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

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# Child-like Heart

Children, the rampant selfishness and egoism found in society today are smothering the tiny world of children's innocent play and laughter. At present, we are familiar only with cunning and artificial smiles, which are not really smiles, only a stretching of the lips. There is no sincerity behind them. We must reclaim the child's world, filled with innocent play and laughter. A child's heart is lying dormant within each one of us. Without awakening it, we can never experience peace or joy.

A child-like heart does not mean childishness, which refers to indiscriminate and immature behaviour. A child-like heart is different; it refers to the attitude of a beginner, the curiosity and enthusiasm to learn about everything without becoming bored. There is wisdom in a child-like heart. Some might say that a child has no discernment. But he is wise enough to know that he can depend on no one but his mother.

A child plays with abandon, enjoying himself and forgetting the world around him. Even if he gets angry or sad, he forgets it instantly. His heart is light



and free. He finds joy in small things. As a result, his enthusiasm is inexhaustible. He has an insatiable curiosity about everything. These are the hallmarks of a child-like heart.

Some children tell Amma, “My friend’s mother is suffering from cancer. His father has no job, and they have no food to eat at home. O Amma, please help his father get a good job!”

All of us have within us such a child-like heart, which longs to share the sorrows of others and to console them. This is manifest in childhood.


A little girl’s friend died. The girl went to her friend’s home. When she returned, her father asked her, “What did you do there?”

“I consoled my friend’s mother,” she said.

“How did you do that?” her father asked.

“I sat in her lap and cried with her.”

The hearts of children become emotionally attached to other people, birds, animals, flowers and butterflies. They become sad when they see the pain of even a tiny insect. We, too, had this quality when we were children but lost it as we grew older. We have since become embodiments of selfishness and egoism.

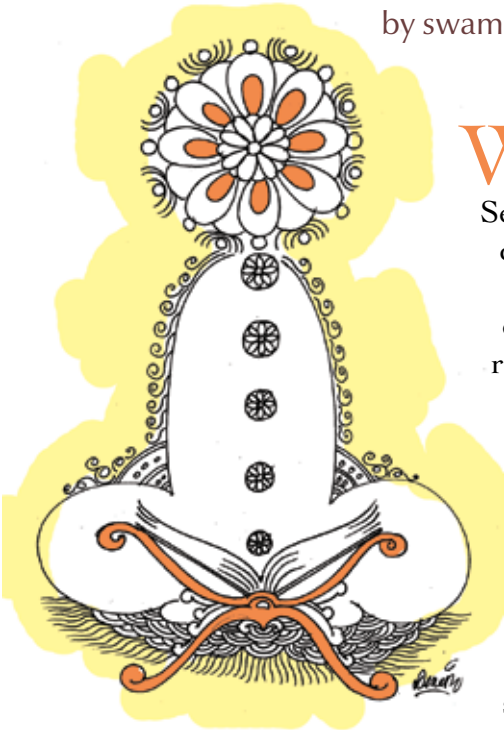
There is still a child-like heart within us all. If we can awaken it, we can progress towards a joyful and successful future. 

A child-like heart does not mean childishness, but the attitude of a beginner, the curiosity and enthusiasm to learn about everything without becoming bored.

# Awareness of the Truth that Overcomes Death

by swami tureeyamritananda puri

**W**hat bestows dignity and nobility on life is Self-knowledge, not wealth or position. But Self-knowledge dawns only when the ego has been routed. Ego refers to the body-centric 'I' sense. One should evolve to identifying with the Self by gaining Self-knowledge. This knowledge uplifts mortal man to a level higher than that of even the gods, who will then start worshipping him.



The Upanishads, which contain the essence of the Vedas, discuss Self-knowledge. It is through Self-knowledge that one understands the real 'I' within oneself. That said, studying the Upanishads is not enough. One must perform penance to realize the Truth. Anyone can study the Upanishads, but that will not awaken Self-knowledge. The scriptures merely point the way to the goal, like a finger would point to indicate an object. But the scriptures are not the final destination. Let me quote relevant lines from *Amritaḍhara*:

The scriptures point the way  
to the goal, which the  
finger isn't.  
If we give the way the  
time of day,  
we can attain  
enlightenment.

No one will reach the goal by holding on to the fingertip. To attain Self-realization, one must do *sādhana* (spiritual

practices). *Tapas* (austerities) and Self-inquiry have been the time-honoured way in Bharat (India). One cannot become great by scriptural knowledge alone. What is the point of having scriptural knowledge but no insight? It would be like saying that one can swim, but not in water! 'Insight' here is nothing less than realization of the Truth. The obstacle to this realization is the ego, i.e. the manifestation of ignorance. Desire, which springs from the ego, is the cause of sorrow. Amma says,

Like the wavelets that  
merge  
to form a massive surge,  
desire increases  
until life's boat capsizes.

We ourselves cause the boat of our lives to capsize in the ocean of *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death.

The experiences of joy and sorrow are closely connected to the ego. When the 'I' sense ceases to be, the experiences

of joy and sorrow will also cease; so, too, samsara. The most important sacrifice is that of the ego. Only when we renounce it will desires cease and the sorrows of samsara end. Only when desires cease will Self-awareness arise. In other words, the heart becomes pure only when desire is renounced. Self-knowledge dawns only in a pure heart, and only then is sorrow eliminated.

We can get rid of the ego only through an attitude of self-surrender. When we defer to God, the 'I' sense will not cast its shadow; the ego will not survive. Thereafter, every action will become a worship of the divine. Once we see work as worship, we will not be concerned with the fruits of *karma* (action). When we are indifferent to the fruits, karma will no longer bind us. When every action is dedicated to God, the sense of doer-ship vanishes. Consequently, there is no one and nothing to

experience. Karma evolves into karma yoga, which helps to purify the mind. Mental purity brings about Self-knowledge, which leads to *moksha* (spiritual liberation). This is the secret of karma expounded in the Upanishads and the *Bhagavad Gita*.

In short, thoughts must become actions, which must be divine. If actions are to be divine, our thoughts must first be divinized, for it is thought that evolves into action. Thought is subtle action, and action is gross thought. If thoughts do not become actions, there will be no life, which is dynamic and creative. Life is not a stagnant ditch but ever flowing, clear water.

Printed words can never uplift anyone. Only we can uplift ourselves. We are our own friend or enemy; so says the *Bhagavad Gita*. We can uplift ourselves only by purifying our mind. If we succeed in doing so, we are our own friend; if not, we are our own foe.

Human life is precious. Let us not waste it. Egoism and ignorance drag human life down to the animal level. Selfishness sprouts from the ego. If we can free ourselves from egoism, ignorance and selfishness, we will surpass even the gods. To do so, the most important thing we must do is purify the heart, and this ought to be our primary concern. We should cleanse the heart through karma, *bhakti* (devotion), yoga or *jnana* (knowledge). Amma repeatedly reminds us that we must rediscover the simplicity of a child-like heart, and that child-like simplicity is the most visible manifestation of God.

Once we lose that simplicity, it will be difficult to reclaim it. When we lose our inner purity, we lose our Self, which is the most tragic loss. One who does not have a pure heart can never accomplish anything great. Loss of the Self is the biggest of man's

losses, and Self-knowledge is his biggest gain.

Amma says that we often defile the heart with selfishness, wickedness, ignorance and desires. In order to cleanse it, we must become selfless. Giving up wickedness and hypocrisy, we must cultivate detachment and honesty. We must work disinterestedly for the good of all without labouring under the yoke of desires and the longing for sensual pleasures. Abandoning the misconception that we are the body, we must work, keeping the goal of Self-knowledge before us. Thoughts and actions can either defile the heart or cleanse it. Therefore, they must become pure.

As far as the scriptures are concerned, karma is a sadhana for self-purification. Liberation is possibly only through knowledge. Sri Shankaracharya makes the same point in the *Viveka Chudamani*:

*cittasya shuddhaye karma  
na tu vastupalabhaye*



Amma repeatedly reminds us that we must rediscover the simplicity of a child-like heart, and that child-like simplicity is the most visible manifestation of God.

*vastusiddhir vicarena na  
kincit karmakotibhibh*

Actions can purify the mind but do not bestow Self-realization. That is possible only through Self-inquiry. (11)

Similarly, “*karmana baddhyate jantub; vidya vimucyate*” — Karma binds beings; jnana liberates them (*Mababharata*, Shanti Parva, 233.7).

That said, the scriptures do not negate karma. They only clarify that it cannot bestow liberation directly. Undoubtedly, karma purifies. Without mental purity, neither knowledge nor liberation is possible. This is why the scriptures say that karma must be done sincerely and that thoughts must be pure. These are means to reclaim the purity of our heart.

The ego casts its shadow over all our actions. We find it difficult to act as an instrument in the hands of the divine because we can neither shake off the feeling that we are the doers nor do we know how to. By promoting itself, the ego suppresses the sense of the divine. The notion that we are the body is so deeply entrenched that we are unable to defer to the divine. We revel, not in knowledge, but in our ego. Our true nature is divine. Egoism and godliness are polar opposites. The ego can never enhance our innate divinity.

“I know this.” “I donated this.” “I’m benevolent.” By thinking or speaking thus, we are not giving sufficient importance to knowledge, giving or benevolence, only to the ‘I.’ If

we think that we are living a life of renunciation, we are giving importance to the 'I' sense, not to renunciation itself. Such an 'I' is body-centric and does not refer to the spiritual self. Had it been Self-centric, we would not go around proclaiming that we gave this, bought this or did that, because the Self is neither a doer nor an experiencer. Where these two are present, the body-centric ego or 'I' sense will predominate, and there will be karma and the fruits thereof, too. The latter takes the form of joy and sorrow, depending on the sense of doer-ship.

But the Self has neither joy nor sorrow because it neither acts nor experiences. It prevails eternally, like life. There is no ego involved. This is why the sages in the Upanishad told their disciples, who sought Brahman, "We don't know if we know about It. However, we cannot say that we don't know either. We heard from those who realized It. We shall

try to explain It to you in the same way, too."

Who can say anything about the Supreme and how? The sages did not even say, "I heard." They used the plural: "We heard." Importance is given to knowledge, not to the ego, i.e. what matters is *what* is to be known and not *who* knows.

One who studies life should also study death. One who has understood death knows that life does not end with death, which has no place in the eternity of pure existence.

It is this secret of death that Nachiketās, the smart and eager student in the *Kāthopanishad*, asks of Dharmadeva, his teacher and knower of Brahman: "Lord, some say that the Self continues to exist even after death, whereas others say that everything ends with death. Who is right? What is the imperishable secret? Please tell me. Do not let me, who has taken refuge in You, return empty handed."


What Nachiketas learns is that only life prevails; death does not. Life is the name for that which prevails, i.e. unending awareness. We mistake the body's destruction for death. Only those who never understood life succumb to death. Death is an accident, like birth. But life is natural and eternal.

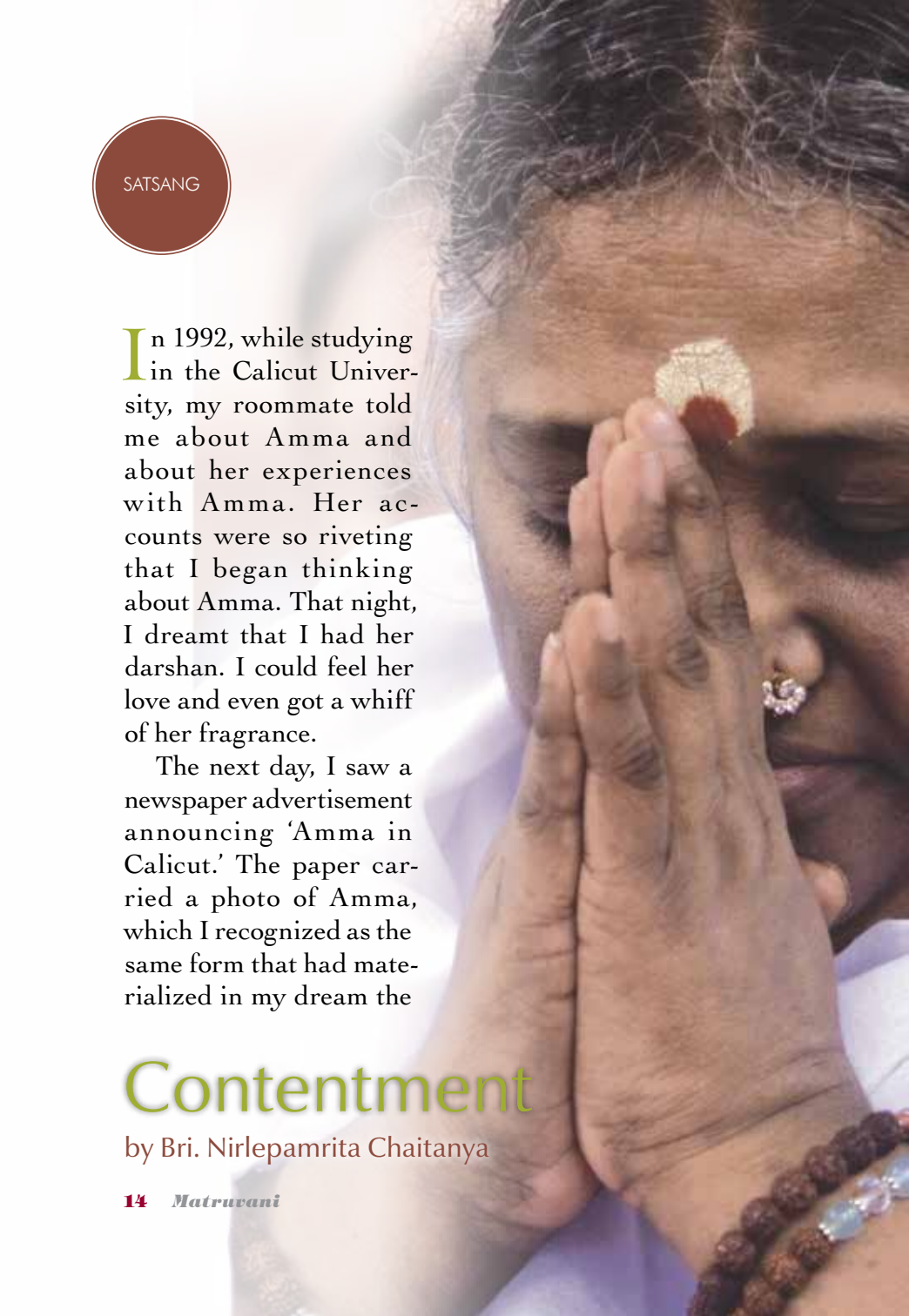
Spirituality is knowing that life is eternal awareness and existence. If birth is the putting on of new clothes, death is the taking off of old ones. The Upanishads tell us to conquer death through karma and to attain immortality through jnana. This requires tremendous effort and alertness, like undertaking a long journey along a razor's edge. But it is our destiny.

Only if we bypass the thorn  
can we enjoy the  
fragrance of the bower.  
Only if we breach the  
final bourn  
will eternal life flower.  
(*Amritakanti*, 32)

Life is eternal. Death has nothing to do with life; it applies only to the body. Evolution reaches its peak in humans. The circle resolves into a dot. Words dissolve in silence. The heart reclaims its child-like simplicity. We realize that the real 'I' is the Self and that the Self is Brahman. Death has no place here. To put it poetically:

The body starts to die  
from the moment of birth.  
And from the day of  
death begins rebirth.  
The immortal Self  
assumes a mortal coil  
as an interim place to  
toil. (*Amritakanti*, 44)

When we abide in the body, we remain mortal, but when we identify with our divinity, we become immortal. Life is eternal, luminous and intelligent. Death is dark and ignorant. Birth is not the beginning of life, and death is not its end. Life is without beginning or end. 



In 1992, while studying in the Calicut University, my roommate told me about Amma and about her experiences with Amma. Her accounts were so riveting that I began thinking about Amma. That night, I dreamt that I had her darshan. I could feel her love and even got a whiff of her fragrance.

The next day, I saw a newspaper advertisement announcing 'Amma in Calicut.' The paper carried a photo of Amma, which I recognized as the same form that had materialized in my dream the

## Contentment

by Bri. Nirlepamrita Chaitanya

night before. My urge to meet Amma began to grow.

At 7 a.m. the next morning, I went to the venue of Amma's program and joined the darshan line. At 4 p.m., I was still in the queue. As I had to be back in the hostel before 6 p.m., I decided to leave. As I was nearing the gate, a man came running to me, saying that Amma was calling me. I thought it was a case of mistaken identity. How could she possibly call me when she had not even met me? I ignored him and started walking away. The man blocked my way and said, "I must take you to Amma. It was she who told me to take you to her."

That is how I first went to Amma. When she saw me, she behaved as if she had known me for a long time. Hugging me, Amma said, "How can you leave without getting darshan?" It was the same darshan I had in my dream! That day, I realized that even though I had everything, there

was a big emptiness in my life. Deep in my heart, I had been craving something. I did not know what that was until this darshan: it was the bond with a Satguru.

In 1996, Amma let me join the ashram. Before that, I had been living in the Sarada Math. I loved the ambience of spiritual discipline there, and the residents of that ashram were very loving to me. When I started living in Amritapuri, I realized how different life is in the presence of a divine incarnation. Amma is Parashakti, the Almighty. She is Goddess Bhavatarini, whom Sri Ramakrishna worshipped and who incarnated as Amma.

Amma provides direct guidance to each aspirant here. All that a seeker needs is available here: archana, scriptural and Sanskrit classes, meditation, yoga classes, chanting, puja, satsangs, bhajans... How can one not be happy here? If one cannot be happy here, where else can one be happy?

Lord Krishna says,  
*yādreccha-labha-santushto  
dvandatito-vimatsarah  
samah siddhavasiddhau ca  
krtvapi na nibadhyate*  
He who is content with  
whatever comes to him  
without effort, who has  
overcome all dualities  
and envy, who is even-  
minded in success and  
failure, even if he acts,  
his actions will not bind.  
(*Bhagavad Gita*, 4.22)

Amma tells us the same thing:  
that, like other decisions, hap-  
piness is also a decision.

A karma yogi is satisfied  
with whatever comes his way.  
He strives to free himself from  
jealousy and rivalry, and from  
dualities such as joy and sor-  
row, success and failure, and  
praise and contempt. He does  
his duty dispassionately and  
remains even-minded in vic-  
tory and defeat.

Amma tells the story of an  
elderly king who wanted to  
find a successor to the throne.

He did not have children. In  
such cases, the practice in the  
kingdom was to send a royal  
elephant out with a garland in  
its trunk. The person it gar-  
landed would be the next  
ruler.

The elephant garlanded a  
beggar, who tried to run away,  
not knowing what was hap-  
pening. Soldiers caught him,  
took him to the palace, and  
told him that he was going to  
be the next king. In due course,  
the old king died, and the  
erstwhile beggar was crowned.  
After a few years on the throne,  
he wanted to re-experience his  
old life. Putting on tattered  
rags, he went out.

Some people gave him alms.  
Some threw food into his beg-  
ging bowl. A few shooed him  
away. He recalled how he had  
reacted to each of these situa-  
tions in his earlier life. He  
used to be elated when he re-  
ceived a lot of food or money.  
If he received nothing or was  
shouted at, he used to feel sad  
and hurt. Now, knowing that

he was a king, with the royal treasury at his disposal, he was moved by neither generosity nor miserliness. He was able to accept whatever he received with equanimity.

*Mabatmas* (spiritually illumined souls) are like that. They are *purna* (whole, perfect). Nothing external affects them. We see this perfect contentment and equanimity in Amma all the time. She sees her own *svarupa* (true nature), which is pure consciousness, in others, too.

Most people tend to compare themselves with others. When we think we are doing better than others, we become proud. When they have done better than us, we feel sad and jealous. *Ajnani* (knower of the Truth) knows that we are all parts of a whole, and is therefore not affected by pride or jealousy. His mind is always calm and steady. He does his duties for the welfare of the world. He acts as if he were an instrument in the hands of

God, and so, lacks the sense of being a doer. His actions are not prompted by *vasanas* (latent tendencies) and do not create new *vasanas*. His actions are a blessing to the world.

These qualities are inborn in Amma. It is difficult to understand or evaluate her actions. If we observe how she receives devotees, we can intuit her total lack of egoism. Amma becomes totally identified with the happiness or sorrow of each person who comes to her; the subject and object merge into the non-dual one.

Some people ask what one gets from meeting Amma. Let me recount an incident I witnessed during darshan. A young man was brought in a wheelchair to Amma. In total distress, he described to Amma how he had been suffering from a serious disease for the last decade. Amma embraced him and also cried. When his darshan ended, the

man seemed to have received a new lease of life. An unknown peace and satisfaction lit up his face. He said, "My friends and relatives deserted me a long time ago. But now I have a mother! Even if I do not recover from the disease, I don't mind because I have finally met someone who shares my pain. But from now on, I will not be sad, because if I cry, my Amma will also cry."

In her presence, we forget ourselves and the world, and reach a state wherein we do not need anything, i.e. we are content. This is the biggest gain one could have.

The next person who went for darshan had happy news. Amma shared his joy wholeheartedly. He, too, gained total satisfaction.

How is Amma able to satisfy everyone? All her actions arise from a sense of completeness. She is ever content. She does not depend on anything external for her contentment.

Amma is helping us turn within and become self-reliant so that we stop leaning on outer objects for our happiness.

In 2006, Amma told me to go to the Kannur Amrita Vidyalayam (school). She added, "I'm going to make you live there alone."

I tried my best to wriggle out of it, saying, "Amma, please don't send me there alone. I don't know anything. What can I do there on my own?"

But Amma did not relent. She said, "Just be there. I will do everything."

How can we have doubts or fears when we become an instrument in Amma's hands? When we depend fully on her, surrender becomes natural. She was also teaching me that the mind should not cave in when it encounters difficult situations. Instead, we should accept them as God's or the Guru's will, and strive to move forward.



Once, a brahmachari asked Amma, “What do we do when others consider our patience a weakness?”

Amma replied, “Son, how does it matter to you if others consider you weak? Doesn’t your question mean that you expect recognition from others? You have come to the spiritual path to realize your Self. Why should you worry about what others think of you?”

Through her response, Amma is trying to make us cultivate an attitude of accepting all experiences patiently, and to develop equanimity in the face of both praise and scorn.

One New Year’s Eve, Amma came to the hall. After the prayer, when she started distributing prasad, people rushed to her and surrounded her. I tried moving towards her to get the prasad, but could not, owing to the rush. Questions arose in my mind. How can I navigate my way

through this thick crowd? If I wait for some more time, will I get the prasad? What if I don’t receive any prasad? Then, a contrary thought came to me. Isn’t everything we receive here Amma’s prasad? If so, let me be patient and content.

Suddenly, Amma turned and so did the crowd around her. I do not know what happened, but the next moment, I found Amma in front of me. She was distributing the prasad with her right hand. I stood dazed and even forgot to extend my hand. With her left hand, Amma took my right hand and put some prasad into it. She even pressed my fingers on the prasad to keep it in my palm so that it would not fall out. A moment later, she moved away, distributing prasad to others. The crowd also moved away along with her.

I was totally stunned. I could not believe what had happened. I had not moved a single step from where I had

been standing, and yet I had received the prasad in my hands. How? When I tried to imagine everything as God's will, Amma's prasad had reached my hands! We may not always get such a mind, but I try to contemplate on this experience often.

Discontentment can be dangerous, as the following story reveals. A fisherman found a large and beautiful pearl. But there was a scratch on it. He thought that if he removed the blemish, it would become the most beautiful pearl in the world. He started filing the pearl's surface to remove the stain, but it did not disappear. The fisherman continued filing it vigorously until the whole pearl was eventually ground to powder. The scratch on the pearl disappeared; but, so, too, the pearl!

Nothing in creation is perfect. If the fisherman had kept that invaluable pearl as it was, he would not have lost it. However, his dissatisfaction and

ambition caused him to destroy the treasure.

Once, I went to Udupi for a school inspection, where I was given a gift. When I returned, I unwrapped the gift. It was a beautiful silver vessel! The moment I saw it, I decided to give it to Amma, who was abroad then. When she returned, I went with the gift for Amma's darshan. When I was near Amma, I felt a little embarrassed about giving her the vessel. So, I tried to slowly push it under her chair without her noticing it.

Suddenly, someone snatched it from my hands. It was Amma! Raising it with her left hand, she asked, "Where did you get this?"

I said, "Amma, I received it as a gift when I went to a school in Udupi for an inspection."

"You mean to say that you accepted a bribe?" demanded Amma.

I tried to make Amma understand that it was not a bribe

at all. I gave the example of how the ashram gives books to guests as gifts.

As if she had not heard what I said, Amma said, "So, you accepted a bribe." She then raised the gift and showed it to everyone, saying, "Our children have been recognized by the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education). They are being invited to inspect schools."

Then Amma told me, "Daughter, whenever you go for inspections to schools, do not accept any gift. If you are offered a gift, return it, saying that you have accepted it, but let it remain in that school."


I agreed. As I was getting up, I told Amma that I could not tell her about my inspection earlier as she was not in India then. Amma said that she knew about it as she had read my letter.

What did Amma mean? I had not given her any letter. Later, after I returned to Kannur, I realized what had

happened. As I stay alone in the school, as a matter of self-discipline, I used to write letters to Amma whenever I had to go out, and would keep these letters in a diary. I had done so before going to Udupi.

Amma's words revealed to me that she knows all that I do and think. This experience inspired me to continue writing to Amma.

Since then, whenever I go for school inspections, I do exactly what Amma told me to do with gifts. My hosts would look surprised, but I feel a deep satisfaction carrying out Amma's instructions.

Each one of our thoughts pass through Amma. Knowing this, let us try to tune ourselves more deeply with Amma. This should be a constant endeavour. If we can sustain this effort, every moment in life will become a precious experience. May Amma bless us all with an attitude of acceptance and surrender. 



SATSANG

# Key to Divine Grace

by br. jairam  
(david gracia linero), spain

**T**hat morning, there were so many people in the darshan hall in Barcelona that one could hardly walk. Outside, the queue for the afternoon darshan tokens began to snake around the block. There was an announcement: “Owing to the large number of people, Amma is giving darshan faster than usual so that she can meet all her children. Amma asks us to be patient and understanding.”

Amma had given clear instructions on how darshan tokens should be distributed on days with so many people. Only the elderly, the ill, or women in advanced stages of pregnancy should be allowed to bypass the queue and be brought directly for darshan.

Because Amma's Barcelona programs were taking place during a weekend, the crowds were even larger than usual. For Amma, this meant sitting for hours together, with hardly any break to eat, sleep or go to the toilet. She also had to field questions from reporters while giving darshan.

Amidst that madness, two busloads of devotees came from Valencia, and the group had to leave quickly. Several people from that group asked me how they could get darshan soon. I conveyed Amma's instructions to the leaders of this group. A short time later, another person asked me the same question. This happened over and over again

throughout the morning. Finally, the manager of the group told me that they were leaving and could not wait any longer. I pointed out that their token numbers would soon be displayed on the screen. When they pressured me repeatedly to let them go for darshan, I finally blurted out that they could go in small groups. I said that without thinking.

Soon, darshan lines had become disorganized, with people having the correct token numbers joining the group from Valencia. People were confused and Amma looked concerned. When she asked what was happening, the people near her told her that people with later token numbers were coming up earlier. Realizing my mistake, my face turned red.

"Who gave them permission?" Amma asked.

My red face turned purple. Amma summoned the person in charge of distributing

tokens and started scolding him. I could not bear to see her scolding someone for a mistake I had made. I moved closer to Amma and told her what had happened: "Amma, it was me. I was the one who let them go ahead, because they were going to leave without getting darshan."

"Who gave you permission to do that? Who?" Amma asked. She looked very angry. Picking up a bunch of petals from the basket near her, she threw them at my head, saying, "You can go now."

I tried to explain why I had acted the way I did, but Amma just repeated the same thing: "Go. Go!"

I left with my head covered with flower petals and my heart in despair, and went to sit behind the stage. For a few minutes, I could neither speak nor think. The silence that enveloped me felt strange. Then I went to the bathroom to cry. I was in there for more than half an hour.

Amma had never been so angry with me before. I began to feel that she was also angry with me for mistakes I had made a long time ago, mistakes that I was aware of but which no one had ever pointed out or corrected.

The rest of the day, I stayed away from my usual responsibilities, especially since some of them were behind Amma and I did not feel that I could go near her again. That night, when I went to sleep, some petals that were still behind my ears fell on the pillow.

When I awoke the next morning, I felt ashamed of what had happened. While brooding, a memory came to mind.

When I was little, my family was poor. We were seven brothers, and we often had just enough to feed ourselves. One day, my mother cooked lentils for lunch. I hated lentils and would usually only pretend to eat them. Later, I would throw them away. My father knew

this and, that day, he got tired of my attitude. When I got up from the table, he asked me, “Where are you going? You haven’t finished eating. Sit down and eat.”

He was determined to continue sitting with me until I had finished eating, and I knew that at some point, he would have to return to work. So, I started eating very slowly to kill time.

My father said, “We don’t have money to eat anything else. Your mother and I are working every day, and we can’t afford to throw food away. From now on, you will like lentils!”

When I refused to eat several times, my father pulled my ears. I then started gobbling down the lentils without even tasting what I was eating. When I finished, my father locked himself in the bathroom. I heard him cry. That day, he was late for work.

Seeing my father upset and having my ears pulled made

me realize that my attitude was wrong. The next week, when there were lentils for lunch, I was the first of my brothers to finish eating what I had been served. My father looked pleased with me. I knew then that he had forgiven me, and I was happy. His forgiveness was enough to help me completely overcome my dislike for lentils.

When it was time to do translation seva behind Amma, I made an excuse to avoid going because I did not want Amma to be angry with me again. As a result, the person in charge of translating Amma’s responses into Spanish did not have a break. Nevertheless, I badly wanted to be by her side so that I could beg her for forgiveness, but I did not know how to do it.

On the one hand, I felt so guilty about what had happened that I did not want to bother her again, but on the other hand, I felt that I could not let more time pass. I needed

to talk to Amma. I went near her. When she saw me, she smiled and invited me to sit next to her. “Forgive me, Amma. I’m sorry. What I did was stupid. It won’t happen again.”

Amma smiled peacefully and said, “Son, Amma was only correcting you, nothing more.”

Her smile did not disappear. I stayed beside her for a long time. Her words were like a balm to my hurt mind. I was no longer in pain. The mistakes had been forgiven.

Being forgiven by a father fills a child’s heart with love and joy. Being corrected and forgiven by the Guru gives us the strength to continue traveling along the path to liberation. The Guru’s scolding is a big blessing in disguise. Unless the Master brings up our negativities, we will not become aware of them and will not be able to advance on the path. Our own ego will be an obstacle. If we have the

humility to see how flawed we are, the Guru will find it easier to shape our character. We, too, will find the going easier.

At the end of the *Lalita Sahasranama* (1,000 names of the Divine Mother), there is a mantra recited about the mistakes we may have made during the *archana* (chanting the divine names):

*mantrahinam kriyahinam  
bhaktihinam maheshvari  
yadpujitam maya devi  
paripurnam tadastute*

O Mother, I may have forgotten to chant many mantras. I may have forgotten to perform many rituals. I may have done it without proper devotion or attention. Kindly forgive my omissions, and make my worship full and complete with Your grace.

During the *archana*, our mind might not be focused on the mantras or might even stray away to something totally



different. The goal is total concentration in God. Amma says that we must continue trying to bring the mind back to the mantras again and again.

The prayer in which we seek forgiveness helps us to cultivate humility and to connect again to the divine. This invokes the compassion and forgiveness of the Divine Mother.


Forgiveness is like a key; turning it opens the door to divine grace. The Master will forgive us again and again, but as Amma says, if we make a mistake while writing on a piece of paper, erase the mistake, and then do this repeatedly, the paper will tear.

Life is like an endless archana. We are given endless opportunities to stay anchored in the present moment and to connect to God. If we immerse ourselves in the beauty and power of life, we will find fulfillment. But if we allow ourselves to be carried away by laziness or if we do not learn

from our mistakes, life will feel onerous and burdensome.

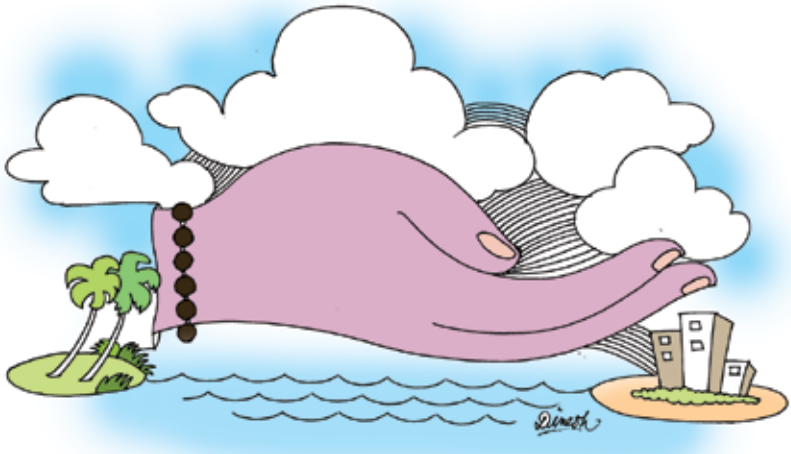
During the last night in Barcelona, I approached Amma from the side as she was giving Devi Bhava darshan, and stood watching her patiently embracing all her children. A prayer arose within me, one that I repeat every time I make a mistake or feel a deep longing for God: "O Amma, please guide me. Don't let go of my hand. Hold it tightly. Even if I want to let go of your hand, do not let me go. Hold on to me even more tightly. Never leave me, even if I try to abandon you."

When I had finished chanting this prayer, Amma turned and gazed at me. She smiled and nodded her head, her eyes locked on mine.

Just as Amma forgives us repeatedly, may we learn to forgive others for their mistakes. May our hearts be filled with love and remain ever open to the shower of the Guru's grace. 

# Arrived as Tourists, Returned as Devotees

by Subhash Kataria, India



**I**t was August 2014. I had just retired and wanted to take a much-needed vacation. Since my wife and I had not been to Kerala before, we went to Ashtamudi and Munnar. While we were staying in a resort, my wife noticed that day trips to Amma's Amritapuri Ashram were being organized as part of the resort's sight-

seeing program, and she expressed a desire to go there. She had seen Amma once, years ago, at Shivaji Park in Mumbai. Although I knew nothing about Amma, I agreed to go to the ashram, as we had ample time and little to do.

This single decision changed the course of my life. In hindsight, I firmly believe that it was Amma's way of calling us to her.

We took a taxi to the ashram, arriving at around 2:30 p.m. Darshan was going on in the main hall, which was crowded with devotees. When I saw Amma for the first time, I was fascinated. She was sitting in the centre of the stage and receiving a stream of devotees. When we inquired if we could have darshan, we were told that we needed tokens, that the token distribution had ended for the day, and that even if we obtained them, we would have to wait for a long time, as there was a large number of devotees.

We were disappointed and left the hall. While we were walking past the Matruvani Office, a brahmachari approached us and asked if we were new to the ashram. We told him that we were tourists who had come for the first time, and that we did not know much about the ashram or its activities. We added that we were impressed by the token system and would have liked to have darshan, but that as our taxi was waiting, we had to leave soon in order to make it back to the resort in time.

Hearing this, the brahmachari said that Amma would want us to have darshan. In a few moments, with his help, we found ourselves on the stage. Thus, within 30 minutes of our arrival in the ashram for the first time, we were on the stage, waiting to have darshan, even though we knew no one here. This gave us an inkling of Amma's divine powers. Today, I can say with all certainty that Amma

herself had orchestrated these events — this is my firm belief. She wanted me to come to her and this was her way of welcoming me.

Even the wait on the stage proved to be enjoyable. *Krishna Jayanti*, Lord Krishna's Birthday, was approaching, and a group of devotees from Gujarat had come to receive Amma's blessings. They took the opportunity to dress her up as Krishna. I found the experience blissful and enjoyed every moment of it.

After that, a group of infants were brought to Amma for her blessings. The pure delight and joy on the faces of the babies and their parents as Amma lovingly fed the infants solid food for the first time was truly a sight to behold.

I do not know how or why: I felt that I was in the presence of a *mahatma* (spiritually illumined soul). It was love at first sight. I sat mesmerized and immersed in the feeling of divinity. I felt comfortable and

at ease in Amma's presence, and was thrilled when Amma gave me a hug.

After darshan, my wife and I walked around the ashram and came upon the bookshop, where we bought a few books. Throughout this time, I completely forgot that the taxi was waiting and that we had to get back to the resort.

The very next day, I started reading the biography of Amma and learnt about her fascinating journey from a challenging childhood to being recognized and hailed globally as a divine being.

When my wife and I returned to Mumbai, the longing to be with Amma again began to grow. I spoke about her to my friend who is more than a sister to me, and she said that she, too, had heard about Amma and wanted to come along with us to meet her. We soon learnt that Amma would be in Palakkad in early January 2016 and decided to fly down to Coimbatore and take

a taxi from there to Palakkad. It was here that we were once again blessed to be in Amma's divine, physical presence. Though we came prepared for a long wait this time, we nevertheless found that we were called to the stage much earlier than expected. Once again, I felt that divine presence drawing us like iron filings to a magnet.

After this, we started visiting Amma regularly. We would eagerly study her tour schedule to look for opportunities to meet her. When Amma went to Pune, we went there. When Amma came to Navi Mumbai, we were there. Over the past few years, we have grabbed every opportunity to visit Amma. Receiving her divine hug and blessings is always such a thrill. Today, we just want to sit near her and soak in the experience.

A few years ago, my wife was afflicted by the Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), a rare medical condition in which the

immune system attacks the nerves. She was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and could not move at all. She later narrated that while she was there, Amma came to her in Devi Bhava and told her, "I have come. You do not need to worry. You will recover!" Indeed, by Amma's grace, my wife recovered fully.

Once, while returning to Mumbai from Kerala, I inadvertently left my bag behind in a trolley at the Mumbai Airport, late at night. I realized it only after reaching home. The bag contained money and valuables. Mumbai Airport being such a busy and crowded place, I had lost hope that I would ever get the bag back. However, my wife insisted that I return to the airport at once, and said that she would pray to Amma to take care of my bag. At the airport, I discovered that security personnel had found my bag. Thus, by Amma's grace, I got my bag back without any difficulty.

On another occasion, I left my mobile phone in a lounge at Kochi Airport, and realized it only after I had boarded the aircraft. But the Airport Police did not let me leave the aircraft to return to the lounge. Once again, I turned to Amma for help. The police sent a constable to search for the mobile. By Amma's grace, the mobile was found and returned to me just before take-off!

Today, I enjoy a life of spirituality. I study the *Bhagavad*

*Gita* and practise IAM™ (Integrated Amrita Meditation) daily. In these days of the lockdown, I am grateful that Amma is giving us her virtual darshan every other week, and boosting our morale through precious words of advice and encouragement.

I eagerly look forward to the day when I can return to the ashram and join the queue of devotees seeking Amma's blessings and her wonderful hug. 🌸

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*(continued from page 40)*

continued, "It was here that the Kurukshetra War was waged between the Pandavas and the Kauravas at the conjunction of the Dvapara and Kali yugas. Samanta-panchaka was also where the momentous mace duel between Bhima and Duryodhana took place.

"This beautiful and holy land is beyond description. It was where dharma and *adharma* (unrighteousness) were discussed and debated at

length and in depth. It bore witness to the delivery of the *Bhagavad Gita* and other dharma discourses. It was where 18 *akshaubhanis* were assembled for war. One *akshaubhani* consists of 21,870 chariots, 21,870 elephants, 65,610 horses and 109,350 soldiers. In the Mahabharata War, which lasted 18 days, all these were completely decimated. What remained were only the eternal truths." 🌸



## Chapter 15: Yoga of the Supreme Self

by Prof. V. Muraleedhara Menon, India

**W**e have reached the shores of the vast ocean that is the *Bhagavad Gita*. In this chapter, all deliberations are concluded. The next two chapters are appendices and the final one is an epilogue. As the philosophy of life propounded so far ends here, the Lord calls it a *shastra* (scripture) at the end of the chapter:

*iti gubhyatamam shastrami-  
dam uktam mayanagha...*

O sinless one (Arjuna),  
what I have uttered is the  
most secret principle of  
the scriptures... (15.20)

At the start of this chapter, *samsara* (phenomenal world) is compared to a banyan tree. This colossal tree has countless branches that are replete with the *triguna* (three attributes, viz. *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*, i.e. harmony, passion and inertia). This tree must be felled with the axe of *awanga* (detachment). We must get rid of *rajas* and *tamas*, enhance and purify *sattva*, overcome attachment to it, and become totally detached.

*Karma* (action) becomes perfect when it is informed by *bhakti* (devotion) and *jnana* (knowledge). We must not undo the braid of *bhakti*, *jnana* and *karma*. They are the triple foundations of life. That said, the path of devotion, which softens sufferings, is easy.

Where there is *bhakti*, *karma* will not feel onerous. Thus, *bhakti* makes *sadhana* (spiritual practice) pleasant.

We can rise above *triguna* only when we gain Self-knowledge. To do so, we must continue to nourish *sattva* and engage in *karma* that is grounded in *bhakti* and *jnana* and which aims to eliminate egoistic attachment. We must work relentlessly. There are no limits to *sadhana*. While doing *sadhana*, we ought to feel happy and cheerful. The Lord explains how in this chapter.

Everything in this world can be divided into three: the worshipful Lord; we, the worshippers; everything else, the material for worship. When our whole life becomes one long act of service to and worship of God, our actions become blissful. If the Supreme is eternal, we, his devotees, are eternal, too. He is *Purushottaman*, the best among beings. He is *Vibhu*, the Almighty. We are his servants. We must



All the work we do must become worship. Through this unbroken worship, the 'I' sense falls away and our whole life becomes saturated by God-consciousness.

nourish such sanctifying thoughts every moment. Isn't creation transient? It is, but birth always follows death. The flowers used for worship yesterday cannot be reused today; the Lord must be adorned with fresh flowers.

Similarly, when our body dies, we will take on another body to serve the Lord. The very transience of creation ensures its perpetuity. Creation is an unbroken flow. Though flowing water changes constantly, fresh water keeps the flow unbroken. It is this perennial newness that lends beauty to phenomenal objects. Likewise, worship becomes joyful, and not tedious or repetitive, when sadhana remains ever fresh. The Almighty gives us new bodies and fresh items for worship so

that we can continue to serve Him with love. When we gain this conviction, life becomes truly blissful.

The *Gita* enjoins us to purify all our actions with devotion. It does not tell us to worship a little and spend the rest of our time in worldly pursuits. We must bring a 'worship mindset' to all our daily activities. We must consider the village we grew up in as a temple, and our neighbours as so many forms of God. We must keep the village clean in the same way that we would keep the temple pure and pristine. Likewise, all the work we do must become worship. Through this unbroken worship, the 'I' sense falls away and our whole life becomes saturated by God-consciousness.

While doing any work, we must do it not only with devotion but with discernment as well. Devotion and knowledge are not two different things. Seeing God everywhere is knowledge. Knowledge is the realization that “I am the eternal devotee of the eternal Lord. My life is for practising devotion.”

The *Gita* ends on an *Advaitic* (non-dual) note: life, God and creation are one. Herein lies the integration of karma, bhakti and jnana. Imagine a temple made of stone, an idol carved from stone, a devotee sculpted from stone standing before the shrine and holding flowers fashioned from stone. Temple, idol, devotee and flowers — all are made of the same material; the differences are only in form. Similarly, when we integrate jnana, bhakti and karma, we will see that the worshipper, the worshipped, and the means of worship are one. This is the consummation

of the *Purushottama Yoga*, the supreme yoga.

Once *parama-bhakti* (supreme devotion) dawns in our heart, all actions will be sweetened by bhakti and jnana. Where there is love, there is service. Service encompasses love and knowledge. When love and devotion are infused into all our actions, we attain *Purushottama Yoga*.

This chapter is the essence of the Vedas. The Vedas are not found in the pages of books; they are lived truths. The Vedas manifest when the fabric of life is woven from love, knowledge and service. The Lord says, “All Vedas point to me alone. I am the essence of all the Vedas. I am the Supreme Being.”

When we realize this supreme yoga in our life, all our actions will manifest the Vedas. Let us toil tirelessly, day and night, to attain this realization. ❧

*(to be continued)*



# Samanta-Panchaka and Parashurama

by Sanoop Sadanandan, India

As described previously, Sage Ugrashravas was devoutly welcomed by Sage Shounaka and other ascetics, who sat around him, eager to listen to and absorb lessons from the *Mahabharata*.

One of the listeners asked, “You were present when Sage Vaishampayana recited the *Mahabharata* to King

Janamejaya. You told us that on your way here, you visited holy places like Samanta-panchaka. What is the greatness of Samanta-panchaka?”

Ugrashravas spoke. “Long ago, at the conjunction of the *Treta* and *Dvapara yugas*,<sup>1</sup> Parashurama annihilated the entire race of *kshatriyas* (warriors). Among those well versed in weaponry, Parashurama was incomparable. In the *Mahabharata*, he is hailed as the *Paramaguru* (supreme teacher) in war strategy. His disciples included Bhishma, Drona and Karna. These disciples and their disciples led the Kurukshetra War.

“The trait of valour in Parashurama was evident right from his birth. He was from

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1 According to Hindu cosmology, one cycle of creation is made up of four *yugas* (epochs), each characterized by a decline in moral values. The *Treta Yuga* was the second epoch, and the *Dvapara Yuga* was the third. The fourth and present epoch is the *Kali Yuga*.

the lineage of Sage Bhrigu. His story starts with King Gadhi, whose only daughter, Satyavati, was beautiful and intelligent. The king gave his daughter’s hand in marriage to Sage Rchika. The sage conducted a *homa* (fire sacrifice) with two resolves: one, that his wife, Satyavati, would bear a son of *sattvic* (serene) disposition and do good to the world; two, that his mother-in-law would have a child of *rajasic* (passionate) disposition. Based on these resolves, he prepared the *homa prasad* (consecrated offering), which he gave to the two women.

“Imagining that the *prasad* for her daughter would be more powerful, Satyavati’s mother ate it. Later, she began to regret her action. Stricken by remorse, the mother-in-law went to Sage Rchika and confessed what she had done.

“Satyavati became sad at the thought that she would give birth to a son of *rajasic* qualities. She tearfully told her

husband that she wished to bequeath to the world a son as sattvic as he. The sage consoled her and took steps to nullify the effects of the prasada Satyavati had consumed. But he said that her future grandson would be rajasic.

“In due course, the illustrious Sage Vishwamitra was born to the wife of King Gadhī, and Jamadagni was born to Satyavati. Jamadagni married Renuka, daughter of King Prasenajit. Parashurama was Renuka’s son.

“Once, it was alleged that Renuka had stood looking at Chitraradha, a celestial prince, as he was bathing. Jamadagni ordered his sons to kill their mother. Four of his five sons refused. Only Parashurama heeded his father’s words, even though he loved his mother more than anything or anyone. Yet, without a second thought, motivated only by a desire to obey his father, Parashurama killed his mother. Later, in deference to his son’s wish,

Jamadagni brought Renuka back to life.

“The quality of valour was predominant in Parashurama because of the prasada that his grandmother had consumed and the kshatriya instincts he had inherited from his mother, a princess. However, his martial impulses were not malevolent. They had manifested because of his desire to maintain and safeguard dharma.

‘At the age of 14, Parashurama completed his education, having mastered all the Vedas. Owing to his keen interest in *Dhanurveda*, the science of warfare and archery, he learnt and mastered the use of all the weapons. He performed *tapas* (austerities) and pleased Lord Shiva, who bestowed on him an axe (*parashu*), which became his favourite weapon. Notwithstanding his martial skills, he also had the *sattvic* (serene) qualities of an ascetic.

“Once, when King Kartavirya Arjuna went hunting along the banks of River

Narmada, he saw Jamadagni's magical wish-fulfilling cow, Surabhi (also known as Kamadhenu), and desired to have it for himself. The king stole the cow. In retaliation, Parashurama killed the king. To revenge the killing of their father, the king's sons beheaded Jamadagni.

"Parashurama felt a terrible wrath not only towards the princes but towards the entire race of rulers. When he saw his mother, Renuka, bewailing her husband's death at the hands of the princes, Parashurama vowed revenge. He travelled the whole land and killed every ruler he encountered, eventually annihilating the whole race. He felt it was his duty to avenge his father.

"Even then, Parashurama's anger was not appeased. Using the blood of his victims, he performed *tarpan* (offering) to his departed ancestors. Five large ponds were created to hold the blood of the slain royalty. Parashurama prayed

to his ancestors, who were pleased by the tarpan, 'Kindly absolve me of the sin of killing all the kshatriyas. May these bloody ponds become places of pilgrimage.'

"Ancestors like Rchika were pleased and blessed him so that his prayers would be fulfilled. They also advised Parashurama to get rid of his anger and to control his senses, mind and intellect by doing spiritual practices constantly.

"Later, Parashurama conducted a great fire sacrifice near the Samanta-panchaka. At the end of the sacrifice, he gave away all the land and wealth he had gained by killing the kings.

"In the course of time, Samanta-panchaka not only became a pilgrimage destination, it also became well-known as a place for making oblations to one's ancestors."

Thus, Ugrashravas explained the legend behind Samanta-panchaka. He

*(continued on page 32)*

# Lilas Around Amma

## Early Experiences

I first met Amma on 11 October 1996 in Chennai. She placed a hand on my shoulder and inquired about my education. I was taken aback because I never imagined that she would speak to an ordinary person like me.

I was 18 years old then and had no interest in spirituality. Two months before, my father had passed away after a five-year struggle with cancer. Earlier that year, my parents visited Amritapuri. My father had breathed his last after returning home. His last



words were “Amma is Parashakti (the Supreme Power).” These words, which still ring in my ears, were one of the main reasons for my going to see Amma. I wanted safety and security in life and hoped that Amma could change my life for the better.

The next morning, she was due to fly abroad. I received information that Amma would be leaving the Chennai Ashram at around 6 a.m. I went to the ashram at 5:30 a.m. just to get a glimpse of her. But after four hours of waiting, there was still no sign of Amma. I lost my patience and became angry. At that very moment, I saw Amma standing on top of the staircase. I had an amazing darshan once again, and felt ashamed for losing my temper. I realized that one needs to be patient in order to gain something truly satisfying.

Shortly after this incident, my eyes became infected. I often experienced itching and a burning sensations in my

eyes, causing them to tear up. I consulted an ophthalmologist, but he could not help.

One night, I dreamt of Amma. She was standing in a corridor that devotees would use during their circumambulation of Lord Satyanarayana’s shrine. This shrine was in a temple that I frequently visited. Amma was standing behind the shrine and wearing a blue-black gown that was the colour of Lord Narayana’s idol. Swami Amritaswarupanandaji, who was standing at the other end of the corridor, asked me to go for darshan. There was no one else in the temple but the three of us: Amma, Swamiji and I. When I went for darshan, Amma pressed my eyes with her fingers. Though it was a dream, I felt a mild pain in my eyes. I tried to wriggle away but could not.

When I woke up, I remembered the dream. My eye problem vanished, never to recur. ❧

— *Saranath, India*