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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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Selfless Service

Children, all religions give a lot of importance to selfless service. It purifies the mind and makes one worthy of God's grace. However, the service we render should be without any expectation. We should not expect even a word of thanks or appreciation. If we do, it will be like working for wages; such work will not help to purify the mind.

When we act without any desire for personal gain, selfishness leaves our heart, at least while we are working. Such work purifies the mind. However, if we engage in selfless service with an eye to gaining *punya* (spiritual merit), acknowledgement or remuneration, the very purpose of service becomes defeated.

Many donate to temples or churches with expectations of compliments or recognition. There are people who donate tubelights to temples and then print 'Donated by so-and-so' on them, thus dimming its brightness. Such people want others to know about their donation and will be displeased

Nothing belongs to us; everything belongs to God. We must be grateful to Him for giving us the ability and opportunity to serve.

if they are not at least thanked for it.


Once, a rich man went to pray in a temple. He gave a big donation to the priest, who neither thanked him nor lauded him for the donation. The rich man started saying, "I'm sure no one has ever donated such a huge sum of money to this temple before..."

The priest tolerated his self-glorification for some time. But when the donor did not look as if he was going to stop, the priest said, "Why brag like this? Do you expect me to thank you for your donation?"

"What's wrong with expecting at least a word of appreciation for the sum I donated?" the rich man asked.

The priest said "You ought to be grateful that the temple accepted your donation. It is

only a tiny fraction of God's wealth, which you are hoarding. You will receive His grace only if you can donate without pride. You ought to feel grateful that you have received an opportunity to serve God and His devotees. If you don't, it's best that you take the money back."

It is the mind that must be surrendered to God. Offering to Him what the mind is attached to is akin to offering the mind itself. In truth, nothing belongs to us; everything belongs to God. We must be grateful to Him for giving us the ability and opportunity to serve. When we understand that even our body, mind and intellect are gifts from God, we will become free of pride and selfishness. When we become free of pride, we become deserving of God's grace. 



“Isn’t all time Amma’s?”

by swami amritaswarupananda puri

During an interview, a reporter asked Amma, “You personally meet tens of thousands daily. You go to the darshan hall in the morning and remain there, listening to each one of them, until you have seen the last person in the queue. Only then do you get up from your seat. By the time darshan ends,

it's usually late at night, past midnight sometimes. In addition, you oversee the M.A. Math's educational institutions and humanitarian projects. After you return to your room, you read letters from ashram residents and devotees. You give them necessary advice. You hardly eat or sleep. Amma, you live only for others. Don't you ever wish you had some time for yourself or a little time to rest?"

Flashing Her characteristic sweet smile, She said, "Amma's time and children's time — are there really two different times? Isn't all time Amma's?"

Those were the playful and innocent words of a child. But in those 'playful' words, Amma had hidden something of great import. She was pointing a finger to a rarefied realm of awareness that the mind or intellect cannot easily grasp or analyse. To understand even a little of what that state is or to gain a tiny glimpse of it, the dissonance within the mind

must cease. The ocean has hidden pearls in its depths. To find them, we must slice the ocean's wavy surface and plumb the vast depths of the sea. Similarly, we can apprehend Amma's pearls of wisdom only when we go beyond the superficialities of words and make the mind meditative.

The ripples emanating from Her sage words must have touched our hearts, for I and a brahmachari who was present looked at each other with amazement. I wonder what sublime heights of the soul Amma's utterances touched...

Time is vast and glorious. Our acquaintance with the riddle of time is confined to the ticking sounds of a clock and the various phases of day and night. We are ignorant about its entirety.

Note this mantra from the *Rg Veda*:

*nasadasinno
sadasittadanim
nasidrajo no
vyoma paro yat*

*kimavarivah kaha
kasya sharmmannabbah
kimasidgabanam
gambhiram*

There was neither existence nor non-existence then. There was neither emptiness nor the radiant sky. Where did everything exist? On what did everything depend? Was there a vast and shoreless expanse of water then?

*na mrtyurasidamrtam na
tarbi na
ratrya abna asit praketa
anidavatam svadbaya
tadekam
tasmaddbhanyanna parab
kincanasa*

Then there was neither death nor immortality, day or night. The substratum breathed without air. Nothing other than That was.

If we believe that this was the state before what science calls the 'Big Bang,' what happened

after that? This mantra from the *Taittiriyaopaniṣad* may have the answer:

*so'kamayata bahusyam
prajayeyeti sa tapo'tapyata
sa tapastaptva idam
sarvamasrjata yadidam
kinca
tatsrstva tadevanuprav-
ishatu
tadanu pravishya sacca
tyaccabbhavatu
niruktam caniruktam ca
nilayanam canilayanam ca
vijnanam cavijnanam ca
satyam canrtam ca saty-
amabbhavatu
yadidam kinca tatsatyami-
tyacakshate
tadapeshya sloko bhavati*

Pure Awareness resolved, "May I be born and become many." It performed *tapas* (austerities). From that *tapas* this universe came into being in all its variety. Thereafter It entered into all. It became the manifest and unmanifest, the expressible and inexpressible,

the dependent and independent, the sentient and insentient, the truth and untruth... It became the ultimate truth and Brahman, the Supreme.

This verse can be interpreted to explain the origins of the visible universe through the Big Bang. It is here, at the nub of creation, that time originates.

In his book, *Cosmos*, the famed astronomer Carl Sagan writes, “The Hindu religion is the only one of the world’s great faiths dedicated to the idea that the Cosmos itself undergoes an immense, indeed an infinite, number of deaths and rebirths. It is the only religion in which the time scales correspond to those of modern scientific cosmology. Its cycles run from our ordinary day and night to a day and night of Brahma, 8.64 billion years long. Longer than the age of the Earth or the Sun and about half the time since the Big Bang.”

In fact, modern science has yet to provide a precise definition of time. The scientists who have gone deep into the subject and gained at least a glimpse into the underlying reality have sincerely recorded their observations.

When his close friend Michele Basso passed away, Albert Einstein sent a condolence message to Basso’s family: “He left this strange world before I did. People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion.”

But what secrets of the universe were revealed to the inner eye of the *rishi* (seer)? The ancient yogis contemplated so deeply about the subtlest aspects of time, its structure and constituent elements, as would have confounded even modern scientists!

Kali (Goddess), *kala* (time) and *Kalan* (Lord of death) — these three are

synonyms of Time, which devours everything and makes them manifest again.

In ‘*Vishwarupadarshana*’ (Yoga of the Cosmic Form), the 11th chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna says,

*kalosmi lokakshayakrt
pravrdho
lokan samahartumiba
pravrttab
rte’pi tvam na bhavishyanti
sarve
ye’vasthanib pratynikeshu
yodhab*

I am Time, the source of destruction that manifests to annihilate the world. Even without you (even if you do not fight), none of the warriors from the opposing side will survive. (32)

Look at the fifth verse in chapter 4:

*bahuni me vyatitani
janmani tava carjuna
tanyaham veda sarvani
na tvam vettha parantapa*
O Arjuna, you and I

have been born umpteen times. You do not remember them whereas I know them all.

The Lord’s assertion, “I know them all,” indicates a state beyond the limits and limitations of time and space.

The story of Kakudmi (Raivatan) from the *Mahabharata* is well-known. Having failed to find a suitable groom for his only daughter, Revati, he travelled with her to Brahma-loka, the abode of Brahma, the Creator, to seek His advice. When they arrived, they found Lord Brahma absorbed in a music concert. Kakudmi waited. When the concert ended, Kakudmi approached Brahma and conveyed his sorrow. Hearing Kakudmi’s concern, Lord Brahma burst out laughing because in the short time that he had waited for Brahma, 27 *chatur-yugas* (four epochs, totalling 4,320,000 years) had passed on earth!

During the Treta Yuga,¹ King Muchukund, who was Lord Rama's ancestor, went to *deva-loka*, the abode of the gods, to help them in their war against the demons. When he returned to earth after a few days, the Treta Yuga had ended and the Dwapara Yuga had begun!

Though Einstein's 'Worm-hole Theory' (the ability to transcend space and time and travel long distances swiftly) is still considered a hypothesis, the scientific community has not denied its plausibility. The Hindu scriptures and the lives of rishis testify to its possibility.

Amma's darshans, which can continue for 12 hours or more, are a daily affair. In Her presence, we can easily understand how quickly time passes. A day can pass without our knowing it. We might think,

.....
1 The second of four epochs (yugas) that constitute one cycle of creation. Each epoch lasts between 1,200 and 4,000 earth years. The Dwarapa was the third yuga.

"Is it night already?... Has dawn arrived?... How fast time flies...!" We experience the same thing when the mind becomes deeply absorbed in meditation.

Let me share an incident that I still recall vividly, even though it happened in 1987. I had gone to the US in March, two months before Amma's first World Tour. Swami Paramatmananda was also with me. Another devotee, Kusuma (Gretchen McGregor), had left for the US even earlier.

It was my first long tour, one that lasted two months, after meeting Amma in 1979. I had never been away from Her for so long. Within two weeks of my arrival in the US, the pain of separation had become agonizing. Those were the days when I understood the mental turmoil that the *gopis* (milkmaids), separated from Krishna, had experienced. There was no letting up of the pain and agony in my heart. An intense desire arose

in my mind: "I want to hear Amma's voice."

In those days, in order to make a call to India, one had to book a trunk-call in advance and wait for the call to come through. The ashram had only one land line. We were in Mount Shasta, California, then. We booked our trunk call at night and waited expectantly for hours, in vain. No matter how much we tried, we could not make the telephone operators understand 'Vallikkavu' and 'Kollam' (Quilon). At last, I tried to subdue my pain and longing, and went to bed.

I don't know if I was asleep or awake. An unearthly radiance and fragrance filled the room. It was not like the sunlight we see and experience during the day, but a brilliance that cooled, consoled and gladdened both body and mind. When I tried looking around, it was not my eyes that were seeing. It was not my mind that was comprehending, or my

nose that was discerning the scent... it was as if every atom in my body was seeing, understanding and experiencing... I don't know where She came from, but I saw Amma standing right before me, smiling. "Son... O my son, don't be sad. Amma is with you..." She repeated this thrice...

Suddenly, everything disappeared. When the sense of time and place returned, I heard the telephone ringing. I jumped up and picked up the receiver: "Connecting your call to India." It was the operator.

After a few moments, from the other end of the line, I heard Amma's voice, which I had been eagerly thirsting to hear: "Son... O my son, don't be sad. Amma is with you..." She said it three times... just three times. I couldn't utter a word. Thoughts had subsided and my mind had become silent. But my eyes were overflowing... an overflow from the inside perhaps...

(continued on page 18)

The Bee Trapped in the Flower

Swami Tureeyamritananda Puri


The bee trapped in the flower
tells a cautionary tale
do not exult in sensory pleasure
its hook takes one to hell

We look outside
for what is within
We think sufferings will subside
once we enter the doors to heaven

If heavenly joy is what we want
remember, we reap what we sow
But once our harvest has been spent
to earth again must we go

When we give in to greed
appetite becomes addiction
The idea that we're flesh and blood
leads to utter perdition

A mere speck of impurity
can conceal the truth
Instead of denying the Almighty
assert it forsooth

The key of austerity
is all we can bequeath posterity
Once we gain true inner clarity
we will attain immortality 



“Remember Me and fight!”

by swami
amritageetananda
puri



If we had to summarize the teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita* in a few words, we could say, “*Mam anusmara yudhya ca*” (“Remember Me and fight!”) (8.7). Lord Krishna uses the word ‘yudhya’ (‘fight’), only because Arjuna’s duty as a warrior was to fight against the unrighteous forces.

Arjuna was still at a lower level of understanding. He understood the Lord’s teaching to mean, “Remember Lord Krishna and fight against the enemies.” “When the Lord is with us, we gain tremendous courage, intelligence and strength. That itself is a victory over the negative tendencies of the mind.

But what the Lord really means is that we must think of God constantly while performing our duties. When we remember Him constantly, our mind becomes purified and we become selfless. We will come to realize that the Lord is present everywhere in creation. With whom then can one fight? The Kurukshetra War is actually an inner battle against the ego, the real enemy. Generally, we fight a losing battle against our ego. But with the Guru's help, we can win that battle.

* * *

In his play 'As You Like It,' William Shakespeare says that human life unfolds in seven stages, beginning with infancy and ending with old age. He likens the world to a stage, and life to a play in seven acts:

And all the world's a
stage,
And all the men and
women merely players;
They have their exits and

their entrances,
And one man in his time
plays many parts,
His acts being seven
ages... (2.7.142 – 147)

In 'The Tempest,' the duke of Milan is usurped by his younger brother. The older brother sails away and reaches an island occupied by friendly spirits. He learns occult sciences from them and gains magical powers. Using these powers, he draws his younger brother and ministers of the duchy to the island, receives them, and entertains them at night with a drama enacted by the spirits of the island.

Suddenly, the actors and even the stage disappear. The usurped duke then philosophizes:

Our revels now are
ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all
spirits and
Are melted into air, into
thin air;
And, like the baseless

fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers,
the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the
great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit,
shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial
pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind...
(4.1.148 – 156)

By saying that our lives are just as phantasmal and fleeting as those of the spirit actors, Shakespeare was trying to impress upon us the impermanence of this world and its achievements.

Swami Vidyanaranya, a 14th century saint, provides a more spiritually pointed example in his book, *Panchadasi*. In the 10th chapter, entitled 'Naataka Deep' ('Lamp of the Theatre'), the Swami compares the mind to the stage of ancient times, when there was no electricity. A big lamp kept at the edge of the stage would throw light on the actors on stage as well as

the audience in the first few rows. Just as the lamp illumines the entrance and exit of the actors, consciousness illumines the entrance and exit of our thoughts. Just as the lamp is witness to the unfolding drama, consciousness is the silent witness or *sakshi*. That is our real nature — the changeless and ever-existing consciousness, or *Atma* (Self).

The stage in Amritapuri is where Amma sits and gives satsangs (spiritual discourses), sings bhajans and gives darshan to Her devotees, who are at different stages of spiritual evolution and maturity. She gives advice and prescribes spiritual practices suited to the seeker's level of maturity. Such is the panoramic nature of Her divine wisdom.

Our mind is also a stage, illumined by Amma in the form of Pure Awareness. Thoughts will come and go. Let us try to maintain unremitting awareness of Her divine presence. That awareness

is the subtle yet powerful light of wisdom, which will guide us in each and every action.

The outer stage where Amma gives satsangs, sings bhajans, meditates and gives darshan is sacred. We must try to preserve the sanctity of every place Amma visits. This is our collective responsibility of all Her children.

We are also duty bound, according to our individual capacity, to purify the world stage. For years, Amma has been advocating respect for Mother Nature and has spear-headed clean-up and tree planting campaigns and other pro-environmental projects.


For Amma, as Shakespeare said, the whole world is one vast stage. She has given us different roles to enact and, like the playwright, She knows when we will enter and exit.

Amma can sanctify the whole world by Her powerful *sankalpa* (divine resolve). But She has given us opportunities to serve the world. “Mam anusmara yudhya ca” — Let us think of Her constantly while discharging our responsibilities to our families, society, country and the world. In this way, we can transform each and every place into Amrita’s Puri, the abode of the Divine.



(continued from page 13)

How many opportunities and experiences there are to understand the meaning of this mantra from the *Lalita Sabasranama* (1,000 names of the Divine Mother): *Om desha-kala-paricchinnayai namah* (Salutations to the Divine Mother, who is not limited by time and

space) (701). Here, once again, Amma’s voice, which can cut asunder the ‘knots’ of our heart (remove our misconceptions), was reminding us: “Amma’s time and children’s time — are there really two different times? Isn’t all time Amma’s?” 

The Lord's Guarantee

by br. devidasa chaitanya

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna offers these words of assurance:

*kshipram bhavati dharmatma shasvachchantim nigacchati
kaunteya pratijanibi na me bhaktah pranashyati*

My devotee soon becomes righteous and attains
eternal peace.

O Arjuna, rest assured, My devotee never perishes.
(9.31)



The phrase ‘*na me bhakta pranashyati*’ literally means, “My devotee never perishes.” This can mean that God saves devotees from dangers and looks after their needs. Does it also mean that a true devotee is immortal or that he or she will never feel any misery? But the lives of many great devotees show how they faced difficulties and suffered as a result. How can we reconcile this seeming contradiction?

The *Bhagavad Gita* refers to four kinds of devotees: the *arta*, *artharthi*, *jijnasu* and *jnani*, i.e. the distressed, the seeker of wealth, the seeker of (divine) knowledge, and the knower of Truth. In the verse mentioned earlier, the Lord is referring to the third and fourth kinds.

Amma speaks about ‘*tattvat-tile bhakti*’ — devotion based on an understanding of spiritual principles. Devotees with that understanding know that problems are part of life, and take them in their stride. They do not see even death as a

tragedy but as a reunion with his Beloved.

Prahlada, an ardent devotee of Lord Vishnu, is tormented by his father Hiranyakashipu, who wants his son to relinquish his devotion to the Lord. But Prahlada refuses, and the father tries to kill him in many ways: by hurling him off a cliff, throwing him into a river, tossing him before a stampeding elephant... Every time, the Lord saves Prahlada. Finally, Hiranyakashipu unsheathes his sword to kill the child and asks him, “Where is your Vishnu to protect you now?”

Prahlada’s devotion was grounded in *jnana* (knowledge). He replies: “My Lord is everywhere, even in these pillars around us.”

Outraged, Hiranyakashipu strikes one of the pillars with the sword. The Lord emerges from that pillar as Narasimha and kills Hiranyakashipu.

God does not always save devotees from death. When

Jatayu, a giant eagle and ardent devotee of Lord Rama, saw Ravana, the demon king, abducting Sita, he tried to stop the demon. But the king hacked away the wings of the bird, who fell from the sky. Before Jatayu breathed his last, Lord Rama arrived, took Jatayu onto His lap, and lavished him with love and affection in his last moments. Thus Jatayu attained liberation.

In supreme devotion, the Lord and devotee become one spiritually. This is the state referred to in the prayer, *'Mrietyorma amritam gamaya'* — 'Lead me from death to immortality.' The *Narada Bhakti Sutras* describes the state of true devotion thus: *'Yal labdhva puman... amrito bhavati'* — 'Attaining which, one becomes immortal' (4). In this state, the question of God protecting His devotee does not arise, for the protector (God) and protected (devotee) are one.

Many of Amma's children have experiences of how She

saved them from difficulties in their lives. Swami Dayamritananda Puri shared one such experience with me. He came to Amma in the early 80's, not as a devotee but out of curiosity. During his very first Devi Bhava darshan, he saw Amma receiving Dattan, the leper. As She drew him into Her arms, Amma's eyes were filled with love. She then began licking the oozing wounds, sucking the pus out from them. This scene made a profound impact on the future swami, who soon decided to join the ashram.

But Amma wanted him to obtain permission from his parents first. Unfortunately, they wanted him to lead a 'normal' life. In order to divert him from spirituality, his parents decided to send him abroad, where his relatives were entrusted to look after him. When Swami told Amma about this, She said, "Go now. You will face many situations that will test you. If you remain unswerving, Amma will

make a *sankalpa* (divine resolve), and you will be able to come back soon.”

Swami went abroad and stayed there for a couple of years. He had to face many challenges, but with inner strength derived from his love for Amma, remained steadfast throughout. Seeing his unresponsiveness to the temptations of worldly life, his relatives were ready to give up. Swami pleaded with them to buy him an air ticket so that he could return to India. They refused.

Dayamritananda Swami was left in the lurch. He did not have sufficient money to buy a ticket. Wondering what to do, he looked into his suitcase and found an old Air India return ticket, which was well past the expiry date. Hoping against hope, he went to the Air India office, approached a woman at the counter, and asked if there was any way that he could redeem the ticket. She looked at it and right away said, “No way!”

Heartbroken, Dayamritananda Swami silently called out to Amma for help even as he remained standing in the Air India Office. After a few moments, the same woman called out to him from behind the counter: “Maybe we can give it a try. Do you have records of any recent medical treatment you underwent? If you do, there might be a way out.”

Call it a sheer coincidence (or Amma’s grace). Swami had undergone medical treatment for his eyes not long before and had the relevant papers in his bag! Within a few minutes, the return ticket to India (and the spiritual life) was in his hands.

Amma personally helped me appreciate the meaning of ‘*na me bhakta pranashyati*’ through an experience. Shortly after joining the ashram in 1991, Amma sent me to AICT (Amrita Institute of Computer Technology), the ashram’s computer training institute in Puthiyakavu. I was to study there and also help Dr. Krishna-

kumar, who was in charge of the institute then. As part of my work, I had to go outside for purchases. While passing shops selling eatables, the desire to eat those items would arise. Ashram life then was much more austere: drinking tea was frowned upon, reading newspapers was regarded as a waste of time, and eating food from outside was a big no-no. But the desire to eat delectable snacks grew day by day.

One day, I saw some peanuts in a shop. Unable to resist the temptation, I went into the shop and bought a packet of peanuts. After dinner, I ate the peanuts, all the while feeling guilty. This sense of unease and guilt kept increasing. After a few days, I could not bear it any longer. I went to Amma, trembling within, and told Her what I had done. She looked at me sternly and said, “If you don’t have any *vairagya* (dispassion) even at the beginning of your ashram life, how will you stick to this path?”

I walked away with a heavy heart. The days that followed were difficult. I tried hard to intensify my *sadhana* (spiritual practices). I would fast one day and overeat the next. I was struggling with my *vasanas* (latent tendencies), failing often, and feeling miserable as a result. I began to feel that I was not fit for the spiritual path. At the same time, worldly life looked dreadful and I could not imagine returning to it. Feeling forlorn, I thought that perhaps it was time to end my life.

One evening, during bhajans, Amma sang many poignant songs such as ‘*Kannunir toratta ravukal etra poyi*’ (‘How many nights have I passed with eyes overflowing with tears?’) and ‘*Ente kannunir etra kandalum manassaliyuka ille*’ (‘Though seeing my tears, how is it You feel no compassion?’). These songs seemed to reflect my inner state. I cried throughout the bhajans.

After bhajans, I went to sit on the western veranda of the

Kali temple, facing the balcony of Amma's room. I wanted to meditate but could not stop crying. I felt I had reached the end of my tether. As I cried, I was fervently praying, "O Amma, am I really unworthy of this spiritual path? Won't you give me one more chance and save me from this misery? I just don't think I can hold on any more...."

A couple of hours must have gone by. The entire area was dark, except for a small light in Amma's room. Suddenly, the beam from a torchlight fell on my face. Opening my eyes, I saw that it was coming from Amma's balcony. It was Amma holding the torchlight! She asked, "Who's that?"

With a frail voice, I said, "Amma, it's me..."

She kept the light on my face for some time before switching it off. After a few moments, Amma beamed the light on my face again. She also threw something at me. It was an apple. Amma's *prasad*!

She then spoke, this time softly and lovingly: "Hey Sudeep! Eat that now and go to sleep. And get up for archana tomorrow."

It was the first time Amma had called me by my name! I felt as if I had rediscovered myself. Amma had known me all along. She had heard all my prayers and seen all the tears rolling down my cheeks. She had understood and felt all my inner pangs of anguish. And She had accepted me in Her heart... The relief and tranquility I felt were inexpressible.

I continued crying while eating the apple. I then returned to my hut and cried until I fell asleep. They were tears of gratitude.

When I woke up the next day, I was a new person. My self-confidence had been restored, and my heart was filled with Amma's love.


In all my years with Amma, this incident still stands out as the most engrossing for me. I had been fumbling in the

darkness. The apple and Amma lovingly calling me by my name epitomized, for me, Lord Krishna's assurance to Arjuna: '*na me bhakta pranashyati.*' Amma conveys the same sentiment, in a warmer way, when She whispers in our ears, "My darling son/daughter, do not worry. Mother is always with you."

In hindsight, I realize that the experience was not about peanuts at all but about my inner struggle to rise up to my spiritual aspirations. At that time, I considered my craving for tasty food a serious problem. The real issue was my inability to overcome the weaknesses of my mind. This was a big blow to my ego, and my repeated failures led to a loss of self-confidence. Amma's response to my confession had only been a reflection of my own sense of failure, and not a reflection of Her attitude towards food. The mask of sternness She wore helped me arrive at a more realistic understanding of how to

balance desire with the fundamental values of the spiritual life.

It is important for a spiritual seeker to hold fast to spiritual values and to the routine of spiritual practices. As Amma often reminds us, even a minuscule hole in a boat can cause it to capsize. Unless we ensure that the boat of our spiritual life is leak-free, how can we cross the ocean of *samsara*, the cycle of births and deaths?

Amma is '*abaituka kripa sindhu*' — the ocean of causeless mercy. She is a *kalpataru*, the divine, wish-fulfilling tree, which fulfils longings that take us closer to God. She does not expect anything from us. Nevertheless, let us offer to Her our pure and sincere prayers, prayers that reach Her heart of divine love. Through *shraddha* (faith and attentiveness) and *bhakti*, may we all become one with Amma and attain Her divine abode of immortality. 

Sumantra: Loyal and Righteous Minister

by c.v. rajan, india



One of the noblest characters in the *Ramayana* is Sumantra, charioteer of King Dasharatha and minister in his court. Almost as old as Dasharatha, he was almost like Dasharatha's right hand, ever at his beck and call. His obedience and loyalty to the king were unquestionable. Not only that, as minister, he was always ready to offer the right advice when needed.

Responsible Counsellor

When Dasharatha became concerned about the absence of sons despite his advancing age, he called for a meeting of wise men in the hope of finding a successor to the throne. Guru Vashishtha advised him to conduct the Ashwamedha and Putrakameshti *yajnas*,¹ which could enable him to obtain offspring through divine grace.

To a great extent, a *yajna*'s success depends on the calibre of the chief *ritvik*, the priest who conducts the *yajna*. He should be of noble virtue, impeccable character and thoroughly well-versed with Vedic rituals and mantras. Sumantra advised Dasharatha to consult Sage Rishyashringa, son of Sage Vibhandaka. Rishyashringa was brought up in a forest and well trained in the Vedic scriptures and

rites. Totally secluded from the world, Rishyashringa had no exposure to women and was a pure *brahmachari* (celibate). At that time, the kingdom of Anga, ruled by King Romapada, faced acute drought. Rain had not fallen for several seasons. On the advice of his ministers, the king sent beautiful courtesans to lure Rishyashringa from his abode in the forest to Anga. The damsels succeeded in their effort. The moment Sage Rishyashringa landed in the kingdom, torrential rains began to fall. The king received the sage with all due honour and reverence, and even offered him the hand of his daughter, Shanta, in marriage.² The sage agreed to the proposal. After the marriage, Rishyashringa remained in the palace, where he continued with his austerities.

1 A *yajna* is a form of ritual worship in which oblations are offered into a fire according to scriptural injunctions, while sacred mantras are chanted.

2 According to one version, Shanta was actually Dasharatha's and Kausalya's daughter, given to King Romapada for adoption.

Sumantra advised Dasharatha, “Dear king, Rishyashringa is most qualified to conduct the Ashwamedha Yagna. As King Romapada is your friend, I suggest that you visit his palace and humbly request for Rishyashringa’s services.”

This suggestion pleased Dasharatha. After consulting Sage Vashishtha, the king went to the Anga kingdom and succeeded in bringing Rishyashringa back to Ayodhya.

The yajna was successfully performed, and upon its completion, the king was blessed with four sons: Rama, Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna.

Free Access to the King

Later, Dasharatha’s decision to crown Rama king was met with enthusiastic approval from his ministers, the holy men, and the subjects of Ayodhya. Sumantra was given just one day to organize the coronation, and he worked with remarkable efficiency,

consulting Dasharatha and Vashishtha on crucial matters.

The next day, Ayodhya was agog over the impending coronation, which had been scheduled for the morning. Sage Vashishtha arrived early. Learning that Dasharatha was in Kaikeyi’s palace, Vashishtha went there only to find out that the king was still in his chambers. Vashishtha asked Sumantra to get the king ready as soon as possible.

Sumantra rushed to meet the king at once. He was blissfully ignorant of all that had transpired over the night: instigated by her maid Manthara, Kaikeyi had extracted from Dasharatha the promise to send Rama in exile to the forest for 14 years and to crown her son, Bharata, King of Ayodhya.

Sumantra walked straight into the king’s bedroom. None of the guards dared to stop him, for they knew the freedom of access Sumantra enjoyed with the king.

Dasharatha was still lying in bed. Notwithstanding his freedom with the king, Sumantra knew better than to violate protocol. Standing reverentially at the bedside, Sumantra chanted hymns of praise to the king to wake him up. He then humbly asked the king to prepare for the joyous occasion of Rama's coronation. To his shock, the king, whose heart was burning with grief and despair, blurted out, "Sumantra, I'm already in great pain. Your words have added fuel to fire!"

Dumbfounded, Sumantra stepped back in fear. Only then did he notice the agony on the king's face. He could not figure out what had happened to cause Dasharatha such pain. Kaikeyi intervened and said, "Sumantra, the king did not sleep the whole night; that's why he is disturbed. Bring Rama here immediately."

Sumantra set off at once. Perhaps, all that the king needed was to see Rama's

auspicious face, and his spirits would be lifted.

Sumantra's Agony

When Rama arrived, Kaikeyi informed Him about the two boons she had received from the king. When Sumantra heard what the two boons were, he could not restrain his tears. Anger began to well up in him when he realized how the wily Kaikeyi had caused the king immeasurable pain and mental agony. Sumantra was honest, righteous, loyal and soft-hearted. Unable to contain the anger he felt against Kaikeyi for humiliating Dasharatha and banishing Rama, his eyes became inflamed. Momentarily, he forgot that Kaikeyi was the mother of the next king, Bharata. Seething with rage, Sumantra blurted out, "Oh Kaikeyi! Our beloved king, your husband, is as mighty as a mountain and as imperturbable as an ocean. If you can humiliate him and hurt him so much, what aren't

you capable of? A *pativrata* (a woman who is loyal and devoted to her husband) might disregard her children but never her husband. You have violated the hallowed tradition of this Ikshvaku dynasty in which only the eldest son is eligible for the throne. Shame on you! Let your beloved son rule this kingdom. But know that honest and right thinking Brahmins will no longer live here. No citizen will want to live in this kingdom.

“I am wondering how the earth hasn’t become shattered after seeing your treacherous behaviour. I wonder how mighty *rishis* (seers) like Vashishtha have managed to hold their tongue and not curse you! Who else other than you can cut down the very tree that gave you sweet fruits, and plant a bitter neem tree in its place?

“It seems to me that your nature is just like that of your mother. How can honey ooze from a neem tree? I know that your father spurned your

mother because of her adamant and arrogant behaviour. Owing to the blessings of a saint, your father had acquired the rare gift of being able to understand the language of other creatures. He promised the saint that he would not reveal this skill to anyone.

“One day, while in bed, your father overheard an ant crawling adjacent to the bed speaking. He was so amused by what it said that he started laughing aloud. You mother, offended by this sudden laughter, demanded to know why he had laughed. Your father told her that if he revealed why he had laughed, he would die immediately. To this, your mother retorted, ‘I don’t care! I want to know why you laughed.’

“Your father consulted the sage who had given him that occult power. The sage said, ‘Let your wife die or ruin herself. Do not reveal it to her at any cost!’ Your father rejected his wife and lived in peace ever after.

“Oh Kaikeyi! Don't emulate your evil mother. Obey your husband and be a noble guardian to the people of this kingdom. Let Rama, the eldest son, become king. He alone is competent to rule. Save yourself from calumny and condemnation!”

After his diatribe, Sumantra stood with folded hands. By his bitter yet well-meaning words, he had managed to make Kaikeyi tremble in fear. And yet, she did not relent or repent. There was no change in her facial expressions. To her credit, Kaikeyi did not react adversely or angrily to Sumantra, indicating how people in those days respected elders.

Loyalty to and Love for Rama

Finally, the moment of Rama's, Sita's and Lakshmana's departure to the forest arrived. The grief-stricken Dasharatha ordered Sumantra to take the three of them to the forest.

Perhaps, Dasharatha sensed intuitively that his days were numbered and wanted his trustworthy and loyal aide to be with Rama and extend his services and fatherly care to Him during the exile.

From that moment onwards, Sumantra assumed the role of charioteer to Rama. He was ready to obey Rama's every word and command. It did not matter to him that Rama was no longer the centre of power or that his own role as right-hand man to the mighty Ayodhya king had ended. Like other citizens of the kingdom, he was most content to be in the company of his beloved Rama.

On the first night of their journey towards the forest, Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Sumantra reached the banks of River Tamasa and decided to stay there overnight. Several people from Ayodhya who had followed Rama also decided to rest there. While they all slept, Sumantra remained

awake, keeping Lakshmana company and talking to him throughout the night about Rama's divine qualities.

Early the next morning, before the others woke up, Rama asked Sumantra to get the chariot ready so that they could quickly cross the river and thus evade the loyal subjects of Ayodhya who were following Rama. He also made Sumantra steer the chariot in such a way as to give the impression that it had turned towards Ayodhya in order to persuade the people to go back. Sumantra did as told.

On the second day, Sumantra charioted them to the banks of the Ganges. Guha, a hunter chief, extended a warm welcome to Rama and His companions, who spent the night on the banks of the river. That night, too, Sumantra kept a vigil. The three of them — Lakshmana, Sumantra and Guha — spent the whole night talking about Rama.

Rama Bids Sumantra Farewell

The next morning, Rama decided to cross the Ganges and proceed deep into the Dandakaranya (Dandaka Forest). Guha arranged a boat for them. Then came the moment Sumantra had been dreading: parting from Rama.

“Dear Rama, what am I to do now?” asked Sumantra.

Rama lovingly placed His right hand on Sumantra's shoulder and said, “Sumantra, return to Ayodhya with the chariot and continue to serve my father with care. We shall proceed hereafter on foot.”

Sumantra replied, “O Rama, it looks to me that leading a disciplined life, learning the scriptures, being kind to all, and remaining truthful does not offer any reward when adversity strikes. Though You have renounced the kingdom and will live in the forest with Lakshmana and Sita, You are like one who has conquered all the three

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worlds. But think of our fate: when we were overwhelmed with joy to learn that You would be king, You deserted us! We are ruined, having come under the sway of evil Kaikeyi. Suffering is our lot now." Saying so, Sumantra started crying.

Rama consoled him. "Rarely has any king from the Ikshvaku dynasty obtained a gem of a friend like you. Our king is feeling devastated on account of my departure. Please return to him and console him. Your presence with him is much needed now. Please convey our respects and best wishes to him and our mothers. Tell them that we are perfectly content to stay in the forest. Fourteen years will pass quickly, after which all three of us will return to

Ayodhya. Summon Bharata quickly and let him be installed on the throne at the earliest. Once he is there, you will not suffer from the agony of our absence anymore. Tell Bharata to treat all his mothers with the same love and care as he extends to our father."

Sumantra continued crying and pleading with Rama to take him along. He said, "How can I return to Ayodhya without you? The whole city is suffering like a child who has lost its mother. How can I face the people, whose laments will grow louder when they see my chariot without You? No, I cannot go back to Ayodhya! I would rather immolate myself along with the chariot! Please give me the pleasure of driving you through the forest. With

the help of the chariot, I shall ward off the menacing beasts of the jungle. Let me have the joy of living in Your company and serving You. I am ready to renounce Ayodhya and even heaven to be with You and serve you. Oh Rama! Don't abandon your servant. Let me have the pleasure of taking you back to Ayodhya in this very chariot after 14 years."

But Rama did not relent. Consoling Sumantra again and again, Rama bid him farewell. With tear-filled eyes, Sumantra continued gazing at Rama, Sita and Lakshmana as they got into the boat and sailed across the Ganges, until he could no longer see them.


Sumantra then returned to Ayodhya. He met the king and conveyed the news that Rama had entered the Dandakaranya. With utmost agony, Dasharatha asked Sumantra, "What message did Rama convey?"

Shedding tears profusely, Sumantra said, "Rama said, 'Please convey my salutations

to father. Please convey my salutations to all my mothers. Please convey my best wishes to them all.'"

Conclusion

After Dasharatha's death and Bharata's arrival, the last rites of the king were performed. Bharata decided to go to the forest with his mothers, ministers and priests to meet Rama and persuade Him to return. Sumantra, too, went along. He thus had the joyous opportunity of meeting Rama once again, at Chitrakuta. After failing to persuade Rama, the entourage returned to Ayodhya, with Bharata carrying Rama's *padukas* (sandals), which he installed on the throne as symbols of Rama's rule.

Reading Sumantra's tirade against Kaikeyi, we cannot help but marvel at his courage. As Amma frequently says, "Pointing out *adharma* (unrighteousness) is also our dharma." This is precisely what Sumantra did. 



Chapter 9: Yoga of the Royal Knowledge

by Prof. V. Muraleedhara Menon, India

In this chapter, the Lord sings the glories of *Hari-nama*, the Lord's names. Saint Jnaneshwar, the 13th-century sage, recited this chapter before breathing his last.

At the very beginning of this chapter, Lord Krishna says that this knowledge, which He describes as royal and secret, is most purifying and must be experienced directly.

Hari-nama is the essence of all the Vedas. The Lord has made available to all the means of liberation, hitherto hidden in the inner recesses of the Vedas. Anyone may avail themselves of this secret now. The Vedic path is difficult and fraught with dangers, whereas remembrance of God is easy and purifying in every way.

God is not hiding in certain pilgrimage centres. He is all-pervading. We need not do any gruelling spiritual practice to realize Him. We just need to mentally dedicate all our actions as offerings to the Lord. If we can discharge our *svadharma* (actions suited to one's nature) in this way, we will be blessed with the vision of God.

Both Lord Krishna and Sage Vyasa (author of the *Mahabharata*, which contains the *Gita*) declare that neither scholarship nor rituals are necessary to attain spiritual liberation; forthright devotion alone is enough. Most of the stories in the *Mahabharata*

show how liberation is a universal right. The Lord declares as much in this chapter.

We should offer all our actions to the Lord. All selfless actions are a *yajna* (offering to the Divine). This is the essence of *raja yoga*, a sweet blend of karma yoga and bhakti yoga (the dedicated paths of action and devotion respectively).

In *raja yoga*, the fruit of action is not given up but offered to God. When we thus dedicate the fruits of all action to Him, the ill effects of action will not affect us. We will be able to surrender all our negativities (including lust, anger and others) — our very mind and senses — to Him. Whatever we do, we can imagine that we are worshipping God that way. Taking care of our child, imagining him or her to be God's gift to us, is a form of worship. Cleaning the whole house and preparing sattvic food lovingly is a *yajna* (ritual fire ceremony), wherein the flames on the stove are the


sacrificial fire. Sleep becomes *nidra-samadhi* (absorption in sleep) when we do so after offering all pleasures to God. Bathing while imagining that we are performing *abbisheka* (ceremonial bath) to Lord Shiva will cleanse us of our sins. Seeing the guest who visits as God and treating him as such is worship. In this way, if we can do everything with an attitude of worship, how blessed our life will be!

We must first see this world and everything in it as perfect so as to treat everything and everyone with reverence.

In short, if we keep in mind that God is all-pervading and offer all our actions, both good and bad, at His sacred feet, we can become free of our sins. Then, all our troubles will cease. Remembering the names of the Lord will reduce to ash the sins accrued over lifetimes. His devotee is ever free from fear. Even if the world is turned topsy-turvy, the devotee will remain unperturbed. Can the

phenomenal world do anything at all to rattle the truth? Therefore, let us try to earn God's love and grace by surrendering to Him. In this way, this fleeting human life will become fulfilled.

Offering God a leaf, flower, fruit, water or anything else, for that matter, becomes a worship if offered with love and devotion. What matters is not the action but the inner attitude.

Thus, work done as worship of God bestows liberation. Raja yoga, in which one offers the fruits of action to the Lord, is superior to karma yoga. In karma yoga, one is asked to work but not expect the fruits of action, whereas raja yoga teaches us not to reject the fruits but to offer them to God instead. What is rejected in karma yoga becomes an offering to God in raja yoga. There is a difference between casting a seed aside and sowing it. Raja yoga makes life simple, beautiful and joyful. 

(to be continued)

Lilas Around Amma

Amma's Kozhukkattas

Amma says that we should strive to become instruments in God's hands instead of considering ourselves the doer. An experience I had vividly brought home this teaching to me.

During Amma's Berlin program in 2012, a devotee offered Amma some *kozhukkattas* (sweet, steamed dumplings) during Devi Bhava darshan. Amma ate and enjoyed them immensely. Calling the head of the kitchen, She said, "I'd like to serve this to my children tomorrow. Please prepare some."



As he was busy cleaning and packing up the kitchen for the next day's travel, he delegated the task to me. When I learnt that it was Amma's request, I agreed immediately, even though making kozhukkattas for 300 tour staff was daunting, especially as the kitchen was closed.

I quickly set about finding someone who could help me make kozhukkattas to Amma's satisfaction. I found two helpers, and we made a sample, which we took to Amma. She tasted it and nodded Her approval. "This is good! Now make 1,000 kozhukkattas. These are small and I want to give at least three to each person so that my children's stomachs are filled."

I was taken aback! I thought making 300 kozhukkattas with barely enough resources was already a tall order, and now Amma wanted 1,000!

I wondered how our team of three could make so many kozhukkattas within the next

few hours, as the tour group was preparing to leave at dawn for the next stop. We asked tour staff to recruit volunteers. Meanwhile, we began frantically rummaging through the packed boxes in the kitchen and pulling out the necessary ingredients and utensils. While doing so, about 50 to 60 volunteers came to help. Word had spread that Amma wanted kozhukkattas to be made.

Once the different tasks were listed, the volunteers organized themselves into a production line. Some people rolled the dough; some made the sweet coconut filling; some added the filling and shaped the dumplings; some steamed them; and some packed them. In just two hours, 1,000 kozhukkattas were prepared, cooled and packed!

At 6 am, we left Berlin. I eagerly anticipated a chai stop during the day's travel, but Amma drove straight to the venue of the next program to

serve dinner to devotees. There was an unexpectedly large crowd gathered there. Seeing it, I understood the change in plan. Amma had known that there would be many people waiting for Her, and wanted to serve them kozhukkattas, too. She was not thinking only of the tour group.

After serving everyone dinner, Amma led the '*Brahmarpanam*' prayer, and then made an announcement, proudly waving a kozhukkatta in Her hand: "I made these with My children all night. We sat together and made them!"

My heart overflowed with love and joy when I heard those words. For the next few days, Amma reminisced about

the kozhukkattas, to the delight of the volunteers who had taken part in the *seva* (selfless service).

I realized that making the kozhukkattas had never been my burden to bear but Amma's *sankalpa* (divine resolve), which materialized flawlessly through Her children. She told us how many kozhukkattas to make and gave us the necessary help. All that we had to do was surrender to Her and do our bit. This is what it means to be an instrument in Her hands. I felt that Amma had orchestrated the whole situation to teach us that something bigger than us and our abilities was at work: Amma's grace. ❧

— *Sridevi Sheshadri, USA*

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AMRITA E4LIFE INTERNATIONAL FELLOWSHIP

August 5th, 2020, Amritapuri: The inaugural ceremony for the E4LIFE International Fellowship Program was conducted online. A 'compassion-driven' PhD program offered by Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham (Amrita University), the fellowship program will enable candidates to 'Experience, Embrace, Engage and Empower' (the 4 E's) rural communities through experiential and academic research. It is hoped that these fellowships, worth a total of ₹25 crores (US\$3.5 million), will generate tailor-made solutions to sustainable development in rural India. One hundred scholars from around the world will be awarded these fully-funded fellowships.

The scholars will spend time in more than 100 villages in India, and thus gain first-hand experience that will enable them to develop and implement sustainable solutions to rural challenges. The program's 'Experiential

(l – r): Swami Purnamritananda Puri, Dr. Maneesha Ramesh, Dr. Venkat Rangan (Vice-Chancellor, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham)



Learning Curriculum' integrates the social, economic and cultural aspects of sustainable development in interdisciplinary areas in order to meet the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Amma says that education must not only equip one with skills to make a living (education for living) but also impart a culture of the heart (education for life), i.e. values that are essential for life (E4LIFE). The E4LIFE formula will not only improve living conditions for the villagers, but will also awaken compassion in the hearts of researchers.

Each fellowship is worth up to ₹25 lakhs (₹2.5 million). It includes a university seed grant to fund the implementation of sustainable solutions in the villages. The scholars can also apply to study abroad at international partner universities, and pursue joint or dual PhDs.

During Amma's 66th birthday celebrations last year, Anurag Singh Thakur, Minister of State for Finance and Corporate Affairs, launched the E4LIFE program and presented the fellowship to the first 10 students. During the online

inauguration ceremony, it was announced that the first cohort of 60 new PhD scholars has now been enrolled in the fellowship program. Among them, 70% are international scholars from 17 countries and different academic backgrounds, including engineering, social sciences, management and biotechnology.

A month after the ceremony, Amrita University was awarded a UNESCO Chair for 'Experiential Learning for Sustainable Innovation & Development.' Through this Chair, to be held by Dr. Maneesha Ramesh, Dean of International Programs, the University will strive to build sustainable communities through a curriculum based on experiential learning. In this way, the University will address Amma's concern, expressed in Her July 2015 keynote address at the UN conference on technology for sustainable development: "We should take into consideration how much we have been able to use research to serve the lowest and most vulnerable stratum of society." 

— Anushree (Rondine Twist),
Belize