



Contents

Vol. 32, No. 11

Learn to Give 4

Shrutis, Smritis and the Bhagavad Gita – 2 8

swami tureeyamritananda puri

Wonder of Wonders 13

bri. shantipurnamrita chaitanya

On Forgiveness 21

indu gandhi, india

Chapter 18: Yoga of Renunciation and Liberation 27

prof. v. muraleedhara menon, india

Upamanyu 32

sanoop sadanandan, india

Amrita Meditation Retreats 35

kamala joy, u.s.a

Divine Mother 38

shail raghvanshi, india

Lilas Around Amma 39

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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Learn to Give

Children, until recently, sacrifice and simplicity were regarded as ideals of life. That vision of life has changed. Today, the goals of most people are to make as much money as possible and to enjoy material pleasures. For many, success in life is taking as much as possible from society while giving as little as they can.

In reality, there ought to be a harmonious balance between the individual and society. If we take anything from society or nature, we are obliged to give something back in return. If each person strives to give more than he or she takes, peace, unity and prosperity will prevail in society.

Whether towards our family or society, our attitude towards everyone and everything has become business-minded. Even our relationship with God has become like this. Our attitude towards God and the Guru ought to be one of



total surrender. Instead, we calculate even in their presence, wondering how we can gain from them.

Amma remembers a story. Once, a rich businessman went on a cruise. Suddenly, there was a terrible storm. The captain of the ship announced that their chances of survival were slim. Everyone on board started praying. The businessman prayed, "O Lord, if I survive, I shall sell my five-star hotel and donate 75% of the money to You. Please save me!"

Miraculously, the sea became calm at once and everyone reached the destination safely. The businessman was disturbed. He thought "Oh dear, if I sell the hotel, I can earn at least 1 *crore* (10 million) rupees. I have pledged 75% of the sales to the Lord. Do I really need to give Him so much? What to do?" He started pondering on ways to get out of this quandary.

The next day, an advertisement appeared in the

newspaper: "Five-star hotel for sale. Price: One rupee only!"

There was a huge demand to buy the hotel. The businessman announced, "I am selling this hotel for a rupee. However, there is one condition: the person who wishes to purchase the hotel must also buy my dog, which is priced at 10 million rupees."

Eventually, the hotel was sold. The businessman then went to the temple and offered 75 *paisa* to the Lord.


Such is the attitude many people have. They are ready to cheat even God to gain their own ends.

We see the world today with the eyes of a businessman. No matter what the sphere, we seek only our own advancement. We might make progress with such an attitude, but such progress is dangerous. Cancer cells grow unchecked and, as a result, cause the individual's death. Similarly, 'progress' that is detrimental to society is never true progress.

In reality, there ought to be a harmonious balance between the individual and society. If we take anything from society or nature, we are obliged to give something back in return. If each person strives to give more than he or she takes, peace, unity and prosperity will prevail in society.



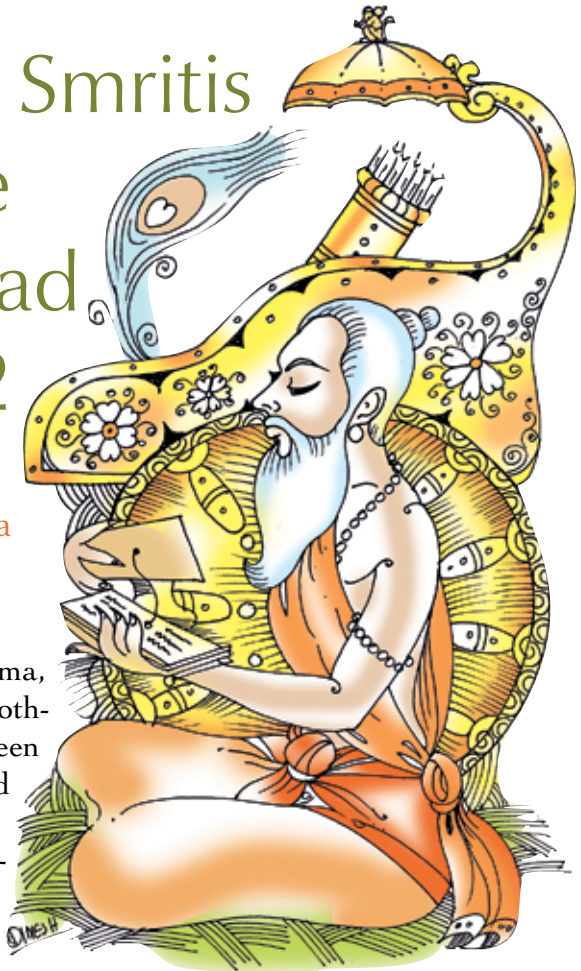
Eventually, it will cause the destruction of both the individual and society. Everyone has the right to grow and expand. However, our growth should also help others grow.

In truth, whatever we give the world comes back to us. If we sow a seed, the earth returns a harvest that is a hundred-fold more than what we sowed. The merit accruing from good actions helps us not only in our present life but also ensures an auspicious future. The real success of life lies in giving more than we take. 

Shrutis, Smritis and the Bhagavad Gita – 2

by swami
tureeyamritananda
puri

Although Bhishma, Drona and the others may not have been spiritually illumined souls, they had studied the scriptures, and therefore were aware, at least in principle, that the soul does not die.



They also knew that if they were killed while fighting, they would attain the heaven for the valorous. For these reasons, they did not grieve. Lord Krishna thus counselled Arjuna, admonishing him for his misplaced fears and his tender-heartedness which betrayed his ignorance.

Lord Krishna continued, “You speak with seeming wisdom about the Self, about *dharma* and *adharma* (righteousness and unrighteousness), and about the duties of the body. It is the common man who is anxious about the death of his sons and relatives, but you, too, have become susceptible to the same grief. That is the impression I get when I hear you talk about dharma and adharma, about the results accruing from actions, and of heaven and hell. How did you reach such a contrary state? The Self is eternal; it does not die. The body, which is made of flesh, blood and bones, must be

abandoned one day or the other. Decay and destruction are inevitable for the body. Why should anyone grieve over that? The Self is the lamp of consciousness shining within everyone’s heart. It is the real ‘I.’ However, the common man superimposes notions of body, mind and the like on it. This is the reason for sorrow. The Self will prevail, with or without a body. Without the Self, the body is only a corpse. It is insentient. An insentient object does not know either joy or sorrow. Bhishma, Drona and the others know that they are not the insentient body and that the Self is imperishable consciousness. Only the foolish lament the destruction of the body. Yet, you spout words of wisdom. How can anyone not laugh at this?”

The reason for Arjuna’s despondency was the notion that “I am the doer. Hence, I will reap the fruits of my actions. I will go to hell if I kill

the Kauravas.” It was ignorance that led Arjuna to believe this. The knower of the Self understands that he is neither doer nor experiencer. The Self remains actionless, free of disease, unchanging, and free of all false imaginings. There is no duality in the realm of the Self. The sense of being the doer and experiencer arises from identification with the body. When we identify with the body, we are beset by sorrow. The delusion of duality stirs fear. *‘Dvitiyat vai bhayam bhavati’* — ‘Indeed, fear arises from a second entity’ (*Brihadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 1.4.2). Once we gain true knowledge, notions of being the doer and experiencer will disappear. All misunderstandings will cease to be and we will become free of sorrow. The disease has to be understood before it can be remedied.

Thus, Lord Krishna tried to make Arjuna aware of the dharma of the Self and that of

the body. This is where the *Bhagavad Gita* really starts:

*ashocyan-anvashocastvam
prajna-vaḍamśca bhāṣase
gatasun-agatasumśca
nanuśocanti paṇḍitāḥ*

You grieve for those one need not grieve for, and yet, you speak like a person of wisdom. The wise do not grieve for either the living or the dead. (2.11)

When we forget the Self (our true nature), the thought that “I am the body” is born. Conversely, remembrance of the Self restores us to our true nature.

It was not only that the thought of killing Bhishma, Drona and others was distressing to Arjuna. He also believed that killing was sinful, would bring him infamy, and lead him to hell. This clearly indicated that Arjuna saw Bhishma and Drona as bodies. Thus, the formidable warrior became mired in despondency.

In contrast, Bhishma and Drona were ready to fight. They were mindful of their duties as warriors and believed that if they died while fighting valiantly, they would attain heaven. This conviction instilled courage in them and made their minds resolute.

The wise know that there is only life and that death is not a reality. They have crossed over death and attained immortality.

That said, Lord Krishna's advice is not given to everyone. The principle of the Self is taught only to a mature disciple. The three most important qualities of a disciple are humility, dedication and a keen thirst to know. Arjuna's surrender indicated the presence of these three qualities in him.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is practical spiritual science that even ordinary people can use to uplift themselves. Compared with the Vedas and the Upanishads, many more commentaries and scholarly studies

have been written on the *Bhagavad Gita*. Most Hindus would know at least one verse from the *Bhagavad Gita*, even if they do not know any of the mantras from the Vedas or Upanishads.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is an inquiry into 'I,' the Self within. We cannot see our eyes with our eyes. We cannot see even our own face with the eyes, which are set in the face. How then can we possibly see the Self? To see it, our inner eye must open, and this can happen only if we follow the instructions of the Guru.

Though the eyes cannot see themselves, we know they exist because we see only because of them. The outer eye cannot give us the knowledge of the 'I.' It is known only with the inner eye, the eye of the Self. The eyes can see, but if the eyelids are closed, of what use is our eyesight? Likewise, God is within, but if our heart remains closed, God will always remain unknown,


incomprehensible and unreachable. To see the Self, we must have the eye of knowledge; we must identify with the Self.

The eye of the Self becomes bright and clear when we gain *Atma-vidya* (the knowledge of the Self). True knowledge is knowledge of the Self. All other branches of knowledge exist outside and they distance us from the true self. Only *Atma-vidya* brings us closer to the Self. That is why all other branches of knowledge are known as *avidya*, unreal knowledge; they do not illumine. Only the Guru can lead us from darkness to light. Once we surrender ourselves to the Guru as Arjuna did to Krishna, the darkness will be dispelled; ignorance will cease to be.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is one such science that gives us true knowledge of the Self. To understand this science, we must first become a qualified disciple. One becomes a disciple only in the presence of a Guru.

Lord Krishna deigned to teach Arjuna only when the latter became a disciple.

The Lord first had to disabuse Arjuna of the ideas that he was killing and that Bhishma and Drona were physical bodies. This fundamental ignorance can be eradicated only when one realizes the Self. Arjuna needed to realize that he was the embodiment of the Self. Only then could his ignorance disappear. The Self is pure awareness and has no attachment to the body. To gain this understanding, one must understand the meaning of the word 'tvam' ('you') – from the scriptural dictum '*tat tvam asi.*'

The Lord explained the meaning of 'tvam' to Arjuna. It is pure awareness, which is not connected in any way to the ego or body. Once Arjuna realized this, his sorrow and despair left him. Scholars say that the first six chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* are an elaborate study of 'tvam.' 

A photograph of a woman in a white sari sitting on a raised wooden platform. She is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. A microphone on a stand is positioned in front of her. The background is a warm, golden-brown color with draped fabric.

Wonder of Wonders

by Bri. Shantipurnamrita Chaitanya

I heard about Amma long before I met her, but had to wait a long time for my first darshan.

In 1993, I learnt that Amma was visiting Kozhikode. As the Kozhikode Ashram was only a few miles away from where I lived, I decided to go and see her. My secret plan was not just to see Amma but to join her ashram also. I

packed my belongings without anyone in the family noticing it. I thought that if Amma agreed, I would leave for the ashram at once. Unfortunately, during my darshan, I could not ask her anything. But Amma whispered in my ear, “My daughter, Amma understands your anguish. Don’t worry. Amma is with you.”

I had to wait another two years to ask Amma. All my family members opposed my joining the ashram and thwarted all my attempts. Now, when I look back at the series of incidents leading up to my joining the ashram, I feel astonished. Isn’t it amazing how Amma can change the course of our lives for the better? Every moment we spend with Amma is wonderful.

Lord Krishna says,

*ashcaryavatpashyati
kashcidenam ashcaryavad-
vadati canyah
ashcaryavaccainamanyah
shrnoti shrutvapyenam veda
na caiva kashcit*

Some see the Self as amazing. Some describe it as amazing. Some hear of it as amazing. Others, even on hearing, cannot understand it at all.
(*Bhagavad Gita*, 2.29)

Similarly, the *Kathopanishad* declares:

*shravanayapi babubhiryo na
labhyah shrnvanto’pi babavo
yam na vidyuh*

*ashcaryo vakta kushalo’sya
labdha ashcaryo jnata
kushalanushishtah*

He about whom many are not even able to hear, whom many cannot comprehend even after hearing: wonderful is the teacher, wonderful is he who can receive when taught by an able teacher.
(1.2.7)

Opportunities to hear about the Self are rare. If at all one hears about it, the chances of understanding what one hears are slim. It is said that only a

handful in millions understands it rightly. The scriptures describe it as amazing because anything that cannot be perceived by our five sense organs is a wonder.

One must have an eye for beauty. Those who delight in seeing forests, the sunrise or sunset will intuit the glory of the Creator. These sights can transport such people to a state of rapture.

The scriptures say that the Self is *'anor aniyam mahato mahiyan'* — 'smaller than the smallest, greater than the greatest.' The five sense organs can perceive only (external) objects, not the perceiving subject. In order to understand the perceiver, we must turn inward and the mind must become subtle. Just as we can see a clear reflection in a clean mirror, an uncluttered mind will be able to perceive the Self. It goes without saying that one needs the Guru's grace to have this inner vision.

Once, a teacher asked her students to name the seven wonders of the world. The students listed the Taj Mahal, Panama Canal, the Great Wall of China, etc. One student did not stop writing even after a long time. Surprised, the teacher went over to him to see what he was writing. He had listed altogether different things: hearing, talking, walking... When the teacher asked him why he considered them wonders, the boy replied that he had a brother who was born deaf and dumb. Hearing this, the teacher's eyes welled up with tears.

Truly, wonders are countless. Much of what we take for granted are wonders to others. For the lame, walking is a wonder. For the mute, speaking is a wonder. For the unhealthy, health is a wonder. Amma always reminds us that even the next breath is not in our hands; it rests in God's hands. So, even something as simple as breathing is a wonder.

We are able to function by God's grace alone.

Some declare that Amma is powerful enough to make the lame climb a mountain. What this really means is that she instils self-confidence in that person. It might be possible to treat lameness surgically. But only *mahatmas* (spiritually illumined souls) like Amma can give someone who is physically challenged the confidence to scale a mountain. Only they can change the innate tendencies of our minds.

Before I joined the ashram, I had a close friend who committed suicide by jumping into a deep lake. One day when I was sleeping, I dreamt of her. It was a lucid dream. She came and sat next to me, and said that she was feeling desolate in her new world because hers had been an unnatural death. She asked me to join her by jumping into the same lake. I was horrified! I said, "You know that I'm going to Amma. I cannot join you." But she

persisted. To free myself from her clutches, I told her to leave, adding that I would join her when I die. But she shook me violently and kept repeating, "Come with me!" When I realized that she wouldn't leave me without taking me with her, I became frightened. I recalled Amma's words: "Daughter... don't worry. Amma is with you." Mustering all my strength and visualizing Amma, I screamed "Amma!" My late friend took her hands off me. When I screamed "Amma" a second time, she asked, "So you won't come with me?" When I called out to "Amma" yet again, she backed away from me and vanished into thin air. I woke up and saw my family members standing around me. I realized that I had really been screaming my lungs out.

One might think that this was just the overworking of my imagination, but for me, the experience was vivid even though I cannot explain it

Some declare that Amma is powerful enough to make the lame climb a mountain. What this really means is that she instils self-confidence in that person. It might be possible to treat lameness surgically. But only mahatmas like Amma can give someone who is physically challenged the confidence to scale a mountain. Only they can change the innate tendencies of our minds.

logically. I feel sure that if Amma had not saved me then, I would have left my house and followed my friend into the lake, for there had been such a strong bond between us. Even now, when I recall that episode, I still feel stunned. I had never told Amma about my friend's suicide, and was not physically near her at that time. But by merely uttering the great mantra "Amma" three times, I had been saved from the clutches of death. Who else

other than Amma can work wonders like this?

Have you seen Amma during the arati or at the end of Devi Bhava? With a bewitching smile, Amma's eyes take everyone in. Isn't that gaze extraordinary? Everyone feels that Amma looked at them, even the person sitting at the back of the hall. Only she can look in that way.

There is a story in the *Bhagavata* of how Sage Narada wanted to test Lord Krishna. When he went to the private

chambers of each of the 16,008 wives of the Lord, in each, he clearly saw the Lord in his physical form. He also saw Krishna feeding the cows, playing with children, chatting with the villagers... all at the same time. Seeing this, Narada became convinced of the Lord's all-pervasive and omnipotent nature.

Once, when Amma was giving darshan in the San Ramon Ashram, a devotee came with a parrot. Amma took the chirping bird in hand. Hearing its chirps, Amma told the devotee that he wanted a female companion. Soon, another devotee, who knew nothing about what Amma had said, brought a female parrot. Both birds joyfully rose to the roof and flew across the hall, chirping sweetly. The scene was truly wondrous. Amma is truly the mother of all beings, and that is why she could understand these birds.

Have we not heard stories of Lord Krishna appearing

before the aged Kururamma (1570 – 1640), an ardent devotee of Guruvayurappa (a form of the Lord), and doing all her household chores? Are these just fables?

A swamini shared a wonderful experience that her mother had. Her mother had been asthmatic for a long time. Whenever her asthma worsened, the daughter would attend to all her needs. After the daughter joined the ashram, one day the mother's asthma became severe and she desperately needed help. But there was no one to get even a glass of water for her. At that point, her daughter's college friend walked into the house and asked how she was doing and whether she had eaten. The mother had not eaten anything. Sizing up the situation, the friend went to the kitchen and returned with some water for the mother to drink. She then made a few *dosas* (Indian pancakes). After feeding the mother, the friend cleaned the whole

house. Just before leaving, she told the mother, "There is a lot of thatch lying about in the courtyard. I will come back another day to stack it properly." Saying so, she left. The mother was so grateful to her for the timely help, and thanked Amma for sending her.

After a few months, the mother went to Amritapuri. There, she saw the girl who had helped her when she was sick. She went up to her and said, "Daughter, you were such a big help for me the other day. But I haven't seen you since."

The girl looked perplexed. She asked, "When did I help you?"

The mother said, "Have you forgotten? Remember how you came to my house, made dosas for me and cleaned the house? You also said that you would come back another day to stack the thatch."

The girl said, "I never came to your house. Firstly, I don't

know how to get there. Moreover, my parents would never allow me to go to friends' houses alone. How then could I have done all those things?"

The mother realized that Amma herself had come in the guise of her daughter's friend. Recalling all the work that had been done, the mother felt sad that Amma had gone to such lengths for her. Her eyes welled up with tears. Amma says that she is a servant of the servants of God. This experience proves it.


Many people wonder what their lives would have been like without Amma. Let me share one of my experiences. Some years ago, I developed an eye problem. When I consulted an eye specialist, he said that my eye had been afflicted by the chickenpox virus, and that I would lose my eyesight completely as there was no medicine for this condition. I was devastated. Mentally, I prayed to Amma. "Amma! How can I live my life without

eyesight? How will I be able to see you? How will I move forward?"

Amma was abroad then. Her physical absence made me even more despondent. In those days, conveying a message to Amma was not easy. But someone managed to send word to Amma, who responded immediately. She asked me to go to the Aravind Eye Hospital in Madurai, Tamil Nadu. I consulted an ophthalmologist there. Right after I left for Madurai, Amma even called the ashram to find out if I had already left. I had to take medication for two months. Subsequently, the disease disappeared completely. On the day of my discharge, the doctor sent for me. He said, "I

never thought you'd get back your vision. Only the grace of God brought you here at the right time and only because of divine grace was the treatment successful."

After Amma returned to the ashram, she called me and asked about my eyes and the treatment. I am convinced that it was by her grace alone that I regained my vision, thus enabling me to continue to see her and witness her divine play. How indebted we all are to Amma!

If we reflect on all that happens with and around Amma, we will become certain that she is not just a five-foot-tall woman. She is all-pervading and she is unfathomable. She is a wonder of wonders. 

Dear Readers,

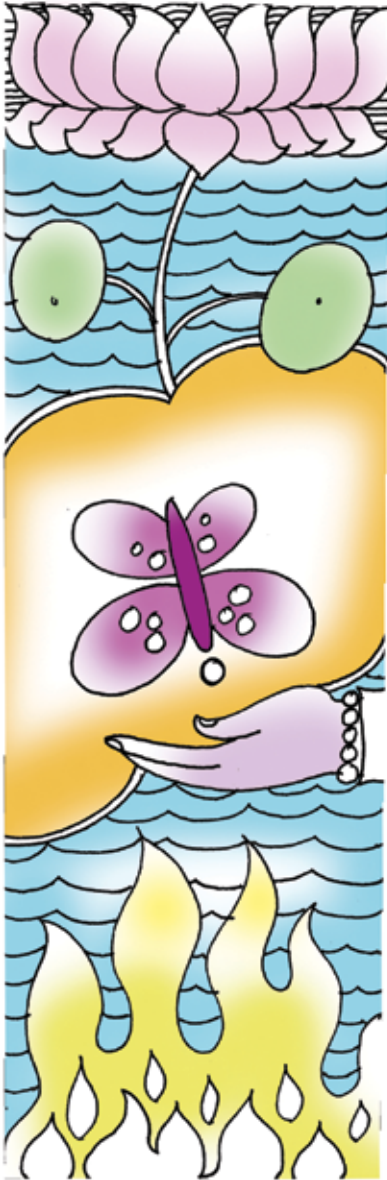
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On Forgiveness

by Indu Gandhi, India

“Forgiveness is dharma.
Forgiveness is sacrifice.
Forgiveness is the Vedas.
Forgiveness is the sacred
texts. Forgiveness is the
Brahman. Forgiveness is
the truth. Forgiveness is
the past and the future.
Forgiveness is austerity.
Forgiveness is purity.
Forgiveness holds up the
entire world.”

— Yudhishtira,
quoting Sage Kashyapa



After 12 years of living inognito, an anguished Draupadi, wife of the five Pandava brothers, became fed-up with Yudhishtira, the eldest Pandava, and the docility with which he had accepted an unjust fate. She could not understand how he could forgive his enemies and not be angry. She and Bhima, his younger brother, had always wondered what kind of *kshatriya* (warrior) Yudhishtira was, and felt that he ought to have been a *brahmin*. They were of the firm view that it was time to attack the unrighteous Kauravas, not to forgive them. Yudhishtira tried to convince them that an angry person cannot see matters clearly. He quoted the aforementioned words of Kashyapa, one of the celebrated seven ancient sages of Vedic literature, and informed them about the huge treasury and support that Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava, enjoyed at the time. Draupadi and Bhima realized

that what Yudhishtira said made practical sense.

Among the Pandavas, Yudhishtira was the most forgiving. But later on, Draupadi became no less forgiving. When Ashvatthama severed the heads of her five sleeping sons, having mistaken them for their fathers, Lord Krishna asked her what punishment she would like meted out to Ashvatthama. Though Draupadi grieved the loss of her sons, she forgave Ashvatthama as he was the son of Dronacharya, Guru to the Pandavas.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna enumerates the virtues of the noble: “*tejah kshama dhritih...*” — “vigour, forgiveness, fortitude...” (16.3). Forgiveness is a divine virtue that allows a sincere seeker to forbear any offence or imperfection in others.

As soon as the word ‘forgiveness’ is heard, one instantly imagines two people: the victim and the perpetrator,

which implies recipient and actor respectively. Both 'enjoyer-ship' and 'doer-ship' are strong pillars of the ego, which is of our own doing ('*jeeva-sriшти*'). This creation knows nothing but misery, for it thrives on our sense of imperfection, guilt, grudge, jealousy and the like, all of which are mental impurities. In '*Ishvara-sriшти*' (God's creation), there is bliss alone, as not a trace of ego exists there.

The desire for vengeance is a karmic cage that imprisons the victim. If unfulfilled, this desire will be yet another cause for rebirth, and thus, the vicious cycle of life and birth is perpetuated. But one earns *punya* (spiritual merit) by praying to God to forgive one's adversary and also frees oneself from the misery created by vindictive thoughts.

Actually, this is appealing, isn't it? Why carry the heavy weight of negative emotions from past events? If someone hurts us, we are burdened by

sorrow, humiliation and the desire to avenge. If we hurt someone, then we are saddled with guilt. In the first instance, why not just forgive? In the second, why not just apologize and forgive ourselves? In this way, our journey through life becomes lighter.

For most of us, forgiveness is a quality that must be cultivated. Suppose someone hurts us. He does so just once, but by keeping alive the remembrance of what he did, we hurt ourselves for life, whereas the other person is not even aware of our suffering. "How can I forgive him?" is the biggest question. The solution is not avoiding thoughts of the event that hurt us. It is better to face those thoughts. By doing this consciously, we can ensure that we do not get carried away by emotion but acknowledge the presence of those thoughts mindfully.

In this regard, one should cultivate open-heartedness and candour. We can tell

someone, “You shouldn’t have spoken / acted that way.” Or, “I shouldn’t have spoken / acted the way I did. I’m sorry. I don’t want to harbour any grudge towards you, and I wouldn’t want you to do so either. So please forgive me. Let’s embrace each other and pray to God, who dwells in our hearts, to bless us with peace and love. Though we may part now, may we look forward to meeting each other with eagerness, enthusiasm, love and light in our hearts!”

Such an attitude fosters magnanimity, compassion, love and spontaneity in us. Remaining calm and serene will help us think and act properly. Lord Krishna asks, “*Ashantasya kutah sukham?*” — “Without peace, how can one experience happiness?” (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2.66).

Amma’s life offers innumerable examples of how to forgive. She is love and compassion embodied. But if she needs to scold her children,

after doing so, she will laugh and ask them for forgiveness. She need not do so, as she would not have scolded without good reason. But every action of *mahatmas* (spiritually illumined souls) like Amma is an example.

*yaḍ yaḍ acarati shresthas
tat tad evetaro janah
sa yat pramanam kurute
lokas tad anuvartate*

Ordinary people emulate whatever a great person does. The world follows the standards he sets through his exemplary acts. (*Bhagavad Gita*, 3.21)

Amma teaches us not so much through discourses as by living the spiritual principles in daily life. She teaches us to live in the present moment, and not to carry the burden of the past.

I had the good fortune of regularly seeing Ramesh S. Balsekar, a mahatma and disciple of Nisargdatta Maharaj, for some time. He was a house-

If we can practise forgiving and forgetting,
the world will be a different place. If we
keep brooding over the past, we will
remain stuck in the rut of pain and hatred.
The moment we boldly choose to forgive,
that very moment we can start the miracle
of spreading the fragrance of kindness,
peace and love all around. This is the
awakening of divinity,
both in ourselves and others.

holder, and spent much of his life conducting spiritual discourses at his home. Balsekar's principal teaching echoed that of the Buddha: "Events happen, deeds are done, but there is no individual doer thereof." He would ask us to do just one spiritual practice every day: to sit peacefully on our bed before sleeping and to recollect all the events of the day. Ultimately, the understanding will dawn that things just 'happened;' 'I' was not the 'doer.' Suppose you are nursing a grudge. You will be led to

think, "If 'I' am not the doer, how can the 'other' be? It just happened; neither of us is responsible." Automatically, peace and happiness dawn, which is what we all seek. We will begin to see everything as a dream and remain in peace. If we do not empty ourselves, we will not be able to lift ourselves and soar high in meditation.

If we can practise forgiving and forgetting, the world will be a different place. If we keep brooding over the past, we will remain stuck in the

rut of pain and hatred. The moment we boldly choose to forgive, that very moment we can start the miracle of spreading the fragrance of kindness, peace and love all around. This is the awakening of divinity, both in ourselves and others.

It is our good fortune that we have a living Guru like Amma. Her very life is an eloquent and living expression of forgiveness. Her devotees and malefactors equally enjoy the same warmth of love and compassion from her because she

sees herself in everything and everyone. They say that even if we start imitating the way mahatmas and *jivanmuktas* (spiritually liberated beings) live, we will assimilate their noble qualities, for we become what we think about most of the time.

Sandalwood perfumes even the axe that cuts it down. The more we rub it, the more fragrance it spreads. If you burn it, the entire neighbourhood enjoys its fragrance. Similar is the enchanting beauty of forgiveness. ❧

(continued from page 34)

appeared before Upamanyu and offered him a sweet. Upamanyu humbly said that that he would not eat it before offering it to his Guru first. Pleased with his devotion to his Guru, the divine physicians cured him of his blindness. They also blessed him with happiness and prosperity.

When he came out of the well, Upamanyu went to his Guru and told him all that had happened. Embracing his disciple, Sage Dhaumya blessed him: “You passed a difficult test. As the Ashwini Kumaras blessed you, you will be prosperous. May the divine principles of all the *dharma shastras* (scriptures on dharma) illumine your intellect.” ❧



Chapter 18: Yoga of Renunciation and Liberation

by Prof. V. Muraleedhara Menon, India

By God's grace, we have reached the final chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

In essence, the *Gita* tells us to do *karma* (action) but renounce its fruit. However, the *Gita* also says that some actions are to

be done and others are to be avoided. Hearing this, Arjuna asks, “O Lord, how can we reconcile the two?”

Arjuna’s is a valid question. Given that that Lord asks us to renounce the fruits of action, what is the relevance of *karma-sannyasa* (renunciation of action)? Are there limits to renouncing the fruits of action? Are there limits to renouncing action itself? If so, what and where? This is the crux of Arjuna’s doubt.

In truth, there is no contradiction. The principle of giving up the fruits of action is applicable to all actions. Where is the contradiction in saying that fruits of all action are to be renounced, and that *rajasic* and *tamasic* actions, i.e. actions arising from passion and lethargy, are to be avoided?

Being asked to act and renounce the fruits of action necessarily implies that some actions are to be avoided, as giving up the fruits presupposes the ability to

differentiate between *dharma* and *adharma*, righteousness and unrighteousness. Can one engage in acts such as killing, lying, stealing and cheating without expecting their fruits? Therefore, what remains is only sattvic karma, actions born of peace. As one cannot do *kamya-karma* (actions prompted by desire) without hankering after their fruits, they are prohibited. Giving up the fruits of action and desire-prompted actions — both aim to get rid of our self-centredness.

Rajasic and tamasic actions, which are impure, make the doer’s mind impure. That is why they are forbidden. That said, if our vision is subtle enough, we will see impurities in sattvic actions also. Does this mean that we must give them up, too? Can we remain without doing anything?

It is impracticable. It is futile to swim against the current of actions that come of their own accord. To ford the

river, it is better to go with the flow.

We must purify our mind by doing our duties with detachment. By doing so, in due course of time, *kriya* (activity) will fall off even as *karma* (action) continues. We must understand the difference between *karma* and *kriya*. As the mind becomes purer, the intensity of the desire for activity is reduced. Intensity becomes moderation, which becomes subtle, which leads to *shunya* (emptiness). This is how *kriya* evolves. When the mind becomes totally pure, *kriya* is reduced to nothing. However, this emptiness inspires endless actions. In short, it is the womb for the creative power behind boundless deeds. Though the *jnani* (knower of the Self) does not seem to do anything, he inspires massive undertakings that promote the welfare of the whole world.

Therefore, let us purify our heart by giving up rajasic and tamasic actions, and by doing

our *svadharma* (work suited to one's nature) conscientiously and selflessly. At the same time, we should avoid actions that are not suited to our nature, no matter how easy they may seem. We should not get caught up with too many activities, thinking that this is good and that is bad. If we do so, we will never have stability in life. We need to do only the *karma* that comes to us naturally. Our *karma* is what suits our *vasanas* (latent tendencies) and enables our evolution.

The doctrine of renunciation shows us what actions are natural to us. We must apply this doctrine even to the ultimate quest of life: *moksha* (spiritual liberation). We don't need to keep thinking about it, as we are already moving towards it. It is enough if we give all our attention to our *sadhana* (spiritual practices). God will take care of the rest. He has promised as much:

*aham tvam sarvapapebhyo
mokshayishyami ma shuchah*

I will deliver you from all sin. Do not grieve.
(18.66)

For a jnani, all kriya ends eventually. He becomes pure emptiness. Everything is auspicious and beautiful for him. This state of knowing is not darkened by even the shadow of untruth, for there is Truth alone. He is established in the sole and supreme truth beyond all moral considerations.

Just as the sky becomes dark just before an eclipse, the shadow of liberation falls on him even before he dies. Such a person is one with the cosmos. All his actions are for the well-being of the world. Whatever such a *mabatma* (spiritually illumined soul) does will always be auspicious.

Three states characterize a jnani. The first is the state of Vamadeva: "All that there is in the universe, that am I." Liberated from body-consciousness, he identifies himself with all the worlds. This is *sarvatma-*

bhava (knowing oneself to be everything).

The second is his state of action. He may do anything but all his actions will be purely sattvic. He might feel as if he is doing all the good and bad deeds in the world but he remains detached from it all.

The third is his state of knowledge, in which he will not be able to bear either *papa* (sin) or *punya* (merit). He wants to shake all these away. He cannot stand even the remotest touch of karma.

How can we reach this ultimate state of total inaction? By becoming totally convinced that we are not doers, only instruments in the hands of the divine. But this conviction does not come easily. We need to habituate ourselves to the idea repeatedly. Then knowledge will dawn.

After thus expounding, the Lord asked Arjuna, "Did you hear everything clearly?" The Lord then told him to


We must purify our mind by doing actions with detachment. As the mind becomes purer, the intensity of the desire for activity lessens. When the mind becomes totally pure, desires leave us totally. However, this emptiness is the womb for the creative power behind boundless deeds.

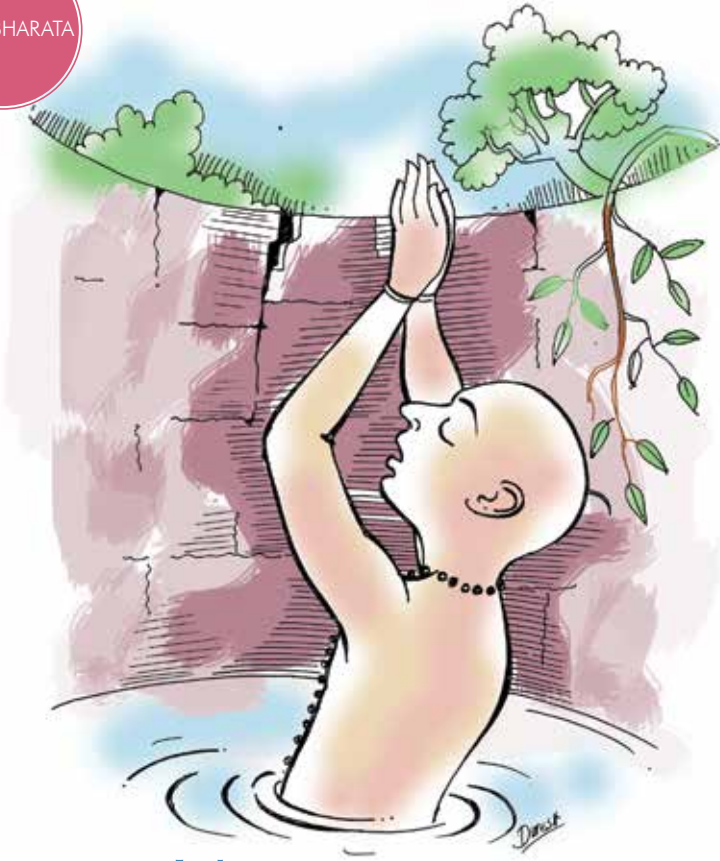
contemplate deeply on all that he had said and gave him the freedom to act as he pleased. But out of compassion, the Lord retracted the freedom he had given Arjuna and said, “O Arjuna, give up your will and all your dharmas, and take refuge in me.”

This means freedom from free will. In truth, what a terrible punishment free will is! How can the weakling that man is cross this treacherous ocean of samsara? The heavy burden of life will crush and destroy him.

That was why the compassionate Lord withdrew the dreadful boon of free will and lovingly asked Arjuna to

surrender to him. When the protective Lord is with us, when we surrender ourselves at his holy feet, and when our whole life is purified by selfless service to him, what bliss and peace we will enjoy!

We are protected by him. Everything is his will. Our duty is to defer to it. When the goat is alive, it bleats, “Me! Me!” But when it dies, veins from its intestines are used to make strings for bows. When plucked, the string makes the sound, “*Tubi! Tubi!*” (“You! You!”). Similarly, when our petty ego disappears, we realize that everything belongs to God. Then, his will becomes ours. 



Upamanyu

by Sanoop Sadanandan, India

Sage Ayoda-Dhaumya (also known as Dhaumya) had another illustrious disciple named Upamanyu, who listened with utmost faith to each and every word that his Guru uttered and obeyed all his instructions in both spirit and letter.

Upamanyu's *seva* (selfless service) was tending to the ashram cattle. Once, after the cattle had finished grazing, Upamanyu brought them back to the ashram at sunset. He went to his Guru and prostrated before him. Dhaumya said, "Child, you've grown fat! What have you been eating?"

Upamanyu said, "I eat what I get from begging for alms."

"You've grown fat by eating all the *bhiksha* (alms). From now on, you should not eat anything before offering to me all the alms you get," ordered the Guru.

Upamanyu started to bring everything he obtained from begging to the ashram and offering them to his Guru.

Days went by. Not seeing any change in Upamanyu's appearance, Dhaumya again asked him what he had been eating. Upamanyu said, "O Guru, as instructed, I have been offering you all the alms I get. I then go out to beg for alms again, and I eat what I get."

Dhaumya said, "That's not true service to the Guru. You're making it difficult for the other monks to get alms."

After a few days, Dhaumya told Upamanyu, "I still don't see any difference in your appearance. What are you eating now?"

Upamanyu said, "O Master, I now appease my hunger by drinking the milk from the cows."

With intense irritation, the Guru said, "That's not right! Your *seva* is grazing the cattle. Service to the Guru should not be cheapened by personal motive. You will incur sin if you derive any personal benefit from *seva*. I will not permit it!"

One evening, after Upamanyu returned with the cattle, Dhaumya asked him the usual question. The disciple replied, "Revered Guru, I now appease my hunger by consuming only the froth that flows out from the calves' mouth when they drink their mother's milk."

The Guru exclaimed, “How cruel you are to the calves! You’ve been taking advantage of their peaceful and meek nature.”

After this, Upamanyu stopped eating. He became weak and emaciated. One day, while grazing the cattle, he started thinking about how he could appease his hunger without disturbing anybody. He ate the leaves that the cows had left intact, not knowing that they were the poisonous leaves of the *madar* plant (calotrope). As a result, he lost his eyesight and fell into a waterless well.

When Upamanyu did not return that evening, Dhaumya went to the forest in search of him. When he heard his Guru calling his name, Upamanyu called out from the well and explained how he had fallen into it. The Guru said that blindness caused by such plants can be healed only by the blessings of the Ashwini Kumaras, twin gods who are

also divine physicians. Dhaumya asked Upamanyu to worship them and seek their blessings to remove his blindness, to ward off other ailments, and to bestow on him auspicious outcomes for all future endeavours.

Upamanyu extolled the deities with mantras from the *Rg Veda*. These mantras glorify them as transcending time, space and the three *gunas* (attributes): *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (associated with the powers of revealing, projecting and veiling).

Further, Upamanyu hailed them as beneficent gods who sought out devotees in distress and saved them from dangers, as deities who show human beings how to obtain auspicious results for their actions, and as bestowers of prosperity on even the gods. He acclaimed them as one with the Supreme.

Following these prayers, the Ashwini Kumaras
(continued on page 26)



Amrita Meditation Retreats

by Kamala Joy, USA

“That which gives absolute satisfaction or contentment is
real dharma.”
— Amma

The white flower meditation began late in the evening of August 27th, 2019, the first day of the month-long retreat in Amritapuri. We were asked to keep our eyes open. As the visualization started, the ceiling fans were turned on, spilling

hundreds of white flowers on our heads and all over the retreat hall. Many of us were moved. It wasn't just the flowers, an extra task the volunteer team had dreamt up and implemented in spite of working from 4 a.m. to midnight for almost four weeks. It wasn't just the symbolism.¹ During the retreats, one becomes more attuned to silence and to love. It is as if the retreats conjure an alchemy that elicits pure emotion from us, just as the wind wafts the scent of flowers.

The Amrita Silent Retreats are an incredible treasure. Amma says meditation is ambrosia. She often speaks about the bliss of the Self, but most of us do not know what she means. During the retreats, we can experience a little of

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1 During the white flower meditation, after visualizing white flowers of peace cascading down to the planet, including the oceans, rivers, lakes, mountains, forests, birds and animals, we are guided to imagine them falling on our own heads as well.

this inner bliss. This is true whether you think meditation "isn't your thing," you are a lifelong meditator, or new to it. The fall 2019 month-long retreat had some newer meditators and at least one person who had never done a retreat. They all loved it!

From the very first meditation, which is guided and focuses on relaxing the body (because true meditation is impossible without relaxation) to the yoga (itself a guided meditation) to the powerful talks, we experienced a break from the incessant chatter of our minds. We were also graced with an intuitive or tangible connection to our true nature: pure love, bliss and silence.

Amma's presence permeates the retreats. She is personally involved in them, reviewing and approving the schedule, and this involvement permeates everything. For those online, the yoga or meditation class on Zoom does not feel


impersonal. Over and over again, online participants have shared their experience of strongly feeling Amma's presence in spite of being away from her physically, and have expressed immense gratitude for this gift. Many encountered Amma's fragrance. And of course, the quieter we became inside, the more we felt her presence. It is this inner darshan that for me is the essence of the retreats.

Amritapuri participants were served by dedicated teams of volunteers who cooked, cleaned and organized. The teams took pains to ensure that participants could focus completely on the retreat. All meals were catered and served in the dining hall inside the retreat facility. Breakfast always included platters of freshly cut fruit. All special meal requests were honoured. Ample snacks, including the amazing Shiva Shakti Hari Hari Bol energy balls, and tea were provided.

Fresh coconut water was served daily.

If we needed anything from the shop, all we had to do was to fill out a form, and the items would appear in our cubby within 24 hours. Laundry was done for us. During one of the retreats, the Indian government wanted all Westerners with expiring visas to submit paperwork to extend them. The retreat staff handled this, saving us hours of standing in line and trying to upload electronic forms.

Swami Purnamritananda, Swami Atmananda and Br. Atmaprakash spent hours holding scripture classes and hosting Q&As. In addition, senior brahmacharis and brahmacharinis gave memorable talks.

Participants continued to experience deeper levels of meditation, joy and silence after the retreats. The inner doors that opened do not close later but seem to lead ever inward. 

Divine Mother

by Shail Raghuvanshi, India

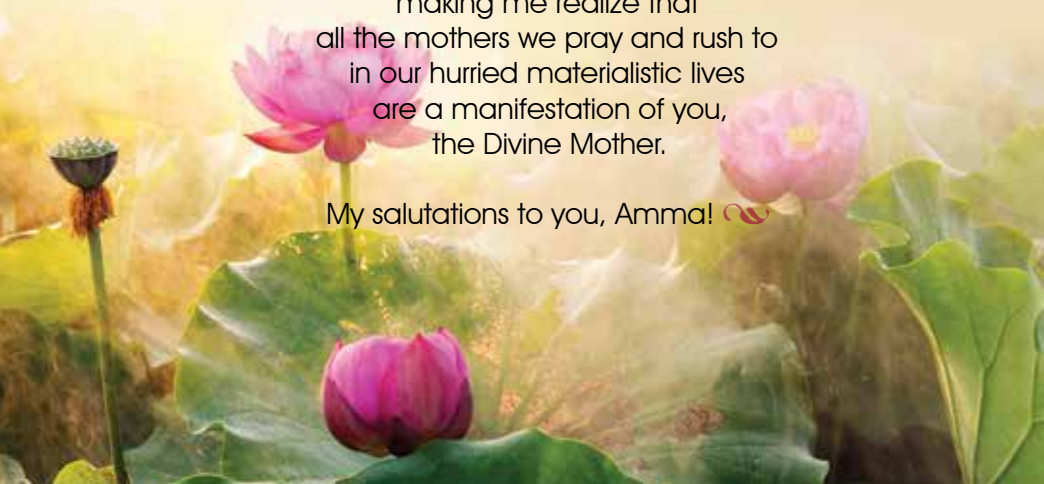
Mother

I thought I had lost you
when my earthly mother ascended
to the heavens above
only to make me more aware
of your presence
at all times
everywhere

How slowly you made your way into my life
even when my earthly mother was alive
bestowing upon me
all maternal love;
only when she left did I realize
that all along you were
making me stronger to make my pain lesser
in her permanent absence from earth.

I remember placing my head
in your white, sparkling, pure, love-laden lap
embracing me, drowning all my despair
making me realize that
all the mothers we pray and rush to
in our hurried materialistic lives
are a manifestation of you,
the Divine Mother.

My salutations to you, Amma! 🌸



Lilas Around Amma

Mother's Chocolate Kiss

My mother was in her mid-40's when she gave birth to me, her only child and daughter. I cannot say that our mother-child relationship was ideal. However, when I was around 20 years old, my mother had a spiritual awakening that paved the way for a reconciliation between us.

In the years to follow, I came to realize just how mature, spiritual and wise my mother



truly was, and what a gift she had already been in my life. We became closer as she shared her spiritual path with me. When I felt unable to connect with her spiritual path, she suggested that I visit a local Hindu temple, as I had learned yoga, meditation and chanting during a year spent with friends in New England. I did not go to the temple at that time, but I share this story to make it clear that my mother was a sincere spiritual aspirant who was open to the Divine touching others through a tradition different from her own. She was not narrow-minded.

I have many stories to tell about how delightful, peaceful, prayerful and self-controlled my mother was. She was also kind and compassionate, providing emotional support to friends who had lost their parents during the influenza pandemic of 1918, throughout their lives. I learned much from my mother and received

spiritual guidance that helped me get my life in order and grow spiritually. I went to church with her every week, and even studied theology and participated in different service and educational projects at church.

When I was 39 years old, my mother died of leukaemia. I felt that I had not only lost a mother but a spiritual guide and pillar of strength as well. I prayed intensely after her death and received a clear message that she would continue to guide me. Five months later, in 1989, I met Amma for the first time.

My first impression of Amma was a recognition of a spiritual energy that was already familiar to me, but it wasn't until my second visit a week later, when I received darshan for the first time, that I realized I had been guided to Amma as the next step on my spiritual path. Surely my mother had guided me to her.

“Children, the coolness of the breeze, the beams of the moon, and all things of this world are permeated by divine consciousness. Knowing and experiencing this truth is the goal of human life.”

—Amma

Amma’s words helped me understand that I had finally found my true spiritual path: “Children, the coolness of the breeze, the beams of the moon, and all things of this world are permeated by divine consciousness. Knowing and experiencing this truth is the goal of human life.” This was what I wanted!

I saw Amma at several venues that year and had many beautiful and meaningful experiences with her: deep meditations, perfect inner peace, a feeling of inspiration, moments of exaltation, increased physical and mental strength, and a sense of inner guidance. I began attending programs and doing *seva* (selfless service) at

the San Ramon Ashram right away. All these brought me closer to Amma. I felt a surprising ease and resonance with Hindu practices and teachings.

Nevertheless, my mind kept doubting: “What would my mother think of this choice of spiritual path? How would she feel about my being devoted to Amma?” I had forgotten how she once suggested I visit a local Hindu temple or that I had felt a strong conviction that she would guide me spiritually after her death.

Over the course of that year, I went through the process that always takes place after the death of a loved one: I sifted through her personal

possessions, clearing things out, giving away precious items to friends, reading through her old letters, gazing at old photographs, and going through boxes, bags, closets and coat pockets. Often, I would learn things about her that I hadn't known or had known only imperfectly. Again, I would wonder, "What would my mother think of my being with Amma now? Did she really guide me to Amma?"

Finally, I finished going through everything; there was only one cloth purse left. As I opened the purse, I thought,

"If my mother has any final message for me, it will be in this purse."

I emptied out the contents of the purse — a comb, bobby pins, a lipstick, a compact, a cotton hanky — the usual accoutrements of a 1950's Mom. I felt vaguely disappointed, thinking that there was no final message after all. And then I noticed a lump at the bottom corner of the purse. I dug down into the purse with my fingers, and pulled out a Hershey's Chocolate Kiss, Amma's *prasad* candy! 🍫

— *Kasturi Karen Mattern, USA*

"Whatever we give the world comes back to us. If we sow a seed, the earth returns a harvest that is a hundred-fold more than what we sowed. The merit accruing from good actions helps us not only in our present life but also ensures an auspicious future. The real success of life lies in giving more than we take."

— Amma