



# Contents

Vol. 32, Nos. 10 – 12

**I am Love. Love is my Very Nature. 5**

**Arjuna's Surrender 7**  
swami tureeyamritananda puri

**Overcoming Maya 12**  
swami amritageetananda puri

**Faith 16**  
sudha (vanessa pilet), france

**Burnout 20**  
madhurima (kim anken), belgium

**Uttanka 26**  
sanoop sadanandan, india

**Forgiveness 28**  
br. chandrasedkhar, india

**Taking Refuge at Her Feet 35**  
br. atmaniratamrita chaitanya

**Lilas Around Amma 41**

*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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Love





# I am Love. Love is my Very Nature.

Children, what people yearn for most in this world is love. People make friends, get married and start families only for love. Yet, the greatest poverty in the world today is the lack of love. Everyone wants to receive love but no one wants to give it. If we love, we do so with many strings attached in the form of expectations and conditions. Such relationships can fall apart at any moment. Such love can become hatred and enmity. This is the nature of the world. If we understand this, we will not suffer. The nature of fire is heat and light. Expecting fire to have only light and not heat is unrealistic. Likewise, if we can accept that worldly love inevitably brings sorrow, we will be able to face each and every situation with equanimity.

There is pure love in everyone. All of us have the capacity to love others without expectation. As love is our very nature, we can never lose it. A diamond left lying inside a bottle of oil may seem lustreless. But if we wipe away the thick coating of oil, we can restore brilliance to the diamond. Similarly, if we eliminate the impurities of the mind, we can regain the most pristine form of love.

The staircase of love has many rungs. At present, many of us are at the lowest rung. We must not spend the rest of our life there. We must slowly climb up the ladder, rung by rung. We can thus reach the highest rung of love and fulfil our lives.

People usually say, “I love you.” But the truth is that “I am love. Love is my very

nature.” When we say “I love you,” there are two entities: ‘I’ and ‘you.’ There is a gap between the two. Love is crushed in this gap.

From this perspective of ‘I’ and ‘you,’ loving another with expectation is like a tiny rat snake attempting to swallow a huge frog, a tortuous ordeal for both. Conversely, if we love without any expectation, we will never feel sorrow. Our selfless love will awaken selfless love in others. Life will then become filled with love and joy. We realize that “love is my very nature.” Thereafter, we become free of desire and expectation. Our love will be like a river, a free flow that touches and purifies one and all. Everything we do will be of benefit to the world. May all of us be able to rise to the level of such pure love. 🌸

Our selfless love will awaken selfless love in others. Life will then become filled with love and joy.

# Arjuna's Surrender

by swami  
tureeyamritananda  
puri

Adi Shankaracharya describes the *Bhagavad Gita* as “*samasta vedartha sara sangraha-bbutam*” — “the quintessence of all Vedic knowledge.”

The scholars say that whereas the Upanishads state the principles of spiritual knowledge, the *Bhagavad Gita* is in the form of a dialogue between two friends.



An ordinary person might not be able to understand or appreciate the subtlety of the Upanishads, but the *Bhagavad Gita* is easily accessible to anyone. While remaining firmly rooted in the understanding that existence is founded on eternal consciousness, the *Gita* comes down to the level of ordinary people and gives them solutions to the problems and challenges of life. It helps us overcome obstacles caused by attachments and egoism, awakens us, and slowly leads us to the depths of our own existence.

As the Self is eternal, it cannot be of the material world, which is transient and mutable. In contrast, the inner realm of man is purely spiritual and eternal. The external world constantly engages the mind in various interests and perpetuates a sense of duality, whereas an inner awakening brings about a lasting transformation and takes us closer to our true nature. The surface of the mind is like a pond

covered by scum. Many people are unable to clear away this scum and see into the depths of clear water. The scum refers to ignorance, attachments, egoism and the like. For as long as these impurities remain, we will continue identifying with the body, mind and intellect instead of the Self.

This was Arjuna's problem. He realizes that he is in the grip of ignorance and unable to bring clarity to his predicament. He knows that he can no longer distinguish right from wrong. Arjuna's self-awareness is evident from his words:

*karpanya-doshopabata-  
svabhavah  
prechami tvam dharmam  
sammudha-cetah  
yacchreyah syannishcitam  
brubi tanme  
shishyaste'ham shadhi mam  
tvam prapannam*

My nature has become tainted by cowardice and my understanding of what is right has become

clouded. Please tell me clearly what is best for me. I am your disciple; I have surrendered to you. (*Bhagavad Gita*, 2.7)

This verse reveals the attitude of a true disciple: one of complete surrender. It is this attitude that moves Lord Krishna, who has hitherto been listening silently to Arjuna's words of seeming wisdom, to impart true knowledge. His teachings begin only after Arjuna has surrendered, for it is only then the Guru's teachings will bear fruit. The Guru will wait patiently until this attitude dawns in the disciple.

Who is a disciple? One who is worthy of disciplining is a disciple. What are the qualities needed to become a disciple? Faith, attentiveness, devotion, humility, self-surrender and, above all, the desire to know.

The root of '*karpanya*' is '*krpana*,' which means weak or wretched. The mind of such a person is turbid with emotion,

confusion and ignorance. He identifies with the body, mind and intellect. Therefore, his true nature is hidden from him. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says, "*yo va etaḍ akṣharam garga aviditvāsmal lokat praiti saḥ krpanaḥ*" - "O Gargi, he who dies and leaves this world without realizing the imperishable absolute is a *krpana*" (3.8.10).

The scriptures also say, "*kripāno yo ajitendriya*." Here, a *krpana* is referred to as a weakling because he has not conquered his senses but is enslaved by them. In short, the scriptures regard a *krpana* as one who has frittered away his or her precious human existence and the opportunities it offers to attain the goal of realizing God.

In another part of the *Bhagavad Gita*, '*krpana*' has a slightly different meaning — those who are in the grip of desire. Instead of doing selfless deeds, they spend their lives in selfish pursuits and eventually reap sorrow.

Therefore, their lot is wretched. In contrast, *nishkama karma* (selfless actions) are those done without desire for their fruits. Those who do not become free of desire and whose actions are motivated by desire alone become debased. As Lord Krishna says:

*dhurena hy-avaram karma  
buddhi-yogaḍ dhananjaya  
buddhau sharanam anviccha  
krpanah phala-betavah*

O Arjuna, actions performed with expectation of reward are inferior to those done with the intellect rooted in knowledge of spiritual principles. Discard such desire-prompted actions and take refuge in divine knowledge. Those who seek the rewards of their labour are miserly.

*(Bhagavad Gita, 2.49)*

Selfish actions are wretched because they suck the doers into the whirlpool of worldly attachments, trap them in the

cycle of birth and death, and bind them to sorrow and desire.

What exactly is *karpanya dosha*, the flaw of cowardice? It is the superimposition of the untruth on the truth, a delusion. Examples include seeing a snake in a rope. Such delusions cause fear.

The American psychologist, William James, once asked whether people run in fear or if they become frightened when they run. The more we run, the greater our fear. Our own footsteps might make us imagine that the ghost (in the post) is coming after us.

Just as darkness was the cause of the fear, delusions are caused by ignorance. The closer we get, the less our fear, because we will see the truth. The further away we move, the worse the fear, as we will believe our suppositions to be true. Maya (delusion) is what disappears when we go close to it but assumes an aura of reality when we move away from it.

Once we enter the realm of divinity, duality disappears. When the mind distances itself from its divine nature and travels to objects of the world, it considers duality (this universe) a reality. When the mind travels inward and moves closer to divinity, the impermanent nature of worldly objects become apparent. When the mind runs after external objects, the diversities of the world assume importance.

At present, Arjuna is '*dharmma-sammudha-chetab*' — confused about his duty. He can shed his impotence only when he regains his sense of discernment and realizes his true nature. Wisdom, once gained, can never be lost, though it can be veiled. In the final verses of the *Gita*, Arjuna proclaims, "*nashto mohab smrtir-labdha*" — "My delusion has been dispelled" (18.73). Thus, the *Bhagavad Gita* conveys the message that even despair can be leveraged to take one to a state of union with the divine.

Joy is the reward of one who remembers his true nature, and sorrow, the lot of one who has forgotten it. Our true nature is *sat-chit-ananda* (existence-consciousness-bliss).

The awareness of one's own inadequacies does not come easily. When it dawns in Arjuna, it impels him to seek a solution. As he does not know how to overcome his weaknesses, he seeks Lord Krishna's help. Here, we see Arjuna's total surrender, the awareness that "I have no other refuge but you." Such surrender is discipleship. It implies the following sentiment: "My life is at your disposal. Do with me as you will." It is an attitude born of the knowledge that life is akin to a dewdrop that could be scattered by the gentlest breeze. It is only by divine grace that a disciple gains total surrender. It is a blessing gained as a result of merits amassed over a million lifetimes. It is the rarest of blessings. ❧

# Overcoming Maya

by Swami Amritageetananda Puri

Lord Krishna says,

*daivi hyesha gunamayi mama maya duratyaya  
mameva ye prapadyante mayametam taranti te*

Maya, my own divine power, which consists of the three attributes (of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*), is difficult to overcome. Those who totally surrender to me transcend it easily. (*Bhagavad Gita*, 7.14)

Maya is God's power. Adi Shankaracharya says that Maya is 'anirvachaniyam' (indescribable). Through his maya-shakti (power of Maya), the Lord creates the whole universe of living and non-living beings. The following example from the *Ramayana* illustrates the power of Maya.

While searching for Lord Rama in the forest, his brothers Bharata and Shatrughna, the three queens, and the entire army of Ayodhya reached Sage Bharadvaja's ashram, listened to his enlightening words, and then sought his permission to leave. The sage asked Bharata and his retinue to spend the night in the ashram. The prince said it would be difficult for the sage to accommodate and feed his family



and the entire army. At this point, using his spiritual power, Sage Bharadvaja summoned Vishvakarma, the celestial architect and engineer, and asked him to do the needful. Within a short time, he created living quarters for all of them, a vast dining hall, and the most delicious food! Bharata and his

group ate to their heart's content, slept well, and left in search of Sri Ram early the next morning. As soon as they left, the palatial tents and dining hall disappeared!

Similarly, after Hanuman had destroyed the palaces of Lanka, Ravana summoned Vishvakarma and commanded

him to reconstruct Lanka. Within a short time, beautiful palaces and gardens graced Lanka yet again. If a demigod can have such impressive abilities, we can imagine the power of those who are one with the Supreme!

Some people think that Maya means illusory, and they ask, “How can you say that everything is Maya? Look at these buildings. We can see and touch them! How can you say that they don’t exist?”

Years ago, before I embarked on my monastic life, I used to hear spiritual discourses in the temple near my house. In those talks, the speakers often said, “Everything is Maya. Brahman alone is real.” Back then, I also used to wonder how this could be true. Later on, I understood. During the Brahmasthanam temple festivals, different booths selling food and drinks, merry-go-rounds and other recreational facilities are built overnight in an adjacent plot

of land. The whole place looks bewitching, with its twinkling lights and sounds of laughter. As soon as Amma leaves, everything is dismantled in a very short time and removed. The land becomes bare again. Maya is not what does not exist but what does not persist.

In September 2001, the Twin Towers in New York City were destroyed. Where there used to be two skyscrapers, there was only empty space. After an earthquake struck Bhuj in Gujarat in January 2001, the beautiful city was flattened. Impermanence is the nature of the world, and this is Maya.

Everything is impermanent. It only appears to exist or it exists briefly before disappearing. Although we know this and although we know that impermanent objects cannot give us permanent happiness, we still run after them. This is also Maya, the power that binds us to the fleeting objects of the world.

It is said that in the first half of our life, we compromise our health in search of wealth and that in the second half of our life, we use all our wealth to get back our health, and that in the end, we lose both.

Only the Guru can dispel our delusion. That is why Lord Krishna says that only one who surrenders to him can overcome Maya. In saying so, he is not referring to his body but the Totality, with which he identifies. Just as a sleeping man can be woken up only by one who is awake, only the spiritually awakened one can wake us, who are slumbering in the dream world of the universe.

Usually, when Amma goes abroad, we go to the airport to send her off. It takes about one-and-a-half hours to travel to the Trivandrum Airport.

But after Amma's flight takes off and we return, it takes us three hours to reach Amritapuri. It is the same distance, same vehicle and same driver. Why the time difference? When we are trailing Amma's car, there are police escorts, and they help us reach our destination quickly. Similarly, when we have a Guru like Amma with us, we can make rapid spiritual progress, provided we have faith in and an attitude of surrender to Amma.

This year, *Guru Purnima*<sup>1</sup> falls on July 24th. Amma's nature is *purna* — whole, infinite and complete, like the full moon. Let us surrender to Amma and pray to her to lift us out of this delusion and bondage called Maya into the realm of divinity, where we can revel in infinite peace and happiness. 🌸

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1 The full moon (*purnima*) day in the Hindu month of *Ashadha* (June – July) in which disciples honour the Guru; also, the birthday of Sage Vyasa, compiler of the Vedas, and author of the *Puranas*, *Brahmasutras*, *Mahabharata* and the *Sbrimaḍ Bhagavatam*.

# Faith

by Sudha (Vanessa Pilet), France

*yo mam pashyati sarvatra sarvam  
ca mayi pashyati  
tasyaham na pranashyami sa ca  
me na pranashyati*

One who sees me everywhere  
and everything in me never  
loses sight of me; nor do I lose  
sight of him.

(*Bhagavad Gita*, 6.30)

**Y**ears ago, I used to work as a psychologist in the intensive care unit of a hospital in Paris where patients often hovered between life and death. Sometimes, they were put into an induced coma so that they could be given intensive treatment.



Often, family members would wait for weeks, not knowing if their loved ones would recover. The patient's condition could fluctuate from day to day, creating an emotional upheaval in loved ones. Family members might find themselves bombarded by too much medical information about the patient, which might overwhelm or confuse them.

I remember one family who experienced much anguish at what they perceived as inefficient treatment of their father's disease. They were overwhelmed by frustration, a lack of understanding of the medical situation, doubts, insecurities, and an inability to trust the doctors or surrender to the situation. Stuck in their distress, they even wanted to file a case against the doctors.

In some situations, where the patients were conscious, I noticed how the distress of family members could make them stressed. Some patients have even requested that their

family members not visit them as the visits were making the patients too anxious.

In contrast, I have clearly seen how family members who are spiritually inclined are able to handle similar situations more calmly. They seemed to be equipped with the inner strength to cope and were much more accepting of the situation. Seeing their attitude reminded me of Amma's words: "Spirituality is a deep and genuine smile at all the situations in life."

I also noticed how the spiritually inclined family members were able to help their loved ones in more practical ways. They would talk to them (even when the patients were in a coma), allay their anxiety, and give them confidence. They were often creative in the way they expressed their love. For example, they would play music or sing, put up pictures, massage them, and express deep affection. Seeing their behaviour, even doctors who

were not spiritually inclined would feel inspired.

I remember a 17-year-old boy, who was admitted to the ICU for a severe lung infection. A coma was induced so that he could be given artificial ventilation. During the first few days of his stay, his mother was clearly overwhelmed with sorrow and worry. She would cry as she spoke about the situation to the staff.

Days passed. She visited her son every afternoon. Soon, we noticed a routine: she would sit next to her son, take his hands and pray. She would then wipe his face with a wet cloth while singing religious hymns.

Later, she told me, "God will decide what happens." She said that she had decided to stop feeling sad, as that would be too much of an emotional burden for her son. She believed that even if he was in a coma, he could hear her and feel what was going on around him. Therefore, she wanted to express as much love to him as

possible. Soon after that, she requested the hospital priest to visit her son regularly and to read sacred texts to him.

We could see how her attitude had evolved over the course of her son's hospitalization. After the initial days of distress, she had come to accept the situation, surrender to God, pray and love. The team in the ICU found her helpful, supportive and grateful.

Amma says, "A real devotee considers everything the will of his Lord. His whole being is constantly in a prayerful mood. For him, every word and deed are a prayer, a worship of his beloved. He surrenders everything to his beloved Lord."

I also remember another religious family comprising two grownup daughters and their father, who would visit the mother in the ICU daily. They seemed to have accepted the situation. The mother was hospitalized for a long time, and throughout her stay, the

family members visited daily, adjusting their personal schedule to care of her. I believe that their loving care helped the woman recover well enough to leave the ICU.

Such situations touched me deeply. I realized how powerful faith is.

Amma says, "People who do not have faith can be overly sensitive and fragile. Even a word or a look can make them feel depressed or sad. They will crumble in the face of difficulties. They will not be able to think or act with discernment. In difficult times, such people may even take their own life. However, one who has faith will always keep up the spirit. Remember, whatever the circumstances of life, faith will protect you. Amma is talking about unshakable faith in God or in a Satguru."

Faith inspires us to see everything that comes to us as *prasad*, a gift from God. When we face adversities in life, we might feel distressed, but faith

will give us the strength to accept the situation and inspire us to use these situations as stepping stones to feel God's healing presence.

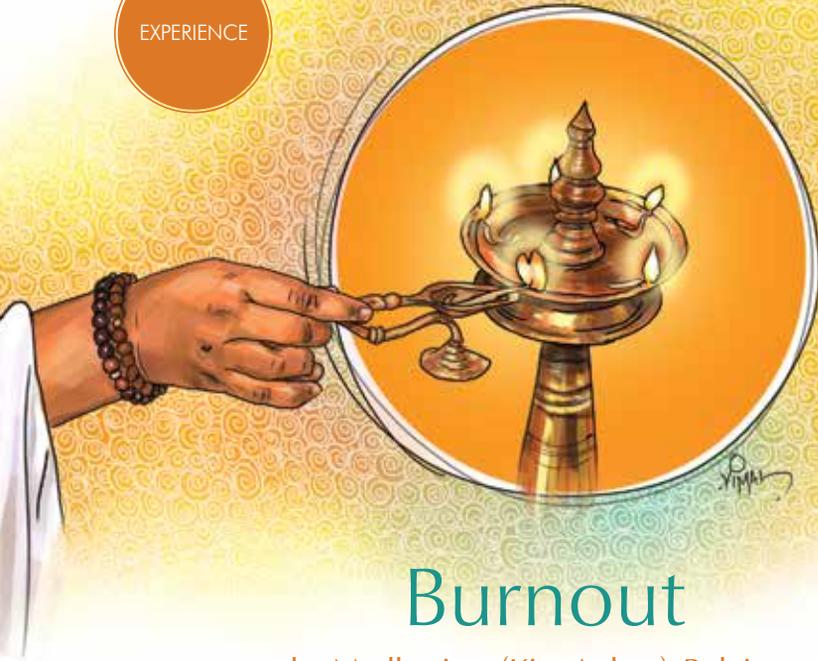
Faith makes us better instruments in the hands of God, inspiring us to express compassion and other spiritual values, and to experience the joy of giving.

Amma is training us. She is churning our minds to bring out the poison of our negativities so that we can become aware of and rise above them. She constantly reminds us that nothing in this world lasts forever, and helps us realize that faith and surrender are our precious saviours.

Let us pray,

*bhakti ta jagadambe  
premam ta jagadambe  
vishvasam tannene  
rakshikku jagadambe*

O Mother of the Universe, give me strength, devotion and love. Bless me with faith and protect me. 



# Burnout

by Madhurima (Kim Anken), Belgium

I work as a counsellor for an intermunicipal company. My colleagues and I are responsible for helping employees who are experiencing psycho-social difficulties at work. We see many people of differing educational levels and from different work areas struggling with similar stress-related problems, including burnout.

According to Western psychology, stress indicates an imbalance between one's resources and the requirements of the environment (workplace). Burnout is a combination of physical and mental collapse caused by too much work or stress over a period.

I have my own experience in these matters, and it was solely because of Amma's guidance that I was able to survive. In sharing my story, I hope others may be inspired to introspect and ask Amma for help if they are going through a similar situation.

In 2009, a few months before meeting Amma for the first time, I started working as a family counsellor. I learned a lot in those first few years, but I found listening to people's problems and guiding them to make a positive change in their lives difficult. This was especially so because I was working for a fast-paced organization that gave me little time and space to go deeper into the core of the problems. In 2011, I felt physically drained for the first time. I underwent a series of medical examinations to find out if there was anything wrong with me. There was. An EEG scan showed 'exceptional activity' among my brain waves,

indicating high stress levels. I was prescribed medication, which only made me feel worse.

In my heart, I felt that the real solution to my problem was to be found elsewhere. I wanted to talk to Amma about my health issues but somehow, circumstances never permitted me to do so. This deepened my belief that there was nothing to be done at a physical level and that I had to go through these experiences to learn a lesson at the spiritual level.

Inspired by Amma's example of tirelessly serving people, I resumed work. Things seemed to go well at first and I regained some confidence. But in 2014, I started feeling defeated again and decided to tell Amma that I was under so much stress that I wanted to quit my job. Her answer was clear and simple: "You can become stressed anywhere. It will be hard to find another job, and once you do, you will have to start all over again. So, it's better to stay at the same

place.” She added compassionately, “You can take a break before returning to your job.”

Though this was not what I wanted to hear, Amma spoke with much compassion. She helped me understand that the stress was not a part of the organization; it was a part of me. Instead of trying to change the situation, I needed to change myself.

A few months later, in 2015, my doctor prescribed one month of medical leave. This was the break Amma spoke about. After that, I resumed work in the same company.

In 2016, my husband and I flew to Amritapuri for our much needed, annual recharge in Amma’s divine presence. The mere prospect of meeting Amma made me feel so happy that the stranger sitting next to me in the aircraft commented on how blissful I looked. I continued receiving similar comments in the ashram. To me, this was proof of how all our burdens are spontaneously

lifted from our shoulders in Amma’s presence. It also showed me how insignificant my problems were in the powerful light of her presence.

Nevertheless, encouraged by other devotees, I decided to once again share with Amma my difficulties in guiding people, how drained the work made me feel, and how little progress I seemed to inspire in others. I spoke during a question-and-answer session. Amma gave an extensive answer. In short, she said that the work I do is important and that I should continue doing it. She said that even if one person in a hundred changed a little for the better, it was worth the effort. Amma also reminded me not to forget that the result of our efforts was not in our hands but in God’s. That said, it was my *dharma* (duty) to deliver the message like a postman, without being attached to the result of my actions. Even if I cannot see the result immediately, it might

bear fruit in a person later. As I was counselling parents at that time, the effect of my counselling could ripple out and benefit their children, who in turn might spread the positive change to their own children later.

Amma's words were inspiring and infused in me the enthusiasm to persevere in my profession, which was in the service of others.

So, I kept moving forward, but still had not reached the end of the tunnel. A few months later, I felt too exhausted to even think or speak properly, and my doctor once again prescribed home rest. One month at home became another... and another and another. I knew that Amma was with me, and so, I did not despair. Yet, I felt tired and ill most of the time.

That year, we went to Amritapuri for a second time. We enrolled in a restorative yoga retreat led by Bri. Shobana. The retreat started with a

small puja, during which, a strong wind blew out the lamp! Was this a bad omen, I wondered? Bri. Shobana calmly said, "It's the nature of the wind to blow, and it is my nature to keep doing what I'm doing." This became my motto for the rest of the retreat.

After the retreat, *Ganesh Chaturthi*<sup>1</sup> was celebrated in the ashram. On the first day of the celebrations, there was a Ganesh Puja, and it was graced by the presence of Lakshmi, the ashram elephant. Lakshmi entered the prayer hall, lined on each side by women holding a plate with flower petals and an oil lamp. I was one of those women. As we started the procession, a strong wind blew my lamp out. At first, I felt devastated. "See, you are burned out!" my mind said. But I remembered Bri. Shobana's words and all the encouragement I had received

.....  
1 A Hindu festival celebrating the arrival of Lord Ganesha to earth with his mother, Goddess Parvati.

from Amma. So, with a newly lit lamp, I proceeded slowly but steadily to the darshan hall. My heart and mind were focused completely on the little flame, which seemed symbolic of my faith. I would make it! I knew I could, because Amma was with me. I prayed incessantly to Amma during the walk. When I arrived at my allotted spot in the hall, not only was my flame still burning brightly, the *pujari* (priest) also came to me with a wick that he lit with the flame of my small lamp and used it to light the main lamp for the puja! I felt overjoyed and filled with self-confidence! In that moment, I clearly understood the importance of focusing completely on what we are doing and how Amma's infinite power can work through us. It is impossible to suffer from burnout when we are in tune with and completely focused on Amma.

I wanted to bring this inner strength and understanding

back home with me. When I returned, I found another doctor who prescribed homeopathic medicines to get my body going again. It took me a few more months to get completely cured.

What's more, after three years of trying, my husband and I conceived our child with Amma's endless blessings. I stayed at home to take care of our precious baby during his first year of life. Then I started working again for the same organization. But this time, the situation was completely different because I understood that if I worked whole-heartedly, Amma would work through me. I kept reminding myself that I was not the doer, and the result was not in my hands.

After a while, I started yearning to work in another environment. But this time, it was not because of any emptiness inside me but because I strongly felt that I could contribute more than my company allowed me. By Amma's grace,

after working for nine years in the company, I found another job, counselling employees who are carrying burdens that I know only too well. As I understand what they are going through, I feel that I can help them more effectively. Isn't that what Amma does? She is able to help each one of us because she knows our hearts.

The journey of keeping my inner lamp burning had been a long but beautiful one. Amma's light has always been my guide, showing me what is truly important. I pray to Amma that my knowledge keeps growing, that I may be an instrument in her hands to help others, and that I may speak her words to soothe their souls. 

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*(continued from page 27)*

Uttanka, Veda said, "My child, ordinary people could not have accomplished what you did. What made it possible for you were your strong will, decisiveness, sense of purpose, and immeasurable devotion to the Guru."

The Guru continued, "Impressed by your efforts to serve the Guru, Indra (the king of the gods), Airavata, (his elephant), Agni, Parjanya (the celestial singer), and others came in various guises to help you. Dhata (creator) and Vidhata (destiny-maker), day

and night, months, and even the seasons favoured you. Now, you can go. May divine grace ever be with you."

Uttanka returned home after receiving his Guru's blessings.

Doing actions based on dharma, and having a strong sense of purpose and the determination to fulfil it help us overcome all the obstacles we may encounter. Devotion and surrender to the Guru enable us to serve him or her well. One who does so will be rewarded with all-round prosperity. 



# Uttanka

by Sanoop Sadanandan, India

**S**age Ayoda-Dhaumya had many perfect disciples, including Aruni, who exemplified self-surrender; Upamanyu, who obeyed the Guru's words in letter and spirit; and Veda, who immersed himself in serving the Guru, disregarding hunger and thirst, cold and heat.

Veda later began accepting disciples. Prominent among them was Uttanka. Once, when Veda had to leave the ashram for

some work, he entrusted all the important ashram work to Uttanka. When Veda returned and inquired into how Uttanka had fared in his absence, he learnt that the disciple had discharged his duties well and in adherence to dharma. Pleased, Veda said that Uttanka's formal education had come to an end, and that he was free to go out into the world.

When Uttanka asked Veda what *dakshina*<sup>1</sup> he could offer, Veda directed him to his wife, who had treated him as her own son all these years. When Uttanka asked her what *dakshina* he should give, she asked him to go to the palace of the Paushya king and to get from his queen the earrings she was wearing.

Hearing this, Uttanka set off. He overcame many hurdles and finally reached the palace, where he met the king and queen and asked for her

1 Honorarium offering to the Guru at the end of one's studies

earrings. The queen discerned Uttanka's noble character and happily gave him the earrings.

When he was returning, Takshaka, the serpent king, appeared before Uttanka in the form of a naked monk, snatched the earrings, and ran away. Uttanka wandered in search of the thief and finally reached *naga-rajya*, the kingdom of serpents. Failing to find Takshaka there, Uttanka became despondent.

Seeing Uttanka's devotion to his Guru, Agni-deva, the fire god, helped him to retrieve the earrings from Takshaka. The gods had been following him from the time he left Veda's ashram, had been pleased by his actions, and had supported him and helped him cross each and every hurdle.

Uttanka returned to Veda's ashram and presented the earrings to his wife. He then went to his Guru and explained all that had happened. Embracing

*(continued on page 25)*

# Forgiveness: Stepping Stone to Acceptance

by Br. Chandrasekhar, India

**M***ahatmas* (spiritually illumined souls) do not forgive; they accept.

There was a rowdy who used to slander Amma. Later, he contracted scabies. Amma went to see him and spoke lovingly to him. She gently rubbed some sacred ash on his sores, from which pus and blood were oozing. The man was so moved that he started crying. Amma wiped away his tears affectionately and spoke soothing words of consolation.

The love and compassion that Amma showed him were expressions of unconditional love, which implies total acceptance. Her attitude goes beyond forgiveness.

When a baby kicks its mother, she responds with love. When bird droppings fall on us, we do not fight with the bird, but accept what happened and move on. Crickets chirrup at night, but we simply ignore them and go to bed. We do not hate fire when it burns our finger, for we

know that the nature of fire is to burn. We do not feel bitterness or animosity in such situations, and the question of forgiveness does not even arise.

Amma's own life exemplifies forgiveness and acceptance. She remained unfazed when family, friends and community turned against her, and she accepted every situation with perfect equanimity. She prayed to God to forgive her detractors, who, over time, became devotees. Such is the power of total acceptance.

### Lord Krishna

Lord Krishna's constant smile was a mark of his inner detachment. He accepted whatever happened with utmost composure and responded suitably to changing circumstances. As a young boy, when the venomous serpent Kaliya began to trouble the people of Vrindavan, Krishna jumped into the river and danced on its head, making it vomit blood. When the serpent's wives begged the Lord for forgiveness and to spare Kaliya's life, he graciously forgave the serpent and asked him to leave Vrindavan and go to Ramanaka Island, assuring Kaliya of his protection there. Such was Krishna's compassion.



King Jarasandha tried to invade Mathura 17 times, but failed every time. Each time, Lord Krishna allowed him to escape. To protect his subjects, Krishna even shifted them from Mathura to Dwaraka, where he constructed a new capital. Finally, to help Yudhishtira complete the *Rajasuya Yagna* (a ritual to make him an emperor), the Lord advised Bhima to kill Jarasandha, for his divine mission was to eliminate *adharma* (unrighteousness), which kings like Jarasandha and Shishupala and their accomplices perpetuated. Krishna was not being vindictive. He had forgiven Shishupala a hundred times. When he finally killed Shishupala, the Lord also bestowed *mukti* (spiritual liberation) on him. Blessing someone who had nothing but hatred for him all his life is divine compassion. A boil on the body may need to be lanced in order prevent infection. This is another face of compassion.

## Lord Rama

Amma's appraisal of Lord Rama's attitude of acceptance says it all. "When Kaikeyi, Sri Rama's step-mother, sought the boon of having Rama exiled to the forest for 14 years, the Lord accepted the exile with a smile on his face. He was not at all hostile to Kaikeyi. Smilingly, he touched her feet, his heart overflowing with reverence and love. He simply accepted the exile as a fact; there was not a trace of anger within him..."

"In the battle between Rama and Ravana, the Lord killed Ravana's charioteer and his horses, destroyed the chariot, and then disarmed Ravana completely. Having lost all hope for his life, Ravana stood waiting for Rama's sharp arrows to pierce his chest. But instead of the whirl of arrows, he heard Rama's voice: 'Ravana, I see that you are completely disarmed.' Rama's voice was calm, 'I could finish you off now if I wanted to. But

I won't. To kill someone who is disarmed and helpless goes against dharma. Therefore, go back to your palace, rest, treat your wounds, and come back tomorrow, fresh and fully armed.' What a noble enemy Rama was! Even on the battlefield, when Ravana, who had committed the unpardonable crime of kidnapping his divine consort and was standing in front of him disarmed and totally helpless, Rama bore no malice but spoke such kind and wise words. This is response." (*Awaken Children*, Vol. 5, 159 – 160)

Explaining response, Amma says, "Forgiveness without having any anger or revenge is response (or acceptance). There are people who might forgive, but they still harbour intense hatred; they forgive but with vengeance in their hearts. For different reasons, people may sometimes appear to forgive. For example, one man beats another. The second man may not fight back because the first

one is stronger. We cannot call this forgiveness. Though the second man does not retaliate, the fire of revenge may be raging in his mind." (*Awaken Children*, Vol. 5, 160)

"Likewise, each person has his own nature. Through your anger, you cannot change the nature of other people. Only love can change them. Understand this, and try to feel love and sympathy for all. Be compassionate, even towards those who bother you. Pray for them. Such an attitude will also help your mind to remain calm and peaceful. This is genuine response." (*Awaken Children*, Vol. 5, 167)

### Anger and Forgiveness: Lessons from the Mahabharata

After losing his kingdom in the game of dice, Yudhishtira is exiled to the forest, where he lives with his valiant brothers and wife Draupadi. One day, Draupadi expresses her anguish about the situation that

they have been forced into and insists that Yudhishtira wage war against the Kauravas and take back the kingdom by force. The latter then delivers a sermon on forgiveness, quoting Sage Kashyapa's views on forgiveness:

Truth is superior to untruth and gentleness to cruelty. Why should I kill Duryodhana and display anger, which the virtuous renounce? The sages regard him as a man of character in whom anger does not exist. The learned men, who see things as they are, always regard him as a man of character who restrains his wrath. O Draupadi, the angry man does not observe the real state of things.

If the injured and chastised retaliate, the consequence would be the destruction of every creature, and sin will prevail in the world.

If fathers slay sons, and sons, fathers, and if husbands kill wives, and wives, husbands, then O Draupadi, how can births take place in the world?

If kings give in to wrath, his subjects will soon perish. The consequence of wrath is the distress and destruction of the people.

There are people who are as forgiving as the earth, and it is because of them that others enjoy prosperity. One should forgive under every injury. We can perpetuate creation only when man forgives.

He is a wise man who has overcome anger and forgives even when insulted and oppressed by a strong person. The man of power who controls his wrath will reap numerous everlasting regions for his enjoyment, whereas the angry one, who is foolish, will meet with destruction both here and hereafter.

O Draupadi, the illustrious and forgiving Kashyapa had, in this respect, sung the following verses in honour of men who are ever forgiving: 'Forgiveness is virtue. Forgiveness is sacrifice. Forgiveness is the Vedas. Forgiveness is the *shruti* (revealed scriptures). He that knows this is capable of forgiving everything. Forgiveness is Brahma, the Supreme. Forgiveness is truth. Forgiveness is stored ascetic merit. Forgiveness is asceticism. Forgiveness protects the merit gained by the ascetic. Forgiveness is holiness. And by forgiveness, the universe is held together.'

Forgiveness is the might of the mighty. It is the quiet of mind. How, O Draupadi, can one like us abandon forgiveness? (*Vana Parva, Arjunabhigamana Parva*)

## Lessons I Learnt

Living with Amma for 12 years taught me the wisdom of accepting people and adjusting to them. Amma often speaks about putting all kinds of people together. Just as putting stones together into a tumbler smoothens their rough edges, interacting with individuals of diverse temperaments creates friction initially but eventually leads to the tempering of each person.

Amma first asked me to serve in the college. There, I had numerous conflicts with people over silly things. My strong views on many matters drew many detractors. This led to my not being on talking terms with many people.

Finally, I asked Amma if I could serve elsewhere. Acceding to my request, she asked me to assist a brahmachari who was handling various charitable projects in Kerala. Even though the brahmachari was supportive, I still had differences of opinion with

various people. My situation was like falling out of the frying pan of the college into the fire! Finally, I realized that I had to accept people as they are and not try to change anyone. This requires a lot of awareness, patience, forgiveness, compassion and calmness. We might imagine that we have forgiven others, but in our next encounter with them, our latent hostility might rear its head and disturb us mentally. But when our mind becomes calm and peaceful, we can witness our reactions as they arise and we can control them. To do so, we must be anchored to the shifting present moment.

In his *Yoga Sutras*, Sage Patanjali advises us to develop four qualities for calming the mind: friendliness towards people who have talents and resources; compassion towards the distressed; happiness for people basking in comfort and goodness; and indifference towards those

who are hostile to us (*Samadhi Pada*, 35). These four traits help us to develop a positive attitude towards others and slowly take us to the state of acceptance.

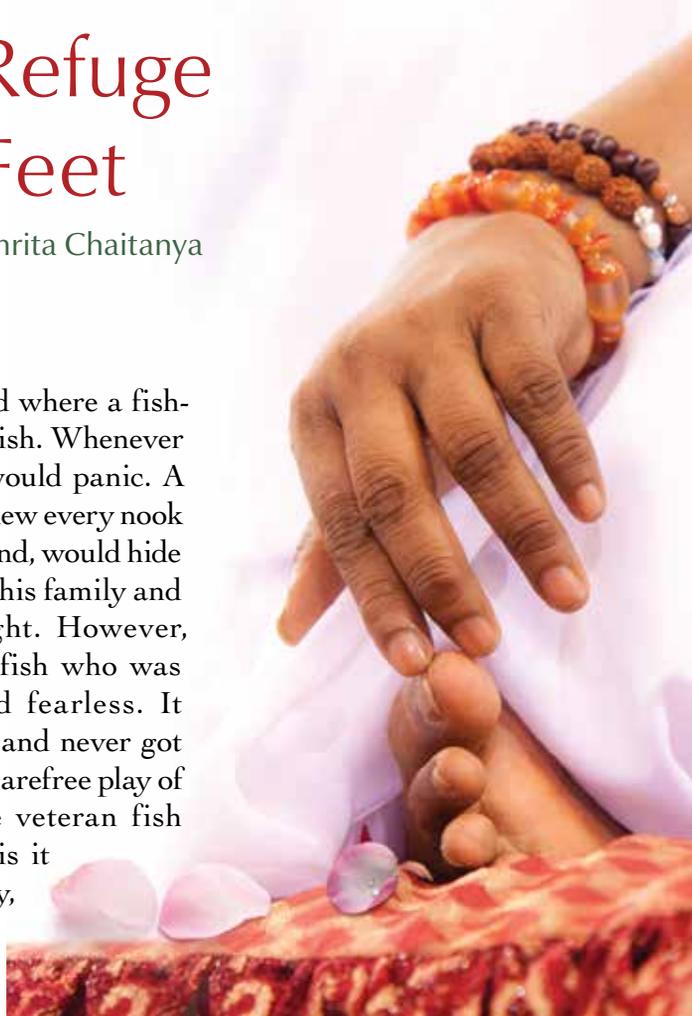
I still have a long way to go, but I have started and am walking the path of forgiveness and acceptance, all thanks to Amma.

Amma is mixing many shades and hues to produce an intense glow of light. By bringing together compassionate hearts, she is forging a bridge that can help millions cross this ocean of life. A beautiful garden abounds with blooms of a myriad colours. Every flower is unique and the gardener nurtures each plant carefully. Bringing out the beauty of unity in diversity is the secret of Amma's leadership, the spiritual gardener par excellence. Only compassionate hearts can accept others. Amma manifests acceptance every moment of her life. 

# Taking Refuge at Her Feet

by Br. Atmaniratamrita Chaitanya

**T**here was a pond where a fisherman used to fish. Whenever he came, the fish would panic. A veteran fish, who knew every nook and corner of the pond, would hide and watch sadly as his family and friends were caught. However, there was a small fish who was always happy and fearless. It danced and swam, and never got caught. Seeing the carefree play of this little fish, the veteran fish asked him, “How is it that you’re so happy, and manage to evade the fishing net every time?”



The little fish said, “It’s very simple, Grandpa. The fisherman announces his intention to catch us by first stepping into the water. As soon as he steps in, the water gets disturbed and murky. All the fish start panicking and dart here and there. I stop whatever I’m doing and swim as fast as I can to the fisherman’s feet before he casts his net. I remain there, away from the net, until he leaves our pond.”

Likewise, if we take refuge at the feet of the Lord, we can also elude the snares of worldly life. What does taking refuge mean? It means having an attitude of devotion and surrender to God. Lord Krishna says,

*api cet su-duracaro bhajate  
mam ananya-bhak  
sadhur eva sa mantavyah  
samyag vyavasito hi sah*  
Even if the worst sinners worship me with one-pointed devotion, they are to be considered

righteous, for they have resolved properly.  
(*Bhagavad Gita*, 9.30)

This verse glorifies *bhakti* (devotion). Unlike *jnana yoga* (the path of knowledge), which requires many preparatory disciplines, there are no prerequisites for becoming a *bhakta* (devotee).

The Lord says that there are four kinds of devotees: *artha* — one who prays to God to be saved from distress; *artharthi* — one who worships God for material prosperity and pleasure; *jijnasu* — one who desires to know God; and *jnani* — one who knows God. (*Bhagavad Gita*, 7.16)

A key feature of *bhakti yoga*, the path of devotion, is *kripa*. It can mean grace, mercy or blessing, depending on the context. According to the 6th chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, one needs four types of *kripa*: *atma kripa* (one’s own grace) *ishvara kripa* (God’s grace), *shastra kripa* (grace of the

scriptures), and *guru kripa* (grace of the Guru).

Atma kripa helps us overcome guilt and boosts our self-confidence. Guilt arises when we feel we have done wrong, and judge ourselves to be sinners. This can be a big obstacle in spiritual life, preventing us from forgiving ourselves. Confidence, the antidote, is the conviction that “even if I have made mistakes, I can correct myself and grow spiritually.” Lord Krishna declares that even the worst sinner can become a devotee. ‘*Duracara*’ refers to evil, immoral, corrupt or illegal conduct. ‘*Suduracara*’ means extremely corrupt, and suggests someone who has committed the worst sins. According to the merciful Lord, even such a person need not worry if he gains *ananya-bhakti* (one-pointed devotion). That person will receive God’s grace; so guarantees the Lord. Once grace anoints him,

*kshipram bhavati  
dharmatma*

*shashvacchantim nigacchati  
kaunteya pratijanibi na me  
bhaktah pranashyati*

Soon he becomes a noble soul and certainly attains lasting peace. O Arjuna, declare boldly that no devotee of mine is ever lost. (*Bhagavad Gita*, 9.31)

Such a devotee, who has resolved rightly, starts to give more importance to *dharm*a (righteousness) than to *artha* (material prosperity) or *kama* (desire), which had been of primary consideration to him. With increasing spiritual maturity, material things become less important. While he still uses material things, he is not so attached to them. A mature soul is dedicated to the pursuits of *dharm*a and *moksha* (spiritual liberation).

Lord Krishna says that the devotee soon becomes a *jijnasu*, one who longs to know God, because he has realized that God is the only source of peace, security and happiness. When

this longing is consummated, wisdom dawns and the devotee becomes a jnani, a knower of the Truth. Such a person is never disturbed by the vicissitudes of life, is ever peaceful and remains devoted to the Lord; such a devotee will never come to ruin.

Let me recount how someone, who might well have been considered a sinner, was transformed upon contact with Amma. I met Surya during the 1992 Chennai Brahmasthanam Temple programs. He lived near the ashram, was a regular devotee, and seemed to come from a cultured family. However, he always looked sad. One day, he revealed the cause of his sorrow. His father, who was well employed and earning a handsome salary, was addicted to alcohol. He would come home drunk every night, and beat his wife. Surya's mother could never stand up to his father.

I urged Surya to bring his father to Amma. He tried to

persuade his father to see Amma but failed. He persisted for another year, pleading with him to meet her at least once. Finally, the father agreed, provided Surya bought him a bottle of rum. The son agreed.

Surya, his mother, brother and father lined up for darshan. I stood behind the father to ensure that he would not change his mind and slip away. As the queue moved towards Amma, the father would take sips from the bottle, which was tucked into a pocket of his pants.

Finally, the family reached Amma. Unable to control herself, Surya's mother fell weeping into Amma's lap. Her body was covered with bruises from beatings. Amma's eyes welled up with tears. Using her own sari, she wiped away the tears from the woman's cheeks. Surya's brother, who was next in line for darshan, stepped aside and hastily pushed his father toward Amma instead. The father was stunned when

he found himself in front of Amma.

Amma looked deeply into the father's eyes. Very sweetly and with utmost love, she said, "*Mone* (son)..."

Surya's father burst into tears and fell into Amma's lap. After some time, she raised him, wiped away his tears, and rubbed his chest. Then, pointing to his family members, who were crying, she said, "Son, the next time you drink, remember that you are drinking their tears." She then consoled him, saying, "Don't worry. Amma is with you."

Darshan ended and I accompanied the family back home. After walking some distance, Surya's father put his hand into his pocket to get the bottle of rum. He took it out for a few moments and then put it back without opening it. This happened a couple of times. When they reached home, he took the bottle out from his pocket and hurled it into the gutter. He exclaimed

"Where have you led me? That woman's voice is still echoing in my ears, '*Mone... mone... mone...*' I can't drink at all!"

The next day, Surya told me what had happened after they reached home. There had been total silence. His father had sat with his eyes closed throughout the night. Early the next morning, to everyone's surprise, he bathed and got ready to accompany his wife and children to Amma's program.

Surya's father completely gave up drinking, and a noticeable, positive change took place over time. Turning to Amma just once helped him turn over a new leaf. Just one hug, one look and one instruction were powerful enough to transform him. So many people have been changed by just one meeting with Amma.

One brahmachari in the ashram was moved when he heard about the qualities of a true devotee. He also heard a talk given by one of Amma's senior disciples on bhakti

yoga, and spent some time reflecting on the 36 qualities of a devotee (mentioned in chapter 12 of the *Bhagavad Gita*). One day, when he came for Amma’s darshan, he chanted the relevant verses to her and said, “Amma, I don’t have even one of these qualities. Will Amma still love me?”

Amma smiled and said, “More than those who have all these 36 qualities, I like the

children who strive to attain these qualities!” Isn’t this proof that her grace flows to those who try?

Divine grace is always present. We simply have to open our hearts to receive it. Amma will never forsake anyone who is sincere in their spiritual efforts. May her love and compassion inspire devotion in us, and may our devotion draw her closer to us. 🌸

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# Lilas Around Amma

## Matruvani

When I was younger, I thought *Matruvani* was meant only for grown-ups. I was wrong. *Matruvani* does not just have news about the ashram and its charitable activities. Each issue of the magazine also has Amma's message, devotees' experiences and beautiful artwork.

One Tuesday in late June, my mom went to a work dinner. My dad was home, but he had a conference call. My mom left many issues of



*Matruvani* for me to read. Some years ago, she wrote an article about me and a marigold flower. You can find it in the 'Lilas Around Amma' feature in the January 2016 issue of *Matruvani*. It's called 'Offering.'

I slowly started reading one *Matruvani* article with my mom every night before going to bed. I would pick a random article and we would enjoy reading it together. The strange thing that happens 90% of the time is that whenever I pick an article, it usually has something related to me or something I like. My mom notices this while she reads to me and usually says, "This is so cool! This has something to do with you! It's a sign that Lakshmi is watching over you!"

Lakshmi is my favourite goddess. I have a small and beautiful Lakshmi doll, dressed in pink.

For instance, one experience called 'On Hallowed

Grounds' by Veena O'Sullivan (May 2012) has a Lakshmi doll in it. Another example of a story with a Lakshmi doll is an article entitled 'Drama in The Film City' (May 2018). On reading it, my mom once again said, "This has something to do with you!"

I like making movies and visiting film cities. My favourite is Hollywood. When I share my movies with my family, they say, "Ria is sure making her way to Hollywood!"

I think we have more than five bhajan books in our house but over 100 issues of *Matruvani* in my mom's room! The oldest is from 1990. The *Matruvani* website ([matruvani.org](http://matruvani.org)) does not have the latest issues, but we can always get them by subscribing to the magazine.

Contributing to *Matruvani* is a great way to help people all over the world connect with Amma. Readers, I hope that you will also write an article for *Matruvani*. 🌸

— Ria Menon, aged 9, USA