AMRTASTAKAM

A Vedàntic Inquiry

Into Supreme Devotion

A Commentary on Eight Verses

From the Bhagavad-Gìtà

With Examples From the Life & Teachings of Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi

By Swami Ramakrishnananda Puri

Mata Amritanandamayi Center

San Ramon, California, USA

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*Offered at the Lotus Feet*

*of my Sadguru, Sri Màtà Amätànandamayì Devì*

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**Sri Màtà Amätànandamayì Devì**

Through her extraordinary acts of love and self-sacrifice, Sri Màtà Amätànandamayì Devì, or “Amma” [Mother], as she is more commonly known, has endeared herself to millions around the world. Tenderly caressing everyone who comes to her, holding them close to her heart in a loving embrace, Amma shares her boundless love with all—regardless of their beliefs, their social status or why they have come to her. In this simple yet powerful way, Amma is transforming the lives of countless people, helping their hearts to blossom, one embrace at a time. In the past 40 years, Amma has physically hugged more than 36 million people from all parts of the world.

Her tireless spirit of dedication to uplifting others has inspired a vast network of charitable activities, through which people are discovering the deep sense of peace and inner fulfillment that comes from selflessly serving others. Amma teaches that the divine exists in everything, sentient and insentient. Realizing this truth is the essence of spirituality—the means to end all suffEring. Amma’s teachings are universal. Whenever she is asked about her religion, she replies that her religion is love. She does not ask anyone to believe in God or to change their faith, but only to inquire into their own real nature and to believe in themselves.

**Introduction**

In India, enlightened masters like Amma are referred to by many different terms. There is *siddha*—a perfected one; *jìvanmukta*—one liberated while alive; *mahàtmà*—a great soul... However, perhaps the most revealing name is *àtma-jñànì*—a knower of the self. This name is revealing because it shows us the secret behind what makes someone like Amma so special—the secret that makes her so loving, so compassionate, so peaceful, so selfless and blissful. That secret is that Amma knows who she truly is.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE**

When we study the Indian scriptures, we see that they stress the importance of knowledge—its power to completely transform our lives, its power to completely change the way we perceive the world, its power to change the way we act. This is because our understanding of people, places, things, situations, etc, forms the foundation upon which our entire life is constructed. Just as every figurine produced from a faulty mold will likewise be faulty, so too it is with a life founded on faulty understanding. In the scriptures we find many examples of this phenomenon: the misunderstanding of the rope to be a snake, the misunderstanding of the post to be a ghost, the misunderstanding of the mother of pearl to be silver, etc. What these examples demonstrate is that when we misunderstand something’s nature, we live our lives with a misinformed attitude toward that thing, which in turn leads to misinformed action.

In my youth I saw what is now considered a classic Clint Eastwood Western, *The Good, the Bad & The Ugly* (1966), which provides us with a modern example of this principle. During the AmErican Civil War, the Union soldiers wore blue and the Confederate soldiers wore gray. In the film, two fugitives of no particular military allegiance are trying to escape arrest by disguising themselves in stolen Confederate uniforms. Driving their wagon through the dusty terrain, they see an army approaching in the distance. They stop their wagon in panic. Are they wearing gray or blue? Should they keep on their gray disguises or remove them? As the army comes closer, they see the soldiers are wearing gray. The fugitives relax and begin shouting out to their “brothers in arms,” “*Hoorah! Hoorah* for the Confederacy! *Hoorah!* Down with General Grant! *Hoorah* for General Lee!” Alas, when the troops stop and start dusting off their uniforms, they reveal their true colors—they are really just Bluecoats covered in dust from the trail. By then, it is too late for the conmen to even try to escape.

When the fugitives were unclear about the nature of the army, their attitude was one of uncertainty, resulting in the action of stopping and waiting. When they misunderstood the army to be friendly, their attitude became one of elation, resulting in the action of waving and cheEring. And when they finally understood the army to be the enemy, their attitude became one of fear, which, had there been time, would have caused them to try to flee.

The principle revealed here is the reason the Upaniçads, Bhagavad-Gìtà and other scriptures stress the importance of *àtma-jñànam*—self-knowledge. They tell us that we humans are born with a misunderstanding of our own nature, and it is this misunderstanding that is the foundation of all of our problematic attitudes and actions. In essence, we believe ourselves to be the finite body-mind-sense complex—a limited individual that is born, lives a certain number of years of emotional dependency on unstable objects, and then perishes. The scriptures boldly proclaim that nothing could be further from the truth—that, in reality, we are all the infinite, all-pervasive, un-individualized consciousness, which was never born, never dies and is of the nature of perpetual, causeless bliss. India’s spiritual tradition is confident that if we correct this misunderstanding—that is, if we can become *àtma-jñànìs* like Amma—we can radically transform our lives for the better, replacing our sorrow, tension and agitation with bliss, peace and contentment. As the Upaniçad boldly proclaims: *tarati éokam àtma-vit*—“The one who knows himself crosses over sorrow.”1

**STUDYING THE CHARACTSriSTICS**

**OF THE ÀTMA-JÑÀNÌ**

In the Bhagavad-Gìtà, there are several sections wherein Sri Käçåa provides us with descriptions of the virtues, attitudes and general behavioral charactEristics found in the *àtma-jñànì*. These include the description of the *sthitaprajña* in the second chapter, the description of the *paràbhakta* in the 12th chapter, the indications of *jñànam* in the 13th chapter and of the *guåàtìta*

in the 14th chapter. 2 Although Käçåa uses different Sanskrit terminologies, in each section he is describing one and the same thing: the *àtma-jñànì*—someone who thoroughly understands his divine nature. Thus, the qualities enumerated in these sections—

such as compassion, patience, mental control, etc—are, in fact, products of self-knowledge. Thus, *àtma-jñànam* is the cause; the virtuous, noble qualities the effect.

For spiritual aspirants like ourselves, who possess at least a basic understanding of the fact that self-knowledge is the only means to lasting peace and happiness and who thus desire to become *àtma-jñànìs*, studying these behaviors and attitudes is very beneficial. First of all, such study helps us gain insight into the very nature of that which we are striving to attain. For example, in the second chapter of the Gìtà, Käçåa says an *àtma-jñànì* will be free of attachment, fear and anger.1 Through our study we can come to understand exactly why self-knowledge destroys these negativities. What is the understanding that has arisen in the *àtma-jñànì* about himself that has negated them? What exactly is the connection between the two? If attaining self-knowledge is the primary goal of our life, these are questions we must investigate. We must come to understand the nature of *àtma-jñànam* to the fullest extent possible.

Another reason it is helpful to study these sections of the Gìtà is that, according to the scriptures, all the various virtues that are natural behavior for the *àtma-jñànì* should be taken as spiritual disciplines by the spiritual aspirant. As Sri Àdi Sankaracharya writes in his commentary on the Gìtà:

For in all the spiritual scriptures, whatever are the charactEristics of the enlightened person are themselves presented as the spiritual practices for the spiritual aspirant.2

Furthermore, it is said that unless one has cultivated these qualities, one can never hope to attain *àtma-jñànam*. Initially, this sounds confusing. We come to Amma and tell her that we are fed up with our behavior and want to change; we want to transcend our likes and dislikes and become a more loving, compassionate and peaceful person. Amma tells us the only way to truly do so is to attain self-knowledge. Then we ask Amma how to attain self-knowledge, and she tells us, “First, overcome your likes and dislikes and become more loving and compassionate and peaceful.” It sounds like a paradox.

We have to understand this in the proper way. The qualities enumerated in these sections of the Gìtà are effects of self-knowledge. This means that when one has understood and assimilated his true nature, these virtues will naturally and spontaneously shine forth to their full capacity. However, *àtma*

*jñànam* is exactly what it says it is: a type of *jñànam*—knowledge. True, it is an extremely subtle form of knowledge, but it is knowledge nonetheless, and all forms of knowledge—no matter how subtle or how gross, no matter how spiritual or matErial—

occur only in one place: the intellect. Gross knowledge—say, the ability to tie one’s shoes or to remember the name of your brother-in-law—doesn’t require a very refined mind to assimilate. However, *àtma-jñànam* is said by Käçåa to be *ràja-vidyà ràja*

*guhyam*—the king of all knowledge and the most subtle.1 Thus, if one hopes to fully understand and assimilate self-knowledge, an extremely subtle and refined mind is required. Therefore, until one has attained these qualities to a relative extent, one’s mind will remain inadequate for *àtma-jñànam*. As Sri Sankaracharya writes:

The undiscriminating ones, who lack self-control, who have not purified themselves through austErity and control over their senses and mind, who have not desisted from bad conduct, who are not tranquil and are proud by nature, they do not perceive [their true nature], even though they strive to do so with the help of the valid means of knowledge such as the scriptures.

So, the difference is one of degree. In order to prepare the mind for self-knowledge, we first must attain these virtues to a certain level. Attaining them to their full degree prior to attaining self-knowledge is impossible. Attaining them to a relative degree, however, creates a mind capable of understanding and assimilating *àtma-jñànam*. Then, once *àtma-jñànam* is fully assimilated, these qualities will manifest to their full capacity, as we see in Amma. This, in fact, is what Amma is telling us when she says, “Compassion is both the beginning and the culmination of spiritual life.”

There are a number of reasons why *àtma-jñànam* is considered so subtle that special mental preparation is required for it. First of all, it is the only form of knowledge that is not about an external object; it is about the subject—about “the knower” himself. Moreover, it is not about the gross aspects of the knower—his preferences and intellectual convictions, etc, which are also objects of perception—but about who he is at his very core, his very substratum. Thus, to understand and affirm the information being presented requires a mind capable of a degree of self-awareness and self-observation unrequired in other fields of study. If the mind is overly agitated or sluggish or psychologically conflicted, the information presented—though remaining valid nonetheless—will be taken more as theoretical instead of as a living, appreciable truth.

The majority of the qualities presented in the Gìtà are appreciated by all cultures, by all religions. Thus, they are universal values. This is not a coincidence. Values such as compassion, patience, friendliness, etc, are universal because they need not really be taught. I know that I want to be treated by others with compassion, with patience, with friendliness, etc.

Due to this inherent self-understanding, we naturally cognize that this desire is there in the hearts of all humankind. Thus, we are born with the Golden Rule etched into our hearts: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” 1 Violating this natural law negatively impacts our psyche, creating mental discordance, consciously or subconsciously. It fragments the mind, and a fragmented mind is a broken mind. A broken mind can never hope to understand and assimilate the highest spiritual truth, the ultimate reality of our self, of the universe, and of God. Thus, if we desire to attain *àtma-jñànam*, we must put in efforts to cultivate these values.

Another reason values are required in order to assimilate self-knowledge is that, unlike other forms of knowledge, the full benefit of *àtma-jñànam* is attained only when it has been integrated to the extent that it has become our natural way of thinking. To misconceive that we are the finite body-mind-sense complex is a natural misconception, reinforced by lifetimes of expEriences that seem to support this conclusion. Thus, assimilating self-knowledge is a long process that requires dedication—a vigilant inner dialogue that consistently reproaches and corrects self-ignorant actions, words and thoughts. Thus, we must willfully remain aware of the spiritual reality as we go about our life in this matErial world until that spiritual mode of thinking has become permanent and natural. As Amma says, “Even if you were to fall asleep for 10 days, upon waking up you would still remember who you are—your name, your age, where you live, etc. This same level of awareness must be there with regard to our true nature, the self.” Maintaining such self-awareness will not be possible for a dull, agitated or psychologically fractured mind. Therefore *àtma-jñànam* requires special preparation. Another reason it is helpful to study these sections of the Gìtà is that the presence, or lack thereof, of these qualities can help us evaluate the degree to which we have assimilated *àtma jñànam*. As mentioned previously, when one has fully assimilated self-knowledge, these qualities will shine forth spontaneously and naturally. This is because, as we will see in the upcoming chapters, each of these qualities corresponds to a given aspect of self-knowledge. They are attitudes and behaviors founded on a firm understanding of the spiritual reality of our true nature. Just as the one who mistakes the rope for a snake will naturally become fearful and run, so too one who understands the rope to be a rope will naturally remain calm and continue about his business. Similarly, one who has understood, for example, “I am not the body,” will not become emotionally disturbed and react if someone makes a disparaging remark about his appearance or if he learns his body is ill. The more we understand and assimilate self-knowledge—that is, the more we intellectually grasp and appreciate the reality of our true nature and uproot habitual thoughts and attitudes based on our previous misunderstanding— the more these virtues will manifest within us. Thus, investigating these qualities provides us with a mirror into which we can gaze, evaluate ourselves, make corrections and progress forward. As sincere spiritual seekers, we need to remain alert and honest about our progress.

As Amma regularly reminds us in this regard, ideally we should maintain a diary in which we monitor our behavior. Amma gives the example of a street vendor who provides for his family by buying and selling small items: “Every night, before going to bed, he will check his profit and loss. If there has been any loss, he will think up ways to avoid further losses the following day. If there has been profit, he will try to think of ways to increase it. Only after these calculations and decisions will he go to sleep. Like this, each day, we should introspect and try to identify our negative reactions. For example, whether we got angry with someone due to our own selfishness, whether we were able to help or love someone selflessly, etc. If we did get angry with someone, we should feel regret and try not to react in the same manner the next day. If we were unable to help someone selflessly, we should try to do so the next day. This kind of introspection, self-reflection and evaluation of our own actions and reactions will definitely help us move forward.”

Thus, by studying these sections of the Gìtà, we can use our negative reactions to identify the exact defect in our self knowledge and where we need to put in more effort to uproot our habitual, misinformed attitudes and actions. This should create a heightened awareness, helping us both correct and ultimately eradicate our self-misconceptions.

With regards to this self-evaluation, I would like to mention one more thing. In our evaluation, we should pay attention to three components: the regularity of our lapses, how long our lapses last when they do occur, and their sevErity. If our problem is patience, how regularly are we losing our patience? Moreover, when we do lose it, how long is it taking for us to calm back down? A few minutes? A few hours? A few days? Finally, when we lose it, to what extent are we doing so? Are we just feeling mental agitation or are we going one step further and expressing our frustration verbally—worse yet, physically? One of the many advantages of having a *mahàtmà* like Amma in our lives is that we constantly have before us a living example of the pinnacle of *àtma-jñànam* and its manifestation. This is very helpful. At the same time, while holding the ideal of “Amma-hood” as our ultimate goal, on a daily basis Amma is not with whom we should judge our progress; we should judge our progress only by comparing ourselves with ourselves. If we constantly evaluate ourselves using Amma as the measuring stick, we may quickly become frustrated, decide we are spiritual failures and give up. However, if we use ourselves as our measuring stick—that is, if we judge our progress as Amma suggests on a day-to-day, week

to-week, year-to-year basis, analyzing it in terms of regularity, length and sevErity—the result will not be one of frustration but one of inspiration. As Amma says, “Let’s say in the beginning, our goal is to remain patient in a trying circumstance just once a day. Even if we are only able to do this, say, five times a month, it is a great victory. You may not think so, but it is.”

Thus, as we have seen, studying the charactEristics of the *àtma-jñànì* presented in these sections of the Gìtà has many benefits. Investigating their connection with *àtma-jñànam* helps us gain insight into the nature of self-knowledge itself—our life’s goal. It provides an opportunity for us to make ourselves more aware of the values we need to cultivate in order to prepare the mind for self-knowledge. Moreover, it assists in evaluating our spiritual progress—the extent to which we have assimilated the spiritual teachings we are receiving from the scriptures and Amma.

**THE CHARACTSriSTICS OF THE SUPREME DEVOTEE** In this book, we will investigate one of the above-mentioned sections of the Gìtà describing the charactEristics of the *àtma jñànì*, specifically the one found in the 12th chapter. There, from verse 13 through 19, Sri Käçåa presents us with what is referred to as the *paràbhakta lakçaåàni*—the charactEristics of the supreme devotee. Together with the chapter’s concluding 20th verse, this section is sometimes referred to as the AMRTASTAKAM. *Amäta* means both nectar and immortal. 1 An *açâakam* is a poem comprising eight verses. These eight verses have come to be known as the AMRTASTAKAM because of their concluding verse in which Käçåa refers to the qualities enumerated within them as *dharmyàmätam*, which means “the dharma that leads to immortality.”

Before we begin our analysis of the AMRTASTAKAM, it is important that we understand why Käçåa’s conviction is that, amongst all types of devotees, the *àtma-jñànì* stands supreme—a statement Käçåa has emphatically voiced in the Gìtà’s seventh chapter:

caturvidhà bhajante màë janàã sukätino’rjuna |

àrto jijñàsurarthàrthì jñànì ca bharatarçabha ||

teçàë jñànì nitya-yukta eka-bhaktirviéiçyate |

priyo hi jñànino’tyartham-ahaë sa ca mama priyaã ||

O Arjuna, best of Bharatas, four types of virtuous people worship me: the *àrta*, the *jijñàsu*, the *arthàrthì* and the *jñànì*. Of these, the *jñànì*—ever-established and of one-pointed devotion—is supErior. For, I am extremely dear to the *jñànì*, and he is extremely dear to me.2

In these two verses, Käçåa has divided devotees into four categories, using four technical names: *àrta*, *arthàrthì*, *jijñàsu* and *jñànì*. The *àrta* devotee is one whose worship of God is aimed at removing him from some form of matErial difficulty—perhaps an illness, a lawsuit or a physical assault. The *arthàrthì* devotee is one who worships God as a means to attain various matErial gains—perhaps a promotion, a spouse, a winning lottery ticket, etc. The *jijñàsu* devotee is one who has come to understand that true, lasting happiness can never be achieved through avoiding matErial pEril or fulfilling matErial desires, but only through attaining God. With this conviction, he has become a spiritual seeker. His worship and spiritual practices are, therefore, only aimed at bringing him closer to the Divine. *Jñànì*, of course, means *àtma-jñànì*: a knower of the self who has fully understood the truth that his true nature and the true nature of God are one and the same.

Why then does Käçåa say that of these four the *àtma-jñànì* is supreme? One can analyze this from a number of different angles, but the easiest reason to understand is revealed by Käçåa’s description of the *jñànì* in the same verse: *nitya-yuktaã* and *eka bhaktiã*. A *nitya-yuktaã* is one who is constantly established, unwavEring. An *eka-bhaktiã* is one who has one-pointed devotion. Thus, according to Käçåa, the devotion of the *jñànì* is exemplary because it is the only devotion that is constant and one-pointed. With the first two types of devotion—the devotions of the *àrta* and *arthàrthì* devotees—this is not the case. First of all, God is not really the object of their devotion, but merely the means to fulfill their matErial desires. Furthermore, their so-called devotion is, at best, divided three ways: between their love for themselves, their love for their desired object, and their love for God, the means. Moreover, even their worship of God as a means continues only until their desire is fulfilled. Then it stops until another desire arises. Thus, their devotion can neither be called one-pointed nor unwavEring.

The devotion of the *jijñàsu* is more mature. Perhaps, at its peak, it could even be called unwavEring, but it cannot be called one-pointed. Why? Because the spiritual seeker is just what his name implies—a seeker. He has yet to fully understand and assimilate the truth that God and he are not two but one—that the seeker is, in fact, the sought. As Amma says, devotion is really just another word for love. It is out of his love for God and his desire to become one with God that the *jijñàsu* prays, does spiritual practices and studies the scriptures. However, because he has yet to understand that God and he are one—that God is, in fact, his true nature—his love cannot be called one-pointed. It remains divided between himself and God. Serving as Amma’s translator during *daréan*, I often hear devotees telling Amma that they love her. When they say this, Amma sometimes takes the opportunity to shed some wisdom along these lines. She will say, “No. Not, ‘I love you,’ but ‘I am love.’ Remove the ‘I’ and the ‘you,’ and you will find that there is only ‘love.’ Until then, love remains imprisoned between the ‘I’ and the ‘you.’” When Amma says this, she is illustrating the same point: Until we realize our unity with God, our devotion, or love, will not be supreme.

Now that we understand the defects in the other three forms of devotion, it is easy to understand why Käçåa says the *àtma-jñànì*’s love is unwavEring and one-pointed and, therefore, supErior. In essence, the reason is that the *àtma-jñànì* has understood the truth that he and God are one, and as a result of that understanding, he has become emotionally full and complete. He is, as Käçåa says in the second chapter, *àtmanyevàtmanà tuçâaã*—“content in the self and by the self alone.”1 His love is one-pointed on God because he has no desires—nothing to pray for, nothing to seek. He does not want anything from God. Knowing he is one with God, he doesn’t even seek God. His constant self-expErience is one of God, and everything he sees around him he knows to be merely an extension of his own self.

His understanding that he is one with God is also the reason why his love for God is unwavEring. If we are honest there is only one person and one person alone for whom we have eternal, undying, unwavEring love, and that is we ourselves. In fact, all our other so-called “beloveds” are subsidiary to this one primary love.

Recently, in Amritapuri, Amma was discussing selfless service with the residents, when she made a thought-provoking statement. She said, “Whatever I am doing, I am doing for myself.” Was Amma saying she was selfish? She then explained, “My belief is that everyone in the world is my child. In fact, I don’t see them as different from me. So, whatever I am doing, I am doing for myself.” In essence, Amma was saying that truly selfless action is only possible when we see others as our own self. So, yes, Amma was saying that she was selfish—just that her self-conception was the entire universe.

In fact, the truth expressed here by Amma will be one of the central themes running through our investigation of the AMRTASTAKAM. For, as we will see, this understanding not only makes the *àtma-jñànì* the supreme devotee, it also gives rise to many of the divine qualities enumerated by Sri Käçåa throughout these enlightening verses of the Gìtà.

That said, with Amma’s grace, let us commence our investigation into the AMRTASTAKAM.

**Sri Àdi Sankaracharya**

The guru-disciple lineages of India are like *màlàs* strung with gems; each jewel is precious and invaluable. Still, some shine with an attention-commanding splendor. Sri Àdi Sankaracharya was such a diamond. His accomplishments were many, but he is singled out because his brilliant commentaries on the *prasthàna-trayam*—the Upaniçads, Bhagavad-Gìtà and Brahma Sùtras—crystallized the theology known as Advaita Vedànta, forever establishing it as the ultimate message of the Vedas. Sri Éaêkara did not invent Advaita Vedànta. Nor was he the first to write an Advaitic commentary upon the scriptures. However, such was the clarity and precision of his scriptural analysis and so profound its effect upon spiritual thought, that it remains today—nearly 2,000 years later—the foundational commentary for all modern Advaita Vedànta discussion. Throughout this book, we will often look to Sri Saêkara’s insights in order to shed light upon the AMRTASTAKAM. Therefore, at the outset, I would like to offer my heartfelt prostrations to Sri Àdi Sankaracharya and to the eternal guru-disciple lineage, before and after him, through which the Vedàntic knowledge has flowed down from time immemorial.

**AMRTASTAKAM**

adveçâà sarva-bhùtànàm maitraã karuåa eva ca | nirmamo nirahaêkàraã sama-duãkha-sukhaã kçamì ||

santuçâaã satataë yogì yatàtmà däáha-niécayaã | mayyarpita-mano-buddhiryo mad-bhaktaã sa me priyaã ||

yasmànnodvijate loko lokànnodvijate ca yaã | harçàmarça-bhayodvegairmukto yaã sa ca me priyaã ||

anapekçaã éucirdakça udàsìno gatavyathaã | sarvàrambha-parityàgì yo mad-bhaktaã sa me priyaã ||

yo na häçyati na dveçâi na éocati na kàêkçati | éubhàéubha-parityàgì bhaktimàn yaã sa me priyaã ||

samaã éatrau ca mitre ca tathà manàpamànayoã | éìtoçåa-sukha-duãkheçu samaã saêga-vivarjitaã ||

tulya-nindà-stutirmaunì santuçâo yena kenacit | aniketaã sthiramatirbhaktimàn-me priyo naraã ||

ye tu dharmyàmätam-idaë yathoktaë paryupàsate | éraddadhànà mat-paramà bhaktàste’tìva me priyàã ||'

He who is not hateful to any being, friendly, compassionate, devoid of “mine” and “I,” who is the same in hardship and comfort, forgiving;

ever content, a yogì, self-controlled, of firm conviction, whose mind and intellect are fixed on me—such a devotee of mine is dear to me.

He who from the world cowers not and from whom the world doesn’t cower, who is free of elation, impatience, fear and anxiety—he is dear to me.

The one devoid of desire, who is pure, efficient, impartial, free of affliction, a renouncer of all actions—such a devotee of mine is dear to me.

That devotee who doesn’t elate, feel aversion, grief or desire, a renouncer of the auspicious and inauspicious—he is dear to me.

One who is the same toward enemy and friend, honor and dishonor, cold and heat, comfort and hardship, who is free of attachment;

who is the same in censure and praise, who is silent, content with anything, homeless, and firm in knowledge—that devotee is dear to me.

However, those who follow this above-said immortal dharma with faith, with me as the supreme goal—those devotees are [also] very dear to me.

**One Who Hates No Being SARVA-BHÙTÀNÀM ADVEÇÂÀ**

The first description of the *paràbhakta*1 mentioned by Sri Käçåa is *sarva-bhùtànàm adveçâà*—one who harbors no feeling of hatred for any being. This is a statement made by Käçåa about the *àtma*

*jñànì*. He cannot hate; hatred is impossible for him. In this regard, I remember an incident that took place in 2000. That year, a huge match-fixing scandal erupted in international cricket, making headlines throughout the world. It began when a phone conversation between the captain for South Africa and an Indian bookie was intercepted by Delhi police. In the conversation, the captain spoke explicitly about his willingness to lose games intentionally in exchange for money. An official inquiry soon followed. The captain ultimately admitted to wrongdoing and was given a lifetime ban from cricket. During the inquiry, he implicated other players, including two who played for India. Soon, they were also given bans, along with several others associated with India’s team.

In India, cricket is like a national religion. For example, in 2011, when India went to the World Cup, it was reported that 67.6 million people in India watched the final game. Part of the reason for this is that the team is not a city team, but a national team, with the entire nation rooting for it. So, in 2000, when the two India players were revealed to have intentionally tried to lose games, the nation was livid. The country’s sentiment was, “How dare these people, who already made so much money, betray the nation that loved them—and that they also supposedly loved back—for a few pieces of silver?”

While they don’t get many opportunities to watch matches, there are a few *àéram* residents who remain cricket fans and continue to follow the team’s standings, etc, in the newspaper. One of them soon found himself discussing some matters with Amma, but while he was talking to Amma, his mind kept returning to the scandal and how the implicated Indian players had betrayed their team and their nation. Finally, when a break in the conversation arose, he managed to mention the issue. He told Amma everything that had happened. Amma listened intently, seemingly encouraging the young man to share his heart, including all his various judgments against the now-banned players.

Typically when we share our feelings with someone, it is because we want them to agree with us, to share in our feelings. This is because if it is a joyous expErience, we can prolong our expErience of joy through sharing it and, if it is a negative expErience, we can, to some extent, curtail our anger and sorrow through others accepting our justifications. As the saying goes, “Shared joy is double joy; shared sorrow is half sorrow.” Amma listened intently as he explained the scandal, allowing him to vent his feelings. At the same time she was aware that what he really wanted was for Amma to express enmity as well. At the peak of his tirade, he suddenly noticed that instead of the scowl he was subconsciously hoping to see forming on Amma’s face, there was just a soft smile. Something about this silenced him. At which point, Amma said, “Son, you know Amma cannot hate anyone—don’t you?”

The *àtma-jñànì* simply cannot hate; it has been stripped from his mental programming. In his commentary on the Gìtà verse in which this quality is mentioned, Àdi Sankaracharya elaborates a bit further, writing:

He does not feel hatred for anything, even for that which is [typically considered] a cause of sorrow, for he sees all beings as his own self.1

Sri Éaêkara reveals the depth of this quality in the *àtma-jñànì*. It is not only that he doesn’t feel hatred in a general sense, but even when someone harms him—verbally or physically—the emotion does not arise.

I have personally witnessed Amma’s inability to hate countless times. When I first started coming to Amma in the late 1970s, there was a group of atheistic villagers who were dead set against Amma. They wanted to expose her as a fake, and when they continually failed to do so, they took it upon themselves to try everything they could to harass the devotees, Amma’s family, Amma’s disciples and even Amma herself. They strew poisonous thorns on Amma’s pathway, gave Amma poisoned milk, fabricated lies about her and inflicted upon her many cruelties. Yet, I never saw Amma become angry with them. I never heard Amma curse them. I never saw Amma take any form of revenge. Myself and the other *brahmacàrìs* would become very angry. Of course, like the young man who told Amma about the deplorable deeds of the match-fixers, what we really wanted was to rile Amma up as well. However, to our chagrin, Amma would never play along. She would just softly smile and say, “Son, they are ignorant. We should be patient with them.”

Over the years the majority of the people who were harassing Amma and the Àéram back then have become devotees. (In fact, one of them even went on to marry Amma’s elder sister.) However, that doesn’t mean that the Àéram no longer faces obstacles and occasional opposition. In such circumstances—although by now it shouldn’t—Amma’s inability to feel enmity never ceases to astound me.

For example, about 10 years ago, someone wrote a negative article about an Àéram project in one of the Malayalam newspapers. It was full of twisted truths and outright lies. Everyone knew that the writer was a puppet of an antireligious organization, but that didn’t make the article sting any less. The other *àéram* residents and I were very angry. Regardless of how much I tried to convince Amma how hate-deserving this particular journalist was, she wasn’t giving in.

About a year later, the same writer suddenly came for Amma’s *daréan*. Someone pointed him out to me, and I quickly made my way to Amma’s side so that I could point him out to her. When I did so, Amma said, “Son, I know very well who he is. In fact, I think he’s probably here to cause more trouble.” As he came closer and closer to Amma in the *daréan* line, I wondered what Amma was going to say to him. (At the same time, I was also imagining all the things that I would say if he were coming for my *daréan*.) Finally it was the reporter’s turn. What did Amma do? Amma took him into her arms just like everyone else and gave him a very long, very beautiful *daréan*, the whole time calling him her darling, darling son. There’s nothing we can do about it: Amma cannot hate.

As I watched the man leave the stage with Amma’s *prasàdam* clutched in his hand, I shook my head once again in disbelief at Amma’s compassion. I realized that, as unrighteous as the man’s deeds had been, Amma understood that calling this person out and scolding him would not have uplifted him. It would only have served to further close his heart. Amma knew that only by returning the journalist’s cruelty with love could she truly hope to affect a change within him.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the full blossoming of qualities such as non-hatred is only found in the *àtma-jñànì* because their full manifestation can only come as a result of self-knowledge. We have to try to inculcate non-hatred as an ideal in order to prepare our mind for self-knowledge, but its full expression only comes as a fruit of that knowledge.

There are a number of reasons why non-hatred is produced by *àtma-jñànam*. We will look at two. The first reason is presented by Sri Éaêkara himself as quoted previously. Sri Éaêkara writes that the *àtma-jñànì* cannot hate any being because he sees all beings as his own self.

The scriptures and spiritual masters inform us repeatedly that we are not the body, not the emotions, not the intellect, but the witness consciousness that serves as the substratum to these and all other varieties of phenomena. Furthermore, we are told that this consciousness is not only our true nature but also the nature of all beings. Consciousness, we are told, is like space. The space outside a given room and the space within it are not two; they are one and the same. Similarly, the consciousness serving as the substratum of my thoughts and emotions, etc, is not different than the consciousness serving as the substratum of your thoughts and emotions, etc. By extension of this understanding, we should come to the reality that—quite literally—“I am you and you are me.” It is the assimilation of this supreme truth that results in the *àtma-jñànì*’s inability to expErience hatred. This is because it is a common expErience that one cannot hate one’s self.

As Amma says, “A spiritual aspirant should see only God, which is the essence in everything. Only then will he achieve equanimity. The electricity that comes through a fan, bulb or refrigerator is one and the same. The only difference is in the medium. Likewise, it is the same consciousness that dwells in all living beings. We will not feel hatred or anger toward anyone when we think that the consciousness that dwells in him is the same as in me.”

Nowhere has this connection been expressed more directly than in the Upaniçads:

yastu sarvàåi bhùtànyàtmanyevànupaéyati |

sarva-bhùteçu càtàmànaë tato na vijugupsate ||

He who sees all beings in the self itself, and the self in all beings, feels no hatred by virtue of that.1

Some may disagree with the statement that we cannot hate ourselves. In fact, it is a common expression, “I hate myself so much right now.” Some people even commit suicide—perpetrating the ultimate form of violence upon their own being. So, how can Vedànta make such a claim?

When someone says, “I hate myself,” if we analyze, we will see that he doesn’t really mean what he is saying. He may mean he hates his physical body. He may mean he hates the actions he has performed, his habits or the direction his life is taking. He could even mean he hates his thoughts and feelings. However, as the scriptures and spiritual gurus like Amma repeatedly tell us, these things are not who we are. In fact, this points to the very difference between the self-enlightened individual and the self-ignorant. The self-ignorant mistakes himself to be things he is not: the body, emotions and intellect. Thus he believes he hates himself. True introspection will reveal that the very statement “I hate myself,” is, in fact, not an expression of self-hatred but an expression of self-love. For the very reason a person comes to hate his body, emotions and intellect is that he wants to expErience peace and happiness, which are his true nature. He wants to reside in his true nature. This expErience is being obscured to him due to his turbulent mind. Thus, self-hatred and even the desire to end one’s life have at their root the desire to know and expErience the bliss and peace of one’s true self. If the hated factor could be changed, the individual’s so-called “self-hatred” would end. Of course, suicide is not a solution to this problem because at the problem’s root are mental phenomena, which the scriptures say can never be eradicated by death. 1 The only solution is gradual refinement of one’s thoughts and the ultimate transcendence of mental identification—in short, spirituality.

In order to understand the second reason why self-knowledge results in non-hatred, we first have to understand an important Vedàntic principle. If we honestly introspect, we will see that we are only capable of loving two things: the expErience of happiness itself and the people, places and things, etc, that serve as a means to our expErience of happiness. When we study the scriptures, we find that, in fact, there is only one source for our expErience of happiness, and that is the *àtmà*—our true self. The *àtmà* is often explained as *sat cit ànanda*—being of the nature of pure existence, pure consciousness and pure bliss. Thus, happiness is our true nature; it is the core of who we are. No wonder we love happiness so much: our love of happiness is the same as our love of our own self. The scriptures are adamant on this point: the self is the only source of happiness in this universe. So, why then does it seem like we are expEriencing happiness from, for example, ice cream? The scriptures explain to us that, in fact, our desire for such objects is creating turbulence in the mind, which in turn is obscuring our expErience of our true nature. When our desires are fulfilled, this turbulence momentarily dissipates to some small degree, and to the same degree the bliss of the self is then momentarily reflected in the mind for our expErience. Thus, the expErience of happiness is not coming from the expErience of the external object but from the self. The object is merely a means for temporarily removing the desire-created turbulence obscuring our expErience of the self as reflected in our mind.

Through this principle, we can now understand another reason why the *àtma-jñànì* is incapable of hatred. For just as we are only capable of loving two things—the expErience of happiness itself, and people, places and things, etc, that we believe serve as a means to the expErience of happiness—similarly, we are only capable of hating two things: the non-expErience of happiness, and people, places and things, etc, that we believe obstruct our expErience of happiness. However, the *àtma-jñànì* has understood happiness to have only one source—himself. This is not only his understanding; he has assimilated this truth to the point where he no longer has desire-created turbulence disturbing his mind and obstructing his expErience of the reflection of the self. Thus, his expErience of happiness is no longer dependent upon “middlemen” such as ice cream. Therefore, neither can anyone remove the *àtma-jñànì*’s expErience of happiness, nor can anyone give the *àtma-jñànì* the expErience of happiness. If we are only capable of hating the non-expErience of happiness, and people, places and things, etc, that prevent our expErience of happiness, what scope is there for hatred in the *àtma-jñànì*?

In the sixth chapter of the Gìtà, there is an oft-cited verse, wherein Sri Käçåa points out the Vedàntic truth that one has only one enemy—one’s own mind when it is undisciplined and lacking in spiritual understanding:

uddhared-àtmanàtmànaë nàtmànam-avasàdayet |

àtmaiva hyàtmano bandhuràtmaiva ripùràtmanaã ||

One should uplift oneself by oneself; one should not lower oneself. For oneself alone is one’s friend and oneself alone is one’s enemy.1

In his commentary, Sri Éaêkara expresses a possible doubt regarding this statement. In resolving that doubt he sheds light on why an *àtma-jñànì* cannot hate any being. The doubt is: How can Käçåa say, “Oneself *alone* is one’s enemy. While a mind in which negativities are manifesting can be counted as one internal enemy, it does not preclude the existence of additional external enemies.” Sri Éaêkara answers, saying, “Whoever may be an external enemy is also of his own making alone. Therefore the emphatic ‘alone’ is logical.” 2 A brilliant post-Éaêkara commentator 3 elucidates Sri Éaêkara’s logic. He says that if one has truly understood spirituality (as the *àtma jñànì*, by his very name, has), then he knows that he is not the body-mind but the *àtmà*—pure consciousness. The very scope for considEring someone as an enemy arises only from identification with the body-mind complex and the feelings of “I” and “mine,” the byproducts of that identification. An *àtma-jñànì*

has transcended this false identification and thus has only one potential enemy—the self-misconception itself. Without the rising of that misconception, there is no scope for an external enemy.

As mentioned in the Introduction, if we want to cultivate total non-hatred, we must understand these connections. Our understanding of who we are must be redirected from our current distorted misconception to our true self. This understanding cannot be superficial. It has to saturate our subconscious mind; it has to come to serve not as a mere piece of information but to reform our entire self-conception and worldview. This process of *àtma-jñànam* converting from mere information to a hardwired transformation in self-conception takes time. In the beginning, we may understand intellectually that, for example, the consciousness at the heart of who we are and the consciousness at the heart of all beings is one and the same, yet hatred and other thoughts contrary to this understanding will still arise. The Vedàntic term for this phenomenon is *viparìta bhàvanà,*

which literally means “contrary attitude.” In essence, it means the arising of thoughts from the subconscious that are contrary to one’s conscious understanding. It is a thought arising from habit, instead of from knowledge.

When speaking of *viparìta bhàvanà*, Amma always gives the example of a wristwatch. She says, “Suppose we have a wristwatch that we wear all the time. It is always on the wrist, but one day we sell it. For a few days afterward, we will continue to look at our wrist to see the time. This is the nature of habit. If this is the case with ordinary and seemingly insignificant habits, what to say of the stronger ones? When we try to change them, our mind will spontaneously turn again and again toward our habits. Only through constant practice can one get rid of them.”

There is no stronger habit than our identification with the body, emotions and intellect. To remove it takes constant effort and practice. It is not easy. I remember when I was a *brahmacàrì*, Amma would tell me never to express anger, but only to say *namaééivaya* 1 and walk away. However, my anger was so intense that—if at all I managed to succeed in this—the anger would still manifest in my intonation. When such negative feelings arise, as sincere seekers, we must check ourselves and remind ourselves of the supreme truth of our essential oneness with all beings. For the very arising of hatred is proof that we have forgotten this truth. This must be done each and every time such feelings arise. In this way, we can gradually rewire our subconscious mind until it conforms to our new understanding of who we are. Not only should we do this in our daily lives, we should also make this practice part of our morning and evening meditations. There, with our calmed mind, we should remember the situations that are prompting our negative reactions. Then we should uproot the sources of those reactions by remembEring the spiritual truths that negate them, affirming and appreciating the reality of those truths.

**A Friend**

**MAITRAÃ**

The next description of the *paràbhakta* given by Sri Käçåa is *maitraã*—a friend. It is no coincidence that this quality immediately follows non-hatred in Käçåa’s list. If Käçåa were to mention only non-hatred, we might get the wrong impression: that the *àtma-jñànì* is an aloof figure, not hating anyone but also not expressing any positive affection either. This is a prevalent misconception about spirituality—that it transforms the seeker into a recluse who doesn’t hate anyone but who doesn’t really care about anyone either. By saying he is a friend, Käçåa wants to end this misconception.

In today’s world, the word “friend” is used quite casually. However, we all know that there are different levels of friendship. The friendship of the *àtma-jñànì* is not superficial. It is a friendship that is always there for us—not only in our joy but also in our sorrow. It is a friendship that never expects anything in return and that would gladly sacrifice everything for our happiness. A popular AmErican children’s book, *The Giving Tree*

by Shel Silverstein, provides an excellent example.1 The tree in the book cheerfully gives everything, without any regrets, to her friend, the boy. She vSrily lives for the boy. She allows him to play and swing from her branches when he is a child. She allows him to sell her apples when he wants money as a teenager. She allows him to cut down her branches and use them to build a house when he is a man. She even allows him to chop her down entirely and make a boat out of her trunk upon his retirement. Finally, when the man is old and infirm and can barely even walk anymore, the Giving Tree allows him to simply sit on her stump. The Giving Tree never asked for anything in return. Such is the level of friendship found in the *àtma-jñànì*. It is important to note that Käçåa says that the *àtma-jñànì* is not only a friend to a few select individuals, but that his feeling of friendship extends to *sarva-bhùtànàm*—to all beings.1 What better example of such a person do we have than Amma? No matter where she goes, no matter who she meets, no matter how old or how young, how traditional or how modern, how sErious, or how silly, how rich or poor, educated or otherwise, no matter what language they speak, Amma feels totally comfortable and at home with them and treats them with warmth, kindness, love and affection. This is one of the many ways in which Amma truly is an *amma*—a mother. It is Amma’s friendliness that draws many of us close to her, helping us to establish that all-important bond that ultimately helps us to transcend all bondage. When Amma is giving programs throughout India, she will occasionally stop at the houses of devotees. Once Amma was at one such house, spending time talking with the family. Suddenly, the youngest child—who was about 17 at the time—began telling Amma about the devotion of her older sister. She told Amma how she would often see her sister shedding tears while listening to Amma singing. Amma is a brilliant psychologist. If there is a subtext, a hidden meaning behind a statement, Amma will see it. As such, when this girl told Amma about her sister’s devotion, Amma knew the real statement was not “My sister cries whenever she hears *bhajans*,” but rather “I never cry when I listen to *bhajans*. What’s wrong with me? Why don’t I have any spiritual longing? Don’t I even have one spiritual bone in my body?” Thus, Amma the psychologist responded, not to the gross statement, but to the hidden one. Amma told the girl, “But you and I are friends, aren’t we? We share a friendship. There is only love between us. Devotion means to evoke the love within you. Amma doesn’t see devotion and love as different from each other.” With wonder in her eyes, the girl smiled at Amma and said, “You’re right.”

The love and kinship Amma feels with all beings reflects in our hearts, and it helps us to open up to Amma as well. When Käçåa says “a friend to all beings,” he doesn’t just mean all types of people. The heart of the *àtma-jñànì* extends with the feeling of friendship to every aspect of creation. Amma’s biography is filled with stories illustrating the reciprocal heartfelt bond between Amma and various animals, and I have personally seen Amma give *daréan* not just to common pets like cats and dogs, but also to parrots, eagles, horses, wolves, cows, goats, camels, beetles, owls, rabbits, chipmunks, bats, turtles, pythons, boa constrictors, monkeys, cheetahs, and elephants. Amma’s heart truly has a space for every aspect of creation. It never ceases to amaze me how she never forgets to consider the needs and feelings of even those creatures we typically think of as insignificant. I remember, one day an *àéram* resident offered Amma a flower garland, placing it around her neck as he came for *daréan*. The flowers seemed particularly beautiful to me, and I said as much to Amma. Amma smiled and said, “Yes, but don’t you think it is sad that someone plucked them before their time? And what of the poor bees who were hoping to sip nectar from them today? Amma is happy with any offering her children make, but I am not only a mother to them. Aren’t the flowers and bees also my children?” I was really taken aback by the expansiveness of Amma’s vision.

Exactly why is it that the heart of the *àtma-jñànì* flows out to all of creation with a feeling of friendship? Here, too, there are a number of different reasons depending upon the angle taken. Spiritually ignorant individuals are totally identified with their likes and dislikes. When we identify with our likes and dislikes, they restrict with whom we are capable of feeling a heartfelt bond. Thus, our friendships are limited to like-minded people. Due to his self-understanding, the *àtma-jñànì* no longer identifies with such mental phenomena. For him, likes and dislikes are no different than clouds passing across the changeless all-pervasive sky of consciousness. Thus, he identifies with the consciousness that serves as their substratum, and this frees him to take up the likes and dislikes of the people who come before him. We see this in our interactions with Amma. When we come before her, she becomes like a mirror reflecting our heart. This is how Amma can switch from total sorrow to total happiness in the blink of an eye. A devotee comes to Amma crying and tells of a family tragedy, and Amma identifies with him and cries along with him. A minute later, the next devotee excitedly announces to Amma that she graduated with honors, and we immediately see her joy radiating across Amma’s face. Amma identifies with our likes and dislikes and the emotions they produce because she knows it provides us with the strength, sense of friendship and support that we need to move forward in life. She knows it strengthens the bond we feel with her and that through that bond she can guide us toward attainment of the higher goals of life. All this is only possible due to Amma’s *àtma-jñànam* and how it allows her to transcend likes and dislikes.

Amma was born and brought up in a small Kerala fishing village. She was raised by parents with very traditional Indian values. Of course, these include universal values such as the ones mentioned by Käçåa in the Gìtà, but they also include values specific to traditional Indian villages. Not all devotees were raised with the culture-specific values with which Amma was brought up. Regardless, we never see Amma trying to convince people from other cultures to try to follow those culture-specific values. Amma accepts those culture-specific values or discards them depending upon the person whom she is advising. As Amma says, “Some things, like the sweetness of sugar or the value of gold, are the same wherever one goes, but other things, such as whether one drives on the left or right side of the road, change from place to place. In this regard every place has its own unique culture.” It is difficult for someone completely identified with their culture-specific values to become close friends with those who do not share those values. However, for Amma, this has never been a problem. When she is in Germany, she adjusts to the German culture. When in Japan, to theirs. So, too, in AmErica, Australia, Kenya... Amma’s self-knowledge has freed her to accept and reject the superficial according to the given situation, and this allows Amma to make a heartfelt connection with anyone and everyone no matter what their likes and dislikes may be.

Let me give you an example. A few years ago a teenaged Indian boy born and raised in AmErica came for Amma’s *daréan*. As per the culture of many teenagers in AmErica, he had recently got his ears pierced and had a small silver hoop in each ear. The boy’s mother was clearly unhappy. Being from another generation, and raised in a traditional Indian environment, she didn’t want her teenage son wearing earrings. In truth, according to the culturally specific values with which Amma was raised, earrings are not something generally worn by men either. However, knowing these values were not pertinent to the boy, who was raised in AmErica, Amma rejected them and took up the values of the boy. When Amma saw the earrings, she said, “Oh, they look so nice! But wouldn’t it look better if you got some slightly bigger ones?” In fact, this was what the boy really wanted all along. While Amma will never accept a culturally specific value that goes against the universal values, she adjusts to values such as these as per the cultural norm of the person who comes before her.

This is one reason why *àtma-jñànam* results in one becoming a friend with all beings: it ceases our identification with our likes and dislikes and liberates us to take up the likes and dislikes of the people with whom we interact.

In fact, friendship is the natural mood of humanity. It is an outward expression of the bliss that is our true nature. Thus, for the *àtma-jñànì*, this attitude flows forth, as natural as breathing. The expression is blocked only by the fear that arises when we perceive something as having the potential to obstruct our expErience of inner bliss. This is never an issue for the *àtma*

*jñànì* because he has realized that there is only one source of bliss—his own self. Thus, no one can possibly obstruct it. Can anyone obstruct you from expEriencing yourself? There is no fear in him that, “Oh, this fellow walking in my direction can take away my happiness.” Thus, the sense of aversion, which is the very thing that obstructs the expErience of happiness, never arises in his mind. Let the most annoying person in the world come pester him, his happiness continues to shine.

This phenomenon is quite fascinating. In our spiritual ignorance, we project the capability to destroy our happiness upon someone who actually holds no such power to do so. However, through this projection, we actually bestow upon him that power. It is similar to the phenomenon of a bank run, wherein people become afraid that, if everyone tries to withdraw their money from the bank at the same time, the bank will fold and they will lose their money, which in turn causes everyone to try to withdraw their money and results in the bank folding. Or we can compare it to the phenomenon of stage fright, wherein, say, a violinist, realizes that if he gets nervous and his hands start shaking he will not be able to perform. This very thought, in turn, makes him so nervous that his hands shake and he cannot perform. In reality, no one has the power to stop our expErience of the bliss of the self. We project that power upon their presence. Then, the sight of them approaching results in mental disturbance in the form of aversion, which does obstruct our expErience of bliss. Thus, it truly is as the saying goes, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”

Those of us who have yet to attain self-knowledge are constantly subconsciously evaluating people as either potential causes of happiness or potential causes of suffEring. The people we see as vectors of happiness, we are attracted to and we consider our friends. The people we see as vectors of sorrow, we feel aversion toward and consider as enemies. The *àtma-jñànì* does not live in such a world. He is not imprisoned by likes and dislikes like the rest of us. He has understood that happiness only comes from within, and thus he has severed the ignorance-based connection that most people believe exists between certain individuals and happiness and certain individuals and sorrow. Thus, friendliness, the natural expression of the bliss of the self, never ceases to flow forth from him to all of creation.

Becoming a friend to all beings to the extent that Amma has is not easy. In some ways, the first quality mentioned by Käçåa, non-hatred toward all beings, is level-one spirituality, and feeling friendship toward all beings is level two. An *àéram*

resident once told me a story that reveals Amma’s appreciation of this fact. He had just moved to Amritapuri and, as such, felt very inspired. When you witness firsthand the extent to which Amma is sacrificing herself, day-in and day-out, to help others, you cannot help but be inspired to try—in whatever small way possible—to move toward a life of selflessness like Amma’s. This is how this individual felt. Thus, one day, he approached Amma and, with his heart open wide, told her that he also wanted to love everyone selflessly like she did. Amma looked at him with eyes full of compassion, gave him a loving peck on the cheek and sweetly said, “Son, to begin with, just try not to hate anyone.”

Therefore, we should understand that feeling loving friendship toward everyone is not easy. Ultimately, it must be reinforced at a core level by regularly reminding ourselves of the Vedàntic truth of our essential unity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this should be done both when our attitudes run contrary to this understanding, as well as in our daily focused meditations.

**A Compassionate Person**

**KARUÅAÃ**

The next quality of the *paràbhakta* mentioned by Sri Käçåa is *karuåaã*—compassion. Not long ago, I read an article by a Christian theologian that gave a beautiful definition for mercy, which I think works fine for compassion: “The willingness to enter the chaos of another.” 1 Like Amma, this definition transforms compassion from a mere emotion into an action. Amma often says that love is the inner feeling and compassion is its outward expression—i.e. love in action. Like Amma, it also implies that compassion most often involves sacrifice. “EntEring chaos” is not a casual expErience. When people are suffEring physically and emotionally, their lives are often messy. Family problems, financial problems, social problems, problems of mental and physical health—they all can create a very disturbing environment. The burden and pain they create in those suffEring from them can result in tension, depression, frustration and anger. Just because we are trying to help the afflicted person doesn’t mean that we won’t become the target of these negative emotions. Thus, compassion is being there for someone and helping them despite all of that, sacrificing your time, energy and resources.

What is Amma’s *daréan* but her entEring the chaos of thousands upon thousands of lives? Each person coming in the queue to Amma is bringing with them their pain, their problems, their fears. Amma tangibly enters their lives, holding them in that heartfelt embrace, listening to their lamentations, drying their tears, often shedding tears herself. It is in Amma’s life that we see compassion expressed in its totality. Amma constantly sacrifices food, sleep, solitude, rest—all the things we believe make life comfortable—simply to bring as many smiles to as many people as possible, to wipe as many tears as possible, to be there to unburden the sorrows of as many people as possible. Why does Amma make this seeming sacrifice? Because Amma knows that in her arms people feel safe, feel comforted, feel that finally they’ve found someone who knows them through and through. With that feeling, they get the strength to move forward in life, and this, Amma feels, is infinitely more important than her physical comfort.

I would like to share an incident that illustrates the extent to which Amma, in her compassion, is willing to sacrifice for the world—how she is willing to give and give and give, even to her own physical detriment. This took place in 2006 when Amma was in Kannur, northern Kerala. It was an extremely large crowd. Amma had come for the program at 7:00 p.m. the evening before and, at 9:00 a.m. the next morning, was still giving *daréan*. At some point, early in the night, one of the devotees had asked Amma if, before she drove on to Bangalore, she would stop at his house. Amma had agreed. As the *daréan* was going so late, I couldn’t believe his audacity. Amma had been sitting on the stage for 14 hours continuously without any food or rest. The next day would bring another large *daréan* in Bangalore, and, yet, this man was pushing Amma to come to his house. Amma assured him that she would come.

When the *daréan* finally finished, we learned that the man’s house was completely out of the way. At this point, I was upset. I told myself that when we reached his house, I was going to explain to him that what he had requested of Amma was incorrect. After a half an hour or so, we arrived. Amma gracefully alighted from her camper and, looking as fresh as ever, entered the man’s house. She did a simple *pùjà* in the *pùjà* room, and then the man asked Amma to go to yet another room. I couldn’t believe it: it seemed it wasn’t enough that Amma had come to his house; this man wanted Amma to enter and bless each and every room. Again, Amma gracefully agreed.

When we entered the room, I suddenly realized why Amma had agreed to come. There, on the bed, was his child who suffered from hydrocephalus. His legs and arms were like toothpicks, and his head was more than double the size of a normal head. It was so large that he could not even lift it without assistance, and even then, it was obviously very painful for him. There was no way he could have come to the program. Amma held the child, cradling his massive head in her arms and fed him with her own hands, whispEring in his ear, “*My son... my son... my son...*” I felt so ashamed for my judgment of this devotee and admonished myself for second-guessing Amma and her deeper understanding of what is and isn’t required.

The fact was that, physically, Amma had to have been exhausted. The *daréan* had gone on for 14 hours, and the next day’s *daréan* would probably be just as long. There is no way that such physical strain doesn’t have an effect on Amma’s health, and there is no way that Amma is not aware of that. However, due to the enormity of Amma’s compassion, there was only one fact that was relevant to Amma: “One of my children is alone and in pain, and I have the power to bring him at least a small amount of comfort.”

How is Amma able to be like this? How is she able to give and give and give, even when that giving seems to be detrimental to her best interests? Why, as Käçåa says, is compassion a natural expression for an *àtma-jñànì*? Here, we must remember that a core teaching of Advaita Vedànta is that there is only one *àtmà*. The proponents of Advaita draw upon many scriptural statements attesting to this truth. One such statement comes in Svetàévatara Upaniçad:

eko devaã sarvabhùteçu guáhaã sarvavyàpì sarva

bhùtàntaràtmà |

The one God, hidden in all beings, all-pervasive, the inner *àtmà* of all beings.1

Käçåa also says this in his own unique way, referring to all the various bodies as “fields” and the one *àtmà* as “the knower of all the fields”:

kçetrajñaë càpi màm viddhi sarva-kçetreçu bhàrata |

O Bhàrata, also know me as the knower of the fields in all fields.2

Amma also has her own unique ways of expressing this truth as well: “All of us are different forms of the one *àtmà*, like chocolate [Hershey’s Kisses] in different colored wrappers. The chocolate wrapped in a green wrapper may tell the chocolate wrapped in a red wrapper, ‘I’m different from you,’ and the chocolate wrapped in red paper may tell the chocolate in blue paper, ‘You and I are different,’ but once the wrappers are removed, all the chocolates are exactly the same. In the same way, at the heart of every one of us is the one and the same *àtmà*.”

What these scriptural statements and Amma are telling us is that if we strip away the superficial layers of our being—the physical layer, the emotional layer, the intellectual layer, etc—what remains is the pure awareness, pure consciousness, the true “I.”

While the superficial layers are different, the true “I” is one and the same for every being.

If we are all one inside, why is that not our expErience? Why do we feel separate? This is a common doubt. To understand this, it is helpful if we look at an example Amma frequently uses. She says, “Suppose you take 100 pots of water and put them out under the sun. In each pot, you will see a sun—won’t you? But that doesn’t mean there are 100 different suns. The sun is one; the reflections are many.” Looking at Amma’s example, the reason we fail to appreciate our oneness is that we are either identifying with the pot, the water in the pot or—at best—the reflection in the water in the pot. We are forgetting the original sun. In Amma’s example, the various pots represent our physical bodies. At this level, some of us are big round pots, some tall skinny flute-like pots, some white, some brown, etc. The water in the various pots represents our individual minds—some of us have calm-water minds, some agitated-water minds, some muddy-water minds, some pure-water minds, etc. According to Vedànta, the sun reflected in each pot is getting closer to the permanent reality, but is still not our true nature. It is but a reflection of the *àtmà* in our mind, what some Vedànta scholars refer to as *cidàbhàsa*—reflected consciousness. Our true nature is the sun—the original consciousness. The original consciousness is one and the same for all. It is not modified by the conditions of the reflecting medium of the mind/water. This is the true eternal nature of all of us. An *àtma-jñànì* like Amma roots his identity and the identity of every aspect of creation—sentient and insentient—in the original consciousness. They are able to discriminate themselves and others not only from the physical body and mind, but also from consciousness as reflected in the mind. Identifying with that true self, they see themselves in others and others in themselves.

It is our obsession with our differences that prevents us from appreciating our oneness. The *àtmà* is the ultimate reality of each of us—whole, complete and infinite. Beyond that shared and permanent reality, I will expErience a certain set of finite, internal and external changing phenomena; you will expErience a different set. Regardless, these temporary expEriences have absolutely no bearing on the infinite shared reality of who we are—the original consciousness. As Swàmì Dayànanda Sarasvatì, a popular Vedànta teacher, said, we should consider our individual body, mind and senses as an addition to the whole, not a diminution.

The *jñànì*’s complete and total understanding of the oneness of the *àtmà* is the source of his compassion. We all love ourselves. We never get tired of feeding ourselves, of bathing ourselves, of striving to better ourselves, of comforting and indulging ourselves. When it comes to ourselves, it is a lifelong labor of love. Amma says that the *àtma-jñànì* has understood that his self does not end at the confines of his physical body but, in fact, pervades all bodies. He knows that the phenomenon of individuality is a mere illusion. This understanding has registered within him to such a depth that his response to the suffEring of others is 100 percent in tune with that reality. It is, as Amma always says, “Suppose the left hand is injured. Does the right hand say, ‘Oh, that’s the left hand; it has nothing to do with me?’ No, the right hand immediately presses and soothes the left hand, applies medicine if needed. This is because it does not see the left hand as different from itself. If we have true spiritual understanding, this is how we will react to the suffEring of all beings.”

I remember once in response to someone’s question, Amma was explaining the nature of her *daréan*—why she just naturally embraces everyone and showers them with affection. She said, “It’s just the outward flow of Amma’s inherent compassion. That flow happens spontaneously when you come to Amma. Just as leaves flutter when the wind arrives, just as sweetness is the inherent nature of a fruit, the motherly sentiment, the flow of compassion, is Amma’s inherent nature. What can Amma do? The feeling of oneness is very real to her. A cow may be black or white or red, but the milk is always white. Similarly, there is only one *àtmà*, not many. It only appears as many to those who think of themselves as the *jìvàtmà*.1 That’s all there is to it. Amma doesn’t feel that distinction.” Thus, Amma has said very clearly that her compassion is a direct outcome of the fact that “the feeling of oneness is very real to her.” It is Amma’s *àtma-jñànam*—her knowledge that the self in her is the self in all beings. Her compassion is all-pervasive because her sense of self is all-pervasive.

Several years back someone showed me a short story that reflects this aspect of Amma. 2 The story is about a couple that finds an undernourished, abandoned puppy in their backyard. These are good people, and they feel the puppy is now—by whatever twist of fate—their responsibility. The puppy is cute enough, but they immediately realize it has a problem. In its thus-far short life it has been horribly mistreated. As a result, it barks constantly, and when anyone tries to offer it comfort, it whimpers, cowers with fear and urinates. It is simply terrified of anything and everything—especially humans.

Despite their attempts to rehabilitate the animal with their affection and care, the puppy’s condition remains the same, and the couple is soon faced with the proposition of accepting a 12-year responsibility for which there is no foreseeable reward. The puppy offers no sense of companionship. It will never become a guard dog. It will not even give them the satisfaction of seeing it full of joy—for, ostensibly, it feels no joy. In the end, the couple does what most anyone else finding himself in such a situation would do. They put the dog into the back of their car and drive it to the animal shelter, trying to ignore as best they can what they know in their hearts to be true: no one is ever going to pick it out as a pet and, after five days, it will be euthanized.

In the story, this is a difficult moment for the couple, but after they get home they quickly fall back into their hectic routines and, more or less, forget all about the dog. About a week later, the husband—who is narrating the story—suddenly remembers the dog, and realizes that, by now, it has most certainly been put to sleep. At this time he remorsefully reflects that the puppy was “a casualty of the limits we all place on our sympathy.”

It is true. The compassion of one who has yet to understand his true self and fully assimilate that knowledge will always be limited. If we are honest, we will admit to seeing this in ourselves. Our compassion has borders, and when those borders are crossed, we retreat from kindness; we retract our generosity. We find ourselves saying things like, “I wish I could help, but I have to think of myself also.” However, when reading this story it occurred to me that no one has ever fallen casualty to the limits of Amma’s sympathy because Amma’s sympathy and compassion simply have no limits.

The *àtma-jñànì*’s compassion has no limits because his sense of self has no limits. An individual’s compassion ultimately ends where his sense of self ends. The *jñànì* understands that any perception of a boundary point wherein he ends and others begin is a misperception based on self-misconception and is to be ignored. As Amma said above when asked about her *daréan*, “The feeling of oneness is very real to me.” This is why when Amma sees someone suffEring, she immediately reaches out to comfort them. It is why, when she sees someone without a house, she wants to give them a house; why, when she sees someone without means to proper education, she wants to give them a proper education; why, when she sees someone without food, she wants to feed them; why, when she sees someone without love, she wants to love them. For Amma, the impulse to help others is as natural as the impulse to wipe the tears that fall from her own eyes.

Some time ago I heard a true story about a young doctor volunteEring in a remote mountain hospital in Haiti.1 It was past midnight, pouring rain, and she was desperately struggling to transport a seven-year-old boy dying from cancer to a more sophisticated institution. The tumor had started in his nasal region but had grown rapidly backward and was now pushing into his spine. The boy’s life was fading, and the woman was literally racing against time, bouncing along the mountain roads in some poor excuse for an ambulance.

In fact, the hospital where she was trying to take the child was in AmErica. The boy’s only chance was through a procedure available only in Boston. Yet, all the while, in the young doctor’s head a debate was raging: The boy was dying. Even if she got him to Boston, his chances were slim. He was going to have to be airlifted, and the cost was going to be more than $20,000. The head of her charitable institution was away, and she herself had pushed for the decision to move forward. Thus, as she bounced through the jungle to the airport, she doubted if she was doing the right thing. Was she wasting money that could be spent on other sick people with a higher chance of survival?

Eventually, the ambulance came to a bridge. Due to the massive rains, the stream over which the bridge passed was flooded and had risen beyond the height of the bridge-deck. Crossing would be extremely dangerous, but they had no choice. When the ambulance entered the bridge, the headlights submerged and everything went pitch black. Overcome with fear of her own mortality, the doctor found herself thinking, “I can’t die. I have so much life left.” Then, before she knew it, they were on the other side—safe. She gave a sigh of relief, and instantly had a moment of clarity. She thought: “Okay, remember that: ‘If it’s your life, it’s always the most important thing.’”

The young doctor realized that if it had been her lying there, there would be no question as to whether or not the $20,000 was an acceptable financial risk. She’d have risked the World Bank. Understanding this, she got the clarity to move forward without doubting her decision.

This is how it is with one who has become established in self-knowledge. Identifying with others’ pain, fears, dreams and needs, the enlightened individual gives as readily as if they were his own.

There is one more important thing to note: While the *àtma jñànì* willingly enters the chaos of the lives of the suffEring, he himself never becomes lost in that chaos. If we observe Amma, at one level we can see the sorrow and joy of the people who come to her reflected in her. On another level, she never loses sight that her true nature is far-removed from anything and everything. I remember one time a journalist asked Amma what makes Amma happy, and Amma said, “On one level, the happiness of the world is Amma’s happiness. When people are happy, Amma is happy. When people are sad, Amma is sad. However, in the innermost core, Amma is not attached to anything. She is always happy and peaceful in all circumstances, regardless of the external circumstances.”

**One Without a Sense of “Mine” NIRMAMAÃ**

*Nirmamaã* means that the *paràbhakta* has no sense of “mine”—no sense of mine with regard to possessions, to achievements, to relationships, to anything external.

In the mid-1980s, Amma’s *àéram* was just a few thatched huts. Even though we never felt it was austere because we were so immersed in Amma’s love and compassion, the fact remains that we only had enough money to eat one full meal a day and sometimes we would even go without that. Myself and the other *brahmacàrìs* only had a few decent shirts among us, and we would share them as per the need of the day. We never had a surplus of rice and vegetables. We lived completely hand-to-mouth. Since I had worked in a bank before joining the Àéram, I felt like I was the only one who really understood the importance of money. I was often irritated with how, despite our lack of resources, Amma was always giving funds donated to the Àéram to poor people. A woman would come telling Amma about her lack of money for her daughter’s marriage, and the next thing I would know Amma would be calling someone to run and get the gold necklace that had been donated the day before. Knowing my place as a disciple, I would usually keep quiet, but inside I would be irritated, thinking, “Amma, we’re poorer than she is!”

At one point, a man who was an expert in *vàstu éàstra* 1 visited the *àéram*. Seeing its layout, he immediately told me that it was inauspicious. He pointed to a large open area through which many people entered and exited. He said, “You cannot leave that space without a wall. If you do, all the Àéram’s wealth will exit through there.” I immediately brought him to inform Amma. Amma listened to him intently and then said, “Son, I want it like that. For worldly people, such a layout may be inauspicious because in their view life is about gaining money. Amma doesn’t see things that way. This Àéram is not Amma’s, nor is anything in it. It all belongs to the world. What is more auspicious than leaving money to help the poor and needy?”

Amma’s view is that nothing is hers. The Àéram, its resources, its institutions, anything donated—everything belongs to the world, she says. Moreover, Amma always points out that even if we ostensibly possess something—be it an object, a relationship, an expErience, etc—we will not be able to take it with us when we die. “Renounce ownership—consider all things as God’s and enjoy them,” she says. “This world is a temporary stop. You are here for a short pEriod, as a visitor. Due to your ignorance, you divide everything, every inch of land, as yours and theirs. The piece of land you claim as your own has belonged to many others before. Now the previous owners are buried in it. Today, it may be your turn to play the role of owner, but remember, one day you too will disappear. Then another person will come and fill your shoes. So, is there any meaning in claiming ownership?”

Amma often says that the *jñànì* has no sense of “mine” because he does not see anything as separate from him. In order to see something as mine, I must first see that thing as existing outside of me: *my* house, *my* pen, *my* brother, *my* car... The *àtma-jñànì* has understood that not only is the *àtmà* his true essence, but it is also the essence of the entire universe—both the sentient and insentient. According to Vedànta, the *àtmà* is the ultimate subatomic particle, as it were. So, the *jñànì* knows that everything he sees within and without is nothing but himself with a different superficial name and form. Seeing the world with this vision of oneness, how can he possibly call anything as “his”? It may be “him,” but never “his.” This is from the ultimate perspective, wherein all names and forms are understood to have one’s own self as their substratum.

Here, some may have a doubt: “Other than the fact that a sense of ownership is an obstacle to *àtma-jñànam*, why would I want to attain it? The previous qualities—non-hatred, friendliness, compassion—all seem like nice things. However, some people derive a lot of happiness from owning things. We may doubt, “If I give up my sense of ownership, won’t I actually lose out?” Amma says that it is just the opposite: “When we give everything, we are, in truth, gaining everything. When we surrender all the pErishable things, what we realize in return is the impErishable *àtmà*—our true self. When we think, ‘*My* land... *my* money... *my* children...,’ etc, our world is contracting. When we renounce the attitude of ‘mine,’ everything becomes ours. Then, there are no differences. In that state, there is no difference between God and us. That is why it said that for one who knows the essence, the whole world becomes his wealth.”

In fact, claims born of our sense of “mine” often render us foolish in the eyes of others. We become like the middleman for a hospital who, trying to get a commission for bringing in a patient, pushes his way to the front of a crowd standing around an accident victim. “Stand back! Clear the way! He’s a relative of mine! He’s a relative of mine!” he shouts. Yet, upon reaching the victim, the man sees not an injured human but a dead donkey—

and everyone else sees not one jackass but two.

More importantly, it is, in fact, our sense of “mine” that is the source of all our worry in life. We don’t worry about our neighbor’s children; we worry about our children. We don’t worry about our neighbor’s health; we worry about our health. That said, just because we don’t worry about our neighbor doesn’t mean that we won’t be there for him when he is in need. If he is sick, we may cook for him and help him clean the house, etc. If we see his child crying, we will hug the child, ask what is wrong and try to solve the problem. Despite helping our neighbor, we don’t fret over his troubles. We lovingly do what is required and follow up if necessary, but we don’t stay up all night worrying about whether or not the particular situation is going to be okay. So, in giving up the sense of “mine,” the only thing we lose is anxiety.

Total eradication of our sense of ownership can only come from self-knowledge. This is because the foundation of our sense of ownership is our misunderstanding that we are limited by the body-mind-sense complex. 1 Self-knowledge directly destroys this misunderstanding and thus, indirectly, destroys the sense of ownership born of it.

How do we know if we are suffEring from a sense of ownership? Very simple: worry. Worrying about something is a clear sign that we feel a sense of ownership toward it. When we find ourselves worrying over something, we should remind ourselves of these Vedàntic principles. When we worry about our children, we should remind ourselves that we neither own them nor, ultimately, can we even control them. We can only advise them and provide them support; we cannot force them to accept our advice. Many people think that worry is proof that we love someone, and if we don’t worry about someone we don’t really love them. This is total delusion. Worry has nothing to do with true love. It only has to do with a sense of possession. Moreover, worrying never helped anyone—neither the worrier, nor the one worried over. Analyze the situation, decide what you can and cannot do to help it, perform that action and then move forward.

Not feeling ownership with regards to our possessions and family members, etc, is not easy. This is one reason the *sannyàsì* does not own anything; his renunciation of all possessions and relations removes all scope for possession-based worry in his mind. This allows him the mental freedom to totally focus on self-knowledge until his understanding and resultant detachment are firm enough that, even if he were loaded with possessions, there could be no sense of ownership. However, Amma doesn’t want us all to take *sannyàsa* and become monks. She says, what is most important is “inner *sannyàsa*.” This is the inner conviction that none of our possessions or family members are really ours, but that, rather, they are all on loan from God, and God can take them back at any moment.

Amma often explains this inner-*sannyàsa* attitude with the example of the bird on the dry twig. She says, “A spiritually oriented householder should be like a bird perched on a dry twig. The bird knows that the twig can break at any moment. Therefore, it will be ready to take off at any time. Likewise, a householder should always remain aware of the truth that his relationships and possessions will not always be with him. At any moment they can snap and he will have to fly.”

So, if we want to reduce our sense of ownership, we should learn to start seeing everything that we previously considered as “ours” as “God’s,” remembEring that God can take back the things he lent to us at any time.

In January 2001, when an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6 hit the Bhuj District of Gujarat, a reported 20,000 people were killed, 167,000 were injured, 400,000 homes were destroyed and 600,000 people were rendered homeless. In March of 2002, Amma herself came to Bhuj in order to give *daréan* to the disaster victims and present them with the keys to 1,200 new homes the Àéram had built for them. When Amma asked them if they were sad about the loss of their loved ones, one of them responded, “Amma, we are not sad. God had given to us, and now He has taken away.” This is inner *sannyàsa*—an attitude that must be there if we want to foster a mind that is free from worry, which is essential to attain *àtma-jñànam*.

**One Without a Separate**

**Sense of “I”**

**NIRAHAÊKÀRAÃ**

The next sign of the *paràbhakta*, Sri Käçåa says, is *nirahaêkàraã*. The word *ahaêkàra* literally means “the ‘I’-maker.” Thus, *nirahaêkàraã* means “one in whom the thought of ‘I’ has gone away.”1 Before we can understand what is meant by “eradicating *ahaêkàra*,” we first must understand what is meant by *ahaêkàra*. We should note that the “I” itself is not the problem; the problem is our misconception regarding this “I.” After all, the most famous Vedàntic statement from the Upaniçads is *ahaë brahmàsmi*—“I am *brahman*.”2 Therefore, what the *àtma-jñànì* has eradicated is not his sense of “I,” but his identification of that “I” with the body, mind and senses. That is, he has come to identify his “I” with pure awareness, pure consciousness. In that rediscovery of himself, he comes to clearly see that he is neither the one performing actions, nor the one undergoing the various expEriences of life. Furthermore, he understands that he is not even the one willing his actions. He is, at best, a witness to all these phenomena. This is what is meant by *nirahaêkàraã*.

The result of this knowledge is total freedom, total fearlessness, total selflessness. For just as self-knowledge frees us from the misconception of ownership when it comes to external objects [as explained in the previous chapter on *nirmamaã*], so too it frees us from this misconception with regard to the “internal” object of the body-mind-sense complex.

A famous story illustrates how a *jñànì* does not see himself as his physical body and the resultant detachment and selflessness that such an understanding can foster. Once a devotee was making a pilgrimage in the Himalayas. There he came across a wandEring monk engaged in meditation. Seeing the radiant and peaceful look on the monk’s face, the pilgrim reverently sat down at his feet and waited for him to open his eyes so that he could have his blessings. When he did so, he noticed that one of the monk’s arms had a very bad infection. There were even maggots crawling on it. Soon the monk opened his eyes, saw the pilgrim sitting there and raised his hand to bless him. As he did so, one of the maggots fell off his arm and landed on the ground. The monk quickly reached down and picked up the maggot and placed it back on his arm, saying, “Oh, my little one. You almost lost your dinner.”

The story is a bit extreme, but is what Amma does really so different? Ignoring the physically detrimental ramifications of embracing a million people every year, Amma—with total detachment—has offered her physical body to the world, allowing all of us to take spiritual and emotional nourishment from her physical embrace. Like the monk in the story, Amma doesn’t see her body as hers; she sees it as the world’s.

*Nirahaêkàraã* does not end with disidentification from the body and senses. It also extends to disidentification with one’s mind. Occasionally people directly ask Amma if she has attained self-realization. Amma always responds by saying that she makes no claims. Some people hear this and think Amma is just being humble. From one perspective, that is true, but the ultimate reason Amma makes no claims is that she doesn’t identify with her mind. What is it that attains self-realization? The *àtmà* certainly does not attain it. The *àtmà* performs no actions and expEriences no fruits. It is, at best, a mere witness and is ever liberated. What attains self-realization is the mind. Self-realization is the mental realization that one is the *àtmà*. Since self-realization is something that takes place in the mind, how can an *àtma-jñànì*—who identifies exclusively with the *àtmà*—ever respond “yes” to the question, “Are you self-realized?”

To better understand how the *jñànì*’s total identification with the *àtmà* leads to a sense of non-ownership from both external objects as well as from the body-mind-sense complex, it is helpful to compare the *àtmà* to light pervading a room. Many people may enter and exit the room, many events may take place there, but the light cannot claim ownership of, or identification with, any of these people and phenomena. So, too, it is with the self—the pure consciousness that pervades and illuminates all of our thoughts, sense expEriences and physical movements. Thus, the *àtma-jñànì* knows that, despite interacting with people at the level of the body, from the level of the *àtmà* there is no such interaction. He is the consciousness that illuminates all expEriences, but he himself has no expEriences, no relationships, no possessions. Thus, there is nothing he can call “his.”

There is a Malayalam *bhajan* Amma sings that presents this view of non-ownership with a beautiful metaphor:

gandha-vàhanan pòle bandhiccu sarvattiluë

bandhamillàtte vazhàn-uîîil nì vasikkaåè1

The line above means: “O please dwell within me, helping me to live like the wind, having a bond with everything, yet being bound by nothing.” Thus, the *àtma-jñànì*, knowing his true nature to be pure consciousness, knows that although the body interacts with various people and things and the mind has thoughts about various people and things, none of these ultimately have any connection with him, who is pure consciousness, pure awareness. In meditation, we can clearly expErience this. We can close our eyes, remain quiet and begin observing various phenomena that enter the stage of our mind: the perception of sound... the perception of a sensation... a feeling of impatience... a memory of Amma... a memory of our father... a desire to have coffee with a friend of ours... If we switch our focus from the phenomena to being the witness of the phenomena, we can see that none of these sense expEriences, feelings, emotions, memories, ideas and desires—despite being mental phenomena—have any real connection with us, the witness.

Thus, “I” is not the problem. The problem is our erroneous understanding about “I.” When we say, “I am the body,” the “I” and the “am” are both very real. The only mistake is in equating ourselves with the body-mind-sense complex. In truth, the correct statement is not “I am the body,” but “I am pure bliss.” The *àtma-jñànì* has realized this.

Another way of looking at this is that the *àtma-jñànì*’s sense of “I” has expanded to include the entire universe. On one level, he knows he is pure consciousness, but on another level he knows that this entire universe has manifested from that consciousness. Thus, his sense of self has become all-pervasive in that he knows that the ultimate building block of creation, as it were, is the consciousness that is he himself. Either way, he is *nirahaêkàraã*—one without a limited sense of “I.”

There is a beautiful Malayalam prayer that Amma sometimes quotes, which illustrates this second interpretation:

ànanda-cinmaya harè gòpàlikàramaåa

ñàn-enne bhàvam-atu tònnàyka vèåam-iha

tònnunnatàkilakhilaë ñàn-itenna-vazhi

tònnèåamè varada nàràyaåàya namaã

O Hari, who is pervaded with bliss and consciousness, in whom the gopikas delight, May I never feel the notion of “I.” If I must, then let me feel “I am everything.” O Giver of boons, I bow down to you, Nàràyaåa.1

When discussing *nirmamaã* in the previous chapter, we said that the presence of our sense of “mine” is indicated by worry. Since the sense of “mine” is subtle, it is hard to view directly; we have to discover it by its symptoms. *Ahaêkàraã* is even subtler. Therefore, it is helpful to detect it via its symptoms as well. One of the primary symptoms of identifying with the body-mind is feeling that we are the doer—the agent of our actions. In fact, *ahaêkàra* is often defined as this identification: “‘I am the doer’ is *ahaêkàra*,” says Tattva Bodha. 2 Anytime we get caught up in the feeling that “I am the doer,” we can be assured that we are identifying with the body-mind. We can then use that as a reminder to bring back our Vedàntic understanding of our true nature. Obviously, it is not that the *àtma-jñànì* ceases to perform actions. On the contrary, he may perform more actions than one who is spiritually ignorant. However, irrespective of the *jñànì*’s level of activity, he can clearly demarcate himself from those actions. We will discuss this at more when we come to the quality of *éubhàéubha parityàgì* [one who renounces both the auspicious and inauspicious].

Other symptoms of *ahaêkàra* are pride, arrogance, hubris, haughtiness, egomaniacal behavior, etc. In fact, these qualities are sometimes simply referred to as *ahaêkàra*. This is because they are all rooted in the belief that this limited “I,” comprising the body and mind, is the ultimate reality. When we conceive of our self in this manner, the natural result will be two-fold:

we will fear that we may be rendered even more limited, and we will long to become less limited.

Arrogance is a direct product of *ahaêkàra* because the more identified one is with the limited self, the less willing he will be to acquiesce to the desires of others. Why? Because subconsciously he will feel that to do so is to concede a piece of himself, which he already perceives as being far too limited. Similarly, such a person will often try to impose his will upon others because he is trying to expand his sense of “I,” to make it less limited, by controlling others. This is how arrogance and egomania, etc, arise from *ahaêkàra*.

On the other hand, sometimes people appear to be humble, but their humility is merely an expression of an infEriority complex. An infEriority complex is just as much a symptom of *ahaêkàra* as a supEriority complex. In both cases, the individual has identified with his mind and the illusion it creates that “I am bound by the body-mind-sense complex.” The only difference between the egomaniac and someone who suffers from an infEriority complex is that the former believes his “I” is supErior to that of others, and the latter believes that his “I” is second-rate. In either case, their concepts are founded on ignorance about their true nature.

Since, *ahaêkàra* and its eradication are inner phenomena, we cannot directly observe them in other people. However, in *mahàtmàs*, we can observe the humility born of non-identification with the body-mind. This is what we see in Amma—someone who is willing to bow down to anything and everything, someone who is always willing to listen to the input of others. Seeing the divinity within every aspect of creation—both sentient and insentient—the impulse to bow down before others is innate in Amma. As we said, Amma makes no claims with regard to her status; she has no feeling that “I am a great *àtma-jñànì*; let others bow down to me.” Identifying not with the mind, but only with the *àtmà*, she is humbler than the humblest.

Every time Amma takes the dais, she bows down before everyone assembled. While I am used to this behavior of Amma’s, there was one time that the profundity of Amma’s humility struck me in particular. The occasion was a Sanskrit, English and yoga camp held at the *àéram* for children who had been affected by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. On the final day of the camp, Amma came for a question-and-answer session with the children. In India, one bows down before another under one of several circumstances: the person should either be an elder, supErior in a field of knowledge, a *sannyàsì* or a *mahàtmà*. Yet, as soon as Amma stepped out before the children, she immediately offered her prostrations to all 6,000 of them. According to the traditional texts dealing with proper conduct1, there was no reason for Amma to do this—she was older than all of them, certainly she was more knowledgeable, none of them were *sannyàsìs*, and Amma herself is a *mahàtmà*. However, age is from the perspective of the body, and knowledge and spiritual greatness are from the perspective of the mind. Refusing to identify with either and seeing each child as an embodiment of the supreme, Amma spontaneously and sincerely offered her humble prostrations. In fact, I have not seen anyone else bow down before the audience like Amma. They may say, “I offer my prostrations to everyone,” but who but Amma literally bows down?

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**One Who Is the Same in Hardship & Comfort**

**SAMA-DUÃKHA-SUKHAÃ**

The next quality Sri Käçåa gives for the *paràbhakta* is *sama duãkha-sukhaã*—“one who is the same in sorrow and happiness.” It is easy to become confused upon hearing this. It sounds like an oxymoron because it is referring to the mind of the *àtma-jñànì*, and a mind that is expEriencing happiness is in no way the same as a mind that is expEriencing sorrow. They are diametrically opposite expEriences. Thus, we should be careful when we come across this expression, which appears often—not just in the Bhagavad-Gìtà and other scriptures but also in talks by Amma. When we see this expression, we should take *duãkha* and *sukha* not as the mental emotions of sorrow and happiness, but as circumstances in which it is common to expErience sorrow and happiness. Examples of *duãkha* would then be realizing your car has been stolen, learning you have failed an exam, hearing that someone you love has been diagnosed with an incurable disease, etc. Examples of *sukha* would be winning a million dollars in the lottery, learning you’ve been given a desired promotion, etc. If we take this interpretation, then Käçåa is saying that the *àtma-jñànì* remains mentally equipoised in both of these poles of expErience. If someone tells him that they think he is great, he smiles serenely. If someone tells him they think he is an ignoramus, he also smiles serenely. Inside he remains blissful.

To understand why the *àtma-jñànì* retains mental equanimity despite whatever happens, it is helpful to look at why people who lack self-knowledge fail to do this. People become angry with someone when they think that person is obstructing the fulfillment of one of their desires. The more intense the desire, the more intense the anger. What dictates the intensity of the desire? Just as anger is directly proportional to desire, so too desire is directly proportional to how much one believes a particular object to be a source of happiness. This is why an *àtma-jñànì*

never becomes angry: He is not under the illusion that any object in the universe is a source of happiness. As such, his actions are never motivated by the desire to obtain happiness. Therefore, if someone prevents him from obtaining an object or doing an action, no anger results.

A question may arise: If an *àtma-jñànì* like Amma does not see any object in the universe, whatsoever, as a source of happiness, then where does his happiness come from? The answer is that it comes from the self, his true nature. The *jñànì* is, as Käçåa says in the Gìtà, *àtmanyeva àtmanaã tuçâaã*—“Content in the self, through the self alone.”1 In fact, this is the very reason why he does not see any object as a source of happiness. He knows that there is only one source of happiness in the entire universe and that is the *àtmà*, which he has firmly understood and assimilated to be his true nature. When people develop a fondness for any sense object, be it a person, place or thing, it comes from the supErimposition of the splendor that is in fact one’s true nature onto that object. 2 The *àtma-jñànì* has no such error in perception.

As stated in the Introduction, all of these qualities enumerated by Käçåa are both effects of self-knowledge as well as required mental conditions for self-knowledge to take place. As such, true mental equanimity comes only as a result of *àtma*-*jñànam*. However, relative mental equanimity must be attained in order to understand and assimilate self-knowledge.

The agitated mind is not really available for our use. Someone praises us and it is dancing on the ceiling; someone criticizes us and it is either depressed or fuming with anger. All of these various mental phenomena—depression, worry, anxiety, agitation, anger, excitement, over-elation—render the mind ineffective. A depressed mind can neither learn nor reflect nor ruminate on what it has learnt; likewise a mind soaring in elation. Such minds are unavailable in the here and now for sErious spiritual pursuit. The primary spiritual practice for attaining this relative level of mental equanimity is *karma yoga*. Käçåa says this himself with his famous definition of *karma yoga*:

yoga-sthaã kuru karmàåi saêgaë tyaktvà dhanañjaya | siddhyasiddhyoã samo bhùtvà samatvaë yoga ucyate ||

Perform actions, O Dhanañjaya, being fixed in [*karma*] *yoga*—renouncing attachments and being mentally equanimous in success and failure. Equanimity is said to be [*karma*] *yoga*.1

However, we should understand that here, in the AMRTASTAKAM, Käçåa is not speaking about mental equanimity born of *karma yoga*. In *karma yoga*, we attain a relative amount of mental equanimity from accepting everything that comes to us in life—

both hardships and fortunate circumstances—as God’s *prasàdam* [gift]. However, through that attitude, one will retain a sense of division between himself and God. He sees himself as God’s devotee and performs his actions as a worship of God. Thus, a sense of non-identity with God is retained. *Àtma-jñànam* is the very knowledge that my true nature and God’s true nature are one and the same: the eternally existent blissful consciousness that pervades all of creation. Thus, the *àtma-jñànì*’s mental equanimity comes not from seeing all things as God’s gift but from his continued appreciation of the reality that bliss itself is his true nature and that all names and forms are but eternally changing superficialities to which he serves as the eternal substratum. As Sant Jñàneévar writes in his commentary on this verse, “He is like the ocean, which is full even if it doesn’t rain.”

In his commentary on this quality, Sri Éaêkara makes an important point. He writes: “Whoever in whom hardship and comfort do not give rise to attachment or aversion is *sama duãkha-sukhaã*.” 1 Sri Éaêkara is pointing out that when the *àtma-jñànì* undergoes a circumstance that most people would label adverse, it does not create within his psyche a negative impression that in the future will make him recoil from similar circumstances. Similarly, when he undergoes a circumstance that most people would label pleasant or comfortable, no positive impression is made in his psyche that prompts him to pursue similar circumstances in the future. Only such a person can truly be considered free. Everyone else is simply reacting. It’s not that the *àtma-jñànì* isn’t aware of the law of cause and effect. Of course he knows that certain actions and circumstances will bring physical pain and problems and that certain others will bring physical comfort and ease. Nevertheless, his decisions are not dictated by that knowledge. It is but one minor factor for him to take into consideration when making his choices. The primary factor is the welfare of the world.

For example, as Amma does most every year, in July 2011, at the request of devotees, Amma traveled to Japan to give a week or so of programs there. The fact that parts of Japan were still considered dangerous due to spillage from nuclear reactors damaged by the Tòhuko Earthquake a few months before did not dissuade her. The other swàmìs and myself were not happy that Amma was going, but we at least took solace in the fact that the parts of Japan where Amma’s programs were being held were far away from the danger zone. During the course of the programs, many victims of the disaster came for Amma’s *daréan*. I could see the fear and insecurity fading from their faces as Amma compassionately showered them with her love and affection. Toward the end of the day, after Amma gave *daréan* to one more such victim of the disaster, Amma turned to the *brahmacàrì* in charge of the Japan programs and said, “I’m going to go there.” He didn’t really take Amma sEriously, but then a few minutes later Amma was asking him to start making the travel arrangements. The next day, Amma and the rest of us were in a caravan of cars driving to Tagajo, just 68 miles away from the still-leaking Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Worse yet, in order to get there, we had to drive just 40 miles from the reactor itself. In Tagajo, Amma visited an evacuation center where more than 100 people who were still homeless were being accommodated. Despite the fact that no one could assure us that the region was completely safe from the leakage, Amma stayed there, embracing, consoling, and wiping the tears of each and every person, showing us all what real courage and compassion are. Amma also visited the seashore in Shichigahama, offEring prayers for the peace of those who had died and for the restoration of harmony between humankind and nature.

I mention this story because it perfectly illustrates how Amma, as a *sama-duãkha-sukhaã*, is not guided by likes and dislikes but only by her selfless desire to console and care for suffEring humanity. Did Amma know that going to the area was dangerous? Of course. Amma also knew that the trip itself would be difficult due to the post-disaster road conditions. Furthermore, she knew it would delay her arrival in Osaka, where she was scheduled to hold her next program, to the extent that she would arrive just a few hours before it was due to start. Yet, none of that deterred Amma. Due to her self-knowledge, her choices were not informed by selfish likes and dislikes but by her boundless love and compassion.

Another famous example is Amma’s interaction with a leper named Dattan who was known for begging around Oachira, a town not far from the *àéram*. His wounds were so bad that Amma would only call him forward at the very end of *daréan*. Otherwise, seeing the blood and pus that Amma would get on her sàri from holding him, no one else would have followed for *daréan*. In the beginning, he was so putrid that, if I was standing beside Amma when he came for *daréan*, I would have to hold my nose. Yet, for years, Amma would not only hold him but she would tend to his wounds, cleaning his infected skin with her own lips and tongue. Seeing his physical recovery, it is my firm faith that Amma healed him. At the same time, I do not believe that this was the primary reason Amma would take him into her arms. I believe that whether Amma could heal him or not did not matter to her. Neither did whether or not she would become sick from their interactions. Her attitude was simple: “Let fate bring what it may, I will have dried the eyes of a child in pain.” This is the type of freedom that comes from *àtma jñànam*—the freedom to stop living in the shadow of our likes and dislikes and start living in the sunlight of a truly altruistic and expansive love.

Some people may ask, “What is wrong with being happy when good things happen and sad when bad things happen? Isn’t that the nature of life?” There is nothing wrong with it, but we should understand that life doesn’t have to be that way. If you want it to be that way, you are welcome to it, but if we reflect, we will see that when we allow objects to become sources of happiness for us, our joy and sorrow will be directly proportional. That is, as much joy as I expErience when gaining a longed-for object, that much sorrow I will expErience when losing it. Moreover, since every single thing in this universe is non-eternal, we will definitely one day lose every object we attain. Thus, as much joy we expErience, that much sorrow. Viewing the human expErience from this perspective, the scriptures refuse to term the enjoyment dErived from sense objects as “happiness” at all. This is something Käçåa emphatically says in the fifth chapter of the Gìtà:

ye hi saësparéajà bhogà duãkha-yonaya eva te |

àdyantavantaã kaunteya na teçu ramate budhaã ||

Whatever enjoyments are born of contact [with sense objects] are vSrily wombs of sorrow alone; O Kaunteya, they have a beginning and an end. No wise man revels in these.1

If you enjoy such an arrangement, you are welcome to it. No one is forcing spirituality upon anyone. However, if you are aiming for the highest goal, then this attitude is insufficient. Moreover, we should also remember that, according to the scriptures, the pinnacle of happiness one can obtain through objects is but an infinitesimal fraction of the bliss that is our true nature: “Other beings live on a particle of this bliss alone.” 2

As discussed, before coming to Vedànta, we should try to cultivate equanimity, primarily through *karma yoga*: performing our professional work, our *seva*, any spiritual practices we do such as *japa* or meditation with the resolve that we are doing these actions only as a worship of God and have no wish for any matErial rewards from them. If grace in the matErial sphere comes, the *karma yogì* accepts it, but that is not his aim. His aim is simply to offer the worship to God and accept whatever comes to him in life—the so-called “good” and the so-called “bad”—equally, seeing them as God’s gift. In this way, the *karma yogì* will become relatively equanimous and will expErience some degree of contentment. This, in turn, will create a mind calm enough and steady enough to focus on Vedànta.

Once we fully understand Vedànta, we should shift the cause of our equanimity and contentment from seeing all things as God’s *prasàdam* to understanding that we ourselves are the source of all contentment, peace and bliss, and that all names and forms are but changing superficialities skating across the surface of our true self. Abiding in that bliss, let fortune come, let poverty come, let success come, let failure come—these things mean nothing to us now, for their relationship is only with the body and mind, and we know we are not the mind, but the witness consciousness—the *sàkçi caitanyam*—that illumines everything but is ever detached. As we move about in life, as we perform our work, do our *seva*, etc, we must reflect in this manner when the fruits of actions come our way. In closed-eye meditation, we should bring back the teaching that we are not the body, not the mind, but consciousness, detached, ever full and blissful. This cannot be just words. As we allow this thread of thought regarding our true nature to flow through our mind, we should affirm it as the truth of our inner reality and appreciate that the true “I” is, at best, a witness and not the performer of the actions, nor their instigator, nor the experiencer of their fruits.

**One Endowed With Forgiveness KÇAMÌ**

*Kçamà* literally means patience, the ability to forbear; a *kçamì* is one endowed with that quality. *Kçamà* can also be taken in the sense of “forgiveness” because forgiveness ultimately means having patience with other human beings, even when they have violated your sense of right and wrong. In such times, forgiveness is really our ability to accept their actions and not hold a grudge.

To understand the source of the *àtma-jñànì*’s forgiveness, we only need to review how willing we are to forgive ourselves because this is exactly how the *àtma-jñànì* sees other people—as his own self. If we are honest, we will see that we have infinite patience and forgiveness when it comes to our own transgressions. When we lose our temper with someone, we will say to ourselves, “Hey, it’s okay. You were tired.” When we fail to live up to our promises, we tell ourselves, “Hey, no one’s perfect. Don’t be so hard on yourself.” We have a thousand ways to justify and then forgive our own actions. Seeing himself in all beings and all beings in himself, the *àtma-jñànì* is just as easy on other people as we are on ourselves. As Amma always says, “If we accidentally happen to poke our eye with our own finger, do we punish the finger? No. We simply try to soothe the pain. Why do we not punish the finger? Because both are part of us, both are ours. We see ourselves in both the eye and in the finger. In the same way, we should be able to see our own self in all beings. If we can do this, we can easily forgive the mistakes of others.”

I would say that Amma can even be frustratingly forgiving. Sometimes when I am standing beside Amma people come to Amma to complain about someone else. Often, I think to myself, “He’s got a good point. That person is very egoistic, and many people have complained about him to me before as well. In fact, I’ve even seen him in action myself.” Like a fool, I start thinking that Amma is going to call and give that person a good dose. However, most of the time, Amma will just say, “*Aw*... he is so *pàvam*.1 He’s very innocent. He works so hard.” Everyone around Amma will probably be thinking, “He’s not *pàvam*, Amma. He’s a megalomaniac. In fact, he has other people do the majority of his work and takes all the credit.” In such situations, even if, ostensibly, we are right, it is not that Amma is ignorant of the real situation. Trust me: Amma knows very well who is hardworking and who is lazy, who is humble and who is egoistic, who is sincere and who is feigning. At the same time, due to Amma’s self-knowledge, her heart feels a unity with everyone and, just as we are very patient with ourselves, Amma has extreme patience with others as well. Although Amma wants all of us to cultivate good qualities and become more spiritually mature, she also knows that you cannot force a flower to bloom. You can only provide the proper conditions. Then you have to wait and let nature take its course. In Amma’s own words, “We need to awaken from within. If Amma tries to force us to change, it’s like trying to open an egg with a baby bird inside it from the outside. It will only end in destruction. When an egg breaks open from within, however, a new creation emerges.”

Although Amma is the embodiment of patience, there are times when she realizes that continuing to externally accept a certain person’s behavior will only feed that person’s laziness or ego—times when she knows that what will be most beneficial is for her to speak up. So, while in general Amma doesn’t like to push, if she knows that a good push is required, she will give it. Sometimes we need that. However, we should note that when Amma does chastise her disciples, this chastisement is also born out of that same feeling of oneness from which her patience and forgiveness come. I remember, speaking on this topic, Amma once commented, “I see the negativities of my children as my own negativities. Therefore, Amma will try to cultivate alertness and the ability to do the right thing in them. Just as a student is given tuition for a subject in which he is weak, true help lies in helping others to correct their errors. Otherwise, what is the meaning in them calling me ‘Amma’ [mother] and me calling them ‘children’?”

Amma’s display of patience with her disciples and devotees may terminate at a point when she feels that they require her intervention to move forward. However, when it comes to people who are not disciples or devotees, Amma’s patience seems limitless. There have been occasions when such people have even told blatant lies about Amma and the Àéram in order to try to tarnish Amma’s name. Regardless, Amma sees such people as infants—people who have yet to attain a level of maturity wherein they are capable of learning from correction. As such, Amma’s response has always been one of forgiveness. I remember on one of these occasions, a newspaper reporter asking Amma if she was planning any reprisal. Amma responded by asking the reporter a counter question: “If the baby kicks the mother, does the mother kick the baby in return?”

This is how an enlightened soul views the transgressions of humankind—both those in general and those specifically against him. He sees them simply as the actions of ignorant people— infants. The *àtma-jñànì* will never hit back when hit or insult back when insulted. He will never harbor any thoughts of spite or revenge. He will never malign the character of the person attacking him. Not only that, he may not even stop helping such people. He simply accepts their actions, never having expected them to act any differently in the first place.

There is a famous story Amma sometimes tells that demonstrates this quality of the enlightened soul. A *mahàtmà* saw a scorpion drowning by the bank of a river. He immediately reached down and scooped it out to save it. Immediately, he was stung and dropped it. Again he picked it up, and again he was stung. Yet, he picked it up a third time. At this point, a passerby asked the *mahàtmà* why he was helping the creature despite its actions. The *mahàtmà* replied, “It is the scorpion’s nature to sting; it is my nature to help.”

In the story, the *mahàtmà* has no expectations regarding the scorpion. Amma says, in fact, it is from our unrealistic expectations with regard to the behavior of other people that a lot of our anger and desire for revenge come. She says that we should drop these expectations. In her own words, “See a frog as a frog and an elephant as an elephant. Don’t try to make the cat into a dog or a dog into a cat.” The *mahàtmà* knows that very few people have self-knowledge and even fewer have assimilated that knowledge fully. Thus, most simply act according to their tendencies. Some have cultivated good tendencies and thus are capable of acting in a responsible manner. Some are trying to do this but have yet to accomplish it. Others are still completely in the grip of their selfish desires. Understanding that this is the nature of the world, the *mahàtmà* accepts everything as God’s play. Sometimes, God’s play is a comedy, sometimes a tragedy. Regardless, the *mahàtmà*, like a dispassionate audience member, simply witnesses, never giving the play any more reality than it deserves.

When explaining this quality, Sri Éaêkara says that even when the *àtma-jñànì* is physically or verbally abused, he remains unperturbed.This implies a mind in which reaction to insult and violence does not enter even as an impulse to be swiftly rejected. Such complete patience and forgiveness are only possible as effects of fully assimilating *àtma-jñànam*. They are born of the *àtma-jñànì*’s total disidentification with his physical body and total identification with the *àtmà*. When someone is abusing the *àtma-jñànì*, regardless of how he chooses to respond physically or verbally, within he always remains unaffected. It’s like that old joke wherein a police officer sees a man leaning against an illegally parked car and issues him a ticket. The man responds, “If you think I’m moving this car just because you’ve written that ticket, you’re a fool.” The policeman then smashes the car’s headlight and writes another ticket for the newly observed violation. The man says, “I said, ‘You’d be a fool,’ because it’s not my car.” This is how it is when someone tries to get a rise out of the *àtma-jñànì* by insulting him. To him, it’s like the insulter is speaking about someone else.

We may feel that, in some cases, forgiving someone and not feeling hatred at the thought of them, is too much—that only an *àtma-jñànì* is capable of such a thing. However, remember, our mind requires at least a relative amount of all of these qualities in order even to be fit for self-knowledge. As is said in Kaâha Upaniçad:

nàvirato duécaritànnàéànto nàsamàhitaã |

nàéànta-mànaso và’pi prajñànenainam-àpnuyàt ||

One who has not desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are uncontrolled, whose mind lacks concentration, whose mind is unpeaceful, cannot attain this [the self] through knowledge.