



Contents

Vol. 32, Nos. 10 – 11

Fruits of Past Deeds 4

Shrutis, Smritis and the Bhagavad Gita 7

swami tureeyamritananda puri

Those Eyes 12

br. rishi chaitanya

Learning to Forgive 22

miliee kassim, malaysia

The Endless Picture Show 28

narayan van de graaff, australia

Chapter 17: Yoga of the Three-fold Faith 29

prof. v. muraleedhara menon, india

Aruni 33

sanoop sadanandan, india

Lilas Around Amma 36

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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May - June 2021 3



Fruits of Past Deeds

Children, some people ask if God is partial towards some. In this world, some people enjoy good health whereas others are always dogged by illness; some are poor whereas others are rich; some are good-looking, and others, ugly. We cannot blame God for this inequality. We alone are to blame for this. Pure actions reap perfect results. The sorrow of *prarabdha* (consequences of past actions) that we experience today is the result of careless actions in the past. There is no point in blaming God for this. For example, by using genetically modified seeds and chemical fertilizers, we can increase the harvest tenfold. However, doing so will reduce the nutritional value of grains and vegetables drastically. Not only that, as a result of eating such produce, our body becomes contaminated by harmful chemicals. The health of



both those who eat such food and their children is impaired. This situation is the result of our selfishness. We cannot blame God for it.


Once, a boss asked his workers to break stones. One worker was physically strong whereas the other was weak. A few days later, the boss went to check on how the work was progressing. He pointed out a large rock each to his workers and asked them to break it. The stronger man struck his rock ten times but was unable to break it, whereas when the weaker man struck his rock just twice, it split open. The stronger man asked the weaker one, "How did you split the rock open after striking it just twice?"

The weaker man replied, "I had already struck it many times with my hammer earlier."

Similarly, if life is easy for some and hard for others, it is because of the actions they performed in the past. Our

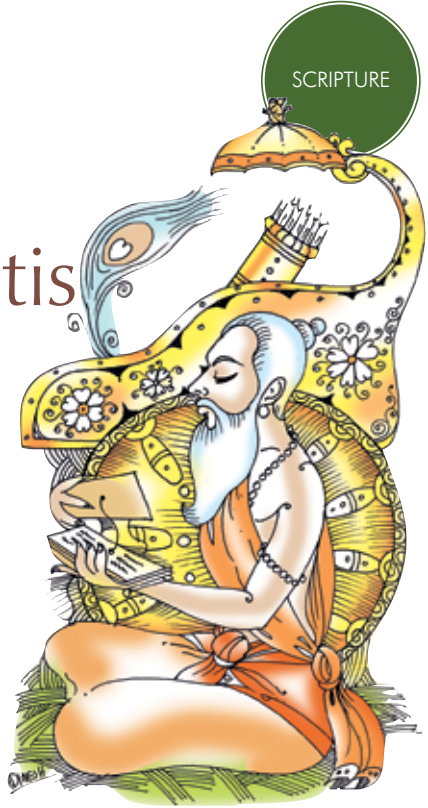
growth today is the result of good actions performed yesterday. If we want to have a bright future, we must do good deeds in the present. If we do not, we will suffer tomorrow.

That said, when we see someone suffering, we must not think that it is the consequence of his past actions. Instead, we must consider it our duty to help him. If we help those in distress today, we will be spared of suffering tomorrow. By pulling out someone who has fallen into a ditch, we can prevent our own fall in the future.

In a sense, the sorrows arising from *prarabdha* are a blessing from God as they help us remember Him. We can see how those who have never even once called out to God turn to Him when they begin to suffer and how they take to the path of righteous living. They can thus find release from the suffering caused by past actions. 

Shrutis, Smritis and the Bhagavad Gita

by swami
tureeyamritananda puri



The source of Indian culture and wisdom is the Vedas. During different periods of time, Vedic mantras illumined the hearts of sages purified by long years of intense meditation. These mantras were not written down but transmitted verbally from Guru to disciple over millennia. This is why the Vedas are known as *shruti*, i.e. that which is heard. As the knowledge is not attributed to any person, the Vedas are also considered *apaurusheya*. They are considered to be without beginning or end and as *pramana*, authoritative texts. They need no other validating authority.

Embedded within each of the Vedas are the Brahmanas, which explain the meaning and symbolism of the Vedic mantras. The Brahmanas constitute the oldest commentary on the Vedic mantras. Many Brahmanas evolved from each of the Vedas.

The other subsections of the Vedas are the Samhitas, Aranyakas and Upanishads. The Upanishads contain the essence of the Vedic mantras. There are many Upanishads. Adi Shankaracharya, the chief exponent of the Advaita (non-dual) philosophy, wrote commentaries on the 10 principal Upanishads: *Ishavasya*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Prashna*, *Mundaka*, *Man-dukya*, *Aitareya*, *Shvetashvatara*, *Chandogya* and *Brihadaranyaka*. Therefore, these Upanishads are widely read. A summary of the philosophical and spiritual concepts of the Upanishads is found in the *Brahmasutras*.

The Vedangas ('limbs of the Vedas') are the six auxiliary disciples of Hinduism and they

include *shiksha* (phonetics), *chandaa* (prosody), *vyakarana* (grammar), *nirukta* (etymology), *kalpa* (instructions on rituals) and *jyotisha* (astrology). The Upangas ('supporting limbs') include *Atharvaveda*, *Ayurveda*, *Gandharvaveda*, *Dhanurveda* and the *Shad-darshanas* (six schools of philosophy): Sankhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Purva-mimamsa and Uttara-mimamsa.

Hindu literature also includes the *smritis*, literally 'that which is remembered.' This vast body of texts are attributed to different authors (unlike the shrutis) and were written at various periods, keeping in mind the well-being and prosperity of society. The subjects discussed include traditional and religious observances, the nature of society, *dharma* (code of righteousness), jurisprudence and social ethics. The smritis reflect the spirit of the times, and they can be modified and rewritten to suit contemporary needs. If

necessary, new smritis can be written based on the current social order and perceptions of social justice. There are many smritis; the most notable among them are the *Manu-smriti*, *Yajnavalkya-smriti* and *Parashara-smriti*. Another smriti text is the Indian constitution, which we could well call the Ambedkar-smriti.¹ Many amendments to the constitution are being drafted even now.

In contrast, the truth of the shrutis is unquestionable. They are eternal and changeless. If ever the laws indicated by the smritis deviate from the path that the shrutis lay down, then those rules must be abandoned, and only the laws in the shrutis should be followed. This is why it is said that the smritis should always be in harmony with the shrutis. The smritis are acceptable insofar as they remain true to the shrutis.

.....
1 Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was the person who oversaw the drafting of independent India's constitution.

The Upanishads, *Brahmasutras* and *Bhagavad Gita* are collectively known as the *Prasthanatraya*. Even though the *Bhagavad Gita* is a smriti as its authorship is attributed to Veda Vyasa, its inclusion in the Prasthanatraya exempts it from being evaluated as a smriti. The *Bhagavad Gita* holds the foremost position in Vedic literature. Its vision is uniquely profound, and it contains the essence of all the Upanishads. It is a practical manual of Vedic knowledge. It covers a broad range of spiritual topics in great detail: spiritual traditions and observances, dharma and *adharma* (unrighteousness). The *Bhagavad Gita* advises different ways to purify the mind and attain liberation. For example, it devotes an entire chapter to karma yoga (path of selfless action), considering it a separate path. The *Gita* further categorizes karma into three: karma, *akarma* (desireless action) and *vikarma* (special action) and explains each

of the three. The *Gita* also incorporates and synthesizes the teachings of different schools of philosophical thought. In short, the topics covered by the *Gita* are those found in the shrutis.

The *Bhagavad Gita* has 18 chapters and 700 verses. However, according to the following verse from the *Mahabharata*, the *Gita* has 745 verses: 620 attributed to the Lord, 57 to Arjuna, 67 to Sanjaya, and one to Dhritarashtra:

*śhaḍśhatani savimśhani
śhlokanam praba keśhavaḥ
arjunaḥ saptapanchaśhat
saptasāśhṭim tu sanjayaḥ
dhritaraśhraḥ śhlokamekaḥ
gitayamaṇamuchyate*

However, scholars contend that this verse was likely interpolated into the *Mahabharata* later. The consensus among them is that the *Gita* contains 700 verses. This is also Adi Sankaracharya's conviction:

*taṁ dharmam bhagavata
yathopaḍiśhṭam vedavyāsa*

*sarvajño bhagavan
gitakhyaiḥ saptabhiḥ
śhlokaśhatairupanibabandha*

The 18 chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* have been sub-divided into three. The first six chapters, known as the *Karma Kanda*, deal with karma yoga. *Bhakti* (devotion) is the focus of the next six chapters, known as the *Upasana Kanda*. The last six chapters, described as the *Jnana Kanda*, delves into the theme of *jnana* (Self-knowledge). This is only a loose categorization because each topic is addressed in all the chapters. This categorization is based only on the emphasis given to a particular topic in these chapters.

Many scholars assert that this categorization is an elaborate elucidation of the scriptural dictum, *tat tvam asi* ('You are That'). Ananda Giri, who wrote a commentary on the *Gita*, adheres to this view. The first six chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* give a detailed

interpretation of the *jivatma*, the individual self, denoted by *tat*. The next six chapters explain the Supreme, denoted by *tvam*, and the final six chapters deal with *asi*, the non-dual relation between *tvam* and *tat*. The final six chapters reject duality and awaken the awareness within the individual of his oneness with the Supreme.


Adi Shankaracharya describes the *Gita* as “*samasta vedartha sara sangraha bbutam*”—the essence of all the Vedas. He did not write a commentary on all 700 verses of the *Gita*. His commentary starts with the eleventh verse of the second chapter:

*ashocyan-anvashocastvam
prajna-vadamshca bhashase
gatasun-agatasumshca
nanushocanti panditah*

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

Arjuna grieves the impending deaths of those who do not fear their own death. Bhishma, Drona and the others have learned the scriptures and therefore know, even if only in principle, that they are the eternal and indestructible Self. Should their bodies be killed, they will go to a heaven for the valorous. Therefore, they do not fear death. As they are not anxious about the future of their children or grandchildren, they do not grieve for the living either.

The common man fears death and worries about the living: “My children and grandchildren have become evil and ignorant. What will become of their future?”

But the wise grieve neither for the dead nor for the living, as they do not identify with the body. They know that they are the immortal soul. They have learned from the scriptures that the soul is not bound to the body. 

Those Eyes

by Br. Rishi Chaitanya

Amma says, “The Guru is like a huge doorway through which the disciple can move forward on the spiritual path. To do so, the disciple should enter the heart of the Guru. The Guru is the noblest and most trusted friend, who awakens us to the reality that ‘I am not this small entity; I am infinite, as pervasive as the sky. I am fullness itself.’”

What is this inner doorway? It is a great mystery. Something opens up inside that we previously had no access to, which we never even knew existed. This doorway is the inner Guru. It is through this opening inside that the disciple is able to glimpse and feel her true nature, which is also our true nature.

She says, “In the spiritual life, two meetings take place: the outer meeting of the Guru and the inner meeting of the Guru. We need to have encountered both meetings in order to move forward in spiritual life.”

I first met Amma in 1996 in San Ramon, California. I was 18 years old. Amma was giving Devi Bhava darshan. I made my way up the stairs to the balcony, and sat above where Amma was giving darshan, looked around and took in the scene. The atmosphere was vibrant and beautiful.



One by one, people of different ages, backgrounds and nationalities went to Amma to be embraced. Captivating as that scene was, what was more splendid was the light that seemed to surround Amma. It wasn't anything supernatural. I somehow *felt* it was there.

After watching Amma for a long time, I closed my eyes and felt within myself the same light as the most soothing and

comforting motherly presence. That presence was so alive and new, yet utterly familiar. It seemed like a presence that had been dormant in my life for as long as I can remember. I spent that whole night on the balcony, watching Amma with open eyes, and then closing my eyes and talking to and being held by that wonderful presence.

As nobody had told us to stay until the end of Devi

Bhava, my friends and I left early. While driving out of the ashram, our car slid down an embankment and into a ditch. We spent half an hour trying to get the car out. At one point, while my friends were still trying, I took a break. I climbed up to the road and sat on the curb.

Suddenly, a Lexus driving down from the temple slowly pulled up and stopped in front of me. Someone rolled down the window. It was Amma! Her eyes were like two shining suns. We looked at each other. My jaw dropped open and I said, “Amma?” She gave me a big smile and the car drove off.

I didn’t see Amma for many months after that, but those eyes became my refuge. Even when I closed my eyes and visualized them, something would open up within me. Every thought of her eyes seemed to open an inner doorway for me.

Later I learnt from Amma that when we internalize our

experiences with the Guru — be it a darshan, a look, a smile, a word, the touch of Amma’s cheek, or the feel of her hand — they become an opening to the peace of our true self. It was by this technique alone — internalizing and reliving their experiences with Lord Krishna — that the *gopis* (milkmaids) of Vrindavan were able to realize God after the Lord left Vrindavan. Even now, I still visualize Amma’s eyes during meditation; that technique remains ever fresh.

Lord Krishna says,

*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)

This is my favourite verse in the whole *Gita* because it

shows the peak of divine love, where the devotee becomes one with God. For many people, before meeting Amma, God was just a word. But after meeting her, God became an experience. This is Amma's greatest miracle: awakening that love in each one of us. That love is no different from God or our true self. Little by little, we begin to feel that love behind everything. Amma has said that there is only one way to enter the doorway to God, and that is through love.

When I first met Amma, I wondered if it was really possible to have such an intimate relationship with God, as indicated by this verse from the *Gita*. Could one experience a closeness to the divine that was just as real as an intimate human relationship?

When I came to India, I found that this verse was really true. I was still a teenager when I left my family and made the journey to Amritapuri in 1997. I had never been out of the US

before. Although I had a spiritual hunger, still, being so far away from everything familiar to me wasn't easy.

At that time, there were not many amenities in the ashram. I found it hard to fit in and get used to life around Amma and in the ashram. To be honest, I often felt, "I don't know if I can do it. Maybe, I better go home..."

It was then that I became acquainted with one of the greatest secrets of this ashram: the ocean. It changed my life here forever. Over the next few years, she became my closest companion. I have poured my heart out to her so many times. I used to feel that no matter how bad a day I had, whenever I went there, she would rush to greet me, and I would lie in her lap and tell her all that was on my mind. This became for me more powerful than praying in any temple or before any deity.

I soon learnt that I wasn't the only one who had this

relationship with the ocean. At that time, I used to live in the small dormitory below Amma's room. I used to sleep next to the window. Many times at night, I used to hear Amma sneak out. She would go to the seashore to meditate, pray, talk to and sing to the Divine Mother in the form of the ocean. Mother Ocean was Amma's refuge when she was growing up. It was to her that Amma used to pour her heart out when no one else understood her.

Once, when it was past midnight, someone came to our dormitory and said, "Amma's calling you to the beach!" We went there and sat around Amma, who sang bhajans and meditated in the dark for a long time. Then Amma said, "Okay, children. Go back to bed. Amma will stay here a while longer." She did not allow even her attendant, Bri. Lakshmi (now Swamini Srilakshmi Prana), to stay with her. Amma said, "I have so many things to tell the

ocean. She may not listen if you're here."

I remember looking at Amma as I walked back. Her eyes were locked on the horizon. Although I had read about Amma's sadhana days, it was on that night that I really felt her relationship with the Divine Mother. I remember thinking, "This is why I've come here. This is what I want to have. I want to be able to pour out my heart to that inner presence, and have that kind of intimate relationship with God."

Amma says that each one of us has this inner relationship, but we have overlooked it for so long that we have lost touch with it. Seeing Amma communing with and demonstrating her great love for God right before my eyes was a tremendous experience. It is from her that we can learn how to pray to and commune with that source of love within. From her, we can learn to perceive the living presence behind forms of nature such as

the ocean, trees and the sky. These are things you cannot learn from books. You can only learn them by being in the presence of a realized master.

But the way this relationship with the Guru unfolds in each of our lives is different and unique. This is what makes it so special and sacred.

About 10 years ago, while travelling with Amma in the US, I invited a friend of mine to the Los Angeles program. He asked me a lot of questions and was looking forward to meeting Amma. We met at the program and talked for a while. I got him a token before the start of the Devi Puja. When Devi Bhava started, I became busy with my seva and we did not see each other for the rest of the night.

The next day, I called him on the phone and asked him, "How was your night? How was darshan? Did you meet Amma? Tell me all about it."

"Well," he said, "After we parted, I didn't even know

where to go. It was so crowded and loud, and people everywhere were bumping into each other. Finally, I made it to the darshan line. People kept telling me to move and then to wait. It was so confusing, and honestly, I was a little irritated. Just before I reached the stage, someone asked me, 'Do you want a mantra?' I said, 'No, I don't.' I don't even know what a mantra is!

"Finally, I got to the stage, and before I knew it, someone was turning me this way and that way. When I got close to Amma, someone got me to kneel. Someone else removed my glasses. Someone started wiping my face with a cloth... I was getting disoriented. When I was finally kneeling just in front of Amma, someone suddenly stuck his head right in front of me and asked, 'What's your native tongue?'

"My native what? Tongue???"

"While I was thinking about my tongue, Amma grabbed me and started mumbling some-

thing in my ear. I was wondering, 'What's she saying? Is it English?' I then got pulled backwards, turned and released.

"I thought, let me just find a place to sit on the stage and take in whatever happened... but there was no place. So, I left the stage and wandered around for a while. The crowds, the people, the music... I finally just got fed up and went back home!"

I was taken aback. I said, "I'm so sorry. I wasn't expecting that at all."

He said, "But you know, when I woke up this morning, the oddest thing happened. I just started crying, and I felt a kind of peace inside that I had never felt before..."

After a long pause, he quietly said, "I just can't get the thought of her out of my mind. I want to go to the next program!"

He did. He flew all the way there, and spent the next two days sitting in the hall,

watching Amma, meditating, praying and connecting to that deeper part of himself that he was just starting to access.

This is how it is for many of us: when the outer meeting of the Guru leads to the inner meeting with her, our lives change forever.

This is not to say that being with the Guru is easy. When I first met Amma and started spending time with her, it was wonderful. But at the same time, something unexpected entered my life — pain. I was totally unprepared for it. Being with the Guru has been more painful than I could ever have imagined. As the yearning to get closer to Amma becomes stronger, we start to see everything — our weakness, ego, desires and *vasanas* (latent tendencies) — that stands between us and our goal. It can be overwhelming and painful because though we know what we want, we are not able to get it. We realize we need help.

This is where the Guru comes in. She is the embodiment of God's love within us, and she will help us overcome those obstacles. But it is not an easy task.

Once we were sitting with Amma in a place of natural beauty. She looked at all of us and said, "You all look like beautiful flowers. But Amma's job is to look for the worms in each one of these flowers and wait for the right moment to remove them!" This 'worm removal' can be painful.

Many years ago, we were staying in a devotee's house during a tour. In the morning, we got ready for the program and rushed out of the house, leaving it in a mess. Late that night, Amma told our host, "Amma wants to stay in your house tonight!"

At first, she was thrilled, and then she panicked! The program was almost over and nothing was ready. The house was a mess. All of us who were staying there left the program

early, jumped into our cars, and raced back to the house. When we got there, we gathered the sleeping bags, dirty clothes, wet laundry, towels, plates, and dumped them all into one of the bedrooms. As we were doing this, the doorbell rang. Thinking that other devotees had come to help, the host opened the door; Amma was standing there with the swamis! In her panic, she slammed the door in their faces, and yelled, "Amma's here!"

We ran, made arrangements for the *pada puja* (ceremonial washing of Amma's feet), and then opened the door. Amma walked in and the *pada puja* began.

In the meantime, the husband was still upstairs, wildly shoving things into the room. Hearing the arati bell, he came dashing down so fast that he fell right in front of Amma!

After the puja, Amma went into the kitchen, cracked jokes, gave prasada to everyone, and

went upstairs to her room. A room had been specially prepared for Amma. It was kept meticulously clean all year and was revered as the 'Guru's room.' But when Amma went up, to the absolute horror of the hosts, she took a sharp left, went straight into the bedroom with all the mess, and shut the door. That is where Amma stayed!

We can put on a mask and fool everyone but the Guru. She goes right to where the dirt is, where our weakness and shortcomings are. And that is where she stays, reflecting what we are, like a mirror. But the Guru does this purely out of love. Her only desire is to bridge the gap between us and God, and to help us recognize and remove those obstacles. This can be painful, overwhelming and intense. Amma says that the Guru may even create situations to make us aware of our ego.

Our efforts can take us to a certain point, perhaps to the

threshold. But to go deeper in our meditation, to pass that doorway or to enter the heart of the Guru, our efforts will not suffice. When I began to see all my weakness, desires and negativities coming up again and again, I felt totally overwhelmed and told Amma about it. She said, "You must learn to face your weaknesses and negativities squarely, not with fear but with love, holding on to the Guru's hand."

Anyone can learn to do spiritual practices. But letting go of the ego and being an open book before the Master takes tremendous courage.

There is a deep and integral bond between God, ourselves and the Guru. When we draw closer to the Guru and open up to her completely, we will find those barriers to this bond dissolving in a mysterious way. The relationship with the Guru is the sweetest; it is also the most difficult.

The following incident took place about 20 years ago in

Chennai during a Brahmasthanam program. It was late at night, around 2 a.m., and I was washing pots. Someone ran to me and said, "Amma is calling you for darshan!" As I did not have time to change, I quickly ran. Darshan was just about over. I reached Amma. She didn't say anything. She just held me by my shoulders and brought her face close to mine until we were nose to nose. Her eyes were brilliant. They were gazing into my eyes with so much love that I felt as if I were falling into those endlessly deep eyes...

And then, it was over. She let me go, and I walked away in a daze. But that experience of Amma looking into my eyes like that went so deep inside me that it has become a part of me. I just have to think of it and I will feel it.


There was a Christian saint known as Teresa of Avila. Once, a nun asked her, "Sister, how do you meditate? How do

you commune with Jesus within?"

She said, "It's very simple. I look at him and he looks at me."

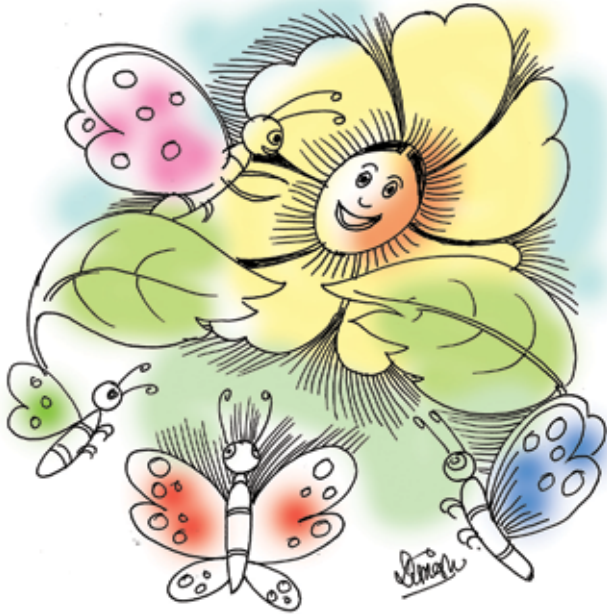
There are no words, just a deep feeling, a flow, love... And if we take that thought and drop it, all that remains is a stillness, oneness, peace.

When we internalize all our experiences with the Guru — be it a look, a smile, a word, the touch of Amma's cheek, or the feel of her hand — they become an opening to the peace of our true self.

May we always feel Amma's divine eyes peering at us from behind all of nature — the sky, the flowers, the ocean... May we hold on tightly to the Guru's hand as we go through difficult times when she cleans our 'dirty rooms.' Let us never forget that no matter where we are, what we have to go through, or how many times we fall down, we are never alone. Know that she never — not even for a moment — loses sight of us. 

Learning to Forgive

by Miliee Kassim, Malaysia



Everyone has had experiences that hurt them physically or emotionally. Many people carry the scars of physical or emotional trauma throughout their lives. They bottle up painful experiences that they find difficult either to forgive or forget. Let me share my experience in coming

to terms with the painful experiences in my life.

My mother and I were raised in an age where corporal punishment was the order of the day. This discipline stretched from home to school and was considered a norm. It was customary for parents to punish children more severely than their teachers. So, our lips were collectively sealed about whatever chastisement we received at school.

According to an old Confucian dictate, teachers are always right, and children must endure whatever was dished out. This instilled, for many in our generation, a certain level of self-discipline and a resistance to emotional trauma.

Growing older, we meet all kinds of difficult people who will test us to no end. Squabbling relatives, untrustworthy friends, gossiping colleagues and ungrateful bosses will constantly stir discomfiting emotions that may even make us feel tortured.

For me, forgiveness towards the elders of my youth and even my mother came much later in life when I began to understand that tough punishments were intended to mould us into becoming better members of society. It was, paradoxically, the traditional way of showing love for one's children and respect for society.

In my working life, I experienced countless setbacks — including unfair treatment, malicious lies and slander, backstabbing, and a whole lot of other mean and vicious actions — that filled me with rage and vengefulness. I would occasionally vent my anger to show my displeasure.

I was lucky to meet and marry an older man of gentle disposition and a patient attitude to life. He always made me feel calm. We had a blissful marriage that saw us through the ups and downs of life for 30 years until his last breath at the age of 80.

The day I met Amma, I was still struggling with these issues, but as I was drawn into her loving embrace, to my surprise, all that I was angry about became hushed, as if my mind had decided to take on an indifferent attitude towards my anger. After this first meeting with her, I imagined that, through the blessing of divine intervention, I would finally be rid of all these unfortunate situations once and for all. How naïve I was!

Initially, it was all sweetness and wonder when Amma bathed me in her undying love, unending attention and countless kisses. In her embrace, I became more deeply involved with her charitable work, and it wasn't long before the sea of emotions began to churn again.

While engaged with her charitable works, it became apparent that there was factionalism, backstabbing, slander and every other kind of negativity one could imagine, and that, too, in a group that

was supposed to promote spirituality and selfless service. Many times, my ego and self-image were badly damaged, and I was again engulfed by rage and thoughts of retribution. In my anger, I swore that I would never forgive the actions that some people committed in the name of my spiritual Mother and Guru. Whenever I complained to Amma, I would blissfully forget all the troubles with a single big hug from her. She would shower me with generous helpings of love and affection, and I would walk away with a smile. This happened so often, every time I saw her, that I was sure Amma knew how deeply indignant I felt.

Each time, Amma also told me to meditate daily without fail. In the beginning, meditation was difficult, as I was heavily distracted by all the energy-draining events around me. Eventually, after three years of daily meditation, my mind became much clearer. I

could observe the movements of my thoughts and other mental phenomena, and they no longer bothered me as much. Instead of adopting the persona of a victim, I began to look beyond trivialities to find the means to improve myself through situations instead of aspiring to crush others who harmed me.

While meditating one fine day, it dawned on me that in a world of duality, there must be people in opposition to goodness and truth. Someone must come in last so that another can come in first. There must be a *yin* (passive, feminine principle) to contrast the *yang* (active, masculine principle). In that moment, I understood and bowed down in gratitude to all those who had harmed me, for it was through them that I was shown who I did not want to be. It was through such people that I saw how big an ego I had; if not, I would not have been bothered by their actions. I realized that I

was hurt because all along, I had seen myself as a hapless victim, whereas the truth was that they showed me my weaknesses and helped me develop into a stronger and more determined person.

The process of forgiveness takes time, patience and determination. We ought not to be harsh on ourselves, but gently foster our ability to introspect quietly. Forgiveness releases pent-up resentment and anger. It may not lead to a reconciliation but it will give us an understanding of why things happened the way they did. Forgiveness is especially important for the mental health of victims, for the wounds that they carry can pass down through generations and metastasize into greater manifestations of resentment and hate.

Forgiveness is a process that truly begins only when we are in touch with the soul. Without such a fundamental transformation, true forgiveness is difficult and incomplete

because one must be open to divine grace to forgive truly. The power of forgiveness flows from the divine through us, from us to others, and finally back to ourselves. I am fortunate that Amma was there to guide me through this difficult process, holding my hand the whole time. The pain and mental agony I used to suffer from were washed away by her ever-flowing warmth and radiance. I am truly blessed to have her as my Guru.

I wish to share a beautiful story that helped me along my journey. It is the story of a little soul in heaven who wanted to experience an aspect of himself called forgiveness. As the soul lived in an endless soul-world, he was unable to understand what it was like to feel forgiveness. To this end, the little one approached God and asked to experience true forgiveness. God replied that because he lived in a perfect world of brilliance, there was no one to forgive as every soul

there was perfect. Looking around, the soul saw that each and every soul was radiating the luminous light of love. Just then, another soul approached him and said, “You may forgive me.”

“For what?” asked the little soul.

“I will reincarnate in your next physical lifetime and make sure to do something for you to forgive.”

The little soul was aghast. “Why would you want to do that? And why would you want to purposefully incur the bad karma of hurting another?”


“Simple,” said the friendly soul. “I do it out of love for you. You wish to experience forgiveness. In the absence of cold, you cannot feel warmth. In the absence of sadness, you cannot feel joy. I only ask one thing in return.”

“Anything,” replied the little soul. He was happy to have found someone who volunteered for such a mission.

The process of forgiveness takes time, patience and determination. We ought not to be harsh on ourselves, but gently foster our ability to introspect quietly. Forgiveness releases pent-up resentment and anger. It may not lead to a reconciliation but it will give us an understanding of why things happened the way they did.

“In the moment I strike you down, in the moments I do the worst things imaginable to you, remember who I really am.”

How many of us would have asked to feel forgiveness like the little soul? During this physical existence, how many of us remember that our detractors are souls who had volunteered to help us experience the pain that necessitates feelings of forgiveness? It must be painful for them to go through life not only feeling unloved but hated and blamed as well by many for the pain they cause. We often forget who we are in a world of

dualities. To forgive, we must remember who we really are. Amma has not forgotten. She sees through each one of us and regards all of us as her children. She showers us with love and grace, and patiently guides us through this quagmire of Maya (cosmic delusion). She knows the formula that each one of us needs, and like all medicine, some are bitter, and some, sweet. Amma helped me to realize that all situations in life are blessings that remind us of and mould us into who we really are — a divine, expansive soul overflowing with divine love. 



The Endless Picture Show

Narayan van de Graaff, Australia

Life is an endless picture show
With myriad scenes gone by
It seems to last forever
Then it's over in the wink of an eye
Denial of death is a crazy thing
It's the only thing that's certain
Now the question is, how will I live
Until that final curtain?
I feel I am a slow learner
When I look back on my life
Such doership and stressed reactions
To real and imaginary strife
Considering the stress undergone
It seems like a spiritual crime
All of that stress is now history
Dust in the vast sands of time
Still, I'm just another member
Of this vast struggling human race
And I'm learning to be equanimous
Through persistence and Amma's Grace
When Lord Yama finally embraces me
At the scheduled time of my death
How will I view the life that I've lived
Before that ultimate breath?
When I must farewell my loved ones
And my soul must finally depart
Will You be there to greet me, Mother
And merge me in Your heart?
Life is a struggle and I do fear death
But they are both easier to face
When I take refuge in Your lotus feet
And can feel Your divine Grace. 🌸



Chapter 17: Yoga of the Three-fold Faith

by Prof. V. Muraleedhara Menon, India

We should not regard life a burden. On the contrary, we ought to have an action plan that will make life joyful for us. In this chapter, the Lord explains the spiritual practices that a seeker ought to perform daily.

From the moment we were born, there were three things with us: our body, the society we were born into, and the world around

us. We must discharge our duties towards all three of them with utmost *śbrad̥d̥ha* (alertness and faith). According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, the duties are *tapas* (austerities), *dana* (charity) and *yajna* (sacrifice).

Let us consider *yajna* first. Owing to our consumption, we have already depleted many natural resources. We must make good on this loss. For example, our agricultural activities have impoverished the soil. We must restore its vitality by ploughing and fertilizing it. It is also our duty to preserve and maintain water sources and to replenish nature's bounty in as many ways as possible. This is how we can compensate for the natural attrition taking place.

We are not doing nature a favour; we are only repaying our debts. *Yajna* is nothing but actions that compensate for the loss we have created.

Our second duty is towards the society into which we were born. We have vital bonds

with our parents, relatives, neighbours, teachers and others. We have, for long, enjoyed their love and benefited from them. We are indebted to those who have nurtured us and must repay this debt. This is *dana*. In other words, *dana* refers to the acts of service that we must perforce do for the welfare of the human race. It includes all acts of service rendered by the body, mind, intellect, wealth and other resources.

Our third duty is towards the body, which is ever wearing out. As we are constantly using the body, mind and intellect, they get fatigued. We must take care of our body so that it can engage in actions that purify the mind. It is our only instrument for doing the *śadbhāna* (spiritual practice) of selfless service. This is *tapas*.

We must thus discharge our three-fold duty to nature, society and the body. In truth, they are not separate. Together, they constitute *seva-yajna* or

the offering of selfless service. Every one of our actions must become an offering to God. When do our actions become offerings to God? When they are *sattvic* (serene and harmonious). We must constantly chant our mantra while doing any action. This keeps us connected to the Supreme.

We should be especially careful about the food we eat. The mind is nothing but food transmuted; what we eat influences the nature of our mind. As food is part of *yajna*, it should be pure. Our ancestors arrived at these conclusions based on their intelligent experiments with food. We should not waste the knowledge that they gained and shared with us.

If we undertake *yajna*, *dana* and *tapas* in the manner prescribed and while chanting our mantra, they will confer prosperity on both the individual and society.

Today, both individual and social life have become riddled

with conflict. The tension between individual and society has become a pressing problem. Actually, the interests of individuals and society are not mutually contradictory. For what else is a country but a collection of individuals?

In all ages, the purity and glory of India have been maintained by spiritually illumined souls. The wealth and resources of an individual are also for others. What difference is there between the air in my room and the air outside? If I believe that there is a difference and try to shut the doors and windows to my room to keep the air inside for myself, I will die of suffocation! When we see home and land as 'my house' and 'my land,' we lose out on the ownership of infinite wealth. If we see just a select few as 'my' relatives or friends, we become cast out from the human family.

Selfishness should be sublimated into selflessness. The

various constituents of society should live harmoniously in the same way that the different organs in the body co-operate with and support each other. The sadhana of yajna, dana and tapas ensures this harmony. May our life become one long and unbroken yajna.

In every action, no matter how selfless, there remains a trace of selfishness that vitiates the purity of that action. Let us chant the mantra 'Om tat sat' and offer all actions to God. 'Om' means that the Supreme, creation and I are eternal. When this *bhavana* (divine feeling) takes root in our mind, we realize Om.

'Tat' means untainted. What this means is that the Supreme

remains detached from all of creation.

'Sat' refers to one whose actions are auspicious. Let us purify all our actions by imagining that all we see is auspicious.

Even the worst sinners can recite this mantra. The Lord's names are powerful enough to purify them. One who has gained a lot of *punya* (spiritual merit) will likely remember the Lord. A sinner in distress has equal freedom to think of God and call out to him.

Let us contemplate on the meaning of the mantra, dedicate all our actions to God, and thus become spiritually liberated. 🙏

(to be continued)

Dear Readers,

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Aruni

by Sanoop Sadanandan, India

After conquering Takshashila, King Janamejaya began living there with his ministers. One day, a great sage known as Uttanka came to meet him with a secret plan. Ugrashravas, who was narrating the *Mahabharata* to the ascetics, said, “Before I reveal the secret to you, let me tell you more about Uttanka’s Guru, Sage Ayoda-Dhaumya.

“Ayoda-Dhaumya was a great sage living in Takshashila. Among his best disciples were Upamanyu, Aruni and Veda.

Aruni, who was from the princely state of Panchala, had surrendered everything to his Guru. When I think of his devotion to his Guru, my hair stands on end. Aruni did all the work that his Guru entrusted, with an attitude of self-surrender.

“Following the Guru’s instructions, the ashram residents took care of the cows, paddy fields and vegetable gardens. One day, when it was raining heavily, Aruni was asked to check the embankment around the paddy field so that water from outside would not seep into the field. Aruni sprinted away at once to obey his Guru’s commands.

“When he reached the field, he saw that a part of the embankment had already been breached. Water was flowing profusely into the paddy field. Aruni tried to plug the gap with pieces of wood, mud and leaves, but failed to stop the water from gushing in. He had to do the Guru’s bidding, but

how? An idea struck him. Aruni laid down along the breach, and in this way, succeeded in damming the inflow of water.

“When Aruni did not return even after nightfall, Sage Ayoda-Dhaumya anxiously went in search of him. The Guru went to the field and started calling out to Aruni. Hearing his Guru’s voice, Aruni, who was lying numb in the cold, wet slush, got up, walked to his Guru and prostrated at his feet. He said, ‘As I could not stop the water from flowing in by any other means, I used my body to plug the gap in the embankment.’

“Hearing this, Ayoda-Dhaumya felt an overwhelming surge of love for his beloved disciple. He embraced Aruni warmly and blessed him. He said, ‘We should do all actions — whether eating, performing a *yajna* (sacred fire ceremony), doing *tapas* (austerities), or giving things away in charity — with self-

surrender. Actions done with such an attitude takes one to the supreme goal. Our action becomes an offering that is worthy of God when we see it as our duty and when it conforms to dharma. You have discharged your duties nobly. As you fulfilled the wish of your Guru, may you be blessed with all things good and auspicious. May all the scriptures be illumined in your

intellect. In times to come, your egoless and dedicated action will be hailed as an instance of surrender to the Guru. As you emerged from the embankment, may you be known as Uddalaka. (*Uddala* means 'that which destroys all diseases.') With self-surrender and the Guru's grace, may you overcome all obstacles and attain the ultimate goal."



"In a sense, the sorrows arising from prarabdha are a blessing from God as they help us remember Him. We can see how those who have never even once called out to God turn to Him when they begin to suffer and how they take to the path of righteous living. They can thus find release from the suffering caused by past actions."

— Amma



Lilas Around Amma

Amma's Krishna Lilas

My first memory of Amma is from 1993, when I was 16 years old. When I returned home from school, I saw a photograph of a woman in our prayer room. My father told me that she was Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, that she was divine, and that I should offer her prayers just as I did to other deities.

A few years later, in 1999, while I was studying for my law degree at ILS Law College, Pune, a hostel mate invited me to visit Pimpri Gaon, Pune,



to see a saintly woman and her ashram. I accompanied her out of curiosity. When we reached the ashram, I saw a radiant woman wearing a white sari sitting on the dais. It was Amma! Just looking at her was uplifting. After her soul-stirring satsang and bhajans, she started hugging everyone.

In the years that followed, I completed my studies, got married, had a child, and joined Amma's school (Amrita Vidyalayam) in Bangalore as a teacher. Life took a turn for the worse in 2008 when my son was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma, a rare type of cancerous tumour that grows in bones or the soft tissues around them. My son's entire left femur (thigh bone) had to be replaced by a titanium prosthesis. He was only seven years old. I felt uncertain about his future and spent many anxious moments worrying about the outcome of the treatment.

But this was also when I started experiencing Amma's grace. My whole family, school and social community came forward to support me. I experienced Amma's compassion in every teacher, support staff and student who went out of their way to help me and my son. Strangers prayed for my son's recovery. Financial assistance started pouring in. Many kind souls gave me moral support.

I also found solace in my connection to Lord Krishna. I shared all my sorrows with him. I would routinely visit Amma's Brahmasthanam temple in the school premises, sit in front of Amma's photo, and talk endlessly to Krishna. On many occasions, I would cry. Looking at Amma's photo, I would see her smiling at me. On two occasions, flowers fell from the photograph. Though this is usually considered a sign of divine grace, I remember looking around to see if a lizard or breeze had pushed

the flowers down. Although my intellect dismissed the whole thing as a mere coincidence, deep down, I knew that Amma was assuring me that she would take care of everything.

My son's health started to improve. I decided to take my son for Amma's darshan during her annual visit to Bangalore. I was anxious about the crowd and my son's prosthetic leg. The school management took special pains to help us and to tell Amma about my son's situation. She blessed him and told him not to worry. As for me, I had been mentally rehearsing the umpteen things that I wanted to tell Amma. But when I looked at her, I forgot everything. I felt as if I was in the presence of Krishna. As Amma gazed at me, I spontaneously asked her, "Are you Krishna?" I suddenly saw her expression change. There was a twinkle in her eyes. Having recognized my Krishna in her, my eyes welled up. Amma

smiled, gave me prasada, and asked me to sit beside her on the stage. Though the meeting was so brief, it was overwhelming. I sat there, continuously gazing at my Krishna. I sang Krishna bhajans and wept, oblivious to the onlookers. Those were tears of bliss. I sat on the stage until 4 a.m. and then decided to go home.

I recall chattering continuously to my sleepy husband about my thrilling experience. He listened to me patiently and was happy that I felt better. I then decided to rest for some time before beginning the next day's work. As soon as I closed my eyes, I saw Amma's feet, which suddenly changed into Lord Krishna's feet. This happened thrice, and I felt all the pain in my heart dissolving and being replaced by joy. Amma knew that I would be able to surrender to her completely only if she came to me as Krishna. After all, she had heard my every thought and prayer in the temple.

I decided to return the next day and ask Amma for a mantra of Lord Krishna. She readily agreed to give me a mantra and asked me to wait. While waiting, I wondered if the mantra would be too difficult for me to chant. When I received my mantra at around 4:30 a.m., to my surprise, it turned out to be a simple mantra. Again, I wondered how she knew what was going through my mind.

I learned two things that day: one, Amma is a holy soul; two, entangled as we are in the problems of life, we have forgotten to turn to God. Amma wants us to depend wholly on Him, for no one else can truly help us.

— Anita Menon, *India*

When Sparrows Helped

Everything in nature is a miracle. The sun, moon, stars, oceans, rivers, plants, deserts, the human body, birds and animals are all miracles of the

creator. Amma's darshan is also a great miracle. She sits long hours to embrace and console thousands of people in a single day without any sign of boredom on her face.

I saw Amma for the first time in 1996, and soon started reading the *Awaken, Children* series of books and the *Matruvani* magazine. These publications spoke to me and touched my heart. Sometimes, I would even skip college just to read these books.

Once, I read that if we pray for others, the entire universe will pray for us; that if we do some good to others, then we will receive benefits that are a hundred or thousand times more than what we give. These were not the exact words but the gist of what was written. In other words, by helping someone, we can yield a bountiful return. I was around 19 years old then and in the second year of my engineering degree. I decided to test this teaching of Amma.

While returning home from college, I saw a beggar. Suddenly, an idea came to me: why not test Amma's teaching this very moment? I gave the beggar 50 *paisa*. He smiled at me, giving me the feeling that he had read my mind. I mentally calculated that if Amma's teaching were true, then I would reap a return of ₹50 or ₹500 (100 or 1,000 times of what I had given to the beggar).

The next day, a close relative visited our house after a long time. As a token of her love, she gave ₹500 to my grandmother, who immediately gave it to me. I was speechless! God or the universe had given me back what I had given, a thousand times multiplied. Amma's teaching really worked!

I decided to test this law of returns at a bigger level. I told my mother about this law and pestered her to give ₹500 or ₹1,000 to the maid who delivered milk packets to our house

every morning. As she was poor, I was sure that she would need the money; I could also test the law of grace. I am not sure if my mother understood but she agreed to help the maid. However, she only gave her ₹250.

Within a month, I received a non-returnable scholarship worth ₹25,000 from a reputed finance company for my engineering degree! This time, my mum began to appreciate the law of grace.


My testing did not end here. I started doing small acts of selfless service. A few sparrows used to visit our apartment, which is on the second floor of the building. I decided to feed the sparrows rice grains. Amma says that if we help someone, the entire universe will help and pray for us. I wanted to feed these sparrows so that I could receive more grace from the cosmos. I was facing quite a few challenges in life then. My father had passed away a

year before. I found the engineering syllabus very tough, and was worried about whether I could meet my target: passing my engineering degree with a first class. I mentally prayed to Amma to help me. I had read about how her blessings had enabled students to pass their exams with flying colours.

One day while preparing for an examination on 'Mathematical Operations Research,' three or four sparrows came to the balcony of our house and started chirping shrilly as I was studying a particular math problem. I had a strange feeling that the sparrows were trying to tell me something. Were they trying to indicate that the math problem I was trying to solve would appear in the question paper the next day? I studied that problem thoroughly.

The next day, to my surprise, that very problem appeared in the examination, and I could answer it correctly.

The sparrows continued to help me during many occasions in the months that followed, until I completed my engineering degree with a first class. I believe that our beloved Amma helped me through these sparrows, who not only helped me with my engineering studies but also helped me on several other occasions to guide me on the right path. The sparrows became so friendly that they used to come into our house to search for food and shelter. In return, they were always ready to help us in times of need.

Sadly, these tiny little sparrows are no longer to be seen in the city because of pollution, cell-phone towers, and apartments that are not nature friendly. Nevertheless, I will never forget these gentle beings. Though it may sound fanciful, it is my faith that Amma helped me through the sparrows when I most needed help. *Jai Amma!* 

— *Saranath, India*



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