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

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Letters and Submissions: matruvani@amritapuri.org

Try Not to Repeat Your Mistakes

Children, rare are those who have not made mistakes knowingly or unknowingly in life. Most people brood over the mistakes they made and feel bad about it. It is futile to continue feeling troubled over past actions. What is over is over. If we continue brooding over them, we will lose whatever reserves of strength we have left. Instead, we must strongly resolve, "I will not repeat my mistakes again!" The pure efforts we put forth afterwards will cleanse the mind. This is what is needed. The mind's purity is revealed by the desire to think noble thoughts and do good deeds, and by the efforts made in that direction.

There is no sin that cannot be washed away by the tears of remorse. However, once we know what is wrong, we must not do it again. The mind must bolster itself to walk the right path.



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If a young child throws a toy at his mother, she will smile lovingly, gather him into her arms and kiss him. But if he does the same thing after he has grown up, she will not tolerate it. Similarly, God will forgive the sins we committed unknowingly, but He will not forgive the sins we commit after we have understood what is right and wrong. Therefore, we must try not to repeat our mistakes.

If we make a mistake while writing with a pencil, we can erase it. But we can only do so once or twice. If we keep erasing, the paper will tear. The greatest sin is knowingly repeating the same mistake. We must avoid this at all costs.

Do not think, “I have sinned many times. My mind isn’t pure enough to pray. I’ll start praying after my mind has been purified.” We will never

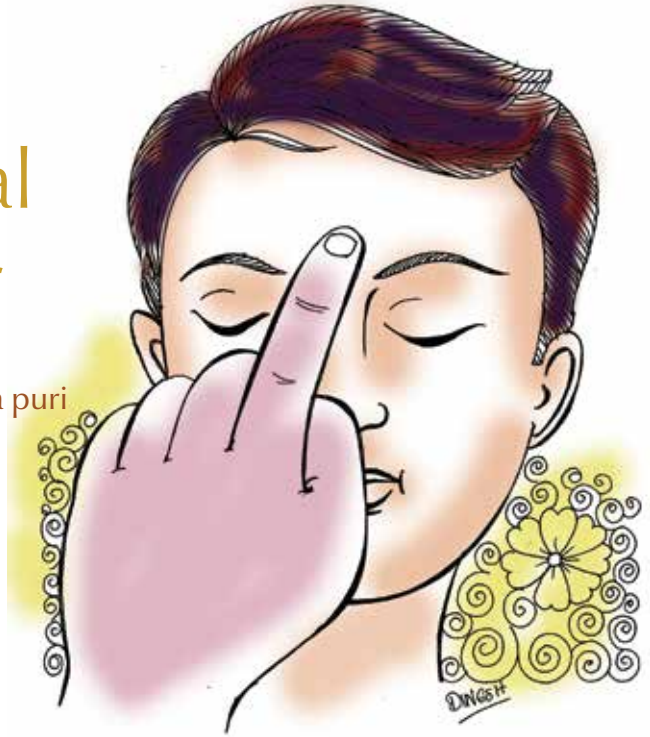
be able to swim in the ocean if we wait for its waves to subside. Can you imagine a doctor telling a patient to consult him only after he has been healed? We go to a doctor to cure our illness. Similarly, God must cleanse our hearts. Only by taking refuge in Him can the mind be purified.

We need not remain sad, thinking about the kind of life we used to lead. The past is like a cancelled cheque. We need not continue lamenting over our past mistakes and failures. We still have with us invaluable capital — life. Hence, we must think about the great profits we stand to gain. Optimism lends vitality to life, even amidst the greatest sorrows. We must never lose our optimistic faith. God’s grace will certainly protect us.



Spiritual Doctor

by swami
amritageetananda puri



August 14th, 2021, was a proud day for Amma's children. The Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) conferred an honorary doctorate on Amma for her "great contributions in the field of spirituality, education, environmental issues, humanitarian efforts, love and compassion."

A verse from *Niti Shatakam* by the venerable sage and king, Bhartrhari, comes to mind:

*ete satpurusha parartha
ghatakab svartha parityajya
ye
samanyastu parartham-
udyamabbrtab svartha-
virodhansi ye
te'mi manava-rakshasab
parahitam svarthaya
nighnanti ye
ye vighnanti nirarthakam
parahitam te ke na
janimabe*

These *satpurushas* (noble people) are concerned only with helping others and have no thought about their own welfare. The *samanyas* (average people) also think about the welfare of others without letting it affect their personal interest. The *manava-rakshas* (demons in human forms) wreck the interests of others to fulfil their own ends.

Those who destroy the

welfare of others for no reason — I do not know what to call them! (75)

Amma is a *satpurusha*. Her whole life is dedicated to improving the welfare of others. By honouring her, KIIT, one of the most pre-eminent universities in India, was honouring the spiritual values and noble qualities she embodies and sending out a powerful message to its students. It is not uncommon for youth to think that spirituality and devotion to God are outdated or for the retired elderly. However, as Amma often points out, true education is learning not only about the outer world but the inner self as well. Making youth understand the necessity of spiritual values is an important responsibility.

A doctor is generally understood to mean a physician. Amma, like all Gurus, is a spiritual doctor, who heals the disease of suffering and bondage. *Sannyasis* (ordained

monks) traditionally chant the *Dakshinamurti Stotra* to glorify the Guru. Dakshinamurti is regarded as an incarnation of Lord Shiva. The word ‘*dakshina*’ also means ‘South.’ One of the verses in the *Dakshinamurti Stotra* is as follows:

*gurave sarva lokanam
bhishaje bhava roginam
nidhaye sarva vidyanam
dakshinamurtaye namah*

Prostrations to Lord Dakshinamurti, who is Guru to the whole world, who heals the disease of worldliness, and who is the repository of all wisdom.

Amma is a *bhishak* (doctor) for those who want liberation from all mental and physical suffering. In the *Guru Stotra*, verses in praise of the Guru, it is said:

*ajnana timirandasya
jnananjana shalākaya
chakshurunmilitam yena
tasmai shri gurave namah*
Salutations to the Guru,

who clears the cataract of ignorance by applying the ointment of spiritual knowledge and thus restores to us the vision of the Truth.

In Tibetan Buddhism, there is a prayer for liberation from the pain and causes of suffering:

*tayata
om bekaṇḍze bekaṇḍze
maha bekaṇḍze raḍza
samudgate soha*

May the many sentient beings who are sick, quickly be freed from sickness. May all the sicknesses of beings never arise again.

The Tibetan ‘*bekaṇḍze*’ (eliminating [pain]) is derived from the Sanskrit ‘*bhishaje*,’ which means healing. This prayer is also known as the Medicine Buddha mantra.


The splendour and glory of the sun will not change no matter what we say about it. But by worshipping its light,

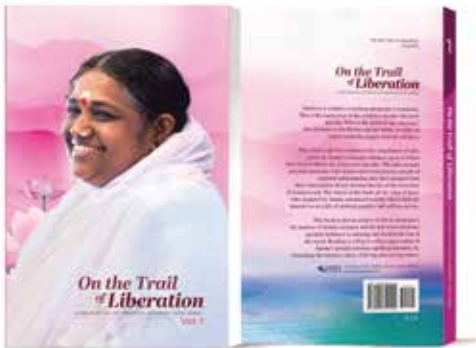
power and energy, our hearts are purified. Similarly, truly honouring Amma means striving to practise and assimilate her noble qualities so that we may be uplifted to the state of infinite peace:

bhishaje bhava roginam

dakshinamurtaye

amriteshvaryai namah

Prostrations to Amritheshvari, who incarnated in the South to become a physician who heals the disease of suffering and bondage. 



On the Trail of Liberation

A RECOUNTING OF PRECIOUS MOMENTS WITH AMMA

Vol. 1

The first volume of the compilation of the evening satsangs is now on sale in our ashram bookstore. You may also order online at amritabooks.in and enjoy a 25% discount or at amazon.in.



Divine Flute

by bri. namratamrita
chaitanya

At the start of 2020, Amma encouraged ashram residents to compose bhajans and said that she would record with them. Her words inspired a song writing and composing frenzy. I remained aloof as I am not a singer and have never written devotional poetry before. However, in spite of this, Amma's *sankalpa* (divine resolve) bore fruit.

In January 2020, during the morning archana in the Kali Temple, I closed my eyes and concentrated on Amma's form

in my heart. All of a sudden, it was replaced by the form of Lord Krishna wearing a turban and yellow robes. He was not wearing any jewellery. Dark as a raincloud, he was sitting under a tree and playing his flute. My first thought was, "I'm not even a Krishna devotee!" My next thought was, "Maybe, I'm imagining all this."

I tried to dismiss this image. However, I continued to see him vividly and feel his presence strongly throughout the archana. When the archana ended, I recalled Amma saying that in North India, Krishna is often depicted wearing a turban and relatively fewer ornaments compared with the South Indian images of the Lord. It occurred to me that I may have been blessed with the darshan of the form loved by countless devotees in North India. I felt that maybe Amma wanted me to learn how to play the flute. I knew a brahmacharini who played the flute and decided to see her.

When I left the Kali Temple, that very brahmacharini appeared before me! Feeling a little abashed, I told her about my vision of Krishna playing the flute and how I believed I should learn to play it. To my relief, she readily agreed to teach me how to play the flute and asked me to buy one from the ashram's music store.

Later that day, I went to the store. The brahmachari there asked me what type of flute I wanted. As I did not have a clue, I told him to select one for me. He did and told me to return at 3 pm to pick it up.

When I told the brahmacharini I had met that morning that I would be picking up the flute in the afternoon, she said, "Actually, there is a student called Unni, who is more qualified to teach. You should learn from him." I wondered how I was going to find this Unni.

At 3 pm, when I went to the music store, I saw both the brahmacharini and Unni there.

She introduced us. Unni taught me some basic fingering techniques then and there.

Another brahmacharini who saw me with the flute told me, "You should get it blessed by Amma."

That evening, I stood near the gate that Amma passes on her way back to her room, hoping to get my flute blessed. She saw me, took my flute, and asked, "Do you play the flute?"

I said, "No, Amma, I'm about to start learning."

Kissing it, Amma said, "So you're not going back to Amrita Vidyalayam, Odisha? You've forgotten all that and are going to sit here and play the flute!" Saying so, Amma handed the flute to me. I smiled sheepishly.

The next day, I met a brahmacharini, who asked, "Have you written a bhajan yet?"

I said, "I have no connection with bhajans. I am no poet either. Further, my Malayalam is bad!"

She said, "I can help you. Give me a theme." I said I would think about it and left.

Later that day, I found myself thinking about what type of bhajan I would write. Focusing on my love for Amma, I tried thinking of some words to describe her, but nothing came to mind.

The next day, the same brahmacharini asked me about my theme. Suddenly, I remembered the flute and the scene I had witnessed in my heart. I began narrating a story:

Krishna is playing his flute in the forest. Drawn by the music, Radha sets out in search of the Lord. She follows the strains of the flute and spots Krishna seated under a tree. She thinks of how blessed the flute is to be always in the hands of the Lord or tied to his waist.

In time, Krishna leaves Vrindavan, leaving the flute behind. The residents of Vrindavan are devastated. In her anguish, Radha wonders how the flute will cope. She finds

the flute in a state of shock and disbelief. It laments, "O Radha! What am I going to do now? Since I was born, I have been with Krishna, who has abandoned me. Why should I continue to live?"

Radha tries to console the flute. An agonising wave of longing for Krishna overcomes both Radha and the flute. Radha touches each part of the flute reverentially, thinking of how Krishna's fingers and lips had touched it. She wonders if she can feel the Lord and ease her pain if she plays his flute. With intense devotion overflowing from her heart, she starts playing. As she plays, she forgets not only herself but also the flute and the image of Krishna. All that exists is the music and supreme love.

As the words tumbled out of my mouth, I knew they were not mine, for such deep devotional sentiments seemed alien to me. The story was not mine

either because I was hearing it for the first time as I narrated it. It was a surreal experience.

The brahmacharini said, "Amma has said that each song should be 12 lines long. How can this story be condensed within 12 lines?" I assured her that I would not mind if she could not do it.

Ten minutes later, she came to me and said excitedly, "I think it's done! I don't know how, but the lyrics just came to me." I was so surprised. I read what she had written and realized that she had managed to capture the story in 12 lines of beautiful, poetic language.

I felt that the tune for the song should be mournful, to reflect the pain of separation that Radha and the flute felt. We wondered whom we could ask for help. Fifteen minutes later, the brahmacharini came back to me and said that a melody had come to her mind. She sang it to me and I loved it. I suddenly had a bhajan to offer Amma!

As Amma had given me the subject, lyrics and tune so easily, I felt that I ought to practise the song to do justice to her gift. Over the next 20 days, I practised singing it continuously but was repeatedly told that my pronunciation was poor and my pitch was going off in various places.

I was about to give up. But after some thought, I felt that recording this song with Amma would be worth any amount of striving, and so decided to persevere. I also asked the brahmacharini who had helped me compose the song to sing it along with me; she agreed.

We began practising together. This time, it seemed even more difficult as we had to synchronize all aspects of the singing — the melody, rhythm and pronunciation. I also received feedback that I was not getting the *bhava* (flavour) of the song right. I watched YouTube music videos to see if I could learn from

professional singers. I soon found myself spending every waking moment on the song and neglecting my *seva* (selfless service) at the Odisha Amrita Vidyalayam. That is when the significance of what Amma had said dawned on me. She had said that I would spend all my time playing the flute and forget about the school. In a sense, wasn't that what I was doing — trying to channel the music from Amma, just as the flute was a conduit for Krishna's love?

I prayed, "Amma, you must have had some reason to put that image of Krishna and the beautiful story in my heart. Now, you have to help me sing this song!"

Finally, the day came when we were to record the song with Amma. As soon as I sat in front of Amma, I felt overwhelmed by her presence. I entered a meditative state of bliss. I barely heard Amma as she chided me and asked me to adjust my microphone. The

other brahmacharini did it for me. As we started singing, I must have sounded bad because Amma threw a candy at me and asked me to eat it and clear my throat. I tuned out the rest of my surroundings — the harmonium, the *tablas*, the brahmacharini singing with me and the chorus — and could only hear and see Amma. She said, “Look at her! She’s in *samadhi*!” I was in a state of overwhelming bliss and deep silence. Nothing had prepared me for this experience, which was a gift Amma bestowed on me. It was humbling and beyond anything I have ever felt in Amma’s presence. I felt so grateful to her!

Somehow, the song got recorded and I got up. As I was leaving, Amma called me back and told me that I should sing with more awareness while singing before a mic.

Six months after I received the flute, I had to leave for Odisha. Before my departure,

I sang the song with Amma during the evening bhajans. This time, I had no issues with bhava because I was truly heartbroken at the thought of the impending separation from Amma. That night, many people told me that they had been moved by the song.

Amma says that we should strive to become an instrument in God’s hands. Wasn’t that what happened? She gave me a chance to participate in her *lila* (divine play). She willed that I should offer her a song and set everything in motion, from imparting a vision of Krishna and his flute to giving me lyrics and a tune.

Whenever I miss Amma now, I listen to the bhajan that is both a sweet memory of my time with her and a symbol of what is possible when we become an instrument of God. May we all become a flute in Amma’s hands and may our lives be transformed into a melodious song of divine love.



Surrender

by dr. ramanathan p.v., india



The scene is the Kurukshetra battlefield at the start of the Mahabharata War. Lord Krishna has briefed Arjuna on several aspects of the sacred and secret knowledge of the Self. The Lord then blesses him with a vision of the *Vishva-rupa*, or Krishna's cosmic form. Arjuna, who is already rattled, becomes speechless and starts shivering at this sight.

Lord Krishna then declares:

*kalo'smi loka-kshaya-krt
pravrdhho
lokan samabartum iba
pravrttab
rte'pi tvam na bhavishyanti
sarve
ye'vastitab pratyanyikeshu
yodbab*

I am mighty time, come forth to annihilate all the worlds. Even without you, none of them arrayed here is going to survive. (*Bhagavad Gita*, 11.32)

The implications are, at least, five:

1. Fate is inexorable;
2. Krishna himself is time, the great leveller that is merciless and has no friend or foe;
3. Time, which comprises the past, present and future, is in total control of creation (which has already happened), existence (which is happening) and dissolution (which will happen);

4. Krishna as Kala, which also refers to the God of Death, is the actual killer of Arjuna's enemies, and not Arjuna;
5. Krishna dangles the carrot in the form of the benefits of victory before Arjuna, who does not want to fight.

Lord Krishna goes on to say:

*tasmat tvam uttishtha yasho
labhasva
jiva shatrun bhungshva
rajyam samrdham
mayaiivate nibatab purvam
eva
nimitta-matram bhava
savyasacin*

Hence, arise and attain name and fame. Defeat your enemies and enjoy a prosperous kingdom. Your enemies have already been slain by me. Merely be an instrument in my hands, O Arjuna. (11.33)

Arjuna is being told that if he fights, victory is his, hands

down. All his enemies are going to be killed, with or without his participation. But by fighting the war, Arjuna will enjoy name, fame, victory and prosperous rulership, gratis.

This is Krishna's message, through Arjuna, to all of us: we are not doers. The sooner we realize this truth, the better for us. Otherwise, we will accumulate karma from doership, which triggers a cycle of cause and effect, creating an endless chain reaction, leading to more sorrow in the future.

It is wiser to know that there is a power beyond — call it Krishna or Kala — that operates, and we are mere puppets in its hands.

Arjuna is here addressed as 'savyasacin,' which means one adept in fighting well with both hands. The irony is that he is refusing to fight. Similarly, we may well be well-equipped, qualified and intelligent, but hesitate, fumble and dilly dally when it is time to act.

Krishna underlines the point: "O Arjuna, you are scared of an act you are not actually going to do!" Through this, he is making several hints that can help us progress spiritually:

- There is a divinity that helps shape our end.
- Discarding the sense of being a doer is a shortcut to *mukti*, spiritual liberation. Anyway, considering ourselves doers, when we are not, is an illusion and grievous error.
- We are in the grip of the ego. But we can refuse to be its slave and cultivate the awareness to drop it. This willingness is also a shortcut to surrender.
- We are all tools in the hands of the Divine. It is wiser to be conscious of it and cultivate an attitude of surrender instead of being a slave of the ego.
- If we remain with God, we stand to gain everything beneficial via divine grace.

But falling to the ego, we come to grief inadvertently.

The *Bhagavad Gita* emphasizes doing one's duty, as is obvious from its very first verse: "*Dharma-kshetre kuru-kshetre...*" (1.1). If we rearrange the words to obtain a different purport, commonly done in Sanskrit, we get "*Kshetre kshetre kuru dharma*" — "Do your duty in every stage and situation in life." Shirking our duty will make us incur a more severe karmic bondage. Arjuna's duty as a *kshatriya* (warrior) is to defend *dharma* (righteousness). Similarly, each one of us is duty-bound as son or daughter, father or mother, brother or sister, husband or wife... As devotees, the greatest and noblest duty is surrendering to the Guru.

Prasada buddhi, seeing everything as divine dispensation, alone helps us gracefully accept all situations as coming from God or the Guru. This attitude

must be cultivated with faith and awareness, and will pave the way to equanimity.

One of the mantras in the *Lalita Sahasranama* (1,000 names of the Divine Mother) is '*Om iccha-shakti jnana-shakti kriya-shakti svarupinyai namah*' — 'Salutations to the Divine Mother, who is of the form of the powers of will, knowledge and action' (658). Here, we see, the glory of the Creatrix of the Universe: firstly, as the wise conceiver of the totality of creation; secondly, as an unerring doer, who knows all the consequences of every move; and ultimately, as an impeccable executor of all actions. Thus, it stands to reason that Lord Krishna can tell Arjuna to become a tool in his hands, hands that handle things with immaculate perfection.

This advice complements what he said earlier: "*Karmanye vadhikaraste ma phaleshu kadacana*" — "Your business is to do your duty, but you are not entitled to its result" (2.47).


Certain mischievous elements may twist Krishna's words as an instigation to fight and kill. This is wrong. The Lord had honoured the traditional steps in conflict resolution, which entails *sama* (negotiating), *dana* (cajoling), *bheda* (reasoning and warning) and *danda* (chastising). He had already tried the first three expedients, even acting as messenger of peace, to no avail. In short, every effort to avoid war was made. War had been declared as a final resort.

Being asked to become a tool in the hands of God (*'nimitta-matram bhava'*) is a simple definition of surrender. Our greatest enemy, the ego, is within us. When we strive to surrender, this enemy will ask, "Why should I?" The best answer is a counter question, "Why not?"

Being a tool is not easy. It has no emotions, likes or dislikes, or preferences. Thus, a tool in the hands of the Almighty is a *stbita-prajna*, one

who is established in the highest wisdom. This wisdom and surrender are two sides of the same coin.

Actually, our whole life is a virtual surrender to all and sundry. My personality (if I have one) is born only of a surrender to my tailor and my hair-dresser. Surrender to my tailor or dressmakers makes a gentleman of me. When the barber puts a knife to my throat, even though he is only giving me a shave, I must say yes in total surrender. My visits to an eatery or a doctor are often a surrender of my health at their hands. What are all these if not expressions of surrender on a daily basis?

A Guru is a far better bet to surrender to. She can help us defeat the mighty enemies of *kama* (desire), *krodha* (anger), *lobha* (greed), *moha* (delusion), *mada* (pride) and *matsarya* (jealousy). Conquering these, one enjoys the kingdom of peace. May we are surrender to the Divine. 

FORGIVING



Understanding Victims and Perpetrators

by pavithra
novak, germany

Having worked as a clinical psychologist and psychotherapist for almost 20 years, it has become increasingly obvious to me how important forgiveness is to our mental well-being. No wonder that it is one of Amma's more prominent teachings. She knows all about the dynamics of the mind, and wants us to tap into the deeper layers of the heart,

so that we can awaken our innate ability to forgive, which contributes to the healing of all. Amma often says, “We are all beads strung together on the same thread of love.” Knowing and experiencing this in every moment, she patiently teaches us all we that need to know about forgiveness not only through her words, but mainly through her deeds. I am sure all her children have experienced Amma’s forgiving nature.

But what exactly is Amma is trying to teach us? What does forgiveness entail? In short, it means to stop holding on to resentments, which is an unhealthy use of our energy. As soon as we stop brooding over what happened, we can outgrow the situation and its effect on us. When we let go of resentment, forgiveness will arise naturally.

We cannot change what happened, only the way we relate to it. The same thing is applicable to people: whatever

they did to us remains a fact. If someone has harmed us in any way, he or she must face the karmic consequences of the *adharma* (unrighteous) action.

One cannot undo an *adharma* deed. It is like a nail that has been hammered into wood; even if we pull out the nail, the hole will remain. We must take responsibility for what we did (or did not do). Repenting and atoning for our mistake and making sure that we do not repeat it is the best way to redress a wrong. We must also forgive ourselves; otherwise, shame and guilt will hold us back and prevent us from developing our God-given potential fully for the benefit of society. We all have erred. As Jesus said to a mob that wanted to stone a woman to death because she was considered a sinner, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast the first stone” (John, 8:7).

Understanding is the key to letting go of resentments.

That said, we must first understand and acknowledge what the victim has suffered before trying to understand the perpetrator. All too often, people, sometimes even the victims, try to empathize with the perpetrator in order to avoid the uncomfortable but important step of becoming aware of and getting in touch with their own pain. Usually, victims feel a lot of shame for what happened to them, and it is important to acknowledge it.

But it is unhealthy to hold on to shame and anger for too long as doing so drains away a lot of our energy and keeps us connected to the perpetrator in a subtle and negative way. In order to become free of the effects of wrongdoing, we must first thoroughly acknowledge, understand and empathize with our own anguish. Only when our suffering has been given enough attention can we move on to understanding the perpetrator,

because perpetrators are almost always victims themselves.

In the US, there is a project called the 'Compassion Prison Project.' As part of the project, the inmates who have signed up for the project are asked to stand in a huge circle in the courtyard of the jail. Then everyone is asked questions like, "If you have been verbally abused, sworn at, insulted, put down or humiliated as a child by your parents or someone else in your household, step inside the circle."

Usually everyone takes a step into the circle. "If you have been pushed, grabbed, slapped or had things thrown at you, step inside the circle." 99% take another step. "If a parent or someone else in your household has often or very often hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured, step inside the circle." Another 80% take a step. More questions are asked, and more

Forgiveness means to stop holding on to resentments, which is an unhealthy use of our energy. As soon as we stop brooding over what happened, we can outgrow the situation and its effect on us. When we let go of resentment, forgiveness will arise naturally.

steps are taken inside the circle.

The longer this continues, the more obvious it becomes how traumatized those prison inmates themselves are, and how they had once been victims of the very violence they committed. This makes it clear that we must not label people because of their behaviour, no matter how terrible it may be. We can always condemn the deed, but not the doer.

Our most beloved Amma exemplifies this attitude. In my 21 years with her, I have never seen her excusing an adharmic deed. But I have

seen that as soon as the wrongdoer takes responsibility and makes amends, she forgives and forgets.

On the other hand, Amma fully empathizes with the victims. She cries with them and allows them to pour out and unburden their hearts. Having been heard and understood by Amma, they are able to move on. In all her wisdom, she helps them make the best of their challenging situations.

Her women's projects exemplify this perfectly. Women are the foremost target of physical and domestic violence


all over the world. Oftentimes, society does not give them proper protection, and many are condemned to a life of abuse, neglect and violence. Amma helps these victims become survivors. Firstly, she acknowledges the predicament they are in, and secondly, she shows them a way out. Amma takes them from a place of weakness, fear and desperation to a place of strength by helping them realize their deepest potential.

Nothing is more healing for one who has suffered from overwhelming helplessness and abuse than being empowered to achieve something meaningful and experience self-sufficiency. From a psychological point of view, it is all about restoring dignity, one of the main keys to mental health.

Victims should not remain victims, as they can end up becoming violent themselves, as we can see from the Compassion Prison Project.

Empowering victims is the safest way to prevent them from becoming perpetrators themselves.

Forgiveness is the restoration of *dharma* (righteousness). It is built upon understanding and dignity. The broader our mind, the bigger our perspective, and the more we can let go of a consciousness concerned only with itself. In her infinite wisdom and broad-mindedness, Amma shows us how to rise up and move beyond the limitations of the mind. She helps us to use the stumbling blocks we face in life as stepping stones to unfold more and more of our unlimited potential. When this happens, forgiveness will arise naturally in us. The more our mind expands, the more it can contain, and the less it needs to reject and judge.

May our consciousness expand until we merge with Amma's universal mind and become one with her. 



The Story of Agni

by sanoop sadanandan, india

Sage Bhrigu was the son of Brahma, the Creator. Bhrigu's wife was the virtuous Puloma. One day, the sage went for his bath, entrusting the safety of his pregnant wife to Agni, the god of fire.

After Bhrigu left, the demon king, Puloman, arrived at the ashram, intending to abduct Puloma. Puloman had long coveted Puloma. But her father had married her to Bhrigu. Looking around, he saw the ritual fire burning in the *yajna* pit, where the

sage performed fire ceremonies. He knew that Bhrigu had wedded Puloma with Agni as the witness. "But I had wedded her in my heart before that," thought Puloman. "Therefore, she is actually my wife!" At this point, the flames in the fire pit began to blaze even more brightly, as if in warning.

Puloman picked up Puloma and started running. As Puloman was running, Puloma gave birth to a boy, who came to be known as Chyavana. At the very sight of the child, who was as brilliant as the sun, Puloman's demonic qualities began to diminish and his lust left him. He ditched Puloma and her son and fled.

Puloma returned to the ashram with the child. Tears were flowing down her cheeks like a river. Brahma, her father-in-law, arrived there to comfort her.

When Bhrigu returned to the ashram, he learnt what had happened. He became furious with Agni for having failed to

protect Puloma. He cursed the fire god, saying, "You will no more be a protector. From now onwards, you will become a destroyer and a devourer of everything!"

Agni prostrated to the sage and said, "I have always only been a witness. I am truth and light. I have not lied to anyone so far. If one lies, seven generations before and after that person will suffer. One who speaks the truth without discretion will also suffer. I have not done anything unrighteous. I did my duty, which was to blaze as a witness. Now that I have been cursed to devour everything, I can consume you also. But people of spirituality and virtue deserve to be worshipped. For this reason, I shall not devour you."

Brahma intervened and said, "O revered Agni! You play a role in the creation, sustenance and dissolution of all the worlds. As you dwell in all elements, you cannot devour everything. You taper upwards


and signify the radiance of God. As the very embodiment of knowledge, you dispel the darkness of ignorance.

“Civilizations and cultures come and go. But you remain the ancient, eternal and ever-renewing beacon-light. Do not worry. Continue your work with discernment. May all things that burn in you become purified!”

Hearing these words of wisdom and benediction, both Sage Bhrigu and Agni became consoled and peaceful.

Fire, which gives both light and heat, is the deity of the

word. Our words ought to shed the light of awareness to others. Just as we are careful when handling fire, we should be careful about what we say, for words, like fire, can destroy or redeem.

God is the witness consciousness dwelling in all of us. Whatever challenge we face, we must try to do our karma without abandoning truth and discernment. If so, we will enjoy God’s grace. A combination of virtue, strength gained from spiritual practices, and an innocent heart can defeat any demonic force. 

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The Devi Idol

by rachna chhabria, india

Nine-year-old Sudhamani stood at the gate of her house. Within a few minutes, she was joined by her younger siblings: Satheesh, Sugunamma, Suresh, Sajani and Sudhir. Their elder brother and sister were busy studying for their exams.

The excited children waited eagerly at the gate, their eyes pinned on the road. They were looking out for the familiar

figure of their father Sugunandan-acchan, who would be returning from the village market any time now.

“Father will get us toys,” Satheesh said.

“He will get us books this time,” Sajani said firmly.

“We will get sweets,” Sudhir announced.

“No, he will not be bringing toys, books or sweets but something else,” Sudhamani said. “Something we can all play with.”

“How do you know?” Sajani asked.

“I just know it!” Sudhamani said, her eyes twinkling.

Soon, their father appeared at the end of the street leading to their house. He was carrying a brown basket filled with various items. The moment he entered the gate, his children surrounded him eagerly.

“Take this!” He handed Sudhamani a lumpy package wrapped in an old newspaper. “Distribute it equally among your brothers and sisters.”

“Not fair,” Sajani grumbled. “Why does sister get to distribute it and not one of us?”

“That’s because Sudhamani is always fair,” Sugunandan-acchan said, laughing. “I’ve complete faith that she will distribute the clay equally. In fact, I’m sure she will give you all a larger share and keep just a small portion for herself.”

“I knew it,” said Sudhamani excitedly as she unwrapped the packet and saw the large lump. She divided it into equal portions and distributed them to her siblings, who retreated with their portion into their favourite corners in the yard. Sudhamani sat down with her share beside the *tulasi* (basil) plant in the centre of the yard.

“Sister, what are you going to make?” Satheesh asked Sudhamani. “I’m going to make an elephant with my clay.”

“I’m going to make a house,” Sajani announced. “Looks like Satheesh and I’ll need more clay.”

"I'm going to make a small idol of Devi," Sudhamani said, kneading the clay between her palms, until it had a smooth texture. Tearing two chunks from the smoothed clay, she handed one each to Sajani and Satheesh. "I won't need so much clay," she said.

"You're always sharing your things with us," Satheesh smiled.

Singing the verses she often heard Damayanti-amma, her mother, recite every morning, Sudhamani started moulding the lump of clay. As the clay idol took shape, Sajani said, "The clay idol doesn't resemble any Devi or Goddess I've seen." Staring wide-eyed at the clay idol, she said, "It looks like a miniature version of you!"

"Oh no," Sudhamani said and began remoulding the clay. The new idol resembled her, yet again. "What's happening? Why is the clay idol taking my form?" Sudhamani moaned.

"Close your eyes and make the idol," Satheesh suggested.

Sudhamani closed her eyes and started moulding the clay. Her hands fashioned the idol's torso, hands and legs. When she heard her brother and sister gasping in wonder, she knew what she would see even before she opened her eyes. This idol, too, was an exact replica of her. "Why does the idol of Devi resemble me?" Sudhamani asked with a frown.

"Damayanti-amma says that we are all images of the Goddess, that all of us are children of the Divine Mother," Sajani said. "Maybe that's why all your idols of Devi resemble you."

"Or perhaps Devi wants us to worship her image in your form," said Satheesh, smiling. "Sister, you have all her qualities — patience, love for everyone, a generous and forgiving nature, kindness... You're always helping people without any expectation. You never judge anyone but accept them as they are."

Not convinced by her siblings' explanations, Sudhamani ran with the small clay idol into the prayer room.

"Why aren't you letting me make your image?" she asked Devi. Holding up her small clay idol, as though showing it to the Goddess, she said, "See what you made me do!"

The idol of Devi stared at her. She then heard a voice from within her: "Sudhamani, I've already made you in my exact likeness. I've given you all my traits and attributes. In fact, you have already started manifesting most of them."

Sudhamani knew that it was Devi who had spoken. As she stared at the Goddess, she heard that divine voice once again in her heart, "I've already merged in you, Sudhamani."

Many years later, Sudhamani came to be known as Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, the incarnation of love and compassion, and an ambassador of joy and selfless love. Her devotees lovingly call her Amma. 🌸

This is a fictionalized story based on the life of Amma.

"Sudhamani, I've already made you in my exact likeness. I've given you all my traits and attributes. In fact, you have already started manifesting most of them."



Lilas Around Amma

Why Fear When Amma is Here?

For Amma's children in Europe, the happiest times of the year are when she is in Europe. I have been blessed to be a part of her Europe Tour for the past several years. I fondly remember one flight with Amma from Helsinki to Barcelona. I was seated just two rows behind her and could see her through the gaps of the seats in front. I was thrilled as this was the first time that I was flying with Amma.




While reflecting on the immense grace that enabled me to fly with her, suddenly, the flight became turbulent. Turbulence has always terrified me. The intense fear of plummeting to my death used to make me feel short of breath, as if I was being choked.

However, this time was different. Although my fear prompted me to start praying to Amma initially, it struck me suddenly that Amma was on the same flight and nothing untoward could ever happen to me. I was confident that we would land safely. My usual worries and fears vanished in a second.

The turbulence became stronger, but to my surprise, instead of feeling anxious, I felt calm. In fact, I was smiling while looking at Amma through the gaps in the seats

in front of me. Knowing that she was with me, the turbulence felt like a joyous roller-coaster ride.

Isn't life also like this? We expect things to go smoothly, and when we encounter even a little turbulence, we lose our mental balance and become gripped by fear and anxiety. In such times, what is most important is faith — the unshakeable conviction that Amma is with us, holding our hands, and protecting us. Such faith will make us relaxed and give us tremendous courage to face the situation, because we will know deep within that even if we fall, she will be there to catch us.

May we all be able to enjoy the turbulent ride of life with immense joy and faith. 

— *Sowmya Ravidas, the
Netherlands*

We must have the unshakeable conviction
that Amma is with us, holding our hands,
and protecting us.

THIRD HONORARY DOCTORATE FOR AMMA



August 14, 2021, Amritapuri: Amma was awarded an honorary doctorate—Doctor of Letters (*Honoris Causa*)—by the Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology (KIIT) in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, during its 17th Annual Convocation, for her “great contributions in the field of spirituality, education, environmental issues, humanitarian efforts, love and compassion.”

The virtual ceremony was watched by thousands, including a distinguished constellation of guests such as Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister for Education, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship; Professor Jean-Marie Lehn, Nobel Laureate in Chemistry; Achyuta Samanta, Lok Sabha Member and Founder of KIIT and Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS); Niklaus-Samuel Gugger, Member of Parliament from Switzerland; Ved Prakash, Chancellor, KIIT; Professor Sasmita Samanta, Vice-Chancellor, KIIT; and Varun Suthra, Director of International Relations, KISS.

Prof. Sasmita Samanta hailed Amma as the “manifestation of the shining light of *Bharata-samskara* (India’s culture)” and lauded her for her mission of mitigating suffering. She said, “The world has yet to see another apostle of peace providing free food, shelter, healthcare, education and livelihood to the poor, while at the same time providing disaster relief and environmental protection to the entire world; giving lifetime pensions to destitute widows and to the physically and

mentally challenged; establishing a multidisciplinary university; and making huge contributions to clean the Ganges... These are but a few examples showing how your heartfelt concern for society pervades all spheres.”

In her acceptance speech, Amma thanked Kalinga University and paid tribute to its founder, Achyuta Samanta, for his track record of humanitarian services in the areas of education, tribal welfare, healthcare and rural development. She said that KIIT was “a beacon of support and shelter for tens of thousands of people living in and around the region.”

Much of her speech was focused on education, its broad objectives and goals. Amma said that education ought to bring out our latent talents, awaken our compassion, hone our faculties of discernment and contemplation, and develop our curiosity about both the outer and the inner words. If learning about the outer world is a bridge, that bridge should take us to the radiant inner self. Education, Amma said, was the *tapas*

(austerity) we must undertake to reach that goal.

Amma outlined five goals of education:

1. to earn a living;
2. to recognize that mental health is as important as physical health;
3. to repay one's debt both to one's family and to Mother Nature for her abundant gifts;
4. to cultivate gratitude, love and respect for Mother Nature and God, and to consequently feel inspired to engage in social work and selfless service; and
5. to awaken an awareness of the

essential oneness of our Self and the rest of creation.

Amma also urged educators to honour India's lofty vision of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' — 'the world as one family,' and to act with a collective sense of oneness, moving forward.

This is the third honorary doctorate that Amma has received. In 2010, she received an honorary doctorate from the State University of New York (SUNY). In 2019, Amma was presented an honorary doctorate from the University of Mysore.

UNNI KANNA

August 30, 2021, Amritapuri: Legends never die. This is especially so for avatars like Rama and Krishna, who live in the hearts of the legions who have worshipped them for the last few millennia. But it takes a kindred spirit to truly bring them back to life — to dispel the cloudy mists in which time has cloaked them. We can then understand them more intimately, and become more aware of the continuing relevance of their lives and teachings. Amma is one such kindred spirit.

Her Krishna Bhava, for example, reflects her spiritual rapport with the Krishna avatar. Those who have had Amma's Krishna Bhava darshan speak about her beguiling smile and playfulness, qualities associated

with children. Amma says that Lord Krishna maintained throughout his life a child-like attitude, which attracted everyone towards him.

In Amritapuri, the celebration of *Krishna Jayanti*, Lord Krishna's birthday, invariably highlights this side of God. The *uriyadi*, a game that recalls child Krishna's pranks of smashing pots of yoghurt suspended from the ceiling, drew the young children of the ashram, who were dressed as Krishna or a *gopi* (milkmaid). Amma, who was watching the spectacle with

merriment, reminded her children that the game denotes striving for the eternal, as yoghurt, which does not spoil easily, represents the timeless. Even the high jinks of spiritual masters convey lofty spiritual principles.

Among the little children dressed up as Krishna was a toddler that Amma calls 'Kochu Unni.' 'Unni' is a term of endearment for young children, and in Kerala, the word is prefixed to Krishna to refer to the child Krishna. 'Kochu' means 'little.' Seeing Kochu Unni



scampering about during the uriyadi, Amma asked him to break the pot. His father even carried him to the pot so that he could try his hand at breaking it, but Kochu Unni wriggled free and ran back to his mother instead.

One of the bhajans Amma sang in the evening was '*Chinna Kanna*' ('Little Krishna'). In this song, the poet imagines how Krishna has become tired after a long day of playing and making mischief, and cajoles him to sleep. As Amma sang this song, her face was lit by a lovely smile of motherly tenderness.

Between bhajans, Amma asked Kochu Unni if he had drunk milk. He unabashedly replied, "Amma's breast milk!" He then started singing his favourite line from a bhajan: "*Bodham, atu bodham...*" — "Awareness, it is awareness..." When Amma asked him to repeat what he had said, Kochu Unni said, "Amma's breast milk is bodham!" Everyone roared with laughter at this adorable blooper! Amma looked pleased with his answer and thrice asked him to

repeat, "Amma's breast milk is bodham!" Indeed, if we can imbibe the milk of her wisdom, we will surely gain total awareness, the goal of spiritual life.

Amma returned to the stage for the final part of the Krishna Jayanti celebrations shortly before midnight. At the culmination of the reading from the *Bhagavatam*, where the singer recounted the events leading up to the birth of Lord Krishna, bells were rung, gongs were struck, devotees started ululating, and the *arati* flame was waved before Amma. The first bhajan she sang then was '*Agatanay*,' a staple of the Krishna Jayanti repertoire. However, that night, instead of singing '*Agatanay agatanay vishnu devan...*' ('Lord Vishnu has come!'), Amma instead sang '*Agatanay agatanay unnikkannan...*' ('Child Krishna has come!').

May the spirit of child Krishna — his innocence and purity, joyfulness and zest, playfulness and compassion — be born in us. That would be the truest celebration of the Lord's birthday.

SPIRITUAL HARVEST

August 20, 2021, Amritapuri:

Every moment around Amma is a festival. On festive occasions, the air crackles with even more vivacity. But these days, an undercurrent of wistfulness has put a slight damper on all ashram celebrations. The reason is not difficult to guess: Amma is thinking of her children who cannot come to Amritapuri because of the pandemic. She said so, too: “There are devotees who have been coming unflinchingly to the ashram to celebrate Onam for the last 48 years.” After serving lunch *prasad* to those physically present, Amma held up a plate of *prasad* and with motherly affection said, “This is for my children who cannot be here!” Nothing nourishes the heart like love. Knowing that Amma was thinking of them would surely have moved and gratified those who were watching the webcast of the Onam celebrations in the ashram.



The morning began with a heart-warming talk by Swami Purnamritananda, who addressed the story of Mahabali, sharing new insights into an old yet fascinating legend that is as much a part of Onam folklore as are *pookkalam*s, floral mandalas, which graced the portico under Amma’s room. Swami said that the interaction between Mahabali, the emperor who was proud of his generosity, and Vamana, unassuming child and incarnation of Lord Vishnu, was novel in many ways. The usual role of the Guru as the older one and the disciple as the younger one was reversed. Not that Mahabali even recognized the Guru when he


saw him. His pride in being a giver was humbled when he realized that he had nothing to offer other than his ego. Swami also stressed that, contrary to popular belief, Mahabali was not relegated to the netherworld as punishment for his hubris. Vamana actually blessed Mahabali by placing his foot on the king's head; for a disciple, the dust of his Guru's feet is a mark of his special favour. By the Lord's grace, Mahabali was transported to Sutala, where he enjoys more prosperity than even Indra, the chief of the gods, and where Lord Vishnu chose to remain Mahabali's personal guard for all time.

There are many lessons to be drawn from this legend. Mahabali was magnificence incarnate, and his reign is still glorified as utopian. However, he harboured the illusion of being a benefactor. The Guru's task is to uproot the last traces of egoism in the disciple. That was the reason behind the *lila* (divine play) of God's incarnation as the diminutive Vamana, who revealed that everything is God's. And yet, the Lord did not diminish

Mahabali's majesty one bit; in fact, he enhanced it for all time.

Vamana is God as child. Amma often speaks about the importance of developing a child-like heart in the spiritual life and about how God finds the innocent particularly captivating. In Vamana (and Amma), one can see the irresistible innocence of a child and the uncanny wisdom of God. By submitting to this child, Mahabali was blessed beyond compare.

In her Onam message, Amma said, "Onam is a time that transforms even the elderly into little children; it awakens the child in everyone." She added, "Imagine a life where we are able to experience and sustain a mind filled with such goodness! If we are able to achieve such a mind, this earth would become heaven. Our life will become an endless celebration."

If we can realize this message in our life, Onam will truly become a harvest festival — the spiritual harvest of exuberance, laughter and receptivity. 

—Br. Madhavamrita Chaitanya