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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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Devotion and Humility

Children, where there is devotion, there will also be qualities like humility, patience and compassion. A real devotee sees himself as the servant of all, not as someone great. He is ready to help others, disregarding his own problems.

King Ambareesh, a staunch devotee of Lord Vishnu, observed the *Ekadashi* fast¹ without fail. Pleased with his devotion, Lord Vishnu bestowed on him the *Sudarshana Chakra*.² Seeing how devoutly Ambareesh observed the vow, Indra feared that he would lose his position as chief of the gods to the king. He incited Sage Durvasa to call upon Ambareesh at his palace on an Ekadashi day in order to break the king's fast. The king greeted the sage with utmost reverence. Saying that he would first take a

1 A fast observed during the 11th lunar day of each of the two lunar phases that occur in a Hindu month.


2 Literally, the 'disk of auspicious vision,' a spinning disk with serrated edges; Lord Vishnu's weapon.

bath, Durvasa went down to the river but did not return even when the time for breaking the fast was drawing near. So Ambareesh offered oblations to the gods, setting some aside for Durvasa. Then, taking a sip of water, he broke his fast.

When Durvasa returned from his bath and learnt that the king had ended his fast without waiting for him, he became enraged. He started verbally abusing Ambareesh, who remained unperturbed. Though aware of his own might, he contritely said again and again, "Please forgive me for any mistake I might have committed". But Durvasa did not forgive him. He conjured a devil to slay Ambareesh. When the devil lunged forward to kill the king, the Sudarshana Chakra materialized and despatched the fiend. It then hurtled towards Durvasa's throat. The sage fled for his life. He sought refuge with Lords Brahma and Shiva but

was unable to shake off the terrifying Sudarshana Chakra. Finally, he ran to Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Vishnu, where the Lord told him that his only recourse for salvation was Ambareesh's protection. Seeing no other way, Durvasa ran to Ambareesh and begged forgiveness. Even then, such was the king's humility that he wanted to wash the sage's feet and drink that water.

God will always be with people like Ambareesh. He will always watch over and protect the humble. In contrast, how can one who feels "I am great. Everyone must serve me" ever realize God?

There are some who, even while praying, brood revenge on others. An oxidised vessel cannot be plated with lead. It must first be scrubbed clean of its patina. Similarly, only when the heart is purified will devotion take root. Only then can we realize the presence of God within us. 



Om Sarvajnayai Namah

by swami amritageetananda puri

Asannyasi has no birthday; he is supposed to have gone beyond birth and death. Nevertheless, every year on my birthday, I go for Amma's darshan. I see it as yet another opportunity to enjoy Her motherly embrace.

This year, when I went for Amma's darshan, She blessed me in Her usual compassionate way,

but said, “*Entaa mone, mind cheyyunnillallo!*” (“Son, you’re not paying me enough attention!”). It is a common Malayalam expression, uttered by those who feel that we are avoiding them or not paying them enough attention. I was surprised to hear Amma telling me this, because I sit near Her during darshan, evening bhajans and meditation sessions. During bhajans and meditation, I might be sitting a short distance away from Her or sometimes even at the back of the hall. I also come to Amritapuri once or twice every month from Bangalore.

By Her grace, I was able to understand what She meant after a few moments. For more than a month, I had been suffering from severe chest congestion and fever. As a result, I found it difficult to do my daily chanting and meditation. Amma was hinting that I have been careless about my daily *sadhana* (spiritual practices).

One of the mantras in the *Lalita Sahasranama*, the 1,000 names of the Divine Mother, is ‘*Om sarvajnayai namah*’ – ‘Salutations to Lalita Devi, who is all-knowing’ (196). I have experienced Amma’s omniscience many times. She reveals it just a little, and only to ensure that I do not flag in my sadhana. Whenever I become negligent in this matter, Amma will hint at it in one way or the other, and I would become alert and continue my sadhana with renewed zeal.

Recently, for various reasons, I was unable to complete my daily count of mantras or sit for meditation for the usual period of time for a few days. I felt bothered about this and was trying hard not to let up on my sadhana. One morning, I decided that I would not get up from my meditation seat until noon. By Amma’s grace, I was able to persevere. At 1 p.m., I received a recorded WhatsApp message from a devotee. When I played it, I

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realized it was a message from Amma! The devotee had recorded it in Los Angeles and sent it to me. Amma's words were full of love and sympathy. I had been feeling sad about certain recent developments in Bangalore, and Amma, who was in Los Angeles, had felt it. Listening to Amma's voice message, I felt so much peace, joy and energy.

I will narrate one more incident that reveals Amma's all-knowing nature. A few years ago, during Amma's Summer U.S. Tour, I had gone to Tamil Nadu for a few programs. One night, there

was a program in Neyveli. By the time I returned to the Chennai Ashram, it was almost 12 a.m. As I had been busy the whole day, I had not finished my daily count of mantras. I decided that I would not go to sleep until I completed my daily count. I sat down with my *japa mala* (rosary), finished the count, and went to sleep at 1:30 a.m. At 5 a.m., Br. Vinayamrita, the brahmachari in charge of the Chennai Ashram, came running into my room with a phone in his hand. He woke me up, saying, "Amma's on the line!" ❧

Who Can Comprehend Your Glory?

by br. vijayamrita chaitanya, india

Some years ago, a brahmachari came for darshan. He was losing his vision in both eyes because of a rare disease. I was sitting nearby and anxious to know what Amma's response would be. She did not say anything. She simply scooped up his glasses with a stick and dropped them. She then picked them up and put them back on his face. She hugged him, gave him a kiss and sent him away. After a few days, the brahmachari went for a medical check-up and found that his problem had lessened substantially, much to the surprise of his doctors. Twenty years later, he still has sufficient vision in both eyes.

By removing his glasses, Amma had saved him from impending blindness. By returning his glasses, She had given him new vision. More than physical eyesight, what a Satguru does is to remove the cataract of ignorance and open the inner eye. We can see God only with that eye. Amma's true form cannot be perceived by the physical eyes.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna tells Arjuna:

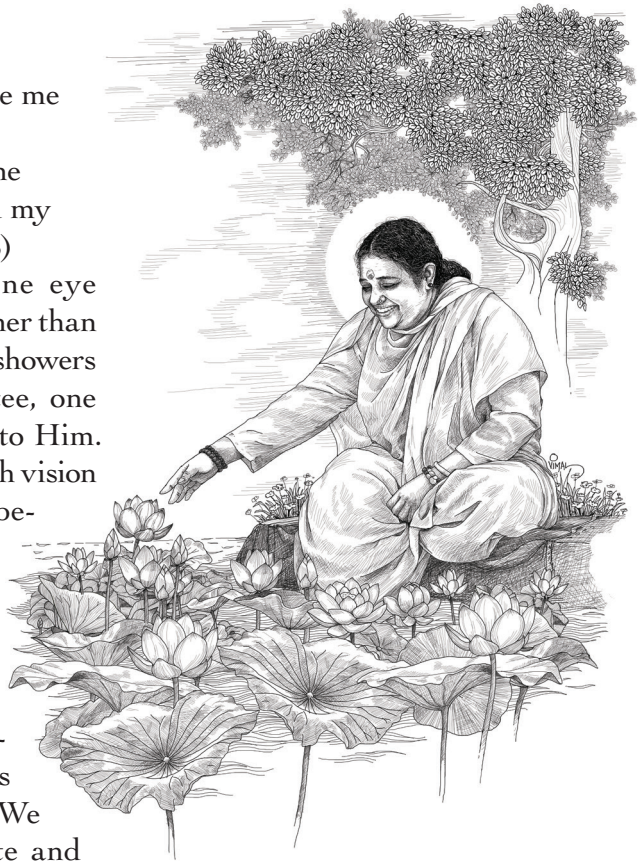
*na tu mam shakyaḥ draśtum anena evaśva cakṣuṣhā
divyam dadāmi te cakṣuḥ paśhya me yogam aiśvaryaṃ*

But you cannot see me
with your eyes.
I bestow on you the
divine eye; behold my
divine yoga! (11.8)

What does the divine eye mean? It is nothing other than divine grace that God showers on a deserving devotee, one who has surrendered to Him. Lord Krishna gave such vision only to a select few because only they were eligible. What makes one eligible is a pure and expansive heart. Amma often reminds us that we are not isolated islands but links in the chain of life. We must try to assimilate and practise this principle.

The Ganges does not flow immediately into the sea. It starts as a tiny stream in Gangotri. As it flows, many rivulets join it, causing it to swell into a river that irrigates and nurtures so many villages and farmlands before merging into the expansive sea. Similarly,

the Ganges of Love in us must grow. It should flow beyond our family to include the rest of society, and then expand to encompass all living and non-living beings. In this way, it will finally merge in God. This expansiveness of the heart is what we all need.




Peace and happiness will prevail in the world only when the power of love overcomes the love for power.

A wise man once said that peace and happiness will prevail in the world only when the power of love overcomes the love for power. Whereas many people run madly after wealth and power, thus ruining their chances to enjoy true peace and happiness, Amma is spreading peace and tranquility through the power of love and compassion.

We do not know the greatness and glory of Amma, who is the fulcrum of this universe. Very often, Her darshan goes on uninterrupted for hours together. She embraces thousands and comforts them. She gives them hope and moral support to propel them through life. Simultaneously, She leads several humanitarian projects. Even while giving darshan, Amma

manages the affairs of the university, hospitals, schools and research institutions. In addition, She provides spiritual guidance to thousands of devotees all over the world. Amma is truly a wonder that cannot be experienced anywhere else in the world. To witness Her glories, we need a vision anointed by grace, divine vision.

It is said that when a *ma-batma* (spiritually illumined soul) is born, all rivers flow towards his holy feet, all mountain peaks prostrate to him, and all stars circumambulate him. The whole universe pays homage to him. We are so blessed that we are living at a time when Amma, who is worshipped by the entire cosmos, is here with us. What a great boon! 

Journey to Amma

by krishna sreesuthan, india

My relationship with Amma has undergone many transitions, from sceptic to seeing Her as my mother, and finally, to witnessing glimpses of Her godly nature and accepting Her as my Guru.

I lost my mother when I was a child. As a result, I grew up very attached to my father. However, the yearning for

a mother never left my heart. I became devoted to Goddess Kali, who was enshrined in a temple near my home. I would visit Her daily and report all the ins and outs of my life. Further, my main *sadhana* (spiritual practice) for years was the *Lalita Sabasranama archana*.¹ It gave me much solace and comfort.

My father felt an instant connection with Amma right from his first meeting with Her. He never questioned Her divinity and became a staunch devotee. He began visiting Amma in Amritapuri. Although I accepted that he saw Amma as his Guru, I was content worshipping my beloved Kali. I also could not quite believe that devotees saw Amma as God in human form. To me, She was merely a spiritual leader.

After meeting Amma for the first time, I did not see Her

again for six years; I did not feel any desire to either. My father would visit Amma regularly even when his health was failing, but I missed all those opportunities to be in Her presence. My father had received a kidney transplant when I was a baby. By the time I was in seventh grade, his body had begun rejecting the kidney and he had to undergo dialysis regularly. To ease his financial burdens, I gave up my dream to become a doctor. I figured the cheapest alternative would be to study in Kerala University. However, my father believed that if I studied in Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham (Amrita University), Amma would look after me if something happened to him. Out of love for my father, I enrolled in the Amritapuri Campus's Biotechnology degree course and took a study loan. During that time, I went for darshan many times just to test Amma. I would ask Her lofty spiritual questions to see if She knew the

.....
1 Chanting of the 1,000 names of the Divine Mother.

answers! Amma ignored me most of the time.

In 2013, the year Amma turned 60, I went home during the Onam vacation. My father gently asked me to stay on for two more days. However, I was excited about doing *seva* (selfless service) for Amma's birthday and returned to Amritapuri. As soon as I reached the ashram, I felt a deep sense of foreboding. Feeling very restless, I began to cry and wanted to speak to my father immediately. I rang my brother, who told me that father was perspiring profusely and had pain radiating into his left arm. I begged my father to seek medical aid at once. He demurred initially but eventually agreed. My brother took him to the hospital.

Meanwhile, I spent the night doing *seva*. Unknown to me, my father had suffered a heart attack. Without checking his medical history, the doctors at the hospital gave him an injection that caused

semi-paralysis. He was taken to the ICU (Intensive Care Unit), where he passed away.

No one informed me of his passing. After my *seva*, I felt a deep urge to go and see Amma. I told my hostel warden, who took me to Her. Amma looked at me and said, "Eat some food and go back home. Your father needs you!" She gave me a banana.

When I reached home, I was shocked to learn of my father's sudden death. Even so, I felt only acceptance and even relief that his lifelong suffering had finally ended, and so, did not cry at all. I was not worried either about what would happen to my younger brother and me. I also realized that Amma had known what had transpired at home, and was slowly coming to understand that there was something special about Her. My aunt, concerned about my seeming lack of response, took me back to Amma the following week and told Her that I had not cried and

must have lost my mind. Amma angrily said: "Have you seen children like this, children who don't cry when their parent passes away? What age are we living in!" She continued to berate me harshly. Unable to bear the scolding, I burst into tears. Amma asked me to sit beside Her. I sat there for a long time, feeling sad that even Amma did not understand me just when I was beginning to see Her in a new light. After some time, She asked me to re-join the darshan queue. When I reached Her, Amma whispered, "Daughter, if you live in this world, you must act in a way that is in keeping with social norms. When it is time to cry, you must cry, and when it is time to laugh, you must laugh. Otherwise, people will consider you mad. But Amma understands you." Thus, She consoled me.

My perspective of Amma shifted. I felt a mother's true love radiating from Her. After that darshan, Amma made it a

point to talk to me every time I went for darshan. Even if I said something silly, She would listen to me attentively.

I began seeing my enrolment in Amrita University as a blessing. In time, my brother also enrolled in the university. During one vacation, he went home while I was still at the ashram. While at home, he suddenly fell seriously ill and was taken to the hospital, where a doctor diagnosed a viral infection. However, no one at home told me about how critical his condition was. Nevertheless, while in Amritapuri, I felt a deep fear for him in my heart. I ran to Amma, who was giving darshan, and told Her my fear that something had happened to my brother. She exclaimed, "You don't believe in me! That must be why you took your brother to another place. If you believed in me, you would have brought him to me first!"

Feeling immense dread and confusion, I rang my aunt, who

“If you live in this world, you must act in a way that is in keeping with social norms. When it is time to cry, you must cry, and when it is time to laugh, you must laugh.”

told me that my brother was in the ICU. When I demanded that he be brought to Amritapuri immediately, my aunt said that I was being reckless and that she would not take the risk. Just then, two brahmacharinis who were present when Amma spoke to me helped me bring him back in an ambulance to Amritapuri.

By then, my brother’s platelet count was dangerously low and he could no longer walk or sit. Nevertheless, we brought him straight to Amma, who received both my brother and me with immense love. She began rubbing my brother’s back and told me, “I will give you a letter to see the doctor. Go to AIMS.”² She then asked,

.....
2 Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences, a super-speciality hospital in Kochi, Kerala.

“If he needs a kidney replacement, who will donate one?” That is when I realized that my brother was suffering from a kidney condition, just like my father had. I told Amma that my brother and I share the same blood group and that I would be his donor. She made arrangements for us to be taken to AIMS.

As soon as we reached AIMS, my brother’s platelet count went up miraculously, and he was able to sit and walk. Amma’s grace was at work! Nevertheless, I did not know anything about my brother’s condition. When the doctor came to see us, I could not answer any of his questions about my brother’s or father’s medical history. As my frustration mounted, the doctor suddenly realized that he knew my father

well. He had often treated him before the hospital records were computerized and knew his medical history as he had come in with a less than 10% chance of survival. He also recalled my father's strong will to live for his two children and his miraculous progression to dialysis. Suddenly, the burden of needing to know my father's medical history was lifted off my shoulders.

My brother was diagnosed as suffering from renal nephritis. Some of his nephrons had been damaged as a result of a genetic defect. I was relieved to hear that his condition could be managed by regular medication, and his treatment progressed smoothly.

I saw Amma's divine hand in all this. By then, my faith in Her had increased tremendously. I knew She would henceforth be our father and mother. I felt deeply inspired by Her and wanted to be like Her, consoling others and loving them as best as I could.

One day, a friend of mine with PCOD (Polycystic Ovary Disease), a condition that could hamper her desire to have children, poured out her sorrows to me. I was moved by her plight and prayed: "Amma, if I have gained any *punya* (spiritual merit) by doing archana all these years, I want to give it to this girl. But don't take on her pain, Amma. I don't want You to suffer. Give me her karma instead."

From the next month onwards, my monthly period stopped and I began to develop symptoms associated with PCOD. My friend, on the other hand, became pregnant with twins!

During my next darshan, Amma rubbed my lower back and said, "Go to the hospital and do a full body check-up." I also consulted a gynaecologist, who discovered a huge bleeding cyst in my womb as well as ovarian cysts. The perplexed doctor said it was unlikely for a girl as thin as I was

to develop PCOD. She prescribed medication.

I then went to tell Amma about the diagnosis. Her response was spontaneous: "You are not Amma! You cannot take other people's karma upon yourself. You have your own karma. The benefit of your sadhana is for you alone."

Her words gave me deeper insight into Her divinity. Amma is not like the rest of us, struggling with karmic burdens. She is an avatar, God in human form, accepting the sins of others.

After my Bachelor's degree, I enrolled for a Master's. My loan was constantly on my mind as I had not begun paying it off. The amount, with interest, had accumulated to a staggering eight *lakh* rupees (₹800,000). Both my guarantors, my father and his friend, had passed away. In such cases, the bank usually cancels the amount owed. However, it took advantage of my ignorance of such matters and filed

a case against me. A bank officer even called me to say that if I did not redeem the loan at once, the bank would ensure that I was jailed! After he hung up, I began crying and praying in earnest before a photo of Amma, who was in Coimbatore at that time.

Suddenly, my phone rang. The call was from Coimbatore. I was too distraught to answer it. However, the phone kept ringing; they were all calls from Coimbatore. Eventually, I answered a call. It was an aunt: "Child, I just had a private darshan with Amma!"


"How wonderful! Here I am, embroiled in money issues and someone is calling me to brag about her private darshan," I thought bitterly. I told the aunt that I was in no mood to hear her story, but she insisted that I listen to her.

Amma Herself had invited the aunt and her family for room darshan. Smiling mischievously, She said, "Something is going to happen

today!" My aunt had produced a photo of me and asked Amma if She would allow her son to marry me; if marriage was not viable, the aunt wanted to adopt me. Her husband said that he wanted to help me; more than that, he wanted me to join the family. Amma was overjoyed. "What more can I ask for? Seeing my children wanting to help each other gives me the greatest happiness. This daughter is in the ashram and has nobody. Don't worry! I'll tell her and she will say yes to marrying your son."

I was stunned to hear all that had transpired. I agreed to the marriage proposal at once. The family was so loving towards me. Coming to know about the financial straits I was in, my uncle negotiated

with the bank, and resolved my case with a minimal sum. I could not have found a better family to marry into if I had searched for a groom myself. Amma's divine ways are beyond imagination.

I am filled with immense gratitude to Amma for lifting my brother and me out of a hopeless situation. I have no doubt now that She is my beloved Kali. She has always been and will always be my best friend and parent. Worldly parents will not have had the foresight that Amma has to provide such timely aid. Although I lost my father and mother, I found Amma. That is the biggest blessing in my life. I pray that my journey with Amma never ends. May divine grace bless all Her children. 

If you're coming to Amritapuri for darshan...

Please note that darshan tokens will be distributed only until 2 p.m. If you wish to go for darshan, please obtain your darshan token before 2 p.m. Thank you.

Sacrifice

by roopesh kaleshan, india



It was the day of *Vijayadashami*, the culmination of the nine-day worship of the Divine Mother. The British army, which held the Sivaganga Fort in Tamil Nadu, allowed young women from the neighbouring villages to enter the Fort to worship Devi in the Rajarajeshwari Amman temple. But the soldiers never permitted even a single

Tamil man to enter the Fort, where the depot containing huge stocks of fire arms and ammunition was located. The Sivaganga Fort was of strategic importance. Losing it would be tantamount to being defeated.

The women carried flowers and ghee for the temple worship. The gatekeepers watched without any suspicion as the beautiful young women moved towards the Rajarajeshwari Amman temple.

Kuyili, one of the girls who entered the temple, opened the pot of ghee. Instead of pouring it into the lamp shining within the temple, she poured it over her body. Her friends, who came with her, also opened their pots and poured ghee over Kuyili.

Some of Kuyili's friends had qualms about her suicidal mission. But Kuyili herself was convinced that it was her great fortune to sacrifice herself for the sake of her country.

Ages ago, another intrepid soul had sacrificed his life for the sake of *dharma* (righteousness). Abhimanyu, the son of the Arjuna, had plunged into the *chakravyuha* (wheel formation) that the Kauravas created, knowing full well that it would be impossible to come out of it. Nevertheless, he went in, knowing that by doing so, he could weaken the ranks of the enemies considerably. Right from his boyhood, he had been convinced that the interests of dharma surpassed those of an individual.

Similarly, Kuyili, who was only 18, was also prepared to undertake the supreme sacrifice for the sake of her country. What fear can be there for those blessed with a great sense of dharma and a steady mind?

After being soaked in ghee, Kuyili prostrated before the deity, and prayed for her country and Queen Velunachiyar. She then took a burning wick from the lamp and lit her sari,

which went up in flames at once. Kuyili charged towards the ammunition depot.



In CE 1772, the small state of Sivaganga was ruled by King Muthu Vaduganathan. Although direct British rule had not yet begun, the East India Company (EIC) had started interfering in the internal affairs of many princely states. The Nawab of Arcot had signed an agreement of diplomatic partnership with the Company. Like other Indian rulers, he might not have anticipated that the Company that came to trade would eventually subjugate the entire country politically.

With the support of the Company's army, the Nawab attacked Sivaganga. The sword and shield of the Tamil army proved to be no match for the guns and canons of the Western troops. Muthu Vaduganathan was killed and

the Nawab gained control of Sivaganga. Queen Velunachiyar, Muthu Vaduganathan's wife, went into hiding in a village called Virupachi.

The Nawab's and EIC's complacent belief that, with the king gone, they had gained dominion over Sivaganga proved to be their undoing. Over the next eight years, Velunachiyar built up a new army with the help of Hyder Ali, the de facto ruler of the Mysore Kingdom in South India, and the Marudhu brothers, Periya Marudhu and Chinna Marudhu, the chieftains of Sivaganga. It was during her underground days that she learnt about Periyamuthan and his daughter Kuyili.

Periyamuthan worked as a cobbler in Sivaganga, and soon became the queen's secret agent, passing on vital secret information to her. Kuyili frustrated plans to assassinate the queen more than once. She


even killed her martial arts teacher when she learnt that he was a spy working against the queen.

Kuyili eventually became the leader of Velunachiyar's women army. The queen's army, which included the women's army, the Tamil armies led by the Marudhu brothers, and the Mysore army, became truly formidable.

But there was one big hurdle to be crossed. How to tackle the Company's army with its enormous arsenal of canons, fire arms and ammunition?

That was when Kuyili devised the secret plan without informing even the queen.

Before the baffled soldiers could act, the depot burnt down along with Kuyili. Having lost all their ammunition, the British soldiers surrendered to Velunachiyar's army. For the next 15 years, the queen ruled Sivaganga without facing any threat.

Thousands sacrificed their lives for the holy land of Bharat. Among them, Kuyili's life still shines brightly with its message of patriotism, fearlessness and valour. 

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Chapter 2: Sankhya Yoga

by Prof. V. Muraleedhara Menon, India

The Lord spoke to all of humanity through Arjuna, who was merely a conduit. If, like him, we are also suffering from intense anguish and have whole-hearted surrender to God, even despondency can become *yoga*, i.e. a means of God-realization.

The *Gita* gives an exhaustive explanation of this principle in this chapter. The Lord introduces three key doctrines: the eternal and unbroken nature of the

Atma (Self); the transience of the body; and adherence to *svadharma* (duty suited to one's nature). The first two are from the realm of knowledge, and the last is situated in the sphere of action.

Svadharma is innate. What this means is that we do not choose it; rather, it is waiting for us right from the time of birth. To put it more precisely, we were born for that very purpose. Therefore, we should not reject svadharma. Our evolution in life must happen through our svadharma. However, powerful desires will keep buffeting us as we walk this path. The most vicious illusion is that we are the body. This petty identification with the body imprisons us in the sense of separation. This mistaken identification is also the breeding ground of all divisive thinking.

Thus, adherence to svadharma alone is insufficient. We must also consider two other principles: that we are not the

transient body but the unbroken and eternal *Atma*. Only when this awareness dawns can we truly follow our svadharma. The body is constantly changing and is perishable. How could we possibly be this puny body? If we associate the *Atma* with this body, which can fall apart any moment, our spiritual growth will come to an end. Why do we fear death? Because of pride in the body. But the moment we abandon this clinging to the body, it will become the perfect instrument for honouring svadharma. We must liberate the all-pervading *Atma* from the prison of our body.

In short, we must leave the crooked path of *adharma* (unrighteousness) or *paraadharma* (another person's duty) and take to the effortless path of svadharma. Knowing the body to be transient, let us prepare it to follow svadharma. Let us keep the sense of separateness at bay by remembering always the eternal nature

Svadharna is innate. We do not choose it; it is waiting for us right from the time of birth. We were born for that very purpose. Our evolution in life must happen through our svadharna.

and unbroken expansiveness of the Atma. By doing so, we can attain the supreme state of *satchitananda* (existence-consciousness-bliss) even while embodied.

The unusual greatness of the *Gita* lies in the fact that it shows us how we can practise these eternal principles in life. The art of practising these principles is called yoga. The second chapter of the *Gita* is called *Sankhya Yoga*. 'Sankhya' means science or principle, and yoga means art. In short, the science must become an art. What art?

Action is of two types: action done with the expectation of results, and inaction if one cannot receive any result. The *Gita* introduces another class

of action: action done without expectation of results. This selfless action (*nishkama-karma*) is superlative. The Lord calls it yoga. The happiness derived from it is pure and incomparable. This body is for meant for *sadhana* (spiritual practice). If we are committed to sadhana, we must follow our svadharna selflessly and dedicatedly, no matter what obstacles we encounter.

Even after the Lord had explained all this, Arjuna remained dissatisfied. What he was seeking were not abstract ideals but the ideal person. Therefore, he asked the Lord to explain what a yogi engaged in selfless service (*nishkama-karma yogi*) would be like, what someone established in


supreme consciousness (*sthita-prajna*) would be like, and what an adherent of *sankhya-yoga* would be like.

In the last 18 verses of the second chapter, the Lord paints a brilliant and exhaustive picture of a *sthita-prajna*. It encompasses the hallmarks of both *sadhana* (endeavour) and *siddhi* (accomplishment). If we reflect diligently upon the hallmarks of a *sthita-prajna* daily, they will impress themselves deeply on our minds in due course. A *sthita-prajna* must have self-control. His senses must be controlled by the mind, which ought to be under the control of the intellect, which must be steered by the Atma. Such is self-control. The senses must be weaned away from sense objects and led towards matters of the spirit. This is not at all easy. It is possible only through stout dispassion and relentless practice. One may falter but one should not become disheartened. We can plug the gaps of

our weaknesses with devotion. Let devotion be at the vanguard of the war against our *vasanas* (latent tendencies).

Similar descriptions can be found in other chapters. For example, descriptions of a *jivan-mukta* (a soul who is liberated while alive), a *bhakta* (devotee), a *gunaatita* (one who has transcended the three *gunas*)¹ and a *jnana-nishtha* (one established in pure Knowledge) are found in the fifth, 12th, 14th and 18th chapters respectively.

Thus, in the second chapter, we see a blend of three factors: 1. the abstract principle of Sankhya; 2. *yoga-buddhi*, i.e. the practical application of that principle; and 3. an ideal person who has internalized that science and transmuted it into an art of living.

This is a holistic science of life. Its end is the attainment of the Supreme. 

(to be continued)

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1 Attributes of *sattva* (tranquillity), *rajas* (passion) and *tamas* (inertia) that characterize all beings.



Font of Inspiration

by br. eknath, india

*yaavat sthaasyanti girayah saritashca mabeetale
taavadraamaayanakatha lokeshu pracarishyati*

As long as mountains and rivers exist,
so long will this immortal epic live.

The Creator, Lord Brahma Himself, bestowed this blessing on Sage Valmiki, who composed the *Ramayana*. This blessing has materialized. The story of Sri Rama has become ingrained in the culture of India and lands beyond. So far-reaching was the impact of the epic that some poets and writers even modified the original Sanskrit text according to their own lights, to varying degrees of success and popularity.

In Sanskrit itself, there are many different *Ramayanas* based on Valmiki's original. The four primary versions are the *Ananda Ramayana* (*Blissful Ramayana*), *Adbhuta Ramayana* (*Wondrous Ramayana*), *Adhyatma Ramayana* (*Spiritual Ramayana*) and *Maha Ramayana* (*Great Ramayana*). These, in turn, inspired regional variants such as the *Sri Ramacharitamansa* in Hindi, *Bhavarth Ramayan* in Marathi, and *Kamba Ramayana* in Tamil.

Apart from the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, which faithfully follows the storyline of the Valmiki *Ramayana*, all the other *Ramayanas* are marked by significant deviations.

The writer of the *Ananda Ramayana* sought to portray Rama's joy and happiness at the latter part of His life, as His days in exile from Ayodhya had been filled with sacrifice and sorrow. The writer wondered if Rama ever enjoyed happiness, for both sorrow and joy are the lot of human beings. Therefore, the writer imagined that Rama must have enjoyed happy days at the end of His life, and portrayed these in the *Ananda Ramayana*.

The writer of the *Adbhuta Ramayana* focused on those parts of Rama's life beginning with his confrontation of Parashurama, omitting the earlier parts. The narrative also gives much more prominence to Sita — especially the events surrounding Her birth and on

Her conquest of Ravana's older brother.

Sage Vasishtha wrote *Maha Ramayana*, popularly known as *Vasishtha Ramayana*, and it is quite different from Valmiki's *Ramayana* as Sage Vasishtha wanted to use the story of Rama to propound the Vedanta philosophy.¹ In addition, there are beautiful verses glorifying the Lord that are influenced by Sankhya.²

Valmiki portrayed Rama as a benefactor to all humankind. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* portrays Rama as a divine incarnation. He is the embodiment of pure consciousness, and Sita is His Maya or deluding power.

For these different reasons, the story of Rama varies from *Ramayana* to *Ramayana*.

It is said that in the middle ages, Shaivaites (followers of

Lord Shiva) and Vaishnavaites (followers of Lord Vishnu) were constantly at loggerheads. To resolve this, the *Adhyatma Ramayana* has Lord Shiva narrating the story of Rama to Goddess Parvati. It is the same story found in Valmiki's *Ramayana*, the only difference being that Lord Shiva is narrating it. The *Adhyatma Ramayana* holds that Liberation arises from knowledge, which is in line with Advaita philosophy. Rama Himself is upheld as the ultimate reality. By thus expounding, the *Adhyatma Ramayana* balances *saguna upasana* and *nirguna upasana*, i.e. the worshipping of God with form and attributes, and God sans form and attributes respectively. Chants such as the *Rambhday Stotra* and *Abalya Stotra* from the *Adhyatma Ramayana* have become more popular

1 Vedanta means 'end of the Vedas,' and it refers to the Upanishads, which propagate the philosophy of Advaita (non-duality).

2 A dualistic philosophy that holds perception, inference and the testimony of reliable sources are the means of gaining knowledge.

than verses from the *Valmiki Ramayana*.

The *Sri Ramacharitamansa*, composed by Goswami Tulasidas, is based on the *Adhyatma Ramayana*, although he has included a few other stories. In Marathi, the *Bhavarth Ramayan* by Sant³ Eknath, *Sbri Ram Vijaya* by Shridhar Swami and *Geet Ramayan* by G.D. Madgulkar are well known.

Bhavarth Ramayana can be considered a commentary on the *Valmiki Ramayana*. By virtue of his purity and the continuous chanting of Hari's name, Sant Eknath achieved a status like Bharat (Rama's brother) in Sri Rama's heart. As of a result, Rama Himself directed Sant Eknath to compose the *Ramayana* in Marathi. The devotion-filled result is the *Bhavarth Ramayan*.

The *Bhavarth Ramayan* has seven cantos, 296 chapters

and 40,000 verses. Sant Eknath composed until the 44th chapter. The rest was written by Gavba, one of Eknath's disciples. Gavba was a mentally challenged boy from a poor household. He was very fond of *puran poli* (sweet flatbread) and used to ask his mother for it daily. People made fun of him by calling Puranpolya. As his mother could not afford to give him puran poli daily, she left him with Sant Eknath in Paithan, where he started getting puran poli every day. While there, he used to do household work. After composing the *Bhavarth Ramayana* until the 44th chapter, Sant Eknath announced that he was going to leave his mortal body. When devotees requested him to finish the book before leaving, Sant Eknath assured them that Gavba would finish it. Eknath Maharaj blessed and directed

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3 'Sant' means saint.

Ramadas Swami had a vision of Sri Rama by chanting “Sri Ram Jay Ram Jay Jay Ram” 1.3 billion times. Based on his experience, he declared that whoever chants this mantra 1.3 billion times will have Lord Rama’s *darshan* (vision).

Gavba to finish the work. He took his Guru’s instructions to heart and finished *Bhavarth Ramayana*. Such was the Guru’s blessings that those portions of the *Bhavarth Ramayan* that Gavba composed were endowed with such beauty that they seemed the creation of Sant Eknath himself. Among the *Ramayanas*, the Bhavarth Ramayan stands out because of the simplicity of its language.

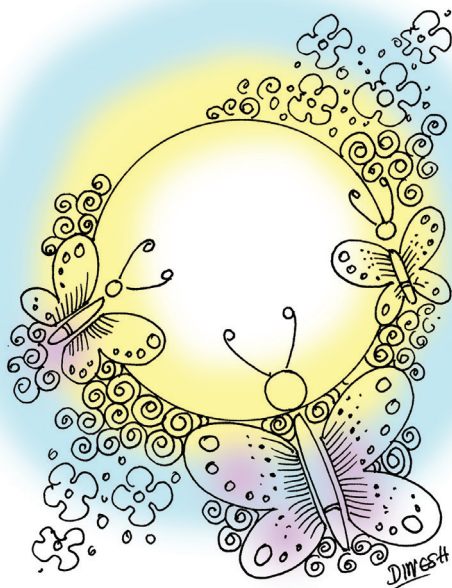
In Maharashtra, Ramadas Swami had a vision of Sri Rama by chanting “Sri Ram Jay Ram Jay Jay Ram” 1.3 billion times. Based on his experience, he declared that whoever chants this mantra 1.3 billion times will have Lord

Rama’s *darshan* (vision). Papa Ramdas of Anandashram in Kerala added ‘Aum’ to this mantra and was blessed with a vision of Lord Rama after chanting the mantra 650 million times (half of 1.3 billion). In the last century, Gondavalekar Maharaj from Maharashtra also had the darshan of Sri Rama after chanting ‘Sri Ram Jay Ram Jay Jay Ram.’ Sri Rama is not just the son of Dasharatha; He is our inner being as well. Gondavalekar Maharaj taught that we should chant the mantra of Rama keeping this non-dual principle in mind. May the life of Lord Rama inspire us all and help us progress spiritually.



Lessons Learnt

by Padmaja Gopakumar, India



Like a moving flame, Amma travels around the world every year to see Her children, dispelling the darkness of sorrow and kindling love in their hearts. In 2019, the Indian Tour began in the middle of January. She first visited Thiruvananthapuram before moving on to Tamil Nadu. On the way to Chennai, Amma stopped near a railway station to spend some time with Her children and to eat with them.

She sat facing the setting sun, which was framed by two trees, and meditated with Her children. After chanting peace mantras, Amma started serving food. Usually, She asks for the 15th chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* to be chanted a few minutes after She has started serving. By the time the recitation is over, everyone would have been served. Then, Amma will lead everyone in chanting '*Brahmarpanam...*' before eating.

Amma was sitting on a chair under a tree. The open sky was clearly visible. Her children sat around Her on mats spread on the ground. While eating, the devotees were listening to stories and jokes Amma shared. Someone said, "We've read about how Lord Krishna used to have picnics with the *gopas* (cowherd boys) in Vrindavan. Now we are experiencing it ourselves!"

After dinner, Amma spoke about the *Ayyappa Bhakta Sangama*, the gathering of

Ayyappa devotees, in Thiruvanthapuram. She had been the chief guest on the occasion. Amma said that temples and temple practices must be cherished. To those who had not attended the function, She said they could read about it, including what She had said, online.

A German devotee then spoke about an extraordinary experience she had had in Sabarimala. She used to participate in the annual cleaning of the place along with hundreds of other devotees of Amma. "In the first year of cleaning, we were clearing the waste with brooms and shovels, and storing it in sacks. Among the garbage, I saw a curio: a human foot made of wood. Though dirty, it was chiselled beautifully. I didn't feel like throwing away such a beautiful object. I put it in a plastic bag and kept it in my bag. After returning to the ashram, I cleaned it thoroughly and placed this gorgeous work of art on my table.

“After a few days, I started experiencing pain in my right foot. Initially, the pain was bearable but its intensity began to increase gradually. When it became unbearable, I went to see the doctor. He examined the foot, said that it was infected, and gave me medicine. Days passed. Instead of subsiding, the pain and swelling increased.

“I noticed one more thing. Many other people around me also started getting foot-related ailments or injuries. Observing all this, I felt that there was something here that defied rational explanation. I explained the situation to Br. Shubamrita Chaitanya, who advised me to tell Amma about it.

“The next day, I went for darshan and told Amma everything. After listening to me attentively, She said, ‘You went to Sabarimala for cleaning. Why did you take something from there and bring it back?’ I said that the carving of the foot had been discarded,

and that I had been drawn to its beauty. For a moment, Amma did not say anything. Then She said, ‘Daughter, don’t keep it with you. Throw it away into the sea.’ I did. Mysteriously, from the very next day, the infection in my foot began to subside. In a few days, I was completely healed.”

Everyone listened to this story with wonderment. The devotee said that she had learnt later why this had happened. Devotees offer images of afflicted body parts to temples. This wooden carving might have been one such offering to Swami Ayyappa. She had unknowingly taken on something that a devotee had been trying to shed; hence the suffering.

“The practice of offering images of afflicted body parts at pilgrim centres is found in many parts of the world,” said the woman. “In Germany also, I’ve seen body parts made of metal or clay, for example, offered in places of worship. I don’t know why I didn’t


remember it when I picked up the wooden foot. Anyway, because of Amma's grace, I didn't have to suffer too long for my mistake."

Selfless service helps to purify the mind. Amma encourages Her children to serve the world selflessly, and advises that the work be done with utmost care and attention.

Having heard the German devotee's experience, Amma shared one of Her childhood experiences. She recalled that when they went to the Oachira Temple festival, street vendors would call out, "Hand, leg, eye..." "My parents were very strict. My father would hold the hands of some of us and my mother would hold the hands of the others. They never released their hold on us. I never craved any item on display, but when I heard bhajans, I would run and sit in front of the singers." Smiling, Amma said, "You don't know how many beatings I received from Damayanti-amma

(Amma's mother) for these things!" Amma has often spoken about how Damayanti-amma, steeped in traditional values, disciplined Her like a Satguru and that even punishment from her was sweet.

A young devotee then spoke about his experience. "Amma, I went on the tour with much trepidation. I found it difficult: eating food I wasn't used to, sleeping on a mat on the floor, queuing up for toilets, etc. Yet, I enjoyed Amma's presence always. Even while walking through the crowded streets of Chennai, I felt peace and joy in my heart. It is a peace I have never experienced at home with all its modern comforts."

Man spends much time acquiring creature comforts. However, they do not last long. In response to the devotee's comments, Amma said that She was training Her children to swim across small pools so that they can eventually cross the ocean of *samsara* (the cycle of birth and death). 

Where is my Necklace?

by ram das batchelder, u.s.a.



As I entered the hotel in Santa Fe where Amma was giving darshan, I spotted Devamrita, my favourite brahmachari, making malas as usual at a table behind the hall. “Namah Shivaya, Devaji! Can we talk?” He nodded, and I sat down next to him. “I spent a crazy afternoon with my uncle and aunt yesterday. Maybe you can help me understand it?”

“Sure, Durgadas,” he replied. “What happened?”

“Well, just before I was going to leave our house, my sister jumped up on our trampoline, did a backflip, made a picture

perfect dismount — and landed on my glasses! After shouting at her, I put my contact lenses in my pocket in the hopes of seeing what Aunt Zelda was going to serve for dinner before I put any of it in my mouth. Her goulash is disgusting!”

“Is that nice?” Devamrita’s smile softened his critical tone.

“No, but her goulash isn’t either. Anyway, as soon as I walked in, my aunt started screaming, ‘My necklace! Where is my necklace? That diamond is worth a fortune, and now it’s *lost!*’”

He laughed at my portrayal. “Is she really like that?”

“Yeah, she’s a major drama queen. So, I reached into my pocket to put on my contact lenses. But I was surprised to discover that I couldn’t find the lens case. I was sure I’d put it in my pants pocket just 15 minutes before, and now it was gone! Frankly, I took that to be Amma’s blessing. I mean, how boring to have to dig

around in someone else’s drawers when there’s no way in the world you’re going to find the thing, right?”

“So then my uncle stumbles down the stairs. ‘Yes, of course, dear, I’ll help you look... But have you seen my glasses? I can’t find them anywhere!’”

“My aunt freaks out. *‘Again you’ve lost them, Olaf? That’s the umpteenth time this week! Just when I need your help the most! You are USELESS!’* She bursts into tears and yanks a cabinet drawer open so forcefully the contents fly all over the room. Poor Uncle starts whimpering and retreats like a dog with its tail between its legs. ‘They must be upstairs.’ His voice is shaky. ‘I’ll just go back up and have a look.’ And WHAM! He trips on the first stair and bangs his head against the wall.

“But Auntie had no sympathy. ‘A *look?! You’re totally blind without your glasses! How could you possibly find them? Oh, where is my*

NECKLACE?’ And she starts lifting all the cushions and flinging them across the room.

“I thought, ‘I’ll just help Uncle find his glasses,’ and escaped upstairs as fast as I could. The tension in the air was so thick I could hardly breathe — in fact, I felt an asthma attack coming on. I started silently chanting, ‘*Om Amriteshwaryai Namah,*’ and after 10 mantras I could breathe again. I said, ‘Thank God for Amma,’ and put my hand over Her picture on my neck mala. And guess what — in that moment I discovered my contact lenses! I’d put them in my *shirt* pocket, not my shorts! So I popped them in and went to help my uncle, who was sitting on his bed with the saddest doggie eyes I’ve ever seen. He says, ‘Durgadas, can you help me find my glasses? I’ve searched everywhere!’

“But guess what! His glasses were hooked behind his ears and resting on his bald head!”

“So I say, ‘Uncle, you’ve already got them *on!*’

“He said, ‘I do?’ And he reaches up and finds them. ‘What a dimwit I’ve been! Come, let’s go help Zelda find her necklace.’

So we bravely tiptoed downstairs and found that Hurricane Zelda had turned the whole living room into a disaster zone. She was now on her hands and knees, peering under the corners of the carpet, kicking her feet in frustration. Uncle Olaf says, ‘Zelda dear, Durgadas found my glasses, so now we can help you search!’

“Auntie starts howling: ‘AYYYYYY! My diamond, my precious diamond! Help me!’ I held my breath and chanted my mantra. And then — you won’t believe what happened. When Auntie stood up, her diamond necklace popped over the edge of her blouse! She’d had it on the whole time!

“So I say, ‘*There’s* your necklace, Auntie. You’ve been wearing it all along!”

“NO! Impossible!’ She felt it with her hand, went running to the mirror and shrieked with joy. ‘AYYY! MY DIAMOND!’ And then she came and kissed me on the cheek and hugged me tightly. Then she gave Uncle Olaf a hug and apologized for being so harsh. He said he was sorry for being such a nincompoop, and soon they were laughing like teenagers. Best of all, Auntie was so thrilled with the help I’d given that she decided to order pizzas, which made me the happiest boy in all of Albuquerque.”

Devamrita laughed with me. “Great story, Durgadas. At least your aunt and uncle respect your path and call you by your Amma name. Tell me, how is your sadhana these days? Meditation progressing?” He put down his tools and gave me his full attention.

“Sadhana’s okay,” I said, trying to hide my discouragement. “I chant the *Thousand Names* almost every day, and

pray and everything... but to be honest, I’m not sure I’m getting anywhere. My meditation feels like nothing at *all* is happening. My mind just wanders everywhere. I hate to say it, Devaji, but sometimes I think God’s never going to come.”

“Don’t say that,” replied Devamrita. “God is omniscient, and hears your every thought and prayer.” He shook his head with affectionate disapproval. “You’re a good kid, and I mean that, Durgadas — but the truth is you’re very much like your uncle and aunt.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just as your aunt thought her necklace was lost, when it was around her neck, and your uncle thought his glasses were lost while they were actually resting on his head, you think God is far away from you. But He isn’t — in fact, he’s within you all the time. The same Supreme Being you’re searching for and praying to is the very one who’s doing the searching!”

His words stopped my self-
pity in its tracks.

“Right behind the ‘I’ that
cries out for God, deep within
your own heart, is an infinite
ocean of peace and bliss — and
that is what God really is. He
dwells within you, *as* you. He’s
the Self within your own heart.
What better hiding place could
he have? He’s hiding behind
your own I-thought.”

“God... is hiding behind my
own... ‘I’?”

“That’s right,” he answered
firmly. “He’s dwelling there as
absolute peace and pure
awareness. And it’s from that
inner space of perfect peace
that your own ‘I’ has emerged.
That perfect peace is God’s
true nature... and it’s what *you*
really are.”

“It’s what *I* am?”

“Absolutely. But what’s
needed is for *you* to be sure. So
the next time you meditate,
look closely at your own ‘I,’
and see if you can get behind
it, and dive deep into the ocean
of pure being. The silence

behind the mind is the Atman,
the divine self. It’s infinite and
eternal, and can never suffer
or die. It’s what we *all* truly are.
And it’s never been lost, Dur-
gadas. It’s closer than your
own breath. It’s what you are.”

His words blew the lid off
my mind. My jaw must have
fallen open by at least an inch.

Devamrita quietly collected
his tools and rose to leave. And
for the first time in my life, I
slid behind my own ‘I’ and
dove deep into the ocean of
silence.

For a while it seemed like I
might never think again. It
was like I was drowning in
that ocean of peace... but in-
stead of fear, I felt a really
deep kind of joy.

It seemed it wasn’t quite my
time to drown in it, though,
because after an hour or so, a
golden life preserver arose in
my mind, Amma’s holy name:
Om Amritesbharyai Namah.
Every syllable was radiant
with supreme peace. I clung to
that name for dear life. 