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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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Bhaya Bhakti

Children, some people ask if fear has any place in the path of devotion, and if *bhaya-bhakti* (devotion born of fear) is unhealthy. Amma would not say that bhaya-bhakti is unhealthy. Though there is no place for fear in the fullness of devotion, bhaya-bhakti certainly helps a beginner progress on the path of devotion. The Lord of the Universe dispenses the fruit of every action to every being. He protects the virtuous and punishes the wicked. The devotion of one who knows that God punishes evil deeds will contain both reverence and a slight tinge of fear. This fear will kindle discernment in him, thus enabling him to keep away from wrongdoing, and give him the strength to walk the right path.

Bhaya-bhakti is not like the fear a slave has towards his master; it encompasses not only fear but also a student's respect for his teacher, and a child's innocent love for his mother. Such ought to be our attitude towards God.

A child loves his mother and knows that she is his protector. At the same time, he also knows that



if he does some mischief, his mother will not hesitate to punish him. Therefore, his love for his mother is tinged with fear. It is this fear that saves him from many dangers and misdeeds. A child's whims and fancies can tempt him to do wrong. However, fearing scolding and punishment from his mother, he steers clear of trouble. Thus, fear of his mother awakens discernment in him and prods him to walk along the right path. At the same time, this fear never hinders his love for his mother. On the contrary, it fosters healthy spiritual growth.

Children often study well when they are young because of fear of punishment from the teacher. This fear helps them overcome laziness and acquire knowledge. By the time they

reach the higher grades, they are no longer dogged by such fear as they would have gained the necessary discernment by then. They will have only reverence and obedience to the teacher. Most devotees have such an attitude towards God.

As the devotee progresses on the path of devotion, bhaya-bhakti evolves to *prema-bhakti* (loving devotion). In prema-bhakti, there is not even the slightest trace of fear. Out of love for the Lord, the devotee receives even punishments from God joyfully. All the latent tendencies that incite him to doing wrong are washed away by the fervour of his devotion. A true devotee forgets everything else and becomes like a baby resting in the lap of his loving mother.



Bhaya-bhakti is not like a slave's fear for his master; it also encompasses a student's respect for his teacher and a child's innocent love for his mother.



Existence and the Ego

by swami tureeyamritananda puri

If death is the answer to birth, then birth is the answer to death. They are interdependent. But life is not like that. It is not the answer to either birth or death because death is not the enemy of life. How can death ever be considered an enemy? The presence of death is felt only in the absence of life. Absence does not mean destruction,

only the absence of light; it is a state of darkness. Where there is life, there is no death. For this very reason, death is neither a friend nor a foe of life.

Where there is light, there is no darkness. Darkness prevails only when light is absent. For this reason, darkness is neither a friend nor a foe of light. We liken ignorance to darkness. That is why we say that ignorance is antagonistic to knowledge, i.e. an obstacle to knowledge. Therefore, life is eternal, and death, ephemeral. In what way is life eternal? If we can do away with birth and death, life becomes eternal. Let us hearken to Amma's words to see how life becomes eternal:

The body will be born
and then die
But the Self will relocate
into another
Even when the Self bids
one body goodbye
It will continue to live
forever

The body, born out of *karma* (action), is mistaken for the Self because of ignorance or a lack of discernment, which is also the cause of sorrow. The remedy for sorrow is Self-realization. The Upanishads declare, '*Tarati shokam atma-vit*' — 'The knower of the Self overcomes sorrow.' The attributes of the Self are *sat* (existence), *cit* (consciousness) and *anand* (bliss) — *satcidananda*.

One who sees himself as the body will also see others as bodies, whereas the knower of the Self sees everyone as pure consciousness. The Self shines only in one who is free of likes and dislikes and established in knowledge and dispassion. We can rediscover the Self, which ignorance obscures, only by the knowledge of the Supreme. Sri Shankaracharya says as much in his commentary on both the Upanishads and the *Sanatsujatiya*.

Desire for the fruit of
action leads to new
karma. One does not

overcome death and rebirth. Only through Self-knowledge does the wise one attain pure consciousness or Brahman, who is of the nature of satcidananda. There is no other way.

Therefore, the cause of birth and death is the desire for the fruits of action. As long as the chain of birth and death is not broken, there will be no end to sorrow. Sorrow ends only when the desire to enjoy the fruits of action ceases. All the scriptures and *mabatmas* (spiritually illumined souls) repeatedly tell us that desire is the cause of sorrow. Desire arises from identification with the body, i.e. the mistaken understanding that “I am the body.”

Note this verse from *Amritadhara*:

If desires are left unchecked,
they can become massive
Even if pruned or hacked,
they can become a sheaf.

Desire causes sorrow. The cessation of desire is the means of liberation from fear. The root cause of desire is selfishness, which arises from identification with the physical body. The excessive hankering after sensual pleasures causes the creeper of desire to rise sky high. We might think that we are meek and desireless, but the seed of desire has sunk its roots deep in us. In no time at all, it will sprout and shoot up. Even if we prune it or hack it away, it will sprout again, for its roots go much deeper than we realize. Desire cannot be eliminated unless we uproot it entirely and burn it. Therefore, we must rise from bodily identification to the awareness that we are the Self. As long as we identify with the body, the chain of birth and death will continue growing longer.

Leaving the body will not liberate us from the vicious cycle of life and death. The Self will take up some other body. Our *vasanas* (latent

tendencies), the mental impressions formed by our actions (*karma-samskara*), our selfishness and desires are, in fact, shaping our next body. However, no matter how many bodies we occupy or how many times we are re-born, the real 'I,' the Self,' remains unchanged, for it is eternal and, therefore, the truth. We are all part of this truth. We will realize this only when Self-knowledge terminates our ignorance. This is also what the *Bhagavad Gita* proclaims. Though the Self is imperishable and the *jiva* (individuated self) assumes and discards numerous bodies, this donning and doffing of bodies is just like the discarding of old clothes for new ones.

*vasamsi jirnani yatha
vibaya
navani grhnati naroparani
tada sarirani vibaya jirnan
anyani samyati navani dehi*
Just as one discards
shabby clothes and puts

on new ones, so, too, the embodied soul casts off worn-out bodies and enters new ones. (2.22)

The soul is pure consciousness, associated with the gross body, and therefore known as *jiva*. Because it resides in the *deha* (body), it is known as *dehi*. The *jiva* takes on the gross body to fulfil certain needs. It is in the grip of *vasanas*. Until it is liberated from these *vasanas*, it will continue to assume different bodies. It is natural for bodies to decay and perish. This is just like discarding worn out clothes and putting on new ones.

There are also subtle and causal bodies. We can liberate ourselves from them only when we have cleansed our minds of *karma-samskara*. The causal body falls away only when ignorance is dispelled. This is why the gross body is called *deha* and the consciousness within the body is called *dehi*.

One who sees himself as the body will see others as bodies, whereas the knower of the Self sees everyone as pure consciousness.

In other scriptural texts, the jiva is variously called *cit-abbasan* (consciousness illuminating the mind) and *pratyag-atma* (consciousness pervading the mind and intellect). In the earlier verses of the *Gita*, the Lord asserts that the Self is unborn, eternal and ancient. Verse 2.22 from the *Gita* highlights the difference between the eternal and sentient Self, and the perishable and insentient body. The same idea is poetically expressed in these lines from *Amritaḍhara*:

The sun that slips into
the ocean
does not keel
but swims ashore to light
up the horizon
with renewed zeal.
The jiva falling into the
sea of mortality

does not keel
but resurfaces in another
body
with even more zeal...
Rebirth will end for none
unless the desire for
action is defused.
To end that desire, one
thing must be done:
all thoughts must be
dissolved.

Indeed, one's birth is determined by one's *vasanas* and *samskaras* (psychological imprints). The cause of birth is karma, and the cause of karma is *vasana*. To put it another way, the seed of *vasana* gives rise to karma. *Vasanas* arise from attachment to material objects in the universe. When we become indifferent to these objects and to the fruits of our

effort, our *vasanas* will cease. The gross part of our *vasanas* evolves into the karma we do, and their subtle part becomes our *samskara*. That is why it is important that *vasanas* are eradicated, for then, both karma and *samskara* will be neutralized. For this reason, a seeker's spiritual practices and austerities are aimed at weakening the *vasanas*.

When *vasanas* and, consequently, karma-*samskaras* are neutralized, the knowledge of the Self starts to dawn, and one attains spiritual liberation (*moksha*). The experience of *moksha* is nothing other than the bliss of the Self or the bliss of Brahman, the Supreme. To attain this bliss, one must cultivate divine virtues, practice contemplation and meditation with a view to gaining Self-knowledge. This process reduces one's *vasanas* into ashes in the blazing fire of knowledge. This leads to the weakening and falling away of the links in the chain of *samsara*,

the cycle of birth and death. Here, *viveka* (discernment) must show us the way. One does not become noble by intelligence alone.

Amma says that when discernment and intelligence unite, the heart space becomes beautiful. When the heart becomes magnanimous, one is uplifted. The implication here is that the heart and intellect are not two separate entities. When discernment arises, we become more broadminded and innocent. Selfishness and egoism are what prevents us from becoming large-hearted. They will destroy peace in the spiritual and worldly life. A life that is enslaved to the ego and selfish desires is no life; narrow-mindedness is not life but death. Broadmindedness is the true measure of nobility and greatness. Only an expansive heart can realize the Self.


Like an idol of Devi abandoned by the roadside, like a precious gem dumped into a

mudhole, or like grains separated from chaff and then discarded in a river, most people squander their lives, not realizing its greatness. In order to appreciate its value, intelligence and discernment must work in tandem.

Like the wavelets that
merge
to form a massive surge
desire increases
until the boat capsizes

Truly, we are utterly helpless as the boat of our life, having neither direction nor destination, lists and lurches as gales lash it and storms buffet it before it finally sinks. Egoism and attachment take us away from our true nature. Instead of coming face to face with the truth, our infatuation with worldly objects keeps increasing until our lives cease to be of any consequence. Instead of degrading our own lives, we must learn to act wisely and with purity of heart. To do so, the Upanishads advise the fol-

lowing: practicing austerities constantly, cultivating the desire to know the truth, seeking tirelessly, dedicating one's life to realizing the truth, and being unswervingly honest. Through these methods, we finally attain a guileless heart.

Egoism and awareness are polar opposites. We are constantly striving to cultivate and bolster the ego. This is the primary goal of all our actions. We hardly do anything to foster awareness. We labour under the delusion that we are the body and do not realize that the body is ours. This is the fundamental cause of our bloated egos. It is like a disease that does not leave us. If we can find a remedy for this 'I am the body' disease, we will gain awareness. Spirituality is the remedy. It is the search behind the inquiry, "Who am I?" Through this inquiry, self-introspection and observation, we arrive at Self-awareness. This Self-awareness is Self-knowledge. 

Sacred Paradise

by Swamini Amalamrita Prana

A young man went to an ashram to learn meditation. He followed the Guru's teachings, became his disciple, obeyed the rules of the ashram, took part in the chanting and pujas, sang bhajans, and did selfless service. But even after staying in the ashram for years, the Guru, who was revelled in the bliss of meditation, did not share the secrets of meditation with him. The disciple became anxious.

Days passed. The disciple's restlessness became evident in his behaviour, but the Guru pretended he hadn't noticed. He spoke kindly and lovingly to the disciple. At times, he would ask the disciple to sit close to him and then speak about the greatness of meditation, but he did not teach him how to meditate. Unable to contain his frustration, the disciple finally asked his Guru, "I've been living with you for years, and yet, you have not taught me how to meditate. Why?"

The Guru merely smiled.

After a few days, the Guru and disciple set out for a walk one evening. There were stars glittering in the sky. The moon had risen. In the calm silence, they heard the chirping of a bird from afar. The Guru asked, "Did you hear that?" The disciple said yes.

The next evening, they went for a walk again. They heard the chirping again. The Guru asked, "Can you tell which

bird is chirping so melodiously?"

The disciple listened attentively and said, "Yes, it's a cuckoo."

On the third day, they heard the cuckoo warbling again. The Guru asked, "Can you sense the sweetness behind the singing?" The disciple suddenly understood what meditation was all about. He lost himself in the beauty of nature and did not hear what the Guru said after that.

Beauty is an integral element of meditation. There is beauty in the chirping of a bird and in the serenity exuded by flowers. In the caresses of the breeze, one can feel waves of bliss.

Amma has time and again said that meditation is not something one does in a secluded room. Attending to each and every one of our daily activities with total focus is real meditation. This is also karma yoga. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna says,

*loke'smindvividha nishtha
pura prokta mayanagha
jnanayogena sankhyanam
karmayogena yoginam*

O sinless one, as previously explained, there is a two-fold path in this world: the path of knowledge for the Sankhyas (those inclined towards contemplation), and the path of action of the Yogis (those inclined towards action). (3.3)

The Lord is referring to the two time-honoured practices — contemplation and action — that lead to Self-realization. The outcome of an action is based not only on what is done but also on how it is done. Kuchela offered just a handful of rice flakes to Lord Krishna. Though of negligible value materially, it was priceless for the Lord, who discerned pure love and devotion in each flake.

How much is a petal or a leaf worth? Its value is immeasurable if offered to God

with love and reverence. When Satyabhama placed her priceless jewels on one pan of the balancing scale and Krishna sat on the other side, the jewels did not outweigh him. But when Rukmini placed one *tulsi* (basil) leaf on the pan, the scale tipped towards the leaf. Why? Because Rukmini's devotion was worth more than the Lord's weight in gold.

Suppose a scholar and a devotee bathe in the Ganges. The scholar would have cleansed his body, but the devotee would have cleansed his body and purified his mind as well. So, the outcome of any action varies according to the attitude behind it.

Amma asks, "Will a Guru adore the one who simply follows his words to the letter, or one who carries out the task with discernment?" She says the latter is dearer. Knowledge and action are not two distinct entities. Performing an action with awareness and knowledge is karma yoga.

In 1985, when I was in junior college, Amma visited the Sarada Mandir in Kozhikode. That is where my family members and I saw Amma for the first time. All of us instantly became devotees. Seeing her aroused in me an interest in living with her for the rest of my life. No one in my family objected to my wanting to join the ashram, but they wanted me to complete my degree first. Amma also said that I would have to finish my degree before joining. Finally, with her consent, I joined the ashram in 1990.

My first seva was in the ashram's printing press. In those days, I did not know why I had to do seva. It is important to have at least some idea about what we are doing and why we are doing it. Swami Jnanamritananda was in charge of the press then. Once, he became angry with us for doing our work carelessly, asked us to leave, and locked up the press. Instead of feeling

chastened, we rejoiced because we could go to Amma. We all went to the hut and sat near her. Seeing us all together, she asked, "What happened? Don't you have any work in the press?"

We happily said, "Swami sent us out and locked the press." Amma called Swami. When she learnt what had happened, Amma lovingly told us that when we act, we must do so with awareness. This will help us to purify our thoughts.

After this incident, Amma started to monitor our work closely. She made it clear that we should not get distracted even if Amma walked past the press. She helped us understand that seva was worship, and for this reason, we should be totally focused on the task at hand.

There were only a few people working in the press back then. On days when there was no darshan, Amma would join the ashram residents and devotees in cleaning the ashram

premises, carrying loads of sand for ongoing construction work, and doing other seva activities. Seeing this, those of us working in the press would feel sad that we could not join Amma and envious of those who could. Amma, who knew our hearts, would make up for it by surprise visits to the press at night. Usually, our work would continue until 2 or 3 a.m. Whenever she visited, she would carry a flask containing coffee in one hand, and a few packets of snacks in the other hand. She would say, "Children, how can Amma sleep when you are working late at night without any rest? After returning to the room, Amma will read letters. I wanted to give you coffee and snacks before that." Amma would spend a lot of time with us before leaving. If we could not attend bhajans owing to the heavy workload, Amma would come to the press afterwards and sing bhajans with us. In this way, our seva became a celebration. Only

much later did we realize that Amma was transforming our karma into karma yoga, work into worship.

At one time, Amma suddenly stopped coming to the press. At first, we thought she was busy. But when she did not come even after many days, we began to worry. Did we do our work carelessly? Did we go against her wishes? Did we harbour impure thoughts? While we were speculating on the reasons for her absence, Amma sent Swami Amritatmananda to us. He asked us if we were all doing archana unfailingly. He said, "Amma does not feel like coming to the press because she thinks that some of you are not doing archana at all."

It was true. For various reasons, some of us were not doing archana. This clearly revealed to us that Amma is not limited to her physical form. She is the all-pervading pure consciousness and is with us subtly. This experience

Suppose a scholar and a devotee bathe in the Ganges. The scholar would have cleansed his body, but the devotee would have cleansed his body and purified his mind as well. So, the outcome of any action varies on the attitude behind it.

convinced us of Amma's omniscience.

In the press, Vasanthi-chechi and I used to make printing plates. Before Amma's birthday, we would be busy with the new book releases. Vasanthi-chechi and I would spend all our time making plates in the image processing room and then give the plates to the brahmacharis, who would work 24-hour shifts to finish printing the books before the birthday. Once, we found that we could not even see Amma for days on end and became sad. We found it hard to concentrate on work. Finally, we decided to make as many plates as necessary at one go so that we could

see Amma. In this way, we managed to finish the work in time.

We heard that Amma had gone to the brahmacharinis' quarters. Just as we were about to go there, the brahmachari in charge of printing appeared in front of us and said, "The plate you gave us is damaged. We need another one. We cannot print with the plate you gave us." Hearing this, we became terribly disappointed. We felt that we should do the seva that Amma had assigned us to the best of our abilities and continued working for another 30 – 45 minutes before leaving. We were not sure if Amma had returned to her room. As luck would have

it, she was still there. She had come to oversee the kitchen construction work and was in one of the rooms with the brahmacharinis when we arrived. We heard Amma's voice and laughter. As there was no space inside the room, we stood at the door. As soon as we reached, Amma got up to go. A battalion of brahmacharinis followed her. Hiding our sadness, we moved aside and pressed ourselves against the wall so that others could pass. While passing, Amma took my hand and pressed something into my palm, closed it, and walked on. When I went to the press, I saw that she had given me a little prasada. Throughout that day, I could smell Amma's lingering scent on my hand.

When our mind gets purer, we stop blaming others for mistakes and instead become aware of our own flaws. I am reminded of a story that Amma tells. A newlywed couple moved into their new apartment. Through the window,

the young bride could see freshly washed clothes hanging on her neighbour's clothes line. She told her husband, "See that? Those clothes are not really clean. Perhaps the woman of the house doesn't know how to wash clothes properly." The husband remained silent.

Every day, the wife would pass the same comment, and the husband would not respond. After a few weeks, she told her husband, "Did you see that? That woman has finally learnt how to wash clothes. The clothes on the line today are spotless. I wonder who taught her how to do the laundry properly."

The husband said, "This morning, I cleaned our windows. It was because of the dirt and grime on our windows that you perceived their clothes as dirty."

If we try to do any work that Amma assigns us, as worship or with the attitude of being an instrument in God's hands, that action will be

transformed. This attitude of surrender draws the Guru's grace, which will wash away the selfishness and egoism from our hearts. Over time, the mirror of our hearts will become clean. Then, we will be able to perceive only goodness in everything.

If we exercise our God-given faculties of awareness and discernment, we can serve the world and evolve spiritually. Amma made quite a few brahmacharinis obtain their Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Education and then assigned them the responsibility of running the Amrita Vidyalayam schools. Amma first sent me to Pulpally, where I served for several years. One day, Amma sent me to Karwar in Karnataka. As I do not know Kannada, this assignment came as a shock not only to me but to others as well. Nevertheless, I firmly believed that she would take care of everything.

I was reminded of an incident that took place in the

ashram's swimming pool years ago. We were lining up to be pushed by Amma into the pool. When my turn came, I became scared and told Amma about it. She said, "Once you have learnt swimming, you won't forget it." Amma then pushed me into the water. Fortunately, I fell into the life ring placed in the water for that purpose. I didn't have to do anything. By moving my legs a little, I was able to make it to the shallow end of the pool. Amma's sending me to Pulpally and Karwar proved to be as effortless as this experience. I felt Amma's divine power acting within me. All I had to do was to be an instrument in her hands.

Let me share a story I heard. It was time to declare the final results in a school. The principal wanted to promote all the students, provided each one could prove his or her competency. Each student was to take on a project; those who could not complete it would be


retained. However, the time given to finish the project was insufficient. The teacher started thinking of ways to promote all his students, all of whom were intelligent. An idea struck him. He drew a star on the board and asked the students to do likewise in their books. Walking around the class, he noticed that some students had drawn magnificent stars. Some stars were mediocre, and some were downright bad. The teacher whispered something into the ears of the students who could draw well. He also whispered something to those who could not draw well.

The headmaster came to evaluate the students. The teacher drew a star on the board and wrote: 'Fill in the blanks.' Each student was asked to come up and draw whatever they could on the board. When they finished, the headmaster saw a beautiful constellation on the board: there were stars in various

shapes and a beautiful moon. There were also many dots. The headmaster asked the teacher what the dots were. The teacher said they were distant stars. The headmaster was impressed and told the teacher to promote all the students.

What had the teacher done? He told those who could draw well to draw the stars and the moon and the others to put a dot.

Isn't this what Amma, the universal protector, is also doing? We have all reached her after many births. In her boundless compassion, Amma has created various opportunities for us to serve and exhaust our karmic debts. Can't we mark a dot at least? She says, "Children, simply do whatever you can. Just be; that's enough. Amma will take care of the rest."

If we make the best use of this opportunity, our lives will be truly blessed. May Amma bestow her grace on all. 



Forgiving Unburdens

by c.v. rajan, india

Forgiveness is a by-product of compassion. When our heart is full of compassion, we will have no qualms whatsoever about forgiving those who have wronged us.

To illustrate, Amma narrates the following story. Once, while a *sannyasi* (ordained monk) was bathing in a river, he noticed a scorpion struggling to clamber ashore. Moved by its plight, he lifted the scorpion to

put it on the bank of the river. But it stung him on his finger. The sannyasi shook his hand in pain, and the scorpion fell into the water. Taking pity on the scorpion, the sannyasi once again picked up the scorpion, which stung him again! The monk dropped it again because of the acute pain of the sting. This happened a few more times.

A man who was witnessing the whole scene asked the sannyasi, “Even though you know that the scorpion will sting you, why do you keep trying to save it again and again?”

The sannyasi said, “Stinging is its nature. Showing compassion is mine.”

According to an ancient proverb, ‘To err is human, to forgive, divine.’ One may say that compassion and forgiveness come naturally only to saints and sages, who have nourished these divine qualities through dedicated practice. However, this is not entirely true. A Self-realized

saint has discovered his unity with God. He perceives everything in the universe as a manifestation of his own Self. He sees his own Self in others; he sees nothing other than his own Self. If we accidentally poke our eye with our finger, will our eye hold a grudge against the finger? Will the eye have to ‘forgive’ the finger? No, because the eye and finger are parts of the same body. We might use the same finger to rub the eye gently to ease its pain. By the same logic, as far as Self-realized souls are concerned, where is the question of forgiving another person for wrongdoing?

In the case of spiritual aspirants whose goal in life is to realize God, practising compassion and forgiveness ought to be an essential part of their *sadhana* (spiritual practice). Through dedicated practice, these divine qualities will eventually become second nature to the seeker.

For ordinary mortals, forgiving others is not easy. Many of us believe in tit for tat, and rejoice when we see the wrongdoer receiving his or her comeuppance. However, such vengeful thoughts are harmful. It is like the dubious pleasure one gets from scratching an itch. Scratching does not cure the itch. In the long run, it leads to a painful wound.

Let me narrate a real-life story. A young man working in Chennai returned to his village during the festive holiday season. He told his mother, "Amma, something interesting happened a week ago. I met Radha-*valliamma* (his mother's elder sister-in-law) at our relative's house at Chennai. The last time I saw her before that was in my boyhood, maybe when I was 9 years old or so."

The mother looked offended. She asked, "How is she? How did she behave with you?"

"She spoke to me so affectionately that I was really bowled over! She recalled how chubby and cute I used to be as a child. She then inquired after all our family members, including you. Valliamma also insisted on feeding me sweets she had brought. To be frank, I can't reconcile how lovable she was with the impression I've been given of her since my childhood..."

His mother shook her head in disapproval. In a stern voice, she said, "You're too naïve to understand people. I know how arrogant and vicious she is. Have you forgotten how she insulted me when I went to see her right after she became widowed?"

The young man thought, "How could I forget it? You've told us all more than a hundred times, and every time you speak about it, your face turns red in anger!"

His mother had been nursing a grudge for several decades. All the relatives in her

in-law's family had a high opinion about Radha-valliamma, whom they considered friendly, loving and caring. This must have created some resentment and envy in her.

This was what had happened. When her husband's older brother passed away suddenly, she had gone to see her sister-in-law. The newly widowed woman was grieving uncontrollably. When this woman tried to enter the room to offer her condolences, the widow slammed the door in her face. Feeling terribly insulted, she returned home in a huff. Her heart was seething with rage and she forced her husband to cut off relations with her sister-in-law. She then kept her indignation alive by repeatedly telling her children the story of how the sister-in-law had humiliated her.

A few weeks later, the young man had a chance to meet his valliamma once again in Chennai. On that occasion, he managed to broach the subject

with her. Radha-valliamma said, "I really don't remember any such incident, my son. I was in utter grief at that time. All my senses were numb; it was as if all my faculties were off-kilter. I don't even recall your mother coming to see me. However, I cannot imagine slamming the door in anyone's face. That's just not my nature. If at all it happened, it must have been purely accidental."

She then narrated how widowhood had turned her life topsy-turvy. She had to raise her four children single-handedly amidst poverty and other insurmountable difficulties. Her life had become a struggle for survival. She had no time to think of anything other than bringing up her children, which she had succeeded in doing through sheer toil and grit.

Having met her, learnt about her difficult life, and gauged her behaviour, the young man became convinced that his mother had painted a


misleading picture. She had harboured a bitter grudge against her sister-in-law for decades. Even if the incident had been true, she could have easily forgiven the older woman, considering the unimaginable grief she was experiencing then and the hardship she had to endure in the years to come. However, she did not allow herself to feel any compassion for her sister-in-law and had neither forgotten the perceived wrongdoing nor forgiven her.

What had she gained by holding onto this grudge? Nothing. As far as the young man knew, his mother had never been happy or contented. She was always grumbling or complaining about something or someone. Even if the alleged incident had taken place, she could have made peace with it by unburdening it to God. But she did not do that either.

Unburdening to God does not mean praying that he

punishes the evil-doers. We ought to pray with the understanding that by forgiving the wrongdoer, we can be cleansed of the negative emotions troubling us. Whether the wrongdoer is punished or left scot-free is no longer a matter of importance. God will take care of it in His infinite wisdom.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi used to say, "It would be folly if a passenger in a train carries his luggage on his head. Let him put it down. The train will carry it to the destination in any case and the passenger can relax. In a similar way, let us unburden ourselves and surrender to his guiding power."

In olden times, the Indian Railways used to mount signboards in railway stations and trains that read: "Less luggage, more comfort." By consciously cultivating the quality of forgiveness, all of us can enjoy the journey of life with less emotional baggage. 

Vyasa Pournami

by Sanoop Sadanandan, India



In the Naimisha Forest, Sage Shaunaka was guiding a large *yajna* (fire ceremony) that lasted 12 years. Ugrashravas, an adept in the scriptures, was addressing the monks gathered there. He said, “I will tell you about the immortal epic (*Mahabharata*), which removes the blindness caused by the cataract of ignorance.”

The sage then related the story of Vyasa, the venerable author of the *Mahabharata*, and summarized the entire story. He also spoke about the greatness of the epic, and the benefits of reading or listening to it.

“In three years, Lord Ganesha transcribed the entire epic that Krishna Dvaipayana Vyasa¹ dictated to him. Sage Vaishampayana, one of Vyasa’s best disciples, recited it in King Janamejaya’s court. I was there and heard the entire recitation. Long before that, Vyasa had transmitted the story to Shuka, his son, and to his four disciples, Pailan, Vaishampayana, Jaimini and Sumantu.

“The *Mahabharata Sambhita* has six million verses, of which three million were for the *devas* (gods), 1.5 million for *pitrs* (departed souls) and 1.4 million for *yaksha-gandharvas* (celestial beings). The remaining 100,000 verses were for human beings. Sage Narada narrated it to the devas, Devala recounted it to the pitrs, and Shuka related it to the yaksha-gandharvas. Vaisham-

1 One of Sage Vyasa’s epithets. Krishna refers to his dark complexion. Dvaipayana means island-born. Vyasa means compiler.

payana, Vyasa’s beloved disciple, conveyed it to human beings.

“I will now tell you in 18 cantos the secret of *dharma*,² which Sage Vyasa conveyed through about 100 cantos. Those who listen to the account with faith and attentiveness will understand the nature of the world and gain the ability to discern right from wrong. They will not have to perform any act of atonement.”

Ugrashravas began by describing how Dhritarashtra heard about the happenings on the warfront from Sanjaya, his charioteer and son of Gavalgana. Ugrashravas told them how agonized Dhritarashtra was and how Sanjaya consoled him.

Ugrashravas said that the *Mahabharata* was a ship to cross the ocean of *samsara* (cycle of births and deaths).

2 ‘That which upholds (creation);’ generally, used to refer to the harmony of the universe, a righteous code of conduct, sacred duty or eternal law.

In a sense, the *Mahabharata* is also the story of Vyasa's family. One can feel the richness of personal experience in it. Vyasa is a character in it as are his ancestors and descendants. The epic is about the conflicts and dilemmas they encountered and how they were resolved.

Vyasa appears in the story at a number of critical junctures. When King Vichitravirya died from tuberculosis, the Kuru lineage faced extinction as the king had died without an heir. On the advice of his mother, Vyasa fathered three sons — Dhritarashtra and Pandu (through Ambika and Ambalika, Vichitravirya's wives), and Vidura (through a palace maid). Vyasa fulfilled his dharma to them but did not have any special attachment to them. He had also the same attitude towards his grandsons, the Pandavas and Kauravas.

He played a role in the delivery of the Kaurava offspring. Gandhari, their mother, had not delivered even after

a full term of pregnancy. Frustrated, she struck her stomach, resulting in the expulsion of a lump of flesh. Vyasa convinced her not to discard that lump. Through arcane rituals, the lump was eventually transformed into 100 sons and a daughter.

The power-hungry and egoistic Kauravas followed *adharma* (unrighteousness), whereas the Pandavas adhered to dharma. The latter suffered much from their youth. Possibly because of this and also motivated by his own sense of dharma, Vyasa was closer to the Pandavas. Through Lord Krishna, Vyasa imparted the dictum that the words of *mahatmas* (spiritually illumined souls) constitute the essence of dharma.

During the Pandavas' years in the forest, he imparted, through Yudhishtira, the mantra to Arjuna for worshipping Indra and Shiva so that he could learn from them the war

stratagem known as *prati-smriti*. The sage told Yudhishtira that through Arjuna, the Pandavas would gain the upper hand in the war. He also conveyed many other strategies.

When the Pandavas and their mother Kunti were wandering in the forest after escaping from a fire, they were comforted and guided by Vyasa, who told them that a bright future awaited them. It was Vyasa who sent the Pandavas to the Panchala court for Draupadi's *svayamvara*.³

It was also Vyasa who bestowed on Sanjaya the gift of *divya drshti*, clairvoyance, so that he could tell Dhritarashtra what was happening in the battlefield.

At the end of the Mahabharata War, Vyasa went to Gandhari, who was agonizing over the deaths of all her children, and reminded her that dharma had won.

³ Ancient practice in which a bride would choose her husband from an array of suitors.

Vyasa encouraged Yudhishtira, who was dispassionate and disinterested in action, to seize the reins of his kingdom. He instructed the king to conduct an *Ashwamedha Yajna* (horse sacrifice), revealed that the wealth for it could be found in a treasury left behind by an ancient king called Maruta, and advised him to reduce taxes by using this wealth. When Yudhishtira surrendered the kingdom and all its wealth to Vyasa, who was also his grandfather, the latter returned it to Yudhishtira and went away to resume his *tapas* (austerities).

Thus, Vyasa, the director of the play, appeared on the stage, revealing signs and omens to the characters, warning them, comforting them, and conveying the essence of dharma, wherever necessary. The author shines as the full moon, guiding all the characters in this *dharma-kavya* (epic of dharma).

Vyasa was born to Sage Parasara and Satyavati in an

island near River Yamuna. As he was born in an island (*dvīp*), he was also called Dvaipayana. After completing his studies and his pilgrimages, he built a grass hut on the bank of River Sarasvati and settled there to continue his tapas.

Once, seeing a mother sparrow lovingly caressing its fledglings, Vyasa began reflecting on the nature of pure and unconditional love. The desire to have a son sprouted in his mind. Ghritachi, a celestial nymph appeared before him, and to them was born Shuka, a child as radiant as fire. Vyasa taught Shuka all that was needed to become a great spiritual master. Vyasa imparted the *Mahabharata* to Shuka first. Vyasa then sent him to Sage Brhaspati, Guru of the gods, to learn all the Vedas and other sciences. Thereafter, in deference to Sage Narada's advice, Shuka renounced everything and set out as a wandering monk. He did not even bid farewell to his

father but told the mountains, hills, rivers, streams and the four directions to convey the news to his father. Shuka eventually became a *paramacharya* (supreme teacher) in *Advaita* (non-dualistic philosophy). His years of tapas culminated in spiritual liberation.

In the meantime, separated from his son, Vyasa was feeling acutely distressed. To console him, Lord Shiva appeared before him and blessed him to see everyone in the world as his son. Later, Vyasa explained, "We may encounter situations that make us happy, sad or frightened. Such situations affect only those who are deluded. They do not perturb the wise, who accept everything with equanimity."

Vyasa undertook the stupendous task of compiling the Vedas. Even after he had finished composing the *Mahabharata*, he remained unsatisfied. So, he composed *Harivamsha*, which describes the divine play of Lord Krishna.

Undergirded by a resolute sense of dharma and devotion to the Lord, the *Harivamsa* is a biography of Krishna.


The ancient sages had discovered the means not only to know the mind in depth but also to make it expansive, pure, steady and lofty. The *Mahabharata* presents these means in a manner that can be understood by ordinary people. This quality makes the *Mahabharata* magnificently creative, the mother all epics.

The style of the *Mahabharata* is not that of hurried story telling. Each one of the more than 1,500 characters has a distinct personality.

The message of the *Mahabharata* is that we should fulfil our *svadharma* (duty suited to one's nature) with *viveka* (discernment). The aim of creation is to instil an awareness of the Truth in people. The epic discusses the four *purusharthas* or goals of man: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha* — doing one's righteous duty, earning

wealth, fulfilling desires, and attaining spiritual liberation.

Through its diverse characters and plot lines, the *Mahabharata* conveys the eternal principle of dharma. The warp and woof of this epic of dharma are woven from the vicissitudes of human life and the eternal values of truth. Vyasa himself declares that what is contained in the epic can be found elsewhere, but that what is not in it cannot be found anywhere else. That is why it is said, "*Vyasocchistam jagat sarvam*" — "There is nothing in the world that has not come out from Vyasa's mouth."

Vyasa's sayings are expressions of dharma. The epic, first inscribed by Ganesha's quill, remains relevant even today. It mirrors the changing times. This may be why we celebrate the birthday of Sage Vyasa, the grandsire of our heritage, as *Guru Purnima* (the full moon of the Guru). The Guru's grace alone can illumine the Self within the disciple. 

My Prayer

O Guru, I heard your voice:
“Surrender! Become prayer!”
I clearly heard the command.
Your words seeped deep into my heart.

The thought arose:
I’ve always been yours
since the dawn of time.
To whom do I surrender?

By the shower of your grace,
nourished by gratitude and humility,
the seed of my heart has blossomed.
My sunflower faces you, O Guru!

In ceaseless remembrance of you,
my thoughts, words and deeds
began to exude your fragrance
as it basks in your divine radiance.

I harbour tender hopes
of serving you and your creation.
May I become one with you:
this is my prayer. 🌸

Bhagyalakshmi R. Nair, India





Chapter 14: Yoga of the Division of the Three Gunas

by Prof. V. Muraleedhara Menon, India

This chapter complements the previous one. We have seen that in order to liberate the Self, we must overcome our identification with the body. To do so, we must exercise *viveka* (discernment) and *vairagya* (dispassion).

This chapter is an analysis of the *triguna* — the three attributes that characterize every object in nature. Varying proportions of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* — harmony, passion and inertia — pervade everything in creation. The Lord teaches us how we can distinguish the Self from these attributes.

Among the three *gunas*, the worst is *tamas*, which causes sloth and slumber. Laziness ruins life. We must give up laziness and work hard. Just like the body, the mind and intellect also need work. We must also overcome the tendency to oversleep. The purpose of the body is to attain the supreme goal of life — spiritual liberation. Can we gain anything if we are always sleeping? Such people are always prone to making mistakes. How can we avoid or minimize this? By doing all our actions with alertness and awareness.

Rajas is the constant inspiration behind all kinds of ac-

tions, which causes all our *vasanas* (latent tendencies) to manifest. All great undertakings are nothing but the play of rajas. One who is predominantly rajasic will not adhere to his or her own *svadharma* (work suited to one's nature).

Adhering to one's *svadharma* is the art of marshalling all our energy, otherwise dissipated over diverse actions, and applying it with single-minded focus to one goal. Scattering seeds haphazardly in a field is different from sowing them systematically. We don't have to go in search of *svadharma*; it is waiting for us. If we can engage ourselves solely in *svadharma*, our mind will become one-pointed and pure.

It is only with great delicacy that the Self can be distinguished from *sattva*. It is a very subtle process. We do not have to discard *sattva* immediately. It is said that after uprooting *rajas* and *tamas*, we must live in pure *sattva* until the body dies. What this means

Laziness ruins life. We must give up laziness and work hard. We must also overcome the tendency to oversleep.

is that we should give up our pride in and attachment to *sattva*. How can we give up this *sattvic* pride? When abidance in *sattva* becomes as constant and natural as breathing, we will not feel proud.

Alternatively, we must give up our attachment to *sattva* by dedicating all *sattvic* deeds to God. When *sattva* becomes deep-rooted, its fruits might manifest in the form of fame and *siddhis* (occult powers). They should be regarded as trifles and discarded. In this way, we can transcend *sattva* as well.

One more important thing: even if we succeed in giving up our *sattvic* ego and attachment, there is a danger of *rajas* and *tamas* infiltrating and tormenting our mind, for as long as we are embodied. This can happen however cautious

we are. This threat will continue to exist until we have a vision of the Self or until we gain Self-knowledge.

Wakefulness alone is not enough. Spiritual practices alone are not enough either. The only way in which we can elude this fate is by praying wholeheartedly to God. Even if we overcome the desire for the fruit of action, we are still not safe. Only God's grace can save us. To earn it, we must fill our heart with pure devotion.

At the end of this chapter, the Lord says, "If you worship and serve me with intense and single-minded devotion, you will be able to transcend *maya* (cosmic illusion). Otherwise, it's impossible."

The simple path of pure devotion is the only way to liberate ourselves from the grip of *maya*. ❧

(to be continued)

Lilas Around Amma

All-knowing

Amma is my lighthouse. Her rays of grace have sustained me in life. Amma's divinity has to be experienced in order to be understood. I would like to recollect a few experiences that might inspire a weary traveller on the road of life to take refuge in the all-knowing Amma.

The following incident happened years ago. After completing his doctorate abroad, my son landed in Trivandrum and called me from the airport to let me know that he had landed



in India and was heading straight to Amritapuri. I wondered why he did not come home. He was our only child. Didn't he need our blessings? Was he running away from us? This and many other doubts disturbed me and his father.

On our visit to the Amritapuri ashram soon after, we saw him dressed in a white *kurta* and *dhoti*. I felt upset, as I had expected him in formal office wear. He sensed my disappointment, and thereafter, our conversation began to flounder. While we were talking, someone came and told our son that Amma wanted to see him. When he returned, he said that she had chided him for speaking roughly to us. She also said, "Your mother is confused. She's trying to find out if you are an academic, a brahmachari or an ashram resident. That's why she is upset." This message touched my heart. Amma had read my mind and conveyed what I had been unable to express.

During a later visit to the ashram, we reached the hall early and waited for Amma to come for darshan. When she arrived, she noticed us and, smiling gleefully, said, "Children, come with me!" Turning to one of the volunteers, she said, "Their son hasn't come to meet them yet. Shouldn't I take over?" How had she known that? On the stage, Amma hugged me and said, "Son is tied to work. He's got a lot of work, intellectual work. Work is his breath!" I saw in Amma a mother trying to justify her son's absence.

Once, when we were going to Amritapuri, we told our friends that we were going to meet our son, not Amma. As usual, after meeting him, we went for darshan. Surprisingly, while waiting for my darshan, Amma did not glance my way or smile at me, as she usually does. Finally, I reached Amma. She hugged me, but the endearing warmth was absent. It struck me that my intention

had not been to meet Amma. I regretted my ignorance. We are all open books to the Divine Mother.

Our visits to Amritapuri continued on and off, and each time, we would have Amma's darshan. Every time I reached her, I would say, "Amma, I am _____'s mother."

On one such occasion, Amma asked me, "Why is it that every time you come, you say that you are _____'s mother?" Tears filled my eyes when I realized that in spite of the countless people she hugs and talks to, she remembered how I introduce myself every time. How is that possible? The only answer is that Amma is all-knowing. Bless us, O Amma. May our intentions be worthy!

— *Geetha Mukund, India*

Love is the Answer

For more than 20 years, I have been blessed with many opportunities to serve Amma during her visits to Chennai.

Initially, I served in the footwear stand. Over the years, I also served in the parking, kitchen and the garbage disposal departments. But I never did security *seva*, which is what I really wanted.

My childhood dream had been to serve the country through the Indian Army, but my parents did not encourage this ambition. I compensated for this by developing a keen defence mindset. I watched and learnt from movies that were military-themed or about rescue missions. I felt that life was a battlefield and one must have the attitude of a fighter to overcome the challenges of life. Imagining myself to be a soldier, I even used to practise the military salute at home!

My defence mentality did help me a few times during Amma's visit to Chennai. Once, when I was going for darshan, a member of the security team asked me to deposit my house keys at a counter that collected keys and mobile phones for

safe-keeping. In exchange, I was given a square-shaped plastic token that had sharp-edged corners. I felt this could be a security issue and duly notified the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) personnel, suggesting that the token be oval or round instead. I took pride in my observation, which I believed was a product of my defence mindset.

I also noticed and rescued a partially blind dog that had fallen into a pit during Amma's Chennai visit. I felt that I had been able to do all this only because of my defence mentality.

During one of my visits to Amritapuri, as I was nearing Amma, I mentally asked her whether my attitude was right or wrong. To my astonishment, Amma started saluting devotees coming to her, saying '*Salaam Saab!*' ('Salutations, sir!'). This gesture alone was enough to convince me that my thinking was correct. My longing to perform

security seva for Amma intensified.

During Amma's 2019 visit to Chennai, the local devotees were wondering if Amma would distribute dinner prasad the night before the first program. When it was confirmed that she would, I became excited. I wanted to inform my mother, who was at home. I called her but she did not answer. Finally, after repeated unanswered calls, I decided to go back home, which is just a minute's walk from the Chennai Ashram, and bring her to the ashram.

The door to our house has an automatic lock system, which means it can be locked from the outside without a key, but to open it, you need a key. In our rush to receive Amma's prasad, my mother and I left home and locked it from the outside, only to realize later that both of us had left our keys inside the house.


After learning about how we had locked ourselves out, a

few devotees invited us to spend the night with them. We politely declined, choosing to spend the night in the ashram, where the Divine Mother herself was staying.

My mother went to sleep in a corner of the ashram hall. As I could not sleep, I started talking to the devotee in charge of security. He was exhausted and asked me if I could take over his seva for a few hours that night. I said a big YES! I mentally thanked Amma again and again for making my mother and I leave our keys inside the house. My long-cherished dream had finally come true! I took charge of the military post, as I called it, from midnight to 5:30 a.m.

In those hours, I imagined myself variously as Arjuna, Bheema, a CRPF officer, a commando... serving Amma to the fullest extent possible by providing full security to her.

By her grace, the problem with the lock and keys was resolved early that morning.

When Amma fulfilled my dream to do security seva for her, it struck me that I was only able to do it because of love for Amma and not my defence mentality. Amma says that love should always be at the centre of life, even while defending the country. A defence mindset alone is not enough in life. Love is the answer. 

— *Saranath, India*

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