



Contents

Vol. 31, No. 12

Time, the Greatest Wealth 5

Instrument in Her Hands 7
br. sharanamrita chaitanya

Spanking 13
vanamali (robert treder), u.s.a.

**Chapter 7: Yoga of Knowledge
and Wisdom** 17
prof. v. muraleedhara menon,
india

Sita: Gem of a Woman 21
chandrakala s. kammath, india

Childhood Prayer 24
Narayan van de Graaff, Australia

Self-effort and Grace 26
br. rupesh, india

Isolated 29
kunhunni purayannur, india

Grace and Self-effort 33
padmaja gopakumar, india

Lilas Around Amma 37

News 40

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

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



Time, the Greatest Wealth

Children, our most precious wealth is time. Even if we lose a million dollars, we might still be able to recover it, but we can never regain lost time. Many realize the value of time only in the last moments of their life.


Alexander the Great, who conquered the whole world, understood the value of time only when he was on his deathbed. Realizing that death could seize him at any moment, he told those around him, "If there is anyone who can lend me even a single breath, I am ready to give him half my kingdom as compensation. In a bid to conquer nations and amass wealth, I squandered precious time and health. I now realize that I cannot stave off death for a single moment even with all my wealth."

Only experience can teach us the value of time. If we truly understood the value of time, we would cherish every moment as if it were a priceless treasure.

Children, our most precious wealth is time. Even if we lose a million dollars, we might still be able to recover it, but we can never regain lost time. Many realize the value of time only in the last moments of their life.

Once, a man received a letter asking him to attend an interview for a job he had wanted for a very long time. In order to reach the city where the interview was being held, he had to take two connecting flights. There was a half-an-hour gap between the two flights. He went to an airport restaurant and had a snack, for which he was billed ₹500. Seeing the bill, the man said, "This is way too much! I did not eat so much." Seeing how upset he was, the cashier reduced the amount by a hundred rupees. But the man insisted that he would pay nothing more than ₹300. Faced with no other choice, the cashier finally relented. Feeling triumphant at his victory over the cashier, the man

sauntered to the boarding gate, grinning all the way. When he reached the gate, he learnt that his connecting flight had taken off five minutes before. Caught up with petty bargaining, he had forgotten his goal, and thus missed the opportunity of getting the job he had been dreaming about for years.

Some people complain that time is not on their side. Time is always favourable but we do not befriend time. It is we who decide if time works for or against us. Not realizing this, we become slaves to circumstance. If we just sit and wait for good times to come, many good things will pass us by. Do not wait for a propitious time to do a good deed. If it is good, do it at once. 

Instrument in Her Hands

by br. sharanamrita
chaitanya

What does it mean to be an instrument in the hands of the Divine? The following verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* gives us a clear idea:

*tasmāt tvam uttishṭha yaśo labhasva
jītvā śhatrun bhunksiḥva rajyam samrddham
mayāivaite nibataḥ purvam eva
nimitta-matram bhava savya-sachin*

Therefore, arise and attain fame. Conquer your enemies and enjoy the prosperous kingdom. I have already killed these warriors. O master archer, just be an instrument of my work. (11.33)

Lord Krishna had already done the work that Arjuna had been deputed to do. The Lord was merely bestowing on Arjuna the blessed opportunity of being an instrument in His hands.

Amma often tells us to be like a brush in the hands of an artist or a pen in the hands of a poet. She also shows us how to be one, just as Krishna guided Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra. If She asks us to do something, She will also show us how to do so. However, if we egoistically feel that we are the real doers, we can expect to face sorrow.

I have been blessed to act as an instrument in Amma's hands on many occasions. Let

me recount one instance. About 10 years ago, we had to organize an award ceremony for Amrita Television. The function was to take place on the grounds outside the Jawaharlal Nehru International Stadium in Kochi, Kerala. The date was finalized, advertisements were placed, and about 7,000 event passes were distributed. The function was to take place in June. Amma was in the US then. From the day after we started preparing the venue, it started raining heavily, making the grounds muddy and water-logged. The function was to take place in 48 hours but the stage had not been erected and the chairs had not been arranged. What to do? The then CEO informed Swami Amritaswarupananda that the program had to be called off because of the unrelenting rains. Swamiji informed Amma, who called me and told me to go to the venue and do whatever was necessary. I was apprehensive.

How would I manage this? However, I remembered how Amma had helped me in similar situations earlier.

When I reached the venue with two other brahmacharis, I saw workers sitting in the rain, not knowing what to do. We had only 24 hours left! Amma called and gave us instructions over the phone. We gathered the workers and somehow managed to build the stage, but there was still knee-level water on the grounds. Amma asked us to create embankments on all sides of the grounds to prevent water from entering. She then asked us to dig small pits, pump out the water from these pits, and to use jute sacks to dry the grounds. We spent all night doing this.

On the day of the event, Amma called at around 3 p.m. I told Her that it was still raining, and that only if we started arranging the chairs by 3:30 p.m. could we finish in time for the function at 6 pm. There

was a minute of silence, and then Amma said, “You can start placing the chairs soon. Amma will call after some time.” At 3:30 p.m. sharp, the rains stopped as if someone had turned off a switch! Together with a hundred other workers, we used jute sacks to dry the grounds and arrange the chairs. People arrived, and the program proceeded smoothly, ending at around 9:30 p.m. As soon as the invitees left, it started raining again! We all were convinced that what had happened was Amma’s *lila* (divine play), and we had been blessed with an opportunity to play a small part in it.

When our actions are aligned to Her will, what follows is joy and peace. Becoming an instrument in God’s hands does not mean sitting idly but acting with dedication and discernment. Amma always reminds us that only by divine grace can we do even the smallest deed. A puppet

might think people are applauding and appreciating its actions, but the truth is that it is nothing without the puppeteer, who pulls the strings. Similarly, we must have the attitude that all our 'strength' is only the play of divine power.

Whatever the Guru asks us to do is for our benefit, no matter how small it may be. We must do it with the strong conviction that it is for our spiritual growth.

Once, Amma called me and asked me to do some work. Because of my ego, I did not do it properly. When Amma found out about this, She did not say anything. She stopped talking to me altogether! How much more preferable Her scolding would have been. Words cannot express the pain I felt on being ignored by Amma. I wrote many letters of apology to Her but received no response. I continued my *seva* (selfless service) as telephone operator. Previously, if Amma wanted to

find out something, She would call me. Now, She began sending someone to get the information. If Amma wanted to call someone, She would send someone to dial the number and connect the call to Amma. This continued for a while. I became so perturbed that I could neither sleep nor eat.

This was in September. Amma's birthday was just five days away. One evening, I learnt that after bhajans, Amma was going to visit the site of the birthday celebrations to check on the preparations. Previously, I had always accompanied Amma on these trips and would receive Her instructions on what needed to be improved or changed. Realizing that I would not be a part of this cherished opportunity, my anguish reached its peak. I lost all control, ran to Amma's room, and started crying outside Her door. That evening, when Amma returned to Her room, She would have stepped on my

tears on each of the steps leading to Her room. I could not stop crying even after I returned to my room.

At around 9:30 p.m., Amma came down from Her room and asked one of Her attendants where I was. When she called me to tell me that Amma had asked for me, I ran to Amma, who took me to the birthday venue and started discussing the arrangements to be made, as if nothing had happened. Sometimes, the Master's silence teaches us huge lessons.

A doctor does not stop treating a patient just because the treatment might cause the patient some pain. The doctor's intention is only to heal him of the disease. Similarly, some of Amma's ways might cause us a little pain but it is only for our own good. The Guru's main goal is to remove the disciple's ego. To do so, She uses different methods, depending on the nature of the disciple. Just as a sculptor

chips away at unwanted parts of the stone to create a beautiful idol, the Guru, out of pure compassion, removes all the unwanted tendencies obstructing the disciple's spiritual progress. We must try our best to give in. Without surrender, it is very difficult to attain divine grace.

Before I started staying in Amritapuri, I was taking care of a small textile shop in Vailom, Kerala. I had to take up the responsibility of managing this shop while I was still in 11th grade. The business was saddled with many debts and legal issues, but I thought I could manage this somehow. I prayed to Amma only for Her blessings but did not tell Her about the problems. After three years, the problems became insurmountable. I went for darshan and tearfully unburdened all my worries before Amma. I told Her that I was helpless and that only Amma could resolve the problems. Consoling me, She said,


“Amma will take care of all your problems. Don’t worry, Amma is always with you.”

True enough, all the problems were settled within a year. When we surrender everything at Her feet, Amma will take care of all our needs. With no interest in continuing the business, I came to Amma and settled down in Amritapuri.

Someone asked a flute, “How does such beautiful music flow out from you?”


The flute replied, “I was just a bamboo pole. My master picked me up one day, cleaned me, put seven holes in me,

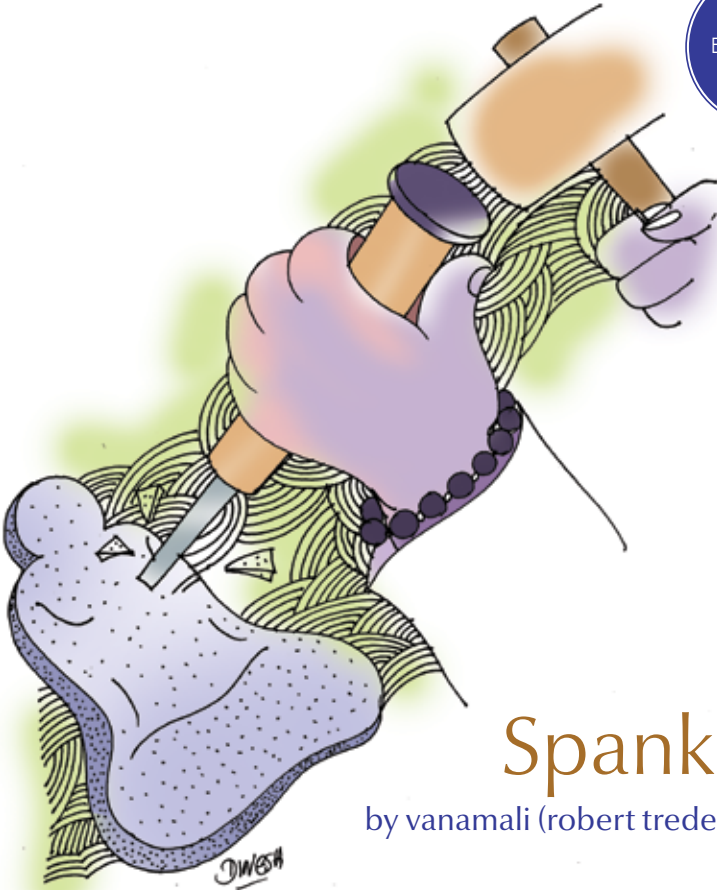
removed the unwanted parts, and started playing me.”

This is what Amma is trying to do with all of us. All we have to do is surrender. During Lord Rama’s time, the *vanaras* (monkey companions) could be with the Lord only during the war. During Lord Krishna’s lifetime, the *gopis* (milkmaids) and other ardent devotees like Akrura and Uddhava could not spend too much time with Him. But we are blessed to be able to spend so much time with Amma. May our association with Amma continue and grow stronger. 

(continued from page 16)

I remember hearing one of Amma’s swamis say that Amma had asked him why Her children do not take Her instructions to heart. It made my heart ache to think I might have disappointed Her. I vowed to do my sadhana with renewed zeal, be more

vigilant about my thoughts, and stop investing so much energy and money into material happiness. May Amma bless my spiritual resolve, and may I make Her happy with my commitment to the spiritual life even while living in the West. 



Spanking

by vanamali (robert treder), u.s.a.

When Amma arrived in Seattle at the start of the 2019 US Tour, I went to the airport with the local volunteers to welcome Her. She usually gives a brief hug to those who are there to receive Her. I waited for the moment She would pass by and give me a hug. After the round of hugs, Amma moved towards the car waiting to take Her to the Pacific Northwest Ashram. Suddenly, She turned and walked back towards me.

She took one of my hands in Hers and, with the other, spanked me. It was not a painful spanking but more like a loving pat given as She chuckled sweetly. She then started moving towards the door, still holding my hand. I have always been extremely shy and, now that I was the centre of attention, resisted following Her. I pulled my hand away as She headed for the door.

A few months later, something startling happened. I wear two malas daily: a *rudraksha* mala strung on silver with a pendant featuring a small black-and-white picture of Amma, and a rudraksha mala strung on gold. When I take them off at night, I place them on a table, framing the Amma pendant with the smaller, gold-strung mala. When I woke up one morning, I found the malas in a pile and the larger mala pulled apart. One of the silver wires was stretched straight out as if someone had forcefully pulled it apart. I was

shocked! I had been wearing this mala daily for about 20 years. As I was staying with my daughter and son-in-law at the time, I asked them if they knew anything about it. They did not. The fact that both these events happened within a few short months was unsettling.

Knowing that Amma never does anything without a reason and knowing that She knows and remembers my thoughts better than I do, I felt She was trying to tell me that I was doing something wrong spiritually. I began to reflect in order to figure out what the spanking and the broken mala meant.

The first thing I realized was that I had been slacking off on my *sadhana* (spiritual practices). Years ago, when I was going to India regularly, I developed the habit of doing the *archana* (chanting of divine names) every morning. I would chant Amma's *Ashtottaram* (108 attributes) and the 1,000

names of the Divine Mother (*Lalita Sabaśranama*), and then sing the *Mahishasuramarđini Stotra*.¹ Having sung '*Ayi Giri*' so many times, I knew it by heart and would do *manasa puja* (worship by visualization) while singing it. That was my daily morning routine even when I was working in NYC with an intense schedule of early morning meetings. Since retiring in 2018, I would still do the archana, but not daily. Sometimes, I would allow other things to get in the way, and would think, "I'll do it tomorrow." I had also stopped singing '*Ayi Giri*' and doing the *manasa puja*. Now that I had more time and could actually do more *sadhana*, I had become complacent.

I grew up in a materialist family. My parents lived through the Great Depression and wanted to give us, their

1 Prayer to Goddess Durga, who slew the buffalo demon named 'Mahishasura.' The hymn begins with the words '*Ayi Giri*.'

children, everything we wanted. Every Christmas and birthday were gift fests. Mostly, we asked for material things, toys initially, and we got everything we requested. As we grew older, our parents helped to fund our education and with buying and remodelling houses. Though our family was not wealthy, my parents worked hard and went out of their way to help us set up lives of material comfort.

While working in NYC, I made a lot of money. When I was about to retire, I became infatuated with acoustic guitars. I thought learning to play the guitar would be a great retirement pastime. After my parents passed away, I bought an expensive guitar with inheritance money. I also started buying additional guitars with funds from my annual bonuses. Guitars have different voices. I told myself that they are helping me to develop a more musical ear. A big part of buying guitars is trying to

find one that is right for me. Guitars are designed differently for different styles of playing, different kinds of music, and different hand sizes. Just before Amma came to Seattle in 2019, I bought my seventh or eighth guitar. I did not even know exactly how many I had at the time but wanted to replace a guitar I had sold a few years before. Was this why Amma had spanked me?

I realized that I had also become less conscientious about guarding my mind against improper thoughts. My wife and I like watching TV, and many shows these days have scripts laced with sexual innuendoes and many have explicit sexual scenes. Such shows, which are very much a part of Western culture these days, infiltrate the mind with lustful thoughts. Many years ago, Amma had blessed me with the ability to maintain celibacy, which I was now finding more difficult to

maintain. I know that Amma knows our most intimate thoughts. I have experienced that many times before. Perhaps this was what initiated the spanking.

Amma works in subtle ways. To understand the meaning of Her actions, one must always be alert. As I reflected on my spiritual life since retiring, I realized that my complacency was taking me away from Amma and Her spiritual instructions. The spanking at the airport was Amma's way of hinting that She knew it all and was gently warning me. My pulling away from Her hand was a physical enactment of my moving away from spirituality. The breaking of the mala, which She had blessed and put around my neck, seemed to indicate that I had broken my bond with Her. I felt ashamed of my complacency and reduced spiritual fervour.

(continued on page 12)



Chapter 7: Yoga of Knowledge and Wisdom

by Prof. V. Muraleedhara Menon, India

In the seventh chapter, the Lord offers new perspectives on *vikarma* ('special' action). Before that, He displays His skill in creating the universe with its plurality of forms and actions, all of which are products of the sentient Self and insentient matter. The

Self and the physical body, or the 'higher' (spiritual) nature and 'lower' nature (matter) are all really one. Why then do we become deluded? To free oneself from delusion, one must find the Creator. The Lord says, "He who wants to transcend Maya (cosmic delusion) must surrender to Me." Maya is nothing but God's sleight of hand by which He conjures up the endless diversity of creation from the amalgam of consciousness and matter. Only when we go beyond this bewildering diversity and find the Creator will our grand delusion cease. The *sadhana* (spiritual practice) to attain this is *vikarma*.

This is the path of devotion. The principle of devotion is vital in *yajnas* (fire ceremonies), *dana* (charity), *tapas* (austerity) and other spiritual practices. Without devotion, no spiritual practice can bear fruit. The fulfilment of all *sadhana* depends wholly on devotion. If we have devotion, the stream

of immortal bliss will flow into us, cleansing our whole being. Once we have tasted this bliss, all other pleasures will pale in comparison.

Isn't it because he has not known inner felicity that man seeks outer thrills? He knows only sense pleasures. Not having seen the object, he is enthralled by its shadow. But our five senses are not capable of unveiling the secret of creation.

When man realizes his true nature, he enjoys true bliss. All other joys feel insipid. The secret of this bliss is devotion, which leads him to the Supreme. Thereafter, the whole universe will become densely saturated with bliss for him.

The Lord talks about three kinds of devotees: the devotee with selfish desires; the devotee without selfish desires, only a one-pointed spiritual urge; and the perfect devotee, i.e. a *jnani* (knower of the Truth). Among the second kind, there are three types: the *artta* (who weeps for God's

Let us not criticize devotees with selfish desires. After all, don't they turn to God for fulfilment? Notwithstanding his desires, the devotee who cries to God is praiseworthy. It is only because of ignorance that he prays for petty gains.

grace), the *jijnasu* (who enquires about the truth) and the *artharthi* (who begs God for material benefits).

Let us not criticize devotees with selfish desires. After all, don't they turn to God for fulfilment? Notwithstanding his desires, the devotee who cries to God is praiseworthy. It is only because of ignorance that he prays for petty gains.

Nor do we need to ridicule those who undertake vows such as *japa* (repeated chanting of mantra) and fasting with a view to having their desires fulfilled. *Mabatmas* (spiritually illumined souls) have been born into families with such devotion. Devotion for the sake of fulfilling desire


eventually evolves into selfless devotion. Devotional ardour, no matter how lackadaisical, is still beneficial.

Among devotees with selfless devotion, there are those with single-minded devotion and those whose devotion is utterly pure. The three subdivisions among those with single-minded devotion were mentioned earlier. The *artta* cries for God. He prays and performs austerities with utmost longing to attain Him. The *jijnasu*, through a relentless search for the Truth, eventually attains God. The *artharthi* looks for meaning and value in everything. He considers if an action is beneficial and auspicious for society, and

will not do anything that is inauspicious or that does not lead to the welfare of the world.

In short, one who regards all actions with the eye of love is an artta; one who considers everything with the eye of knowledge is a jijnasu; and one who looks at everything through the lens of auspiciousness is an artharthi. The artta attains God through action, the jijnasu, through his heart, and the artharthi, through his intellect. As they all approach God with singular devotional attitudes, they are considered single-minded devotees.


The perfect devotee is a jnani. For him, all that is seen in the universe are diverse manifestations of the Supreme. Everything, from an ant to celestial bodies such as the sun and moon, is a form of the Lord. The bliss of such devotees is infinite and perfect.

If anyone says that this is delusion, let him remember that this delusion bestows utmost bliss. The jnani-devotee who moves about seeing everything as pervaded by the divine ultimately attains the holy feet of the Lord. 

(to be continued)

(continued from page 25)

go through the rigmarole of proving Her worth time and again, Sita must have decided that enough was enough. She is the best example of womanly dignity.

Has there been such a gem of a woman in any of the Puranas?² No one else comes to mind. O Mother Sita, infinite prostrations from this devotee at Your holy feet! 

² Literally, 'ancient' or 'old,' the Puranas refer to the genre of ancient Sanskrit writings on Hindu mythology and folklore.

Sita: Gem of a Woman

by chandrakala s. kammath, india



My grandmother, who was the oldest in our extended family, named all the grandchildren born into our family. She would not object to the girls being called by any name except 'Sita Devi' and 'Janaki'; she would not allow

that. When I was older, I asked her why. Grandmother said, "Goddess Sita was Lord Rama's consort. She was a loyal and beautiful princess, the treasure-trove of all sterling virtues. But has any wife on earth suffered as much sorrow as She? Sacrifice, forbearance, patience, courage, serenity, simplicity, self-confidence, affection, determination, love for all beings... Goddess Sita was the embodiment of countless such virtues. I have no wish to tarnish that good name by naming our children after Her."

Later, after I had read the *Ramayana*, I understood why grandmother was so partial towards Sita. She was the daughter of Mother Earth, and She was indeed as patient as the earth. At Her paternal home, Sita became well-versed in all branches of learning.

How fervent was the intensity of Her renunciation. She was ready to follow Her husband into forest exile for 14

years, forgoing all the creature comforts of palace life! For Her, the sharp and jagged stones and thorns of the jungle were like soft flowers.

When the evil Ravana was carting Sita away in his aerial vehicle, She had the presence of mind to remove Her ornaments, bundle them up in a strip of cloth torn from Her sari, and throw that bundle down as they were flying over the Rishymukha Mountain. The distress She must have been feeling did not cloud Her presence of mind.

Who else on earth has shown such forbearance and patience as Sita? In the long months spent amidst demoneses in Lanka's Ashoka Grove, though constantly shedding tears out of immense anguish, She continued chanting Rama's name.

How daring She was, too. When Ravana tempted Her with various inducements, Sita contemptuously likened him to an insignificant blade of

grass and warned him with sharp retorts.

Sita behaved towards Her father-in-law, who unwillingly agreed to send Her husband into forest exile, with utmost reverence and respect. Even towards Kaikeyi, She never expressed indignation or irritation, only devotion, love and humility. Towards Hanuman, She expressed motherly affection. She even addressed him as “son.” Don’t all these indicate tremendous presence of mind?

While staying in Sage Valmiki’s ashram, Sita behaved towards the other ashram residents with disarming simplicity. She also inculcated qualities such as discipline and valour in Her sons, Luv and Kush. The fortitude She displayed was truly remarkable.

After being reunited with Rama, when Sita learnt that Her husband wanted proof of

Her chastity, She did not hesitate to submit Herself to the ordeal by fire.

When Lord Rama conducted the Ashwamedha Yajna,¹ Luv and Kush captured the horse and defeated Rama’s brothers and their army. When Rama Himself came to fight, He realized that His opponents were none other than His own children. In the joy of meeting His sons and wife, Rama wanted to take them back with Him. Sita, however, declined and returned instead to the lap of Mother Earth, Her mother. She had earlier been subjected to the ordeal by fire to prove Her chastity, and later been exiled by her husband because of gossip among the subjects of the kingdom. Even though Rama wanted to take Her back this time, She demurred because She knew that someone or the other would question Her purity yet again. Not wanting to

1 Ancient horse sacrifice ritual.

(continued on page 20)

Childhood Prayer

When I was a child
My Beloved
I thought as a child
I acted as a child
And I prayed as a child
Especially at night
When unexplained fears
Assailed me as I tried to sleep
I prayed to the God
Of my childhood understanding
And my prayers were answered
Wonderfully and fully
Then I felt so safe and secure
And easily fell asleep.

Now I am an aged man
My Beloved
And You tell me to be
As a three year-old
To regain that innocence
That openness and trust
So apparent in young children
I pray now again
As I did seventy years ago
To the God of my understanding
Except that You are now that God
And my prayers are different
For I am now less innocent
Than I was seventy years ago.





I now pray not to fall asleep securely
My Beloved
But to wake up to my Self
And I also pray that
You forgive me
For my transgressions
That have weighed heavily on me
Yet I also know, deep down
That as the Divine Mother
You have always loved and forgiven me
As I cannot yet
Love and forgive myself.
And You ultimately only see
The Divine shine within me.

I am now an orphan
My Beloved
As both parents died some time ago
And that, of course
Is the way of life, and death
But truly, I will never be an orphan
Because I know
In the depths of my being
That You will always be my Mother
My Divine Mother
Ever there for me
And I will always be
And have always been
Your darling child. 🌸

Narayan van de Graaff, Australia

Self-effort and Grace

by br. rupesh, india



Varadaraja's heart was burning with the thought that his Guru had lost faith in him. Wiping tears streaming down his cheeks, the boy thought, "My classmates and even my friends consider me a dullard." However

hard he tried, he could not grasp the grammar *sutras* (aphorisms) that others learnt easily. His only hope was his Guru.

The Guru, Bhattoji Dikshitar, was an exceptionally brilliant Sanskrit grammarian. Moreover, he possessed great teaching skills and could lead his disciples to greater depths of knowledge. It was only because of the Guru's love for him that Varadaraja could bear the pain he felt when others called him a dullard. As others moved on to higher grades, Varadaraja remained in the same grade on account of his poor performance. Fearing that his Guru would also give up on him, Varadaraja's heart became overwhelmed by despair.

As he was walking towards a well to quench his thirst, Varadaraja's attention was drawn to the stone slab over the well. A rope hanging from it was tied to the handle of the bucket used to draw water from the well. He continued staring at the slab. Suddenly,

a smile lit up his face. He ran joyfully to the Guru's hermitage and stopped in front of Dikshitar.

"I'm ready to learn again," the boy said.

Surprised, the Guru asked, "What happened?"

"O Guru, I was about to drink water from the well when I noticed the stone slab over it. There was a deep groove on it caused by the repeated rubbing of the rope against it as the bucket was lowered into and drawn up from the well. Seeing this, I learnt the truth."

"What is it?" Dikshitar asked curiously.

Varadaraja replied, "How is it possible for a soft rope to create such a deep scar on a slab of stone? It could not have happened in a day, a week or even a month. It must have happened over years. If a soft rope can do this, I thought that, with constant effort, I can also taste the sweet nectar of knowledge, though I am a

If a soft rope can carve a deep niche on a stone slab, with constant effort, we can also taste the sweet nectar of knowledge.

dullard.” The Guru placed both his hands on the disciple’s head and blessed him.

The above is a popular legend from the life of Varadaraja, who went on to become a renowned 17th-century Sanskrit grammarian. Maharshi Panini’s comprehensive masterpiece in Sanskrit grammar, *Aṣṭadhyayi*, is a text that linguists all over the world study with great wonder. It comprises eight chapters and 3,959 sutras. Acharya Varadaraja, as he came to be known, condensed it into two versions: *Madhya Siddhanta Kaumudi* and *Laghu Siddhanta Kaumudi*, the latter a brilliant distillation of less than 1,400 sutras. These works are considered authoritative primers on basic Sanskrit grammar even today.

Vedic grammar declares, ‘*samyak kritam iti*

samskritam’ — ‘Sanskrit is that which is refined and perfected.’ This magnificent language is also one of ancient India’s innumerable contributions to the world. Although the initial well-known treatises on Sanskrit grammar were authored by sages like Panini and Patanjali, Acharya Varadaraja’s contribution, in which he codified the rules of grammar in simple terms for new generations of students, is no less significant.

Let us remember Varadaraja and seek inspiration from him whenever we feel exhausted or defeated by the trials and tribulations of life. If a rope can carve a deep niche into a stone slab and if a ‘dullard’ can compose primers on Sanskrit grammar, we can also attain our goal through unstinted effort. ❧

Isolated

by kunhunni purayannur, india



Amma says, “Today, if there are three members in a family, they live as if on three different islands. In this day, it would seem impossible for people to know what peace and happiness are.”

This is indeed the age of isolation. Life has become so hectic that no one has time for anyone else. Perhaps, this is one of the more serious challenges the world is facing.

While discussing this subject with a group of people, one of them, an elderly gentleman, said, "In the old days, there were many opportunities to meet and talk, such as when we went to bathe in the lake, during weddings, etc. But these days, everyone seems to be living in his or her own world."

I remember the story of a child who had run away from home. He went to the nearest railway station and got into the first train he saw. Fortunately, the person sitting next to him smelt something fishy and informed the police, who took the boy back home. The child was later counselled.

Young people who feel lonely often run away. Some might get involved in immature love affairs. Others might fall into bad company and start taking drugs. Those who remain at home might become addicted to social media. Why do they not find solace in the comfort of home and family? Perhaps, the loneliness they experience

is so oppressive that they feel driven to find some relief. With no one to talk to, they go wherever they can get at least a little attention.

When we feel so isolated at home, the risk of falling prey to anxiety and depression increases. Therefore, we should strive to ensure that at least family bonds are strong enough to make family members feel that they can open their hearts and talk freely to one another.

We find that such relationships are becoming increasingly brittle. The media have become successful in diverting our attention away from each other. Distractions bombard us from all sides. Thus, we are unable to concentrate our mind on any one thing, like mentally unstable people who often speak coherently, linking unrelated things.

The overuse and misuse of mobile phones is a serious issue today. Some people connect more easily to electronic

If asked what our basic needs are, we would say food (and water), shelter and clothing. Amma says that love is also a basic need.

equipment than to other people. If you take away such electronic devices from children, they become withdrawn or aggressive. Owing to the long hours spent on the computer or mobile or watching TV, they have become like machines.

In this context, a story Amma that narrates is worth recounting. One day, while the wife was tending the garden, she asked her husband, who was standing nearby, "Could you please help?"

He replied, "Am I your gardener?"

On another occasion, when the wife was trying to drive a nail into the wall, she asked him, "Could you please hold this nail?"

The husband said, "Am I a carpenter?"

On another occasion, as she was busy, the wife asked him if he could help to wash some utensils. He asked, "Am I your servant?"

One day, when the husband returned home, he found the place unusually neat and tidy. The neighbour, a young man, had helped his wife clean the place in return for either a meal or a kiss.

"Did you give him a meal?" the husband asked.

She retorted, "Do you think I run a restaurant?"

The husband's repeated neglect of his wife created resentment and anger in her. Instead of helping to bring people together, interactions seem to widen the gap. How can we foster closeness?


I can think of no one other than Amma, who has

established such strong ties with people and who advocates strong family bonds. She embraces us with utmost care and attention. She does not neglect anyone. Nowhere else is such an experience of total empathy and unconditional love available. The world that Amma is trying to create, one based on the foundations of love and compassion, is incomparable.

If asked what our basic needs are, we would say food (and water), shelter and clothing. We cannot live without these things. But people can be unhappy even with all these things. They also try to find fulfilment in positive interpersonal relationships.

Amma says that love is also a basic need. For how long can we remain alone? A key factor in mental health is one's personal environment. If we live in a loving and supportive community, we will have the strength to overcome all crises in life.

Amma often says, "We are not isolated islands but links in a chain connected to each other. Our actions knowingly or unknowingly affect others. A change in one person reflects in another person as well."

As present, we do not consciously feel connected to one other. We must make a conscious effort to do so. We should not expect other people to change and remain passive ourselves. Only those who think about what they can do to change and act will be able to bring about a change. Following Amma's example, can we establish friendships with those who lead isolated lives? If we succeed, we can help them regain a sense of kinship and community. We should welcome them unconditionally. We should treat them in such a way that they feel they are one with us. Can we do this? Each one of us has this ability but it may be dormant in some now. All we need to do is to awaken it. 



Grace and Self-effort

by Padmaja Gopakumar, India

It was the first Tuesday of March 2020. As usual, Amma arrived at 11 a.m. to meditate with Her children. Before meditation, Amma gazed at those seated in the hall and said, “Children, the whole world is in the grip of a serious situation. The coronavirus is fast spreading and scaring everyone. Tens of thousands of people have already been infected. Only

divine grace can save us. Every day, we chant '*Lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu*' ('May all beings everywhere be happy') together. However, that isn't good enough. When you sit alone, you must chant this mantra at least for 10 minutes. Pray for the well-being of all in the world."

Amma keeps reminding us that spiritual life is not just about our own liberation. It should be for the benefit of the world as well. She says that if we can acquire compassion in addition to practising meditation, it would be as if gold became fragrant or sunlight became sweet-smelling.

To remind us that viruses affecting the mind are more dangerous than those affecting the body, Amma said, "Children, the virus of anger, hatred, etc. are our own creations, and they are more dangerous than any other virus." She reminded us that our thoughts and actions affect others. Different kinds of

thoughts create different kinds of vibrations. Therefore, we must watch our thoughts and consciously try to cultivate only good thoughts.

During the question-and-answer session after meditation, a young Western man stood up to ask Amma a question. Many ashram residents are foreign nationals. Many others spend days or months doing spiritual practices and *seva* (selfless work) in the ashram. The questioner was returning home after having spent a few weeks in Amritapuri. One could hear the note of sadness at the impending separation from Amma in his question: "Amma, it is said that a spiritual master only needs to make a *sankalpa* (divine resolve) to bring anything about. She can bestow Self-realization to anyone in a moment. She can even bestow that realization to everyone seated here at this very moment. Why then is nobody able to realize the Self easily?

Amma keeps reminding us that spiritual life is not just about our own liberation. It should be for the benefit of the world as well. She says that if we can acquire compassion in addition to practising meditation, it would be as if gold became fragrant or sunlight became sweet-smelling.

Why is the spiritual master not kind enough to give it to at least those who are keen to realize the Self?"

That everyone liked the question was evident from the loud applause that followed. Amma smiled and said, "Son, your desire is good. But who wants Self-realization? Who wants to give up worldly desires and strive only for the ultimate?"

Amma then said that God, the very embodiment of unconditional love and compassion, is showering divine grace on us all the time. However, our ego might be an impediment to receiving it. Self-

realization happens within, but not many people open their hearts. If one digs a pit near a riverbank, water will fill it without any effort. But we must put forth the effort to dig the pit. Similarly, we must strive to attain God. Those who do not bother trying will not be able to appreciate the glory of God-realization.

To drive home the point, Amma narrated a story. Once, after a forest-dweller had saved an ascetic from danger, the ascetic wanted to give him a token of his appreciation. Having nothing else, the ascetic gave him his pet parrot, who had been with him for a

long time and had learnt all the scriptures by heart. After some days, the ascetic went to see the forest-dweller to ask him how the parrot was doing. The forest dweller said, “Swami, it was very tasty!”


How could a forest-dweller have appreciated the parrot’s scholarship? Similarly, bestowing Self-knowledge on one who has not put in any effort would be like trading a precious gem for a few peanuts, Amma said.

She added that some people might seem to attain God-realization easily, but it is only because of the efforts they put in during previous lifetimes. She asked, “Son, one cannot obtain even worldly objects without effort. How then can one attain supreme liberation without trying? Even if Amma makes a sankalpa, no one can gain Self-knowledge if they do not open their hearts and strive.”

Elaborating, Amma gave an example She has mentioned

often. If a child is asked to choose between gold coins and chocolates, he is likely to choose the chocolates. He does not know that the gold coins can buy him as many chocolates as he desires for the rest of his life. The man without discernment is like this child, interested only in momentary sense gratification. Therefore, Amma said, to attain Self-realization, one needs *atma-kripa* (grace of one’s own self), too.

She then told the questioner, “Son, Amma knows your heart and appreciates your broad-mindedness. But inside Amma, there is a weighing scale called conscience. On one pan is grace. To balance the scale, there ought to be an equal amount of self-effort on the other.”

Let us remember Amma’s words always: “The supreme *dharma* (duty) of man is Self-realization. True dharma encompasses thoughts and actions that nourish our spiritual transformation.” 

Lilas Around Amma

Answered Prayers

I would like to narrate two experiences with Amma that I treasure most dearly.

I was living in Hyderabad in 1988 when I heard that Amma was visiting the city for the first time. I had met Her for the first time in Chennai the year before, and was ecstatic that I could meet Her again.

The day before Devi Bhava darshan, volunteers asked some of us to bring silk saris to decorate the room where Devi Bhava darshan would be held. I brought three of my most



beautiful saris and handed them to the volunteers, who used two of the saris for the decoration. They kept aside the third one, a lovely emerald-green Benares sari, saying that it was not needed. I was disappointed because I had thought it was stunning and had been praying fervently that it would be used to decorate Amma's chair. But another sari was used to decorate it.

The program commenced. Amma started the puja, and then the curtains were closed. When the curtains opened again, Amma was in Devi Bhava, looking splendid and regal in a gorgeous silk sari and jewellery. I dejectedly looked at Her chair, which had been draped with another sari earlier. What I saw filled my eyes with tears. Amma was sitting on my emerald-green sari! Amma had heard my prayer and answered it. I do not know how or why the saris were switched. The rest of the evening passed

in a blur of sweet ecstasy and devotion.

The second incident happened in the summer of 2018. My daughter, who lives in San Francisco, was pregnant and had come to stay with me in Chennai for a while. As I did not want her to travel back alone, I decided to accompany her. Amma was due to visit San Ramon in June and I was quite excited about seeing Her there. However, the dates of Her visit had not been posted on the website yet. As the ticket prices were increasing daily, I booked my onward and return tickets based on the dates of Her program in San Ramon the previous year. About a week after I booked my tickets, the dates of Amma's US Tour were posted. I saw that She was arriving in San Francisco the day after I was scheduled to leave the US. When I tried to change my return date, I realized that I would have to pay an exorbitant amount. I mentally begged

Amma to forgive me for booking my tickets before Her itinerary had been confirmed. To console myself, I thought that if this was what Amma wanted, who was I to question Her?

On the scheduled day of departure, my daughter and I left for the airport and checked in. Our flight was announced and we boarded. The aircraft started accelerating along the runway, gathering speed for the take-off. Suddenly, it started slowing down and finally came to a halt. After an hour of waiting, the pilot announced that there was a technical problem that could not be rectified. We were asked to disembark and told that we would be put on another flight the next day. The beginnings of excitement

and hope started fluttering in my stomach. I asked the customer services officer who was helping us get on another onward flight if he could schedule my flight to a couple of days later. He was only too happy to oblige and booked me on a flight two days later without any additional charge. You can imagine my excitement and happiness when I realized that I could meet my darling Amma, who had made the impossible a reality!


I spent a blissful two days in San Ramon before returning home. Thank you so much, Amma, for showering Your grace on this child of yours!



— Radha Rajakrishnan,
India

(continued from page 42)

You are the 'I' that is in me
and I am the 'you' that is in You.

May this realization be our goal, and by Her grace, may we attain this mystic union with our beloved Guru, Amma. 

— Veena O'Sullivan, Australia

GURU PURNIMA 2020

For Amma's children, Guru Purnima is always special. Some can celebrate it in Her physical presence; others express their love and reverence for Her through a special celebration with their satsang group or in the solitude of their prayers. In any case, the occasion brings much joy.

This year, the coronavirus pandemic has made life topsy-turvy for everyone. It has amplified the pain of separation for many of us, who wonder when we can see Amma again, nestle in Her motherly arms, inhale Her fragrance, and gaze into Her eyes.

Because Amma knows our anguish, She saw to it that we could at least watch the live stream of the Guru Purnima celebrations in Amritapuri. What we experienced was Her boundless benevolence. All over the world, Amma's children watched — with hearts melting in devotion and tears streaming in gratitude — as She generously shared hours of Her time, wisdom and love.

Before Amma arrived, Swami Amritaswarupananda gave a talk in which he spoke of the vital need to celebrate Guru Purnima in these times. The balance of creation has been lost, and taking refuge in the Guru's feet is more important than ever before. Those sacred feet, he said, are the foundation upholding the Truth. Prayers to the Divine Mother — as Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati, the goddesses of power, wealth and knowledge respectively — to remove our negative tendencies will eliminate suffering and restore balance. Amma calls us Her “darling children... the essence of the eternal OM.” By submitting to the Guru, we allow ourselves to be guided by Her until we attain the eternal. The path Amma shows is that of love. Swamiji stressed that we can always experience Her love and guidance if we have an open and receptive heart.

As his speech ended, Amma arrived, radiating the healing glow of moonbeams. She began by leading the peace prayer, '*Lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu*' — 'May all beings everywhere be happy and peaceful.' Somehow, it did not feel like we were in a virtual satsang but in Amritapuri, taking part in the holy event.

Though Amma does not want anyone to do *pada puja* (ceremonial worship of the feet) to Her, She agreed to a *paduka puja* in deference to tradition. Swamiji performed the beautiful puja, at Amma's feet, to Her silver padukas (sandals). The camera brought Amma into our rooms and our hearts, and in some ways, we could not have been closer to Her. It was as if we were performing the puja ourselves.

Ochre seemed to be the colour theme of the day. Amma's chair was draped in ochre, and the garland offered to Her



was in an analogous shade of red as were many of the flowers offered at Her feet. The parasol above Amma's chair was a radiant golden-yellow. These details seemed to honour the *Guru-sampradaya*, or lineage of spiritual masters, and was a reminder of the *deeksha* (initiation) ceremony held in March, during which Amma initiated about 270 disciples into brahmacharya and sannyasa as an offering to the service of humanity. Amma has said that ochre symbolizes the inner fire of *vairagya* (dispassion) towards the world and the blazing love for God.

Amma's words of wisdom were elevating and a soothing balm for aching hearts. She reminded us of the essential goal of life, the Guru's role in fulfilling this purpose, and what we must do to attain it. Amma's practical advice never fails to inspire. She distinguished between love and trust, asking us to love all but not to trust everyone indiscriminately. She asked us to view every experience as a teacher and to learn from it. Amma highlighted how the perspective of a spiritual master is completely different from ours,

and as such, we will find it hard to understand the actions of a Guru. She always acts in our best interest. Such is the love and compassion the Guru has for Her disciples, whom She will never forsake.

After taking us deep into ourselves with the guided 'white flowers of peace' meditation, Amma treated us to some bhajans. This sweet *amrita* (divine nectar) from Her was delectable yet sublime. As She slowly 'returned to earth' after Her rapturous singing of 'Amma, Amma, Taye,' I could not help but feel that this precious being has dedicated Her life to take us from the darkness of our ignorance to the light of immortality, the essence of OM.

Kabir Das, a 15th-century Indian mystic poet and saint, said, "All know that the drop merges into the ocean, but few know that the ocean merges into the drop." Amma expresses the same truth in *Omkara Divya Porule*, a poetic rendition of Her teachings:

*ennile jnan anu niyum – pinne
ninnile ni anu jnanum*

(continued on page 39)