mystic, he was humble, simple, spoke backwards, and hid his strength. Yet, he was the mightiest and wisest person in the whole universe.

I called out to this universal force, "Help me! I need you. I need to meet a Jedi! I need to meet Yoda!" That really was the language I used; it was all I had. Strangely enough, my fears subsided and I was filled with a strange certainty that I would meet someone who could help me.

Two weeks later, I left town for a conference. Before I left, a friend came to me, put his

hand on my shoulder, and said, "Never underestimate the hospitality of strangers." Was this a message from the universe? I got the chills!

When I arrived at the conference, I walked up to a stranger and said, "Hi, I'm in a spiritual crisis." That person was an Amma devotee. He said that Amma was in his home city, and that some people believed Amma was like the Buddha, Krishna or Christ, an incarnation of God. Maybe she could help me.

My heart skipped a beat. I had read about great souls who lived in the ancient past. Were there such souls in the world today? I had to meet Amma and find out for myself. "If you come, you can stay with my family," he said.

A stranger showing me hospitality! I bought a plane ticket immediately. In two days, I was on my way to meet Amma. I didn't know anything about her but felt that she would be able to help me.

I walked into the San Ramon Temple and saw Amma giving darshan. I immediately thought of Jesus sitting with his disciples. I saw people praying in a new way: praying for God and God alone. They were not praying for a car, a house or a job, but to know God more and more, and this impressed me. I could feel and see the light surrounding them and enveloping the room. Amma was obviously at its centre. I had never seen anything like it before.

I realized that saints existed in all the traditions of the world. The Master-disciple relationship was also true. But I still had doubts: what did Amma want? What was she hiding? What was she out to get from me and from all of us?

I studied and watched Amma carefully from the balcony. I watched her all day long. I watched Amma arrive. I watched her meditate. I watched her give darshan. I watched her smile and laugh.

Meanwhile, I had to keep leaving — to eat, to use the bathroom, to stretch my legs, to eat again, to use the bathroom again... But Amma never got up. She never stopped smiling. She never stopped darshan. She was so happy. And that was what caught me.

She had it... she had the Buddha nature. She knew what happiness really was. Hers was a happiness that was independent of the circumstances around her. Her happiness came from within. I felt that she knew the peaks of unending bliss. And I had a gut feeling that somehow Amma could teach me...

Amma looked my way across the room and shot a smile at me. Did she just hear my thoughts? Does Amma know me? When I prayed to the universe, did Amma hear my prayers? Is she the universe embodied? Did Amma bring me here?

As I watched Amma giving darshan, passages from the

*Tao Te Ching* flooded my mind:

The Master is available to all people and doesn't reject anyone.

This is called embodying the light.

The Master doesn't take sides —

She welcomes both saints and sinners.

She is good to people who are good.

She is also good to people who aren't good.

That is true goodness.

The Master acts without doing anything and teaches without saying anything.

The Master's mind is like space.

People don't understand her.

They look to her and wait.

She treats them like her own children.

In Amma, I saw an ancient master. Ancient wisdom



She had the Buddha nature. She knew what happiness really was. Hers was a happiness that was independent of the circumstances around her. Her happiness came from within. I felt that she knew the peaks of unending bliss. And I had a gut feeling that somehow Amma could teach me...

became transmuted from words on paper to a living and breathing example right before me.

I left the balcony and tried to get closer. It was hard to see Amma, but I got glimpses. I remembered the book *Siddhartha*, about a pilgrim's journey to meet Lord Buddha. At one point, all he could see was the Buddha's hand due to the crowds. But that was enough for him, for he saw wisdom emanating from each finger.

I stared at Amma's hands and fingers, her ear, her sari... whatever I could see. I felt as if she was teaching through every gesture, every move-

ment, every pore. The closer I got, the more I could feel that she was holy.

I received darshan. I felt like I was dreaming or in heaven. The person next to me was bawling. The opening of hearts around me made a deep impression. I saw Amma wiping away the tears of people and consoling them. She was the very embodiment of love and compassion.

A few days later, Amma served food to each person attending her program. She was sitting outside under the trees, by the lake, surrounded by children. I remembered paintings I had seen of Jesus

sitting with children in the forest. The way the children interacted with Amma gave me a calming reassurance. I didn't trust adults, but children were pure to me. I could see their innocent love for and attraction to Amma.

While serving plates of food to the devotees, Amma's hands moved so fast. For a second, I thought she had four arms like the Indian Goddess images I had seen! The energy around her was intense. The look on her face was supernatural, quite unlike anything I had ever seen before. I experienced Amma as pure power.

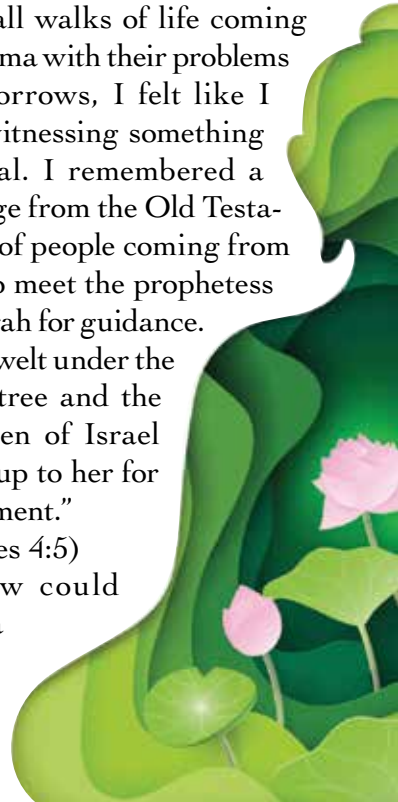
The next day, I saw Amma bow down to everyone when she entered the hall. She spoke about how we should acknowledge divinity in everything and respect it — even the pen we use, and the chair in which we sit. She spoke about honouring Mother Earth, the Sun and Mother Ocean. Amma's reverence for all life forms,

animate and inanimate, reminded me so much of Native Americans. Her words and language were simple, humble and pure, just like those of the native elders. I later met a Native American medicine woman who told me that she saw in Amma the White Buffalo Calf Maiden, *Ptesáŋwiyi*, the chief prophet of the Lakota religion.

As I looked at the long darshan queue winding down the hill at San Ramon, and people from all walks of life coming to Amma with their problems and sorrows, I felt like I was witnessing something Biblical. I remembered a passage from the Old Testament, of people coming from afar to meet the prophetess Deborah for guidance.

"She dwelt under the palm tree and the children of Israel came up to her for judgement."  
(Judges 4:5)

How could Amma

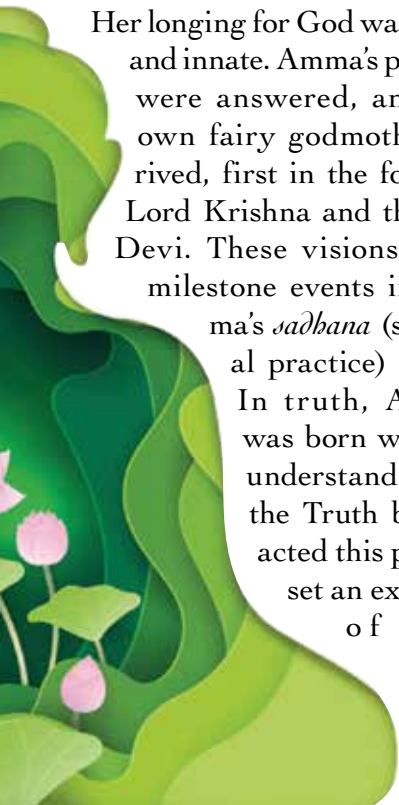


have risen to such pre-eminence from such humble origins? At first, I thought she had inherited a spiritual legacy, like many monks or lamas do, continuing the work of their predecessor. But it was nothing of the sort. Amma's life is a true Cinderella story.

She was born in a poor, rural fishing village, and stopped education at 4th grade after her mother became ill so that she could serve the family. Her longing for God was deep and innate. Amma's prayers were answered, and her own fairy godmother arrived, first in the form of Lord Krishna and then as Devi. These visions were milestone events in Amma's *sadhana* (spiritual practice) phase. In truth, Amma was born with an understanding of the Truth but enacted this play to set an example of the

yearning one needs for the spiritual goal.

Every time Amma is invited to be the keynote speaker at global events, it feels like she is being whisked away to a royal ball. Who attends such functions in today's world? Movie stars and pop idols, leading scientists and CEOs, religious leaders, Olympians and Nobel laureates. I've seen Amma move in such circles first-hand at the Vatican, in Abu Dhabi's royal palace, in Hollywood, at the United Nations, and at Stanford University. When Amma meets VIPs, she is so relaxed that she can reduce the most respected guests to laughter and tears. They all become like babies around Amma. This is a marvel because Amma had no spiritual teacher, little formal education, and hardly any material resource. She had only God; she had only her Self. Yet, with that alone, Amma inspires and uplifts everyone.




At the end of my first week with Amma, I attended her Devi Bhava program. Seeing her as Devi, I felt as if she had been pretending all along to be a sweet and nice lady in a simple white sari. By the end of Devi Bhava, I became convinced that Amma had indeed been hiding something — something marvellous, beautiful, good and powerful — her true nature: pure and perfect unconditional love. I accepted Amma as my Guru and she accepted me as well.

Once, when a devotee was speaking on the microphone about how much he loved Amma, she interrupted him, took the mic, and said in English, “Screws loose me!” while spinning her fingers around her temple, indicating that she was crazy. I laughed so hard! Amma was Yoda: plain, simple, backwards speaking and secretly all-powerful. I finally had my own Jedi Knight!

Before meeting Amma, I wanted to know the peak of

unending joy. Two years later, Amma named me Sadanand, which means ‘Eternal Bliss’ in Sanskrit. Through this simple act, she showed me that she had been with me long before we physically met, guiding my start on the spiritual path. ‘Sadanand’ also reminds me that when I met Amma, it was her supreme happiness that inspired me and made me receptive to her.

Amma cared about me before we even met. Why? Because she is my God-Mother. Amma heard the call of my aching heart and paved the way for our meeting just so that she could help me and save me from my own delusions.

Amma knows the Truth, the irrefutable truth that we are all eternal, blissful consciousness. She is guiding us all to see the same truth in ourselves and all beings. That is all Amma wants: to help everyone awaken to their own true nature. 



## Chapter 12: Yoga of Devotion

by Prof. V. Muraleedhara Menon, India

**A**lthough the whole Ganges is holy, the waters at Haridwar, Kasi and Prayag are considered especially sacred. Similarly, certain chapters in the *Bhagavad Gita* are especially venerated. The 12th chapter is one such. This 20-verse chapter is particularly revitalizing and sweet.

The exposition of *bhakti* (devotion) ends in this chapter. Arjuna asks the Lord who is dearer to him: the devotee who worships God with form (*saguna-bhakta*) or the devotee of God without form (*nirguna-bhakta*)? It was a problematic question, akin to asking a mother which of her two sons she loved more. The Lord replied as a mother would have: both are equally dear to him.

The *saguna-bhakta* worships the Lord with his senses whereas the *nirguna-bhakta* does so mentally. For the *saguna-bhakta*, the senses are means of worshipping the Lord. The eyes see his form, the ears listen to his glories, the tongue chants his names, the legs enable him to go on pilgrimages to his shrines, and the hands perform worship.

Worshipping God with form is easy. We can do so in many ways. Taking care of our parents and serving the village we were born in are all forms of worship, provided they are not

contrary to the welfare of the world. It is enough if we imagine that no matter who we serve, we are worshipping God.

In comparison, worshipping God without form is much more difficult. For the *nirguna-bhakta*, the senses are obstacles to be overcome. In *saguna-bhakti*, feelings of tenderness, love and imagination come into play, whereas in *nirguna-bhakti*, only knowledge matters. The ambience of *saguna-bhakti* is gentler and safer.

Once, I, too, pursued the path of knowledge. But in time, I realized that knowledge alone was insufficient. It washes away only the outer crust of the mind's impurities, leaving behind the residual subtle impurities. Only the waters of devotion can remove these.

I am not belittling knowledge, which burns sins away. But it is difficult to have that knowledge while we are identified with our emotions. The *saguna-bhakta* relies on the Lord, whereas the *nirguna-*

bhakta is self-reliant. But who else is there in this 'self' other than the Lord, who is the very in-dweller, our very Self?

That said, devotion should be based on knowledge. The flower of knowledge must blossom on the vine of devotion; only then will devotion become perfect. This is akin to evolving from personality to principle.

*buddham sharanam gachami*

I take refuge in the Buddha

*sangam sharanam gachami*

I take refuge in the  
sacred order


*dharmam sharanam gachami*

I take refuge in Dharma

These are the three forms of surrender in the Buddhist tradition. Even if the first two (individual and organization) disappear, dharma must prevail, for it is most important. Similarly, our worship may start as saguna bhakti, but it must evolve to nirguna bhakti. Only then can our striving be fulfilled. Both are mutually complementary: one is the

beginning, and the other, the end.

There are beautiful examples of these two phases of devotion in the *Ramayana*. Prince Bharata symbolizes nirguna-bhakti, whereas Lakshmana embodies saguna-bhakti. By serving Lord Rama, Lakshmana's identity dissolved into that of the Lord.

The saguna-bhakta's devotion must be based on principles, and the nirguna-bhakta must acquire the emotional grounding of the former. Eventually, both kinds of devotion coalesce. It is difficult to separate the two. As the Lord says, "Arjuna, it doesn't matter whether you're a saguna-bhakta or a nirguna-bhakta. All that matters is that you are a devotee." He then describes the attributes of devotion. We ought to contemplate on these daily. Doing so will take us closer and closer to the Lord. May divine fervour infuse all our actions. 

*(to be continued)*

## Without One, There is No One

Swami Tureeyamritananda Puri

You are glorified in a thousand names  
though you are beyond them all.  
You are remembered in a myriad of forms  
though you have none at all.

If we forget to count the one,  
the counting will go awry,  
for there is nothing without the one.  
When zeroes follow the one,  
the value grows with each additional one.

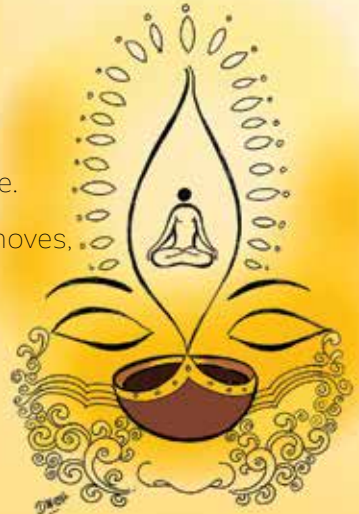
Like the path along which the carriage moves,  
the value of one does not change.  
Zeroes become heroes  
only when we give the one prime place.

If I don't gain my own self,  
all other gains will bring me only tears.  
I don't have to seek my foes afar,  
'I' and 'mine' are my enemies.

Negative thoughts are our foes, and positive ones, our friends.  
The cessation of thoughts brings deliverance from karma.  
He is a yogi who knows the meaning of  
*karma* (action), *vikarma* (special action) and *akarma* (inaction).

When I identify myself with the body,  
I become a stranger to myself.  
You are, only because I am. When you disappear,  
'I become That;' so declare the Vedas.

Those who say they know the Almighty  
as the transcendent effulgence  
become one with It  
when they offer themselves to It. ❧





# Synchronicities

by Rajani Menon, India



The flight from Munich to Barcelona took two-and-a-half hours. I had a window seat and busied myself taking photographs of the beautiful sights below. The white peaks of the Alps loomed endlessly on the horizon. Suddenly, the lady in the aisle seat said, “Excuse me, I noticed that your mobile phone has Amma as the lock screen. Are you going for her program? Because I am, and Victor, the person sitting

in front of you, is also going for the program.”

Of all the people in the plane, we were seated next to two Germans from Munich who were also attending the Barcelona program. You can imagine how animated the rest of the journey was for us. Victor shared an orange with us, and we shared stories of Amma. Andrea and Victor first met Amma in 1998 in Munich and have been to Amritapuri many times. She is a psychologist and he runs a taxi company. They introduced my son and me to another devotee named Sicily, an occupational therapist. Sicily goes for Devi Bhava darshans in at least five European cities.

The Barcelona-El Prat is a sprawling and spacious airport designed in such a way that sunlight filters in everywhere. At the train station, which is in the airport itself, we met a resident of Amritapuri Ashram who was wandering around with two big

suitcases in search of the train to Granollers. We all tumbled into the train for the hour-long ride. Spain is a country of sunshine and mountain landscapes, and we enjoyed the ride. My son and I disembarked first as our hotel was some distance away from the program venue.

At around five in the evening, we reached the stadium where Amma’s program was held. Many people were sitting on the high stands, waiting for the crowd below to thin out and for their token numbers to be displayed on the board. After obtaining two tokens, we sat down and enjoyed the music. The people in the crowded hall waited for Swamiji to sing “Malayali bhajans.”

Amma was giving darshan very fast. I was caught between not wanting to bother her and going for darshan as we were returning to Nuremberg the next morning. Finally, we went for darshan. Amma looked concerned as

she asked my son about the bus, train and plane rides we took to attend her program. She gave me an enormous hug and whispered much love into my ears. Then she checked whether we were wearing our 'bangles' (the tour bands) and made us sit beside her. We sat there for nearly an hour but did not speak as I did not want to tell her that we had come just for the day; I am sure she did not want to hear it either.

After some time, Amma asked for a Malayalam bhajan to be played: '*Vatavrkshamam.*' Amma's voice resounded mellifluously in the stadium. Then she wanted a TV set kept at a low height right in front of her. Two devotees took time adjusting it to the exact level that she wanted it. She asked them to play the videos of the *Ganapati Homa* performed on her

birthday and the *tabla* performance on *Vijayadashami*.<sup>1</sup> She made them replay the two videos again and again, eagerly watching her children in Amritapuri even as she was embracing her children in Spain.

I was quite sure that Amma would sing at the end of darshan. But my son was tired, and so I said, "Okay, let's go back." Whom should we meet on the way out but Andrea and Victor, searching for taxis! We decided to go back together. Victor said that it would be his birthday in five minutes. So we waited (he was planning to go for darshan the next day). My son got him a birthday cake from the canteen. Then we said a silent farewell to Amma and returned to our hotels, our hearts overwhelmed by her shower of love.



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<sup>1</sup> The Ganapati Homa is a ritualistic fire worship aimed at propitiating Lord Ganesha. A tabla is an Indian drum. Vijayadashami marks the culmination of a nine-day festival in which the Divine Mother in the forms of Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati are worshipped.

# Lilas Around Amma

## Highway Darshan

In March 1994, I went home to Chennai to attend my sister's wedding. I was flipping through issues of a popular Tamil magazine, which was running a series called 'Living Mahatmas.' Each issue carried a profile of and interview with people of spiritual attainment, most of them (as yet) not much known to the public.

The article on 'Mata Amritanandamayi Devi' resonated with me immediately. Reading Amma's life story thrilled me. Here was a person from a humble back-



ground, who had not benefitted from modern schooling or the traditional Guru-disciple tutelage. And yet, her profound comments on spiritual issues seemed to come from a direct experience of Reality. I could not wait to have her darshan.

The next year, I became the District Collector of a quiet tribal district in Eastern Maharashtra. I went to Pune for some work and used this opportunity to also inspect a plot of land that a colleague and I had jointly purchased in the Nigdi suburb. On the way there, we saw a banner announcing Amma's visit and darshan at her ashram in Nigdi. What a coincidence!

When we reached the ashram, a devotee escorted us into the hall. Perhaps, he had realized that we were senior government officials from our car. "You are lucky," he said. "Bhajans just ended and darshan will start soon." We received Amma's blessed hug. My colleague later recalled

that after Amma's darshan, his cervical spondylosis started healing gradually.

Amma's tour itinerary was written outside the hall. I learnt that she would soon be visiting Nagpur and Nanded, two cities in Maharashtra. I figured that Amma would have to pass through the district where I was Collector. I felt that I ought to meet her somewhere to offer my humble greetings both in my personal capacity and as the district's Chief Government Officer.

On the expected day, I called Amma's hosts in Nagpur. They said that Amma's entourage had left at 8 a.m. I figured that she would enter our district in about three hours. I asked the personnel manning the police outpost at the start of the district to inform me as soon as they saw a convoy of vehicles. In those days, there was hardly any traffic on the roads in our district. I checked with the police regularly but received no news

until late afternoon. That evening, I had to attend a family function in another town in the same district. I had promised to attend it months ago. Fortunately, the trip there would take us along the same road that Amma would have to take. I left for that place.

By 7 p.m., I had still received no indication of Amma's passing. Perhaps she had changed her route? I felt disappointed.

However, while returning at 8 p.m., my alert driver said, "Sir, there are a few vehicles travelling together in the opposite direction." We turned around and tried to catch up with the convoy. After some time, our vehicle's honking and flashing of amber lights caught the attention of the convoy's last vehicle, which stopped. Some swamis came out. I introduced myself and expressed keenness to have Amma's darshan. They told me that though they had started early that morning, Amma

had stopped at a scenic spot and spent hours there; hence the delay. They said, "Go! Follow Amma's car!"

Amma's car was far ahead, and there was another car race. Amma's vehicle stopped when we went close and my driver honked. To this day, I do not know if what I did was right but something beyond my understanding impelled me. I rushed to the car, followed by my wife and children. The car's inner lights were turned on. I offered my salutations to Amma. Without showing any sign of being disturbed, Amma put my three-year-old daughter in her lap, made me feel at ease, and blessed all of us with prasad.

After this incident, we renamed our daughter 'Amritha' in remembrance of Amma's highway darshan.

Recalling how Amma stopped on the road for us brings tears of gratitude even now, 25 years later.

— *Viswvanath Giriraj, India*

## Walking with Amma

I grew up with rosaries and novenas to Our Lady. I have fond memories of pilgrimages to the Knock Shrine in western Ireland with my family. When I met Amma, it was natural for me to connect to the Divine Mother within.

One year when Amma was in Dublin, I had been having a difficult time before her program. I went for darshan with my family in the early hours of the morning. Amma asked us to sit beside her. We sat down and I tried to mediate. Just then, someone started to sing a hymn from my childhood. I used to sing that hymn and cry out to God when I was small. Instantly, I got the inner message that the Divine Mother has been with me throughout my life and has been hearing my calls since my childhood.

I feel nurtured by a strong inner connection with Amma. However, I often forget this. My outer life has been much

like any other life: ups and downs, gains and losses, good and bad times, and many worries over work, money, health and family.


Often, I have experienced an agonizing inner strife. I have come to see that, like most people, I have a 'separation consciousness,' i.e. the belief that I am separate from God and from other people. As a result of this negative conditioning, egotistical tendencies pervade almost every aspect of my life.

For a while now, I have been chanting my mantra throughout the day. At first, I would forget to chant and then feel guilty and unworthy of God. By Amma's grace, I am able to chant my mantra much more now. Chanting has revealed to me my negative conditioning. I have also learned to stay present with intense feelings of not being good enough and with feelings of loss, loneliness, guilt, fear and insecurity. Anger, rage and

hopelessness have arisen within me at times. When I stay with some of these difficult feelings and meditate on them, usually something beautiful breaks through after a day or so. I gain a glimpse of the inner divinity, and divine grace flows into my awareness. I have found that mentally holding Amma's hand and looking at it all like an observer help me to see negative feelings and thoughts as fleeting bad weather.

Inwardly, the feeling that Amma is supporting me has increased over the years. I have become more tuned in to the inner Divine Mother. This has given me the strength to tackle my inner demons. I have asked Amma to heal me and

to help me surrender and serve. Amma has been answering my prayers.

One morning, I cried out to Amma and Christ. I started to meditate as tears poured out of me. Soon, I felt a wave of peace and stopped crying. I was transported into a state of such stillness as I have never experienced. After a long time, my mind started thinking again. I looked at the clock; nearly an hour had passed. Inwardly, I asked Amma to give me words for my experience. This is what came out: "You are God experiencing separation. God has never left you and you have never left God." 

— *Bhargavi (Kathy Kennedy),  
Ireland*

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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](mailto:matruvani@amritapuri.org). By submitting your artwork or article, you give your consent to have it published.