

The Transformation of a Heart¹

by Al Drucker

Dear Reader. My loving salutations to you. Baba says that this whole world is like a drama being played out in a girl's college. Some girls are playing the part of ladies, some are playing the part of men, others are playing children, some are elders, some are animals, some are gods and angels, some are demons... there are so many different parts being enacted on the stage, but underneath the actors are all the same, they are all just girl students. But, there is one figure connected with the drama who is neither a girl nor a student; he is the author and director of the play.

A few years ago at the ashram, the western children were given a chance to put on a Christmas performance called the Sarva Dharma Play, which dramatized the religious and spiritual history of the world. Behind stage at the Poornachandra Auditorium, Swami asked me, "Are you the director of this play?" I said, "Swamiji, you are the director. I am the assistant." Immediately Swami replied, "No, the director needs no assistant. You can call yourself an instrument."

Swami was pointing out that once we become aware of the Divinity who is in charge of the play, then we must surrender all our independence and individuality to him; for then we become knowingly, what we have been all along, unknowingly... instruments in his hands. He does not need our help in running the world. Our role is to be good instruments and to be good actors playing out the parts assigned. The stage is in place, the lights are on, the curtain is up and the play is in full swing, but the actors are blind to the grandeur of the performance; they are much too busy playing their little parts, thinking these to be real and under their control.

Fortunately, we are blessed with the presence amongst us of the Lord of the Universe, and so we can be conscious instruments of the Divine; we can look around us and enjoy the high drama that he has produced, even as we perform the roles that have been assigned to us in his grand production.

But, Swami encourages us to elevate our thinking to an even higher plane. He says, "Think of yourself as the Divinity itself. In truth, you are no different from God. You are not this body. You are not this mind. You are not this limited personality. You are the eternal, the one divine principle, the timeless truth. Fear or grief can never touch you. In essence, there is no difference between us. You and I are always one." This is the loftiest teaching of the Avatar, directing us back to our sacred source, the immortal Atma. Swami tells us that there is only one sin and that is thinking that we can be separate individuals, different from God. This is the greatest mistake that we can make, for it leads us to pursue our petty lives in the world without ever seeking to know the truth of the Divinity that we truly are.

These teachings have had a most profound effect on my life. Once I took them to heart, the inner reorientation proceeded at such a rapid pace it almost took my breath away. It seems like countless ages and many, many lives of studying and practicing spiritual truths become telescoped into just a few short years, after coming to Baba. My youth was spent in a traditional Jewish family in Germany before the War. When we fled from there and came to America, very quickly the wonders of the world became my fascination and science my religion. I was an agnostic bordering on outright atheism.

Before I came into Swami's fold, I knew or cared very little about any religion, including my own. With this background you will appreciate my embarrassment when on a number of occasions after coming to Baba, he directed me to speak to the assembled devotees on Christmas Day about the life

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and teachings of Jesus Christ. I protested that I was not a Christian, that I was brought up in the Jewish tradition, but Swami would have none of that. He said, "Jesus was also a Jew. Christians, Jews, Muslims, all are brothers. You speak." One fine Christmas, I was happily surprised by the talk that came out of me, just before Swami's Christmas discourse. I spoke from notes but felt very much transported by the words, a little bit like an old-type preacher caught up in his sermon...a role that was completely out of character for me. Afterwards a number of devotees came up and congratulated me on the fine talk.

That evening there was a Christmas dinner with Swami. One of the senior devotees mentioned to Swami the good talk that Drucker gave. But Swami wrinkled his nose in displeasure and said, "It was just a written thing. You pay attention to words, but God listens only to the feelings that come from a pure heart." That was a revelation... words are a product of the mind, and in the spiritual context, the mind must be cleansed of every impurity and become thought-free and word-free. Words do not matter; what matters is the heart, the spiritual heart, letting everything that pours forth come out of the inner recesses of the heart, spontaneously, unjudgingly and selflessly. That pure heart of hearts, Swami says, is the Atma, the one Self of all.

Earlier in my life before coming to Swami, I was moving from one internal crisis to another, overwhelmed by a dryness of heart that was excruciating. It slowly dawned on me that I was suffering from a terrible spiritual disease. I doubted if there was any way of ever bringing lasting joy into my life. Later, I came to realize that the name of that disease is ignorance, and its principal symptom is the feeling of separation...separation at a very deep level from everyone and everything, and most painful of all, I was a stranger even to myself. I worked very hard and played very hard and was involved in lots of causes that engaged my time and kept me distracted from myself. I seemed to need constant activity and entertainment to engage my attention and keep myself out of the clutches of boredom. I knew nothing at all about myself, who I was, without all these activities and identities, except to know that I would find little joy in spending time with what I felt was a very sterile self. I had read the masters speaking of what they called a spiritual heart, brimming with selfless love; but I had no experience at all in that area. Do I even have such a heart, I pondered?

When I was a little boy I spent some time in a small ghetto town in Poland, studying with an old rabbi. I remember the long side-curls, the funny clothes and wide-brimmed hats of the other boys, the blanched faces from being months without ever seeing the sun. But most of all I remember their joy when they burst out of the classroom at the end of the day and danced about the rabbi, and their spontaneous friendliness and heartfulness towards this German boy who had come as a stranger into their midst.

What a wonderful light shone from their eyes and how their hearts were filled with so much love, it just enveloped everything around them. Would I ever be able to feel my heart? I have thought often about those boys. They all went into the furnaces of Auschwitz; why was I, with this dry heart, saved? Many, many years later, I was asked to address the students at the Sri Sathya Sai College in Brindavan on U. N. Human Rights Day. When I got up to speak I looked out at the boys, and for the first time in 40 years I saw that sparkling light again, coming from the eyes, and that exquisite quality of inner joy showing on the faces. And a stirring in my heart made me wonder if those sweet souls of yesteryear had been reborn again at the feet of the Lord.

I saw that same light again years later when Swami took me in his car. Children were lined up along the road, on tiptoe with anticipation. Then when they got a glimpse of Swami and were bathed by his warm smile and blessings, they became animated with joy; they danced and laughed and that light shone from their eyes. Since then I have seen it many times. If one pays attention to the lines of

devotees when Swami gives darshan, one can see a wave of light flash across the faces of the people as Swami goes by, and there, revealed, are the many faces of God. I realize now that that light is the light of the heart, the light of Atma emerging from those faces. The whole long saga of coming home to Swami, is but a journey of discovering that pure light of the heart.

We can measure our progress on the spiritual path, our transformation, by our proximity to the Atma, our very Self. How strange it is that we have somehow become estranged from our own true Self, that we have veiled ourselves with an illusory ego, an illusory mind, an illusory individuality, an ephemeral body, a personality burdened with selfishness and narrow-mindedness and ungratefulness. How far have we come in nailing these onto the cross, and crossing them out forever? Baba has come for this one reason to help us destroy these false selves and find our way home to our true Self, the Atma. That is the transformation of the heart that he is effecting in all of us.

Dearest Reader. We are so very blessed to know of Baba, to come under his protective wing, and to be guided by him through life, even long before we consciously know of him. May I tell you the story of how I first heard of Swami?

It all started in one of the most beautiful places on earth, the rugged coastline of Big Sur, California, in 1972. There, on the grounds of the institute where I lived, I was sitting on a rock overlooking the ocean, and found myself thumbing through a book that I had found in the 'free box' that day, whose cover had been torn off and a number of pages removed; it turned out to be Sathya Sai Speaks, Vol II. I didn't know who Sathya Sai was, and not having any previous interest or exposure to Indian teachers or teachings, I glanced at it rather quickly, not expecting to find anything of particular interest for me there. Nevertheless, for some unknown reason, I had taken it down to the rocks.

As I was thumbing through the book, Swami must have been thumbing through me, and he undoubtedly decided that this was the time to rescue this straying soul. So he arranged for my eyes to contact the one word which would be sure to catch my attention. There towards the end of the book, on one of those random pages that flitted through my fingers, I momentarily espied the word 'Chinese'. I should explain that whereas I didn't have much interest in India at that time, I had a great deal of interest in China, having spent some time there as a young man, and having just completed my studies in Chinese medicine, and, also, having just helped to arrange for a well-known taoist scholar, an Englishman who had spent most of his life in China, to come to our institute and give a series of seminars, which were to start that very evening.

So, I scanned that particular page which had the word 'Chinese' on it. It was a talk that Swami had given in Puttaparthi in 1962, in which he inaugurated a new village elementary school and spoke of a new era of Sai education that was starting then, which we now know has spread to every state in India and to many countries abroad.

Although later, through his grace, I was to become part of that great educational system, at the time this meant nothing to me, and I just skipped to the paragraph where the word 'Chinese' appeared, and there I found this statement,

"... I know that your hearts are filled with thoughts of pushing back the Chinese who have invaded our sacred motherland... India has Krishna on its side and where there is Krishna there will be victory... Already the trumpets of victory will have sounded... I assure you my birthday will not be spoiled by any bad news... on the contrary, it will be made happier by positively cheerful news."

Then I turned a few pages further on to the next discourse delivered the following morning, where he spoke of the turn in events. He said, "By now you will know that the Chinese of their own accord, prompted by the mysterious working of a higher power, withdrew from the advanced lines they held on the night of the 22nd, and as I said, my birthday was celebrated in an atmosphere of joy... some unseen force has caught them by the neck and hurled them back... man is impelled into aggressive actions by greed and lust, but he is compelled to retrace his steps by the power of God."

Reading that made a most powerful impression on me. It was incredible that there could be someone in the world with such great power that by his will alone he could effect major events like that... giving himself a birthday present by dramatically forcing a whole foreign army to withdraw from his homeland, seemingly spontaneously, on the eve of his birthday.

I had been working with nuclear weapons. I had been involved with the development of every major ballistic missile system. I knew something about the terrible power of these weapons and how at any moment a button can be pushed and initiate a cycle of events that in a short time would extinguish all higher forms of life in the world, leaving only the grasses and insects and microbes to inherit the earth. By the end of the 1960's I could no longer live with myself. The inner conflict arising from being in the killing business began telling on me. I was in and out of hospitals with ulcers. Even changing to more peaceful NASA-related work was not enough. I had to change professions completely and get out of the world of machines and computers and into the world of living people.

Looking for ways of being able to perform some service for humanity instead of destroying it, I became a Peace Corps trainer, a Gestalt therapist, a Rolfer, and a few years later ended up in Oxford studying Chinese medicine, homeopathic medicine and other natural healing arts, and then returned home to open a free-clinic on the coast. But, having been intimately involved with so many aspects of nuclear weapon delivery systems, the threat of nuclear holocaust never left my mind. It seemed like a hopeless situation for mankind, for where was there a power on earth that could prevent the arms race and the inevitable confrontation that was sure to come? On that fateful day when I first read Swami's talk, my heart leaped when I suddenly realized that here was real hope, that here was a power of goodness and love that would not let the world slide into chaos and darkness.

As I mentioned before, we were scheduled to have an esteemed taoist scholar come to our institute and conduct some seminars on ancient Chinese culture and philosophy. That evening in his introductory lecture, he spoke about the unusual nature of the Chinese mind, which in the west we consider to be inscrutable. He gave as an example, how in the border war with the Indians in 1962, the Chinese came in great strength, overwhelmed the Indian forces at the border and drove deep into the Indian heartland. But then one night, at the height of their success, they suddenly withdrew, seemingly without rhyme or reason. This is what made them so mysterious to westerners. The professor attempted to give some explanations for their actions by quoting certain verses in the I Ching and the Tao Te Ching, books of great antiquity whose prescriptions for different life situations still guide Chinese thought, even those of the present communist rulers of China.

At this point I showed the old gentleman the torn-up book I had discovered that day, and said, "Professor, please read these short passages in this book. It seems to indicate another explanation for the same incident." He read. His eyes became very wide, he shook his head, and said, "You know, we may think that the Chinese are inscrutable, but the Indians are inexplicable, and when the Chinese and Indians come together then it all becomes totally incomprehensible."

Well, I thought alot about this mystery that had suddenly been launched into my awareness and that was to have such a profound effect on my life. I should mention that reading those talks of Swami's I

was touched on much more than just the cognitive level. There was something in the second talk which I could hardly understand at all, but, nevertheless, which shook me to my very roots and awakened some kind of deep acknowledgment in me that convinced me of its truth. This is what Swami said at the end of that talk:

"Suppose you are asked 'Who created all this diversity in the world, who is responsible for all this variety?' What will you answer? The correct response is, 'There is no variety at all'. The question makes no sense. No person or force or urge or accident produced this multiplicity. There is no multiplicity. The one always remains as one. You mistake it as many; the fault is in you. Correct your vision; remove your delusion. Brahman did not change into the world; the rope did not change into a snake. Only you mistook it to be a snake. Brahman is Brahman for ever and ever; your ignorance of this fact makes you see it as world. The world stands on the one leg, delusion. Cut down that leg and it falls... I often tell you not to identify even me with this particular physical buildup. But you do not understand. You call me by one name only and believe I have one form only, but there is no name I do not bear and there is no form which is not mine."

That was my first exposure to Swami's non-dualist teachings of Vedanta. From that point on, Swami was firmly established on the map of my consciousness, and I must admit to you that this subject of the omnipresent indwelling Divinity that Swami spoke of in that talk, and has been stressing in every one of his recent speeches, has seeped into my very blood. The yearning for unity-consciousness has come to dominate my thoughts and now I find myself shying away from every encounter that involves any kind of feeling of separation.

But, let me get back to that initial impact of reading Swami's words, when I first discovered this force of incalculable power in the form of a holy man in far-off India. I had to find out more about Him. At that time, I still had no idea what he looked like (all the pictures had been removed from the book), nor did I have any real notion of how to go about seeking him out. But the Divinity has its own time-table, and will reel you in when the right time comes.

A number of months after that first exposure to Swami, I had a harrowing aircraft incident, which I later wrote about in the 1980 Golden Age publication. I was piloting a small aircraft and got caught up and lost in a major winter storm over the rugged mountains and wilderness area of northern Nevada; then practically at the last possible moment, with the fuel running out, with my passenger either unconscious or dead and the aircraft beginning to come apart, when both my energy and my hope had drained away to nothingness, a mysterious voice came on the radio and during a momentary break in the storm, guided me into a safe landing on a snow-covered field. In that impossible situation, I had remembered God for the first time in 30-odd years. I prayed fervently to him to save me... and most dramatically, he did.

A few days later, escaping from that stormy wintry scene, I found myself in Mexico, coming into a Yoga academy in the evening, just as the group of students assembled there were singing the arathi and waving a light in front of Swami's vibhuti-covered picture. When I looked into the eyes of that image, I choked up with tears. Suddenly something stirred most powerfully in my dry heart. I didn't know who the picture was of and why they left it covered with a heap of dust, but inwardly I knew, unmistakably, that there was some powerful connection between the voice that came on the radio in that storm over the Nevada desert and the holy man whose picture this was. Soon I was told lots of wonderful stories of Baba and I told them, "O yes, I know all about him. He is the one who threw the Chinese out of India on his birthday."

From that day on, I read everything of Baba that I could lay my hands on, I went to Sai Centers and talked to devotees, and I prepared myself in many ways to come into his presence. Thus it was, about a

year later, that I made my first pilgrimage to Baba, reaching Prashanti Nilayam during the Mahashivaratri festival.

I was excited with anticipation, but also a little groggy from jet-lag and the daze of suddenly landing in strange, noisy, crowded India. At the ashram there was a huge throng overflowing the Poornachandra Auditorium. Our group had permission to be inside, so a phalanx of volunteers got behind us and pushed; we landed in the auditorium amidst shouts of "Sai Ram!" ringing out around us, as we stepped over people in a sudden jostle.

I was in momentary confusion, and then seeing the massed flags on the stage and the banners on the walls above, I went into shock. It was as if I had suddenly been transported back to an earlier phase of my existence. Here, on the stage was Swami's table, on which was inscribed two swastikas, an ancient sacred symbol representing the OM; but for me this was the terror-filled symbol of Nazi Germany, where I grew up as a young boy and from which we had escaped under great difficulties just before the War. On the stage was a floral arch depicting a gate on which was written 'Work is Worship'; on the gates of the concentration camps the Nazis had put a similar slogan, which roughly translated means 'Work Cleanses the Soul'. The pageantry, the excitement of the crowd, the common greeting of 'Jai', which means the same thing as 'Heil', the adoration of the charismatic leader... all these sudden impressions created a most powerful feeling of *deja vu*.

Then I saw the SS carved in the base of Swami's chair, representing Sathya Sai; but for me it brought up a memory of an incident 35 years earlier in Germany. It was just before the war, when I was nine years old. The situation for Jews had gotten so bad, that I was sent off to be with relatives living in Poland. I travelled alone by train across Germany. After a stop in Berlin, my well-to-do relations put me into a first-class compartment, not knowing that Jews were not permitted to travel by that class. At the next station, there was a clatter of heels in the corridor outside and the door of my compartment flew open, a brown-uniformed soldier shouted "Achtung!", meaning "Attention!", and a tall man, a dark eminence looking like death itself, strode into the compartment, straightened out his arm in the Nazi greeting and snapped out, "Heil Hitler!".

He was dressed in a black uniform, with shiny knee-length black boots, a black belt across his chest, a black pistol holster on one side, a black dagger on the other side, a skull and cross-bones on his peaked cap, a swastika band on his arm, a monocle perched in one eye, and white gloves covering his hands, in which he was holding a black riding crop.

Immediately I realized that a high officer of the dreaded SS, the action arm of the Gestapo, the secret police, had entered my life. For a moment I was petrified, then I snapped to attention, took my bag and got ready to leave the compartment at once, when he said "Sit down!" I sat. He gave a quick look at his adjutant who was still in the door. The man clicked his heels in salute and closed the door.

The officer took off his hat, put away the monocle, took off the belt with its pistol and dagger, took off his gloves, put away the riding crop, loosened his collar and made himself comfortable. He turned to me and said quite softly, "You're Jewish, I know. Well, boy, have you ever heard of Moses?" I said "Yes sir". Then for the next hour he proceeded to tell me a number of Bible stories. My fear disappeared; I was fascinated and then I was charmed. He had a warm, soft voice and kind-looking eyes. He knew his Bible and he told the stories straight and sympathetically. Finally, he leaned very close to me and said, "Listen my boy, I like you. Let me give you some advice. This country has gone mad. Tell your parents to leave here as fast as you can. Going to Poland will not help you. You must go the other way. Don't stop until you are out of Europe, and don't worry about leaving your possessions. Just save your lives. This time there will be no Moses to lead you; you will have to do it yourself." I was totally astonished to

hear these words coming from such a high Nazi official.

In fact, we had applied for emigration to America but the visas had been held up because of some technicality and my father had taken no further steps to reapply. I was thinking of this, when the train whistle blew, the shout of "Achtung!" was heard from outside the corridor. We were pulling into a station. The officer got up and put on all his paraphenalia. The door flew open with the same clicking of heels with which it had been closed. He turned to me, raised his hand in a stiff "Heil Hitler!", and then paused for just a moment in the door and gave me a knowing wink. The last thing I remember seeing as he left the compartment, were the two lightning strokes on each lapel of his uniform, signifying SS. Now sitting in the Poornachandra that SS flashed back into my mind. When I got to Poland I had written to my parents and reported what the SS officer had said to me so forcefully. My father reapplied and the day I returned home, a packet in the post brought the life-saving visas. We left on one of the last trains out of Germany.

Swami's discourse was over and he started singing in that sweet, melodious voice of his that totally captivates the heart. I was catapulted back into the present; I remembered what I was doing there and why I had come on this journey. Here on stage was the ultimate of goodness... love personified... the Divinity come with all its power and wisdom and glory into a human form... whose advent was an event of incalculable importance, something we have prayed for and waited for through countless lives. And long before we ever know of him, he works both within us and in the events around us. As in this story of the SS, it is only after coming to him that we begin to recognize his presence in all the critical situations that have occurred in our lives, one following the other like a succession of way-markers leading to him.

On that first trip to Prashanti Nilayam they put me into a room with a little Indian man, who seemed very poor and lived very simply. But, after a few days, when we got to know each other and I drew out his story, he told me how he had been a high official in the Indian government and how one day he found himself in a city where Baba was visiting. Baba sent for him and then related to him a number of incidents of how Baba had saved his life, once coming as an air-raid warden in war-time London during the blitz and getting him into the shelter just before the building was hit by a bomb and demolished.

I looked back on my life and saw how often Swami must have been present in my life, whether as the ground-controller who saved me in the storm, or as the SS officer who warned me in the train, or in the many other disguises that the Divinity has come into my life without being recognized. In the years that have gone by since that first trip to Swami in Prashanti Nilayam, there have been countless personal experiences of his loving presence, nurturing, guiding and correcting. If even a few hours go by in the day, without feeling that direct, invisible but unmistakable presence of Swami, I know that I've been unconscious.

He never rests, he never disappears, he never relaxes his vigilance... it is just these minds that get distracted and forget his sweet omnipresence. Everything and anything is possible for the Divinity. Out of his unbounded love he will turn earth into heaven and heaven into earth for his devotees. He will come in countless forms and disguises and perform countless acts in order to rain surprise and delight and good lessons on us. We have all had many experiences and can tell Baba stories that would fill many books. The most wonderful realization is the connectedness of all the experiences...how they are like the unfoldment of scenes on an already existing tapestry, rendered in exquisite patterns, laced with surprising twists and twirls, and woven with immeasurable love by the master craftman of them all. Everything taking place seems to have a genesis, a long history in the past, which is then carefully guided into the present by the divine hand.

A few years after first coming to Swami, I had the notion of visiting an ashram in the north where some American friends were staying. In my mind there was a desire to listen to the discourses being given by their guru on the Gita. In darshan I asked Swami for permission to go there.

His reply was short and succinct, "One path. One teacher. No confusion. You stay." Clearly, I was not ready to go and listen to some other teacher. I stayed and put the trip completely out of my mind. A year later in darshan, when I had totally forgotten about it, Swami said to me, "Now you can go to that place." But there had been many problems in that ashram and I no longer had any interest in going there. I asked Baba if I could go on a pilgrimage to the Ganges instead; he gave his consent. A few days later I was on my way to Delhi and then on to Rishikesh.

It was a long, hot, dusty, bouncy ride through one of the most-overcrowded parts of India. The heat, the stench, the teeming humanity, the lack of sanitary facilities along the way, all took their toll on this western body. When I finally arrived in Rishikesh, the beautiful holy city at the foothills of the Himalayas, where the Ganges becomes a mighty river, running wide and strong, I was unable to appreciate any part of the visual beauty that was now all around me. I had become painfully ill with stomach cramps and fever.

I went to the office of the ashram where I had made my reservation, arriving there just as they were about to close for lunch. I asked the sadhu on duty for accommodations. He said there was no place in the ashram. Didn't they receive my letter and my telegram? No, nothing was received. Could he suggest some other place to try, perhaps a hotel or traveller's bungalow? No, there was no place available anywhere around. Could I leave my baggage there for a short time while I looked for a place? No, that would not be possible. Could I perhaps have a little drinking water. Sorry, it is already past closing time; there are tea shops around. And so, a few moments later, I was out in the street in the Indian noon-time sun, sitting, or more correctly, slumping on my baggage, miserably sick and no place to go.

A nice-looking young man came up to me and asked, "What is your native place?" It is one of the standard phrases they learn in school, and every foreigner who spends any extended time in India hears the query endless times, as children come up to practice their English. This time I couldn't handle it, I was feeling too miserable.

I said, "Please, go away."

He persisted, "But where did you come from?"

"From the south, from Andhra Pradesh, and I'm not well and I don't want to talk, so please leave me be", I answered.

But far from leaving me alone, the boy came closer and said, "Did you come from Sai Baba's ashram?"

I perked up. "Do you know of Sai Baba?" I asked.

"O yes!" he answered, "Baba told me to come here."

I said, "Then please do me a favor and get me some clean drinking water."

"I'll get it for you right away", he answered.

He walked a few steps away from me and suddenly he looked down at his hands; then he pivoted around and said, "Look, this has just come. It must be for you." His hand was filled with a nice big mound of white vibhuti, the kind that Swami makes.

Startled, I asked, "Where did it come from?"

"Well, I think it came through the air from Puttaparthi", he answered. I took the vibhuti from him and he went off to get me the glass of water. Just as I put a little bit in my mouth, the same sadhu that had seemed so unfriendly earlier, came running up to me, flashing a big smile and said, "We have a room

for you! One of the permanent residents will be off-station for some time. You can stay in his place. It's very nice. But now, come with me and wash up and have some lunch." He helped me with my baggage and showed me to the room. I could feel Swami's love flooding into me; I knew immediately that everything would be alright.

For days afterwards I wondered about the boy who had given me the vibhuti and had gone off to fetch me some water. I never saw him again, nor did anyone know of him. It is as if he had vanished into thin air.

I settled down in my luxurious room, complete with fan, shelves filled with books, closets, everything. At three in the morning I was awakened by the beautiful, heavenly sound of veena strummings. It went on without pause for many hours, coming from the room next door. Later in the day, I had a chance to meet the old gentleman who lived in that room, who, as it turned out, had not stirred out of that room for 20 years. His whole life had become filled with the Gita, and he offered to instruct me in the deeper meaning of its verses.

For the next fortnight I became immersed in Gita. It was Swami's gift to satisfy a longing that had arisen a year earlier, and that was to fructify still further years later, when I was blessed to be present when Swami gave his direct teaching of the Bhagavad Gita in the temple at Prashanti Nilayam. Later, I had a chance to pass on these Gita teachings in lectures to foreign devotees at the ashram and then compile and publish the book of Swami's discourses on the Gita, which has been giving so much joy to devotees.

Like that, he looks after us, and guides us and takes care of us, and makes his presence constantly known to us, until we realize that there is no longer a separate entity feeling his presence. It becomes just like icecream of two different flavors melting together on the tongue, until all there is is just the exquisite taste of the one sweetness, melting into the one joyous feeling of pure delight...pure goodness. That is Swami's love which becomes our love, and soon envelops our whole world.

Dearest Reader. Have I been able to give you some taste of the inner movement that takes place when Baba comes into our life? Have you caught the flavor? Let me share one more incident with you. I was sitting on the verandah of the temple at Prashanti Nilayam, lost within myself, when suddenly I opened my eyes and found Swami standing in front of me. With a twinkle in his eye, he said, "Drunker, what do you want?"

I replied, "Swamiji, I'm content, I'm satisfied."

"You mean you want nothing?" He asked.

"Swamiji, all I want is YOU." I said, putting my hands on my heart.

"That's not NOTHING" He rejoined, "That's EVERYTHING! That's Mukti! Yukti! Santrupty! Health!

Wealth! Everything!" And he put his hand over mine on my heart, and said, "Everything is here.

Everything is here." Then he added, "And nothing is there", pointing out to the world.

I held his hand for a few seconds. I hardly registered the great wisdom contained in his words, I was so struck with his love. As if to punctuate the complete naturalness and connectedness of the moment, when he turned to speak to someone else sitting nearby, I noticed a spider entrapped in his hair. I reached up to take it out. He looked at me for a just a second and then continued his conversation with the other man, but at the same time he bent his head down ever so slightly to let me extricate the little thing, which was desperately tangled in the kinks and curls. Then, without turning his head, he said to me, "Be careful, it may be a scorpion. It may sting." But it came out quite peacefully and there was no sting.

In this way, life goes on, heart to heart, bathed in the continuous presence of the ever-loving mother... the stern father... delightful friend... divine teacher... beloved Self.

Let me conclude with a personal note. For seven years following that first journey to India, I made twice-yearly pilgrimages from America to the lotus feet. On one of those trips, Swami told me to stop doing individual healing work and, instead, to teach. With Swami's blessing a school of alternative medicine and healing came up at our institute and became very popular among health professionals and lay people interested in holistic health. Just as we were at the height of success, Swami told me in an interview on a trip in early 1981, "Close everything up and leave it. Come be with Swami." And then he gave a little poem, which has stuck with me like a mantra. He said, "You don't need marriage, you don't need money and you don't need fame... all of those will lead to pain." He was speaking of the three goals of worldly life, the purusharthas as they are called in India. Leave them behind and put everything into reaching the fourth... "be free... be with me".

I came back to America, terminated my affairs there and within a month left to settle in India. But now, years later, I realize that Swami was not referring to an outer change of residence but an inner transformation. And that doesn't come quite as quickly as buying an airplane ticket and getting rid of a few possessions. It is nailing the ego up on the cross. It is when the mother of mothers in her supreme love transforms into Kali with sword in hand. That is when the spiritual path seems more like entering a shark's mouth, with all teeth facing inwards. From that point on, the only way to proceed is deeper and deeper inside while getting chewed up and absorbed along the way.

In one of his discourses, Swami once said, "I will bring you near me and make you completely ego-free. For many years it has been sweetness, kindness and soft persuasion; from now on it will be different. I will drag you to me. I will place you on the table and operate. It is my love that prompts me to save you. It is my love that prompts me to open your eyes before you get bogged down deeper in the swamp of worldly life." For many of us, that process has begun. And so there will have to be other articles written with perhaps a slightly different theme, as the great surgeon proceeds with his operation and as the great jeweler fashions his ornament.

In one interview, Swami said to us, "When you want a precious jewel of original design, you must give the gold and rare stones to the jeweler, and then wait while he melts and bangs and twists the gold, and grinds and chips and polishes the stones, and designs the jewel. Then, when he returns the jewel to you, you will have something truly worthwhile. But in the middle of his work, just because you don't like the ordeal that the gold and stones are being put through, can you ask for them back? No. You must be patient and forbearing and trust the jeweler. He knows what he is doing."

Dear Reader, I leave you with that thought. Trust in our divine jeweler, he knows what he is doing. Again I salute you with my love and best wishes. May you receive the precious jewel conferring all blessings, and realize the blissful Lord, who is your own immortal Self.