

UNDER
THE LIGHT
OF
DIVINE
LOVE



A COLLECTION OF REMINISCENCES
BY THE DEVOTEES OF
SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI MAHARAJ

**UNDER THE LIGHT
OF DIVINE LOVE**



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Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj,
our precious Gurudev, an Incarnation of Divine Love



Our precious Lord, Gurudev,
please give each and every one of us
a place at Your Lotus Feet.

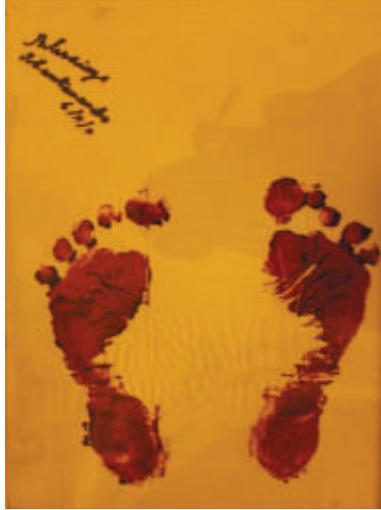
You are our Mother, Father, Friend, Guru and God.

UNDER THE LIGHT OF DIVINE LOVE

An offering of devotion
at the Holy Feet of Divine Love,
Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj,
Vasishtha Guha, Himalayas

By the ever-grateful disciples and devotees of
Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj





My fickle heart fluttered
and hopped down, sought rest
at your feet, where nest
other hearts.

I was welcomed graciously.

In this space we share
some sing joyously
while others listen
steeped in silence.

Before I know it
I am swept
into a luminous sphere
of stillness.

Such is your love, it binds me close, it sets me free.

– Geetha Ravichandran



“Love God to the exclusion of everything else.
Be obsessed and possessed by God day and night.
Think of Him constantly and chant His name.
All your impurities will dissolve
and God will reveal Himself.”

– Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj



A gorgeous halo appears to follow our Divine Gurudev as he steps out of Sri Manakula Vinayagar Temple at Pondicherry

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PREFACE

In *Srimad Bhagavatam*, in Kunti's prayers to Lord Krishna, Kunti narrates the various incidents where the Lord has personally come unasked and took her and her family out of dangers in the past. The purpose of these prayers is not to extol the miracles performed by the Omnipotent Lord but remembering such past favours by the Lord is a type of meditation by itself when we concentrate on the Lord.

Similarly the purpose of this book of reminiscences by the devotees of Swami Shantanandaji is not to entertain the reader with various miracles which disciples attribute to him but serves as a type of meditation by reliving those experiences with gratitude and love. Another purpose for remembering all these past experiences is that our enthusiasm in doing our sadhana as advised by the Guru gets rejuvenated and the inspiration is doubled.

Perhaps when many new readers go through these experiences of disciples, it could kindle their interest and curiosity to take the path of spirituality to reap similar or better benefits.

Reshma Krishnakumar, the gifted daughter of the author of *Rays of Grace*, Rohini Krishnakumar, has spearheaded this project to success with help from Venkiteswaran, Kalpagam Sarma, Arjun Balachandran, Sai Guhapriya, Babita Kapoor, Babu Sethuraman,

Geetha Ravichandran, Rohini Krishnakumar, Deepti Ahuja, N. Arpana, and Pronti Bordoloi.

This wonderful team is to be specially thanked for having thought of this offering. Kalpagam Sarma called all the devotees and disciples, and even persuaded some reluctant devotees to record their experiences and then handed over their articles to Reshma for compiling them into a book. Reshma selflessly took up the task of formatting, embellishing and editing the book singlehandedly despite her on-going exams and submitted it for printing in a short period of time with her relentless perseverance and intense devotion. Babita Kapoor gave her time for editing as well. Geetha Ravichandran shared her two most beautiful poems. Last but not the least, Mr. D.N. Anand, IAAS (Retd) who constantly encouraged us with timely advice and unconditional support can never be thanked enough.

Ultimately, it is the infinite and compassionate LOVE of the Supreme Lord and our GURUDEV that created a desire for this project and also saw it through.

Hari Om



INTRODUCTION

Swamiji tells us that the Guru is the Antaratma. Each disciple's connection with the Guru is unique. However a common tenor runs through the varied experiences shared in this book. And that is the resonance of love. Swamiji gives his inexhaustible love to all in such large measures. The words in this book can thus only hope to convey a fleeting glimpse of that infinitude.

Swamiji has drawn to himself, several aspirants from different walks of life. As the pages of this book reveal, each person has sought out Swamiji for different reasons. Some have come to him with doubts and scepticism; some out of curiosity; some with troubles. Swamiji has without distinction enfolded everyone in his love. He has fulfilled their desires, consoled the despairing, protected the vulnerable and saved his disciples from danger and disaster. At the same time he has so skillfully, so unfailingly opened the hearts and minds of the people who surround him, to the divinity within. The sheer presence of Swamiji is divine grace.

The articles in this book are the flowers that have bloomed in Swamiji's garden. They all confess to the nurturing and care they have received. The flowers in this bouquet reflect a myriad hues and are all fragrant. Swamiji, we are indeed the fragrant flowers in your garden. As Amarjeet Singh puts it beautifully – “We are all flowers in the garland around Swamiji's neck.”



**UNDER THE LIGHT
OF DIVINE LOVE**



1. IN THE DIVINE SHADE OF LOVE

– Rohini Krishnakumar

The compassion and blessings of a Master envelope his disciples at all times, like a Divine shade which protects one from all dangers, thereby helping us cross the ocean of samsara. Experiences or the so-called 'miracles', which a disciple is fortunate to enjoy, are reminders from the Supreme that He is present with the disciple at all times. Just as a physician prescribes medication in its required quantity which varies from one patient to another, the Guru's teachings are unique for each of His disciples. Even when the disciple forgets his duties, the Guru never leaves the disciple's hand. Instead, the Master always proves to His disciple that He remains as his immortal Guardian.

Given below is a perfect example of how the compassion of the Guru works, breaking all the constraints of space and time.

All my life, after I received my Diksha from my Guru, can be considered as one unique experience. Some of my experiences have already been narrated in my book named *Rays of Grace*.

Last year in October, 2012, I went to Sri Ramanasramam at Tiruvannamalai. The precious photo of my Gurudev with whom I converse freely and get all my problems solved was with me. I had kept it underneath the pillow of my Gurudev but I forgot to tell Him about it. My purpose of keeping it

was to get it charged with my Guruji's direct vibrations. One day when my Gurudev suddenly removed his pillow, He saw the photo with its top mirror cracked radially to all its corners. I was dismayed and began to wail and weep loudly like a child. All the people tried to console me on seeing my plight. Abir (a fellow devotee from Assam) took the photo from my hand and went directly to the bazaar, got it quickly framed with unbreakable glass, brought it back and handed it over to me. Still I continued to be unhappy and I considered it as a bad omen, portending some danger or calamity. I continued to be restless.

That night my husband rang me up from Dubai and narrated this incident – He was driving at high speed, and changing the track midway is prohibited as a rule as it



*Gurudev and Rohini Krishnakumar,
the author of Rays of Grace*

might cause appalling accidents. While driving, suddenly he was impelled by a compulsive feeling that he must immediately cross to the low speed track. Involuntarily, he crossed over to the low speed track and luckily he did not cause any accidents. But within a second or two, there was a chain of crashes of fast-moving cars in the high speed track he just left. Vehicles were thrown up in the air like fire balls. Due to some reason, somewhere in the middle of the track, one car had hit the car in the front violently and thus it resulted in a chain of car crashes. About six or seven people died on the spot and some were wounded. My husband Krishnakumar was transfixed with horror. How could he guess the reason why his Gurudev had prompted him to change his track! On hearing this incident I rushed to my Gurudev's room and narrated the whole incident to him. Oh Gurudev! Please continue to protect us like this every moment in the future.



2. SRI GURU MAHARAJ – COMPASSION INCARNATE

– Gulam

KRISHNAYA VASUDEVAYA
HARAYE PRAMATMANE
PRANATA KLESA NASAYA
GOVINDAYA NAMO NAMAHA
SRI GURUBHYO NAMAHA

One of the frequently quoted lines of Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj, the Guru of our Guru Maharaj, is: “What are we seeking?” “Bliss!”

Yes. Our Guru Maharaj is the super bazaar of BLISS. Most people who have had the fortune of meeting Sri Guru Maharaj at least once in their lifetime and lucky to hear his nectarine words will always fondly cherish the meeting and the joy they experienced in his presence.

Sri Guru Maharaj is a rare Guru. His approach to everything is deeply rooted in SASTRAS. He is an ideal example of an ACHARAYA who is a SROTRIYA and BRAHMANISHTA. At the same time, he is very unorthodox and this is evident from scores of youngsters who spend hours and days at his feet with admiration in their eyes, awe and reverence on their faces and joy in their hearts.

Let me explain this further. Three or four years back our Master was staying at Sri Anandji's house. It appears that in the room where he was to stay for the night, one of

the books of the popular Harry Potter series was lying on the table. As we all know, Maharaj never reads newspapers, magazines nor does he watch TV; he had no idea about this popular book series. Before retiring to sleep, Sri Maharaj flipped through a few pages of the book and got an idea of the contours of the story. Next day he had to address a group of students from several schools and colleges promoted by a group of educational institutions at a function. The audience of youngsters was astonished to see an eighty-year-old, ochre-clad Swamiji with a flowing white beard, twinkling eyes and a sonorous voice describing the good character of the hero, Harry Potter – qualities like courage, truthfulness, willingness to fight for the right and for the sake of camaraderie, and urging to emulate the hero and imbibe these positive qualities.

One of the attributes of the attribute-less (Brahman) is SOULABHYAM (easy to approach/get). Swamiji's door is always open to whoever wants to come in. He being AVYAJA KARUNA MOORTHI (Compassion Incarnate) – verily our Divine Mother, his doors are always open, his mobile phone is always switched on with a loud ring tone, and this writer has witnessed people calling him late at night seeking solace.

Our Gurudev entertains all the four types of seekers, i.e. AARTAH, ARTHARTHI, IJNASU and JNANI (those in distress, seekers of worldly benefits, the curious who want to know about the SASTRAS as well as serious spiritual aspirants). This writer is fortunate to witness the skilful way in which our Master treats each type of seeker, like a single-man orchestra where a musician plays several instruments simultaneously and creates perfect symphony of unparalleled beauty and Grace.

Swamiji is a storyteller par excellence of stories from Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, life stories of great Masters of yesteryears like Sankara, Ramanuja, Sri Ramakrishna, etc. Stories from the Holy Bible, Buddhist, Zen, Sufi Scriptures, and the Holy Koran flow from his lips flawlessly. The beauty is that every new narrative of the same story assumes a new form, suitable for the context and full of humor mingled with deep truth, obvious as well as subtle. Hearing a story from Sri Gurudev every time is a SADHANA in itself for the listener.

I am totally convinced that when Sri Vedavyasa wrote VASUDEVA SARVAMITI, SA MAHATMA SUDURLABHAHA, he meant great Masters like our Guru Maharaj.

Many of us know that one method of identifying a JIVANMUKTA is the sheer happiness and peace one experiences in his presence. Many of my friends who are fortunate to spend time at Sri Maharaj's Feet will understand the true meaning of this.

When Lord Krishna entered Mathura along with Balabhadra and led by Akrura, various people envisioned him according to their mental makeup. Vasudeva and Devaki saw their eighth-born son and Devaki felt like breast-feeding the Lord. The young ladies of the city saw Kamadeva himself coming in. Kamsa and his cronies observed the God of death walking in. This applies to our Maharaj also. Many devotees see him as the Divine Mother. Some see him as Parthasarathi with a whip in his hand giving Gitopadesa to a despondent Arjuna. Some even see him as a child to be taken care of with love. Many South Indians see Kanchi Paramacharya or Bhagawan Ramana in him. Some from the North see him as Sri Purushottamanandji Maharaj. Many a times, his words

and actions bring in the remembrance of our Thakur, Sri Ramakrishna, always talking of the glories of the Lord, sharing his food with one and all, narrating several anecdotes, etc. Recently, a South Indian Vaishnava Master exclaimed: “Sri Shantananda Puri is the real Maharaj. He is the Maharaj of SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM. When I see him, I feel like SRIMAD BHAGAVATAM has grown hands and feet and is standing there with a mischievous smile to bless us.”

Sri Gurudev, this one is unable to continue this blabbering. Even Lord Anantha with thousand hoods and two thousand tongues cannot describe Thy glory. Words fail and the mind is unable to approach.

Oh Maharaj! Continue to pour Thy Grace on us always.

Oh Compassionate One! Lead us through the right path.

Oh Lord! You are the expert puppet-Master. Please make your puppets play our role in this drama properly, please make us vanish behind the veil of Maya and merge in YOU.

SAMSARA SAGARE MAGNAM
DEENAM MAM KARUNANIDHE
KARMA GRAHA GARHITHANGAM
MAM UDHARA BHAVARNAVAT

(I am immersed in the ocean of worldliness. Oh, Compassionate One! My position is pathetic. The crocodile of worldly karma has bitten me. Lift me from this ocean of worldliness with THY GRACE.)

GURU MAHARAJ GURU JAY JAY
PARABRAHMA SADGURU JAY JAY



3. MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH MY GURUDEV

– Ajata

“Aham Brahmaasmi” “Remain as the Brahman and wake up to the Reality.” - Swami Shantananda Puri in his book, Instant Self-Awareness.

My name is Carmen Negoescu, also known by my spiritual name, Ajata. I am from Romania, working since 2000 as a General Manager for a Swiss Branch in Romania and Moldavia. I had the good fortune of meeting Gurudev in 2003. Since then, I am a devotee of Gurudev. His Love and blessings constantly pour into my life and everywhere I walk, His Grace is accompanying me. My heart is full of joy and gratitude for this most unexpected encounter with Him.

Every meeting with Gurudev miraculously touches my heart with profound teachings and deep insights. Writing about Him is not an easy task as the words cannot express my deepest gratitude in comparison to the vivid experiences I have had with Him. It is challenging to choose a topic for this book of reminiscences about Him as there are so many amazing miracles He performed in my life. I will narrate about the magical experience of my first meeting with Gurudev, an event which goes back ten years in time.

2003 – Meeting with my beloved Gurudev

For more than a year before my meeting with Gurudev, I was very restless. I was struggling to understand what happiness is and why I was feeling so incomplete, although having everything that I previously thought would make me happy. I strived and worked for a good career, car, house, relationship, money, travelling abroad, loving parents, etc. Yet my heart was puzzled and kept asking questions such as “Who am I?” “What is happiness?” “Why is it that everything I have gathered does not fulfill me?” “Why do people around me cannot make me happier?” “What is the real purpose of life?” “Why are we born and why do we die?” Every day I would ask these questions. With anxiety in my heart, I began to pray fervently to God, searching for answers.

I had a chance meeting with Ajati, presently Swami Ajatananda Puri, who introduced me to India and Advaita Vedanta. Finally, peace started to trickle in my heart. I knew I was on the right path to find the answers I was looking for. This was the first sign of Grace and the starting point of my love story with “my India” as well as the beginning of the journey back Home.

9th of July 2003 – First vision of Gurudev

I was travelling to Italy on a work assignment. I had to take the train from Milano to Padova for the management meeting. I started reflecting on the teachings about our true nature. My heart was bursting with the desire to know more about who I really am. Something inside me began to shift deeply. I had a clear feeling that this is the beginning of a new page in my life, and it felt so right. I was experiencing strong emotions and was unable to stop the tears rolling down my face. Though the people around me

saw my emotional state, yet I was unable to stop the flow of tears or fully understand what was going on inside me.

On reaching Padova I checked into the hotel and had two hours to wait for my business meeting. Feeling quite tired, I decided to rest for a while. As I put my head down on the pillow, I fell into deep sleep. It was then that I had the following dream:

I saw myself in a sunny place. This place looked like an open yard with a few trees and graded gravel on the ground. In the background, I could see a house with a porch and a few pillars. On my left, there were two small monuments, both having metal grills. In front of me, Swami Ajatananda appeared with another man. They were both levitating in the lotus posture. The unknown man was an elderly monk with immense shining eyes and a shaved head. Swami Ajatananda said to him: "Please meet Carmen." At the time I did not have a spiritual name. The older monk greeted me with a broad smile.

Suddenly awakened from sleep, I had strong feeling that this was not just a dream, because it felt so real. I wondered where the place was, who this man was who looked at me so serenely and with so much Love? I searched the memory chip of my mind but I could not find any answers.

18th of July 2003 – Second vision – Arunachala

A few days later, I came back to Romania and started my usual day-to-day life. I kept reflecting about this dream and realizing how deeply my heart was touched by this beautiful monk. One day as I sat in meditation I had the following vision:

I was hovering above from where I could very clearly see a winding stony path leading up to a strange mountain

with unusual trees. Gracefully, from the sky a beautiful red rose fell very slowly and gently on this path.

Again, although I could not reconcile the place with an image from my memory, it seemed familiar. At that time, I felt a burning desire to visit India and the sacred mountain of Arunachala, about which I had heard. On 7th of August I embarked on the greatest adventure of my life. Inexplicably, it felt like going back home. The starting point of my first journey to India was Tiruvannamalai.

9th of August – Meeting Gurudev in person

Reaching Tiruvannamalai, I experienced again the feeling of returning home. A strong and sweet energy was enveloping my heart. My wish was to climb to the top of Arunachala and meet with Swami Ajatananda's Guru about whom he talked with so much love. My heart was trembling with the thought of finally meeting a true Master.

Climbing the mountain was a marvelous experience. Getting closer to the heart of the sacred mountain, I was astonished to see the stony path and trees just like they appeared to me in meditation. I felt sacred vibrations of the mountain. I felt very grateful as I began to finally understand the significant events happening in my life leading up to my visit to Arunachala.

Coming down from the mountain, I felt so energized. From the terrace of Daya Dharmam I could enjoy the quiet beauty of Arunachala. I started reading *Fragrant Flowers*, the autobiography of Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj. As I read, I realized that the Sanskrit words, which were earlier difficult to remember and pronounce, seemed mysteriously easy and familiar.

A few hours later, Swami Ajatananda and I went to see Swami Shantananda Puri. When we reached Sri Ramanasramam, another surprise was waiting to unfold: the place in my first vision, when I was introduced to the elderly monk was right there! I recognized the house, the porch and pillars and the two monuments, which later I found out are Samadhi tombs made for Bhagawan Ramana's pet crow, cow, deer and dog.

Entering the room of Swami Shantananda Puri and seeing him, I realized that he was the elderly monk from my dream-vision. I kneeled in Pada namaskar for the first time in this life in front of the One who was to become my beloved and treasured Gurudev. I understood that I was given the boon to “see” him in the dream before meeting with him in person and understanding thus the fantastic connection, already preordained by Ishwara. I was speechless; what could I have said about this avalanche of Grace in my life, of whose gigantic greatness I could not fully comprehend at that time?

Swami Shantananda greeted me with a broad smile and made a sign to sit down. He was in mouna, the vow of silence. In that space of quietness and filled with his Love, I suddenly heard the Mahavakya “Aham Brahmaasmi”; it was an arrow that pierced me in the middle of my chest. A deeper peace was dawning upon me. Through His Grace, I was experiencing a state of blissfulness, a deep peace; all mental agitations disappeared, there were no questions, no thoughts, and no worries. I felt free, without any limitations. I was speechless! Any attempt to describe this state would fall short.

Before our departure, Gurudev wrote on a piece of paper and handed over to me, again with a big smile:

“When once you come to Arunachala, you will come again and again. May you have a long life. All my blessings. Swami Shantananda.” My heart was genuinely moved and my eyes filled with tears. We went outside to take a picture in the same yard where I saw Gurudev in my vision-dream. This picture is the icon of my first meeting with Gurudev, the symbol of Ishwara's Grace manifested as my teacher. Gurudev's words come true as always as I have been visiting India and Arunachala every year since 2003, sometimes even twice a year.

Until I met with my Guru, I did not know the experience of pure Love. After meeting with Him, my whole life changed and a deeper understanding dawned upon me. Through the years, Gurudev has showered me with his unending Love and compassion. I feel Gurudev so close to my heart. He is my best friend on earth. Every meeting, every discussion with Gurudev, every second spent in His presence feels like a direct encounter with Ishwara. His teachings are gems that answer all spiritual questions, eliminating doubts and dispelling fears and sorrows. Gurudev compassionately answers our day-to-day questions with practical solutions. His pearls of wisdom are reaching the heart of the seekers in a unique way, transforming each of us. In any form the answer comes, it leads us to the Ultimate. Many times, with the sweetest voice, Gurudev said to me: “Ajata, even if the sky were to fall on you, do not get disturbed, remain at peace. Don't forget that everything is a dream; remain as witness in the totality, there is nothing to gain and nothing to lose. Be the watcher in the tower. Be happy. Remain with no thoughts, no likes, and no dislikes. Think of Consciousness, this is the only thing that matters.” Amazing Grace flows constantly from Him to all who come near Him.

Gurudev, You are everything to me: Mata, Pita, Guru, and Deva. You are my Divine Mother, Divine Father, Beloved Guru and my God. I humbly bow to Your velvet Lotus Feet in deep gratitude. Please bless me with Your guidance and Grace and lead me to the ultimate goal in life: moksha. We pray that You will to be in this Divine Form and grant us your Divine presence and unending wisdom.

OM TAT SAT



Gurudev with his Romanian disciple, Ajata



4. REQUEST IN THE DREAM, INITIATION IN THE WAKING STATE

– Swami Ajatananda Puri

OM Namō Narayanaya! Hari OM!

This is the narrative of Swami Ajatananda Puri, a Romanian disciple and about his initiation into Mantra Diksha and Sanyasa Diksha, received from Gurudev Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj in India.

My first meeting with Gurudev Swami Shantananda Puri took place during my stay at Sri Ramanasramam in 1999. I was in the Ashram from 14th May to 15th July and Gurudev arrived around 1st of July. I was introduced to Gurudev by Nochur Venkataraman from Kerala who was visiting the Ashram during that time. The meeting was short and we talked very briefly about my interest in Advaita Vedanta. Subsequently we parted to different areas in the Ashram. After 15th July I rented a room in Ramana Nagar area near the Ashram and attended some of Gurudev's lectures offered in Ramanasramam's New Hall. We never spoke after our meeting in July.

On 27th September 1999, I had a dream that would change the course of my life. It was on a Monday morning. In the dream I went to the New Hall and waited in front of the door for Gurudev to come out after finishing his discourse. As he walked out, I approached him and asked

for his permission to speak privately with him. He agreed upon which I asked him the following question:

“Would you accept me as your disciple?”

After I asked this question, I heard an inner voice (which I considered for many years as the voice of inner Sadguru, Ishwara, and Sarvajnya) saying: “Why do you need an embodied Guru when you have had an inner Guru all along your spiritual quest?” Upon hearing this inner voice, I said to myself: “Yes, for twelve years I did not need an embodied Guru, but then why did I ask this question?”

After pondering for a few seconds and realizing that Gurudev did not answer either 'yes' or 'no', suddenly I woke up. I dismissed my dream experience saying, “Forget it, it was just a dream, only in a dream you could ask this question but not in the waking state.”

In the meantime I continued with my sadhana. But soon I realized that this dream did not give me peace and a force from within was sending me to Ramanasramam to meet Gurudev and ask him the question from my dream. Between the morning hours and afternoon, I had to struggle with this strong impulse from within which was pushing me toward the Ashram to ask the question. With a herculean effort, I managed to stay in the room up to 4:30pm. Shortly afterward I found myself urgently riding on my bicycle toward Ramanasramam. I went straight to the New Hall and as soon as Gurudev came out, I approached him and asked him if I could talk to him in private. It was Déjà vu all over as I found myself enacting my dream to the very last detail. I addressed him, again with the question: “Would you accept me as your disciple?”

Soon after, I explained the context of my question explaining to him about my dream and the fact that getting

no answer from him in my dream had compelled me to ask the same question in the waking state. Smiling he said: "So, you asked me the question in the dream and because you did not get any reply you came to ask the same question in the dream number two -waking state?" We had a good laugh together! He said: "I cannot give you the answer today – it was Monday – but let us see how we feel about it next Saturday. Meet me in the Ashram and then I will decide."

We met on Saturday after five days, and I told Gurudev that I had the same question and I only requested him to give me a simple answer "yes" or "no". We walked towards his room and on the way he asked me: "What do you think about Bhagawan Ramana's statement that there is no real Guru, no real student and no real teaching?" I replied that I know his statement, I agree with it and I had the same view but I still need an answer in order to cancel out the question. Hearing this, Gurudev said: "If you are aware of this statement and if you agree with this view, then it is fine; let it happen. It has to happen because of our previous connection." At this point I understood that the answer to my question was "yes".

Then Gurudev said: "Come tomorrow morning at 7am and knock on my door and you will receive the traditional initiation in my room." Next day the Mantra Diksha initiation took place in his room at Sri Ramanasramam. During the initiation, Gurudev spoke a bit about another type of initiation called Sanyasa Diksha.

In the spring of 2000, I asked Gurudev for Sanyasa Diksha. He said that it was too early, too close to the first initiation and asked me to wait another ten years.

The second request for initiation into Sanyasa happened in the autumn of 2000 and I was given the same answer, “You have to wait ten years and after that we will see.”

During the third attempt in the spring of 2001 Gurudev told me: “It is still too early and you should not be in a hurry and run after Sanyasa but rather you should wait for a while and let Sanyasa run after you. If it runs faster, it will catch you.”

So, it happened that I did not search for Sanyasa after this third attempt. It did not interest me anymore.

Ten years passed by and in January 2011, while living in Tiruvannamalai, I again felt the call for Sanyasa. In February, the call had become quite intense and so in March, I spoke with Gurudev on the phone about this matter and reminded him: “Gurudev, those ten years have expired.”



Gurudev blesses Swami Ajatananda with Mantra Diksha

He asked me: “Which ten years?” I said: “You know, last time in 2001 you recommended me to wait ten years for Sanyasa.” Then Gurudev immediately remembered



Gurudev initiates Swami Ajatananda into Sanyasa

it and said: “Oh, those ten years! Did they pass so quickly?” I said: “It looks so.” After this he said: “Come to Vasishtha Guha Ashram in April when I will be there the whole month and I shall see what I decide.”

On the 7th of April 2011, I reached Rishikesh and Vasishtha Guha Ashram when Gurudev decided to initiate me into Sanyasa. After entering Gurudev's room, I did full Namaskaar and sat on the floor. Gurudev then said: “I know why you came; now is the right time to receive Sanyasa!”

The Sanyasa initiation ceremony took place from 2am to 5am on 18th of April 2011 (full moon day) at Haridwar, inside Surat Giri Bangla Ashram, on the banks of Holy Ganga Maa.

I am infinitely grateful to my Gurudev Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj for what he did for me and for making me part of the Advaita Vedanta tradition!

OM Sri Gurubhyo Namaha!

OM TAT SAT



5. MY ETERNAL GUHA

– Vikramaditya Raval

As a young boy of 18, I was not much into spirituality or knew much about God to say the least.

I first met my Eternal Guru in 2002, at the Bangalore Shirdi Sai Baba Ashram. I accompanied my mother and that was the first time I touched his Feet not knowing who he was or where he came from. I did not know the impact he would have on my life hence forward.

The next time I saw him was two years later, in 2004. I remember that day vividly, my mother asked me to go with her to Tiruvannamalai as my family was going to see Swamiji. At 21, I was little interested as I found the opportunity to have the whole house to myself exciting. The thought of going to meet a Swamiji did not interest me as much. I remember thinking to myself, “What is there in Tiruvannamalai? It is going to be boring there anyway.”

The time came when my family had packed and were all set to leave but at that moment I changed my mind and I decided to go with them. I am yet to understand what made me take this decision. We reached Tiruvannamalai and straightaway went to see Swamiji in his room. As soon as he saw me enter, he said, “Ah! Aditya has come here to test me!” I was shocked. I did not know how to react. So, I quietly sat down at a distance thinking over his remark and trying to understand his reason for saying so. I was there in his room for over three hours listening to him talking about

God, happiness and our purpose and goal in life. Everything that he said was put in a simple way that it all made sense.

As we left Swamiji's room, I thought about all that he had said for a very long time. The next day there was a change in me, I did not want to leave Tiruvannamalai. I did not want anything else but to be with him at all times. I was convinced with the thought and I told Swamiji, "Swamiji I don't want to go back, I want to be here with you." That is when Swamiji laughed and said, "You have to go, you have to study well and take care of your mother. Don't worry everything will happen." He also said, "Be in the world, yet not of it." He gave me an analogy of how the water in the ocean should not get into the boat. These words of his still remain deep in my heart.

Ever since, I look forward to visiting Tiruvannamalai, and try to go there as often as possible.

Swamiji, how can I ever thank you for all that you have done for me? You have taken care of me step by step!

In another incident, I learnt from a devotee that at 5:30am one day, Swamiji was found carrying a heavy chair from his bathroom to his room. When asked why he was doing so, he replied saying, "That it is for Aditya as he is coming later in the day and cannot sit on the floor." I was touched with his compassion.

Oh my Eternal Guru! With all my heart, I bow to you again and again. It is your Love that has brought me up and it is your Love that will set me free!





*Gurudev with his disciple, Vikramaditya
known fondly as Aditya*

6. FAITH HEALS AND REVIVES

– J.S. Mani

From the time Swami Shantananda Puri became a monk, he blessed us by coming to live with us for a couple of days or so at a time whenever he visited Chennai. My brother, Padmanabha Iyer, was beset with so many ailments like high diabetes, occasional high blood pressure, oedema of the legs, cardiac problems and poor eyesight, (practically blind) etc.

Once it so happened that my brother's health was in a deplorable condition and I had informed Swamiji about it. Swamiji had already planned to come to Chennai as usual for a couple of days. On hearing the news of my brother's condition, he immediately changed his program and came to our house to be with us for about seven to eight days. I would sleep on the floor in my brother's bedroom while Swamiji used to stay in the room opposite to it. During one of these nights, suddenly my brother fell down from the cot unconscious. As I had some knowledge of pulse beat, I checked his pulse and found it to be nil. I was shocked and shouted to Swamiji to come there immediately. Swamiji rushed to my brother's room, lifted him and kept my brother's head on his lap and a little loudly, called, "Mr. Padmanabha Iyer, you are only sleeping. Come on, get up." With my limited knowledge of medical science, I was 100% certain that my brother was already dead. On hearing Swamiji's voice, he got up. I certainly swear that this was the most astonishing case of a revival from death.

After another three days or so, the same incident repeated itself. My brother fell down dead on the floor and his entire body became cold and his pulse had stopped. I called Swamiji who again kept my brother's head on his lap and called on him to get up. This time again to my astonishment, my brother sat up and he was revived immediately. Then Swamiji took me aside and told me in NO UNCERTAIN TERMS that the next time when a similar thing happens to my brother, he could not be revived anymore and it will be his final end. This proved to be true much later on.

It is impossible to narrate the numerous occasions in which the very remembrance of Swamiji has protected us from the various impending perils. Whenever I or Anjali (the maid who has been assisting in looking after the house for more than 15 years) have confronted a serious problem of any nature, we just pray before the photo of Swamiji and our problems are never solved but dissolved instantly. I dare to say that our day-to-day life is running smoothly because of the visible or invisible presence of Swamiji in our midst. I ever remain personally grateful to HIM for all he has done for us.



7. HUES OF GRACE

– Arpana Caur

Please pardon me for not being good with words. I do try my hands with colours and in images. So I will try to express in my limited way, about our dear Swamiji, so dear to us all, in the above language.

Saffron, the colour of abstinence of all worldly things, in the process embraces the rare joy of the Lord's rose-coloured Feet. A luminous orb of light mysteriously follows Swamiji. It is taller than his frame. It is made of ether, cool as ice, and has been captured on various occasions.

Swamiji's other colour is the pure white, colour of compassion for us all lesser beings. He knows each one's joys and sorrows, family ties and professional compulsions, embraces them all in that lithe frame of his, which is ever on the move untiringly. Two nights' train journey leaves no mark on him. He is fresh as a flower.

In that Ashram in Haridwar where he lay for months, bricks dangling from a fractured limb, he was still fresh as a daisy, the same twinkle in his eyes. Before we arrived from Delhi, instructions had been given for a hot meal and a room to rest in before we took the train back. Even in that state, he thought only of others.

When Amarjeet first took my mother and me to meet him in Aurobindo Ashram a decade ago, I had seen a flower

drop from the air and fall near him as he sat laughing full of little stories and jokes, the flower of his being emits a fragrance that envelops all who come into the orbit of his Compassion. And there are thousands. May he live long and inject us with his energy and his joy, our dear Swamiji!



8. SRI SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI – A BEACON LIGHT OF JNANA AND VAIRAGYA

– D.N. Anand

It was sometime in the year 1996 that my wife and I had been to Anandashram near Kanhangad, Kerala. One night, when we were in the Dining Hall, I noticed a Sadhu, whose face was aglow with Divine effulgence, with eyes full of all-encompassing compassion. He just had a glass of milk and left the dining hall. On enquiries, I learnt that the Sadhu was H.H. Sri Shantananda Puri Maharaj from Himalayas and he was observing Mouna (silence) during which period he would not eat anything in the night. I immediately thought of buying some bananas and offering them to Revered Swamiji. I went to his room, placed the bananas at his Feet and did Pranams at his Lotus Feet and took leave of him silently. After a couple of days, when Pujya Swamiji had broken his Mouna, we had his Darshan and introduced ourselves to him. Swamiji was very happy to hear that I had retired from the same Department from which he had also retired. He then told me that if he were not in Mouna, he would not have allowed the bunch of bananas to be left in his room as he never kept anything for the next day. I had read a lot about Vairagya (detachment) but had not met anyone who was practicing it to such a minute extent. Then and there, I became a great admirer of Him and my devotion for Him flowed instantly. I requested him to come and stay with us whenever he came to Bangalore. Swamiji was full of compassionate to

accept my request. We are singularly fortunate in having Revered Swamiji in our house whenever he visits Bangalore.

We found Revered Swamiji to be a Scholar par excellence in Vedic Scriptures as well as in the Puranic texts. He is extremely thorough in everything and has the very rare capacity of communicating his views convincingly.



Gurudev with our most loving Mr. Anand

In the year 1997, I had been to Chennai to attend a Board meeting. Very close to my guest house in Kotturpuram stayed Sri Padmanabha Iyer, a very noble person with thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, with mastery over *Srimad Bhagavatam*. He was very dear to His Holiness Sri Shantananda Puri Swamiji and naturally we became close to each other very soon. One evening, when I was with him, a small packet of papers was received by him from Pujya Sri Shantananda Puri Swamiji. He told me that Swamiji had sent a summary of his talks on *Srimad Bhagavatam* with a request that a few copies

thereof might be sent to him for circulation among his devotees in the North. I took those papers to the guest house for reading in the night. To my utter amazement I found them very inspiring and ennobling. Next day when I met Sri Iyer, I told him that God willing we would have the book printed at Bangalore. Call it Divine Mother's Grace or Swamiji's remote control or both, I could find a sponsor who volunteered to finance the printing of the books. Immediately, there were offers to get it translated into Kannada and Telugu. Thus started Parama Pujya Swamiji's publications and so far about 50 books have been published. Financial assistance has come readily from various corners. Sri Venkatesh Babu, owner of Omkar Offset Printers, has been printing all the books of our Swamiji with great love and ensuring they are despatched as per the mailing list given by Revered Swamiji.

Pujya Swamiji is a prolific writer and he has just to sit down and words - inspired and dynamic - cascade through his fingers on to paper with effortless ease. What a variety of themes Swamiji has worked on. All his books are unique in that they provide the reader with a systematic check-list so that he could gauge his spiritual progress from time to time.

Swamiji has transformed the lives of hundreds of devotees. Dissemination of spiritual knowledge has been Swamiji's foremost goal. To know Revered Swamiji is a blessed privilege and to be associated with him closely is one's fortune.

I and all the members of my family offer our humble Pranams at the Lotus Feet of Revered Swamiji.



9. MY EXPERIENCES WITH SWAMIJI

– Mrs. A

“EXPERIENCE”, that's precisely the term I have to use if I have to talk about Swamiji.

I have read in various philosophical books that the entire Universe is a Cosmic play of the Supreme Lord and all that happens in the universe is nothing but an enactment of the Divine script. I was blessed to have a first-hand experience of the same, with the occurrence of a chain of events in my life, leading to an existential crisis and finally culminating in my meeting Swamiji. Till I met Swamiji, I had only intellectual knowledge about various concepts regarding spirituality, Gurus, evolved souls, and the like. Ever since I came under Swamiji, I feel blessed to be able to clearly see all the conceptual knowledge being transformed into a first-hand experience.

My first meeting with Swamiji was at Vasishtha Guha in the Himalayas. Hailing from the Southern part of India, I had never heard of this place - Vasishtha Guha. My visit was arranged in such an unusual manner, where for the first time in my life, my sister and I travelled with a group of friends consisting only of ladies, almost to the other end of the country.

When my aunt came to know about our proposed visit to Haridwar and Rishikesh, she insisted on us visiting a place called Vasishtha Guha. We had no idea about the

place nor did we bother to find out about its significance but the very name of the place, appealed to us greatly. We expressed our desire to the group and yet we were not very sure whether this could be included in the itinerary which had been finalized long ago. We went to Rishikesh on the second day of our trip and visited many temples in and around the place. From the moment I set foot in Rishikesh, I had an intuitive feeling that I am going to meet a Sadhu, who might play a major role in transforming the course of my life. Nevertheless I did not have the slightest clue about where and how I would meet this person. So I kept looking diligently at each and every sadhu who crossed my path, not wanting to miss him at any cost. The day passed normally and there was yet no sign of meeting anyone, the thought of it also started to fade away slowly. By evening, our big group was split into many small ones so that each could visit their respective places of interest; my sister and I opted to go to Vasishtha Guha. Vasishtha Guha was right on the lap of Mother Ganga! It cannot be explained in words. It can only be experienced. Let me not make any futile attempt to describe its divinity and eternal beauty.

My sister and I went inside the Guha and were given a wonderful introduction about the Guha by a brahmachari who was present there. We were to report to our group in an hour's time and decided that we shall meditate for half an hour inside the Guha and after that we shall visit Arundhati Guha. We started to meditate and lost hold on our sense of time. I was brought back to my senses with the gentle touch of my sister and we came out of the Guha. We were surprised to notice that we meditated exactly for half an hour and upon asking my sister how she knew that exactly half an hour was over, she said she too had no idea and that she too was just made to open her eyes at that particular time. As it was dark inside the cave, there was no

chance for us to know the time from our time piece. Again, it was only the Divine that guided us.

We saw the same brahmachari talking to a group of three people outside the Guha. We proceeded towards him to enquire about the way to go to Arundhati Guha. As we were nearing him, we heard him say, "I am also a sadhaka; I can't give you any spiritual guidance. We have our Swamiji here. Due to his ill-health, we are restricting the public from meeting him. I will find out whether you can meet him now." My sister and I looked at each other after hearing this and instantly had the urge to meet the Swamiji along with the other group. Little did I know at that point of time that the Sadhu of my intuitions is none other than our Guru, Swamiji!

The brahmachari came with a positive message that we could meet Swamiji. My sister and I were the first ones to enter the room. Swamiji welcomed us showing much familiarity with a Divine, compassionate, contagious, childlike smile. We prostrated before Swamiji and just sat before him. We were literally dumbstruck after seeing Swamiji and our minds were calm. There was absolute stillness. The others were asking certain questions on spiritual practice and Swamiji was explaining in his own inimitable style and eloquence. My sister and I were already initiated into meditative practice and the way the doubts of those persons were cleared by Swamiji, was like recapitulating all that we were practicing. We both remained mute spectators and just enjoyed Swamiji's presence and discourse.

After about 30 minutes of blissful Satsang, just before taking leave, Swamiji asked us where we were from. We replied that we were from South India. Swamiji said

that he also stays in South India for a few months in a year. It did not occur to us to even ask him about where he would be staying in South India. We just stood in awed silence before him.

We came out of the room finally with a heavy heart; the heart refusing to move even an inch away from Swamiji. Outside the room, the Brahmachari was waiting with a book in his hand to be handed over to us. The book was by Swami Purushottamananda Maharajji, Guru Maharaj of Swamiji.

After I received the book from him, I asked the Brahmachari, "What is Swamiji's name?" He smiled and said, "SWAMI SHANTANANDA." He added, "You are very lucky to meet him now. He is leaving in two days." I understood later the reason for such a smile from that Brahmachari. He was amused and surprised at my ignorance of the identity of such a great well-known Divine being.

We left the Ashram, completely intoxicated by Swamiji consciousness. The next day after reaching home, the first thing to do was to search the web to collect details about Swamiji. To my great happiness, I found a treasure trove of discourses of Swamiji. I promptly downloaded them and started to listen to all of his audio discourses. I also came to know that Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai was the place where Swamiji stays for a few months in a year, which is not very far from my place.

Within a week's time, my daughter's summer vacations began. My daughter and I went out of town for about a month. My daughter was moving on to her final year of school. The lack of congenial atmosphere at home made an

adverse impact on her performance in her exams, which drew tremendous pressure from school too. It was not an easy condition for any child of her age to cope with at all. I was very anxious about my daughter.

During the month-long vacation, there arose certain situations which pushed me to the peak of the so-called crisis. Rather than the need for getting any immediate support for myself, I was more concerned about how I could render emotional support to my daughter and assist her in obtaining good scores in her final year of school, which is a career-determining one. Owing to the circumstances prevailing then, this almost took the form of a challenge. I was afraid for my daughter's life, having lost all confidence in my ability to help her; I started having serious doubts whether I would be able to handle the situation well. I did not see any help from human quarters.

In the meantime, a good friend of mine, who came to know about my difficult situation, got in touch with me and suggested that she would consult her family astrologer, who is renowned for his accurate predictions, and is also very reliable, and seek some remedial measures to tackle the difficult situation. Since I was more concerned about my daughter, I asked my friend to check my daughter's situation alone.

The next day, my friend called me over phone and told me about her meeting with the astrologer. I was given to understand that according to my daughter's planetary position prevalent at that point of time, she was to have a tough period ahead. He had also told her that I would have to play a crucial role in order to keep her at peace. He had not given the full predictions to my friend and had asked

me to meet him in person after I return. I became depressed and despondent with a deep sense of helplessness. Yet I did not lose faith in God. I reposed all my faith in the Divine and continued to listen to Swamiji's discourses and yearned to meet him.

On one of those days, I browsed the Internet to find some Vedic Mantras which would give some relief from the situation, especially for my daughter. To my great surprise, I happened to find certain Mantras in a book written by none other than Swamiji. It was a clear message from the Divine that Swamiji is our sole refuge.

I wrote to Ramanasramam and came to know that Swamiji had already reached Ramanasramam from the North of India and that he would continue to be there for the coming months. I was overjoyed on hearing this and my earnestness to go to Swamiji intensified.

My next concern was about my travel to Ramanasramam. It was definitely not possible to obtain permission from my family members for my visit to the Ashram, especially since I was taking my daughter with me. The idea of going to an Ashram, meeting a Swamiji does not surely go well with my family.

I was back from my vacation the same week. To my great surprise, all the other family members were not in town and we came to know that they would be back after four more days. I was amazed to see how the Divine works.

I left the following morning for Ramanasramam with my daughter, not being very sure whether I would be able to meet Swamiji. We reached the Ashram by 11am. I found out from the office Swamiji's room and went in search of Swamiji. As I neared the room, I saw Swamiji locking the

room and leaving with three other persons. I literally ran towards Swamiji leaving behind my daughter and called out "Swamiji".

My Lord heard me and stopped to respond to my call. It seemed so and even in the literal sense. After nearing Swamiji, without even paying the usual obeisance, I started to converse with him saying that I met him in Vasishtha Guha a month ago. Swamiji did not seem to remember our meeting at Vasishtha Guha. In the meantime my daughter came near us.

To this day I do not know what made me utter the following words to Swamiji. "Swamiji! This is my daughter. I came here to hand her over to you. I cannot take care of her any further. She is all yours." I never rehearsed or thought beforehand any of those lines which I spoke to Swamiji. It was purely without my conscious effort that I spoke those words to Swamiji. Later, I realized that it is the Divine that made me speak.

As soon as I finished saying so, Swamiji looked at my daughter for a few moments. He asked us to come back there in an hour's time as he was going for lunch then. I said "Swamiji, we will wait here till you come back as we have come only to meet you."

And then with such motherly affection, Swamiji enquired whether we had lunch. On receiving a reply in the negative, he insisted that we go with him to have Prasad in the Ashram and also ensured that we had our Prasad. My daughter's account of various experiences with Swamiji from this stage of our meeting can be found as a separate entry in the book.

I have no words to explain the sense of relief that I experienced at that particular moment. I felt as though I had attained the greatest freedom. Much later when I read Swamiji's book, *Srimad Bhagavatham and its Message to Modern Man*, I felt that Swamiji came to my rescue literally like Lord Krishna. Swamiji has quoted an anecdote of Lord Krishna in the book and it reads thus: "The Lord rushes to the rescue of an aspirant at the appropriate time and smoothens the way by relieving him of all worldly burdens. I am reminded of an anecdote of Krishna. One Gopi, who had once filled a pitcher with water from a well, requested Krishna who happened to be standing nearby, to lift and place the pitcher on her head. Krishna flatly refused and walked away. After a little while, when the Gopi had managed somehow to carry the pitcher home, Krishna came rushing and voluntarily helped her in placing the pitcher down. On being questioned by the Gopi to explain his perplexing conduct, Krishna answered with a smile: "I do not burden my devotees, but I rush to relieve them of their burden at the proper time." Swamiji is indeed our Krishna, who relieved us from our agonizing situation.

It's not an exaggeration if I say that from that moment the anxiety regarding my daughter was totally removed from my mind. I felt as though in a split second, Swamiji took over all my responsibilities as a mother towards my daughter. I cannot express my gratitude to the Divine in words for having blessed me to take my daughter to the place where she actually belongs. I am convinced that I am just appointed as a caretaker to attend to the needs of my daughter, the real mother being Swamiji. After being with Swamiji for a few hours, we left for our home.

In the meantime, my friend had already fixed an appointment with the astrologer for the following day, who

wanted to meet me in person in connection with my daughter's horoscope. I met him along with my friend with the least amount of anxiety and worries regarding his earlier prediction. To our greatest surprise, he started to say that it is a wonderful period for my daughter. He also said that she has the Grace of the Divine in abundance, which will completely shield and protect her. I did not attempt to seek any explanation from him for his contradicting statements as I knew the exact reason for such a contradiction. Undoubtedly the astrologer was a wonderful, pious soul, practising astrology as a service. I was blessed with yet another opportunity to witness the Divine Play and the Grace of Swamiji.

Though my acquaintance with Swamiji is relatively for a short period, it feels as if I have been with him forever. This feeling reminds me of the eternal nature of the Atman (soul), and that the soul always remains connected to the Source. Each and every moment spent in Swamiji's presence is indeed a unique experience. I have read about the significance of Satsang in great detail. It is said that while being present at the holy Feet of sages, the world disappears. The world does disappear for me when I am with Swamiji. I also learn a lot by just being in the company of Swamiji's disciples. They are the reflection of what Swamiji is, full of love and compassion. I am indeed blessed to experience the nectar of Satsang.

I thoroughly enjoy Swamiji's style of imparting wisdom, which includes relating interesting anecdotes from various Scriptures. Swamiji's repeated advice is "Love everyone and do not hate anyone." When I once expressed that it is

difficult to love the one who hurts me, he explained with a wonderful example:

“A film actor plays a dual role of both RAMA and RAVANA. If the actor is asked to choose the best among RAMA and RAVANA in terms of acting, will he be able to choose one? Is he not the one to have played both the roles? In the same manner, God is in everyone and He plays as each and every one of us. Then where does the question of hatred arise?” Swamiji also says, “The same God is present in a puppy as well as a tiger. You can hug and cuddle the puppy given its relatively tame nature. But you will stay at a distance, far away from the tiger, having understood its wild nature. Do not venture to blame anyone.” It is such a significant advice. When I tried to put it in practice, with the Grace of Swamiji, I felt it was not all that difficult. The very change in the attitude brought much peace and harmony within me to an unbelievable extent irrespective of the external circumstances. From Swamiji, I have learnt that one cannot lead two different lives at any given point of time, i.e. spiritual life and worldly life. All the teachings that are helpful for spiritual development have to be applied wholly in our worldly affairs too.

In yet another circumstance, I asked Swamiji, “Between husband and wife, if only one is spiritually inclined and the other with absolutely no inclination, will not each other's acts result in disharmony? How do we cope with the situation?” Swamiji said, “There is no need to publicise one's spiritual practice. It can be done in the heart.” Saying thus, he quoted the life of the great Sufi Saint Rabbia and the manner in which she practised in a hostile environment, and eventually realized God. He also said, “If we have an earnest love for God, then any sort of hostile environment will turn into a favourable one by the Grace of God.”

Every single wish, whether expressed or unexpressed, gets fulfilled in the presence of Swamiji. A few fellow devotees of Swamiji asked me whether we received Mantra Diksha. Till such time, it never occurred to me that I should ask for Mantra Diksha. I was initiated into meditative practice and Japa by my uncle a few years ago. Hence I was under the impression that I had already received my Mantra Diksha. So I earnestly prayed to Swamiji that my daughter should get Mantra Diksha from him. Shortly thereafter, with Swamiji's Grace, we were blessed to visit Swamiji. My daughter expressed her wish for receiving Mantra Diksha from him. I too requested Swamiji for her Mantra Diksha. After making a witty remark in his unique style, Swamiji asked us to come the following morning for receiving Diksha. After dinner, when we were about to retire to our room, we asked him if there was anything we needed to bring with us the following morning. He told us to get bananas and some unstrung flowers. He said, "Just four bananas for both of you are sufficient." For a moment, I did not understand properly whether Swamiji was talking about my Mantra Diksha too. I informed Swamiji that I have received a Mantra from my uncle and asked if it is permitted to have another one from him. Swamiji asked me what the Mantra was that I was given. Upon hearing the Mantra I received, he said it is not a moksha Mantra and in a firm voice said, "ONE WHO GIVES MOKSHA Mantra IS YOUR GURU." Swamiji is truly a personification of the Divine Mother who knows the exact requirements of Her child. Thus, I received Mantra Diksha in an unexpected manner along with my daughter, on the auspicious day of VAIKUNTA EKADASI from our Lord Himself.

It feels as though my daughter has had a new birth under the tender motherly care of Swamiji. It is such a

delight to witness the interaction between them. She too has this absolute conviction that Swamiji is the One who does everything for her including that of writing her exams for her. There has been a significant improvement in her studies too. She also handles every situation with much confidence and ease. I can say that I have completely been relieved from anxiety and worries regarding her as a mother.

Swamiji exhibits effortlessly the qualities of motherly Love (vatsalyam) and compassion (karunyam) along with being freely accessible to one and all, (saulabhyam) even with his spiritual eminence and stature. As per the Scriptures, the Guru is revered as God Himself. Beholding Swamiji, one cannot have the slightest doubt about it.

Swamiji's every single word is a blessing which will enable me to carry myself through this lifetime. I am grateful to the Divine for having swept me under the Lotus Feet of Gurudev whose influence gives a meaning to my life, a harmony and peace to my heart. Shata Koti Pranams to my Guru Dev, who is my sole refuge.

HARI OM



10. WORDS FROM THE HEART

– Kasthuri

Association with a true Guru for countless number of years is not something which one can get with ease. It certainly requires the accumulation of blessings over several births and also the Guru's sheer Grace. When the Guru becomes the light of love and the shadow of divine protection for a disciple, there isn't any need for pages to talk about him. A few lines from such a disciple is sufficient to serve as a constant inspiration for other spiritual seekers.

It is always true that a person can run short of words to express something either when he doesn't know anything about it or when he has felt it deeply and intensely that he becomes one with it. Similar is the case with the Guru. A person who hasn't got the fortune of being in the divine company of a Master cannot explain about how it is like to have a Master. At the same time, the one who has known him to the fullest finds difficulty in portraying the pure Love with mere words.

I am sure that my association with Poojya Swamiji has been from several earlier births. I did not approach him for getting any material benefits. Just as iron filings get attracted to a magnet, I got attached to Swamiji.



11. MY CRASH COURSE IN SPIRITUALITY

– Arjun Balachandran

It is generally known that the yearning for liberation arises in the heart of an individual only after countless births. Moreover, only an intense yearning is said to melt the heart of the Lord who assumes the form of the Guru in order to place such a seeker on the spiritual path. Such an intense yearning is also generally believed to arise only after several countless births. However, in certain cases of extreme ignorance, the Lord himself, out of his cause-less and infinite compassion, comes as the Guru and conducts a crash-course on spiritual life as a wake-up call. I am a benefactor of such a crash course, organized by my Guru, Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj of Vasishtha Guha Ashram, Himalayas.

I am from a religious background. I never had any spiritual sadhana except the occasional reading of the (Shirdi) Sai Satcharita for a few years preceding 2008. However, I used to enjoy reading the experiences recorded in the Satcharita. I used to wonder how lucky all those people from remote villages were that they could get the blessing of being in the presence of a great Mahatma; a Mahatma, who as a Guru, played various roles in order to firmly establish the disciples on the spiritual path. The book was emphatic – if one wishes to get out of this cycle of repeated suffering (samsara), a Guru is the only solution. At that point, I wondered – “Am I eligible to this privilege?”

For, I never had any yearning for getting out of this samsara or for a spiritual life.

In mid 2007, I visited Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, along with my mother. That was my first visit to an Ashram and to Tiruvannamalai. That visit gave me the opportunity of meeting Swamiji for the first time. His jovial nature greatly impressed me. However, his jokes were all that I could understand and enjoy – I was a thorough alien to spiritual matters. Strangely, that trip had some effect on me. Thereafter, I started reading spiritual books. Coincidentally, I also happened to read Swamiji's book, *Adhyatma Ramayanam*. I enjoyed reading it. By then, I was bursting with doubts on spiritual matters. I strongly felt that Swamiji would definitely be able to clarify my doubts. However, he was in North India then. So I decided that I would wait till 2008. Incidentally, my mother had been visiting Swamiji since 2005. I was well aware of this fact, but never had any inclination to join her in her visits then. Probably, the opportune moment must have arrived only in 2007.

In May 2008, we visited Swamiji in his Ashram room A-1. There I put forward all my doubts and he beautifully clarified all of them. I was greatly impressed by Swamiji's breadth and depth of scriptural knowledge and the conviction in his answers. All my doubts were laid to rest then and there. During that lecture, he happened to mention regarding his Guru, Swami Purushottamananda Puri Maharaj of Vasishtha Guha, and his Guru Parampara. I was already aware of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and his disciple Rakhhal Maharaj.

At the end of the meeting, I asked him some more doubts to which he smilingly replied, "Don't worry, we will

see next time.” I peacefully departed from Tiruvannamalai, knowing that all my doubts would be clarified by Swamiji. Even then, there was no inclination for spiritual sadhana. I was merely a well bubbling with doubts.

Thereafter, the next few months were filled with frequent one-day visits to Tiruvannamalai. I used to sit in his room, listening to his lectures. When the room was empty, I would put forward my questions. At that time, I managed to get a copy of Swamiji's *Fragrant Flowers*, then. That book gave me good insight regarding Swamiji's personal experiences with various Mahatmas. I was impressed by his touching account of his experiences with his Guru. However, what struck me most was Swamiji's intensity in spiritual life, his yearning for a Guru, the arrival of his Guru in his life, the manner in which the Guru-disciple relationship is generally established (including how Swamiji got his Mantra Diksha) and how Gurus can greatly aid and protect the disciple in the latter's spiritual and worldly life.

Till now, I was ignorant regarding the need for a Guru or for obtaining initiation from the Guru. I was entirely satisfied, simply by being in his presence and getting my doubts clarified. I did not need anything more. However, after reading *Fragrant Flowers*, the need for a Guru and spiritual sadhana was strongly felt. I seriously started to consider the possibility of obtaining Mantra Diksha from Swamiji. Overall, I was convinced regarding his 'greatness', both from my personal experiences and from what I had previously heard about him from other disciples and devotees. One day, I called him and asked him whether he would give me Mantra Diksha, to which he replied that he would consider when I next visited him. The next time when I visited him, I requested him for Mantra Diksha to

which he replied – “Aye, you will get someone better as your Guru.” However, upon my insistence, he agreed to give me Mantra Diksha and gave me on the following day itself. Looking back, I am now extremely glad and grateful that Swamiji, in his infinite compassion, actually paved the way for me to attain liberation and thereby escape from this tortuous samsara. I consider the day of my Diksha as extremely blessed because Swamiji formally and unconditionally accepted me as his disciple. Thereby, I was also able to become a part of a prestigious and powerful Guru Parampara. I also feel very fortunate to have become connected to the spiritually potent Vasishtha Guha Ashram, with its scenic landscape, as my Guru Sthaan.

However, I must frankly admit that my initial faith in my Guru was very lukewarm. However, progress in sadhana with minimal efforts from my side and Guru's guidance naturally strengthened my faith in him. At every road block in sadhana, his guidance accompanied by his Love automatically removed impediments. Thereby, I became increasingly confident in sadhana and tried to practice his instructions to the best extent possible with sincerity, love and faith. These keywords became the backbone to my sadhana. Along with sadhana, some study of Scriptures also happened under Swamiji's guidance. I have learnt from him that practice is more important than theory. So, I ensured that I did not get involved in needless theoretical and intellectual debates. Swamiji often quotes the scriptural verse that categorically says – “Only upon liberation will all doubts cease.” However, where he felt that my doubts were valid, he patiently gave clarifications in a simple and beautiful manner so that I could understand. This ability also highlights his 'greatness': the ability to explain abstract and profound spiritual concepts to a layman in the most patient, lucid and crisp manner.



Gurudev and Arjun during Girivalam

Along with sadhana, I also got the blessed opportunity to physically serve my Guru. I have learnt that to physically serve the Guru is an opportunity, which he graciously provides, for our spiritual development. I firmly believe that the Guru has nothing to gain or lose through our service ultimately, for he is totally desireless and selfless. By doing physical service and by training myself to implicitly follow Swamiji's instructions while serving him, the purity of mind, discipline and vigilance in my lifestyle developed tremendously. This development simultaneously gave boost to my spiritual sadhana. I have read somewhere that the best service that a disciple can do to the Guru is to practice the sadhana as per Guru's instructions. Thus, in this manner, my spiritual life gradually blossomed under Swamiji's firm, yet compassionate guidance.

In a nutshell, the effect and extent of transformation due to Swamiji's presence in my life has been total. I am sure that many others would also agree with me. I consider myself very lucky to have gotten some association

with him. Thus, I would like to conclude the summary of how I got my crash course in spirituality from my Guru. I pray that he continues to shower upon me and everyone his Grace and Love so that we may continue to strive and rise up to his expectations and to get God-realization in this very birth.

Hari Om!



12. MEETING THE MASTER

– Babita Kapoor

A Divine conspiracy led me to my Guruji. It all began with an unexpected meeting with Radha whom I met at a friend's house. In the course of our conversation, I mentioned to her about my love for Ramana Maharshi and she excitedly mentioned that her twin sister Geetha Ravichandran, one of Guruji's disciples, was visiting her Guru in Ramanasramam. An instant kinship sprouted within with a desire to reach out to a fellow devotee of Bhagawan Ramana. I left the party that evening with a song in my heart completely oblivious to my connection with the all-pervading music of the universe!

The following week Geethaji, Radha and I began an e-Satsang several times a week where we shared our love for the Divine energy that surrounded us. Geetha shared how Bhagawan Ramana had guided her to her Guruji who is as Ocean of Divine bliss. Geethaji's longing to sit at the Feet of her Guruji reminded me of a river's restless longing and tireless pursuit of its source. Upon returning from the Ashram, it seemed as if she had emerged from the river Ganga after a sacred, soul-cleansing experience. By now my curiosity started compelling me to listen to the soulful melody of her Guruji for myself. I immediately googled him and found some of his discourses on YouTube. I casually clicked on the link titled – 'Get in the mood for God'. Very quickly I was drawn into the vortex of energy of this

great soul. His eyes resembled the depth and compassion of my Bhagawan Ramana's eyes. His bright face shone with the light of his Divine madness for God. As he spoke his entire being became one with the God he urged the listener to connect with. I watched spellbound and my heart stirred with a longing to see him.

I spent the following weeks immersed in the company of Guruji's holy words as I plunged into his books. In his biography, Guruji opened the treasure chest of his heart giving an honest and vivid peek into his spiritual quest. Sri Ramakrishna's Divine ecstasy for Mother Kali, the simple elegance of the Holy Mother's divinity that shone through her eyes and the silent fullness of Bhagawan Ramana's presence lit a blaze of spiritual fire in Guruji's early days. Inspired by the depth of love for these saints, my heart had been restlessly longing to see them. I realized that Guruji was the mirror who could give me a glimpse of the divinity I was searching within. The excitement of this discovery quickly transformed into fear like ice melting under the sun. The advice of the saints of the world echoed in my mind: Find the one who will be your mirror! I had found the one who would be my mirror but what if I was not worthy of him?

Arranging a trip to Sri Ramanasramam where Guruji was staying was not an easy task for a working mother of two kids living in the United States. Surprisingly all obstacles were swept away like dry leaves in an autumn breeze. Thankfully my supportive husband who had seen the longing in my heart volunteered to take charge of the kids and home so I could make the trip. Having reserved my plane tickets and Ashram stay, I began to count the days in anticipation of my meeting with Guruji. Very often my mind

tied itself in knots of doubts. "What if he refuses to see me? What if Guruji refused to give me Mantra Diksha?" In the end I opted to surrender and peacefully accept the terms of the Universe, whatever they might be.

On February 12th 2013 around one in the afternoon, I found myself standing outside the door of the office at Sri Ramanasramam. I nervously inquired if Swami Shantananda Puri was still at the Ashram. To my great relief I was given his room number along with directions to his room. A range of emotions swept through me as I dropped my bags in the room, washed my face and stopped briefly to purchase some fresh fruits to offer at Guruji's Feet.

Before going to Guruji's room, I went to Bhagawan's Samadhi for his blessings. My heart was beating fast as I approached the door of Guruji's room. The door was ajar and I could hear the trailing remnants of a conversation within. Hesitatingly I stood at the entrance as my eyes rested on Guruji's Divine form half lying on his bed. Immediately the image of Lord Vishnu reclining on the Sesa Nag flashed across my mind. Guruji's compassionate, smiling eyes greeted me with warmth I will never forget. When I told him my name he teasingly asked if I had anything to do with the Raj Kapoor family. He graciously took the fruits from my hands. I took my place amongst the many devotees who were basking in the sunlight of Guruji's Grace. Sitting there gazing into those big, expressive, Divine eyes I was struck by the realization that after all this wandering my soul had finally come home! Tears of joy began to tumble down my cheeks like a gushing waterfall. The soul was finally at the feet of its Master!

The five days that I spent in Guruji's Divine field went by so quickly that they almost have a dreamlike quality.



Gurudev and Babita Kapoor

He accepted me as one of his own. Very quickly it was evident to someone like me whose spiritual antenna is not open that I had always known Guruji - that this was not the first time we had met. He was my very Self, how could I not recognize that? How could there be any separation from one's own Self? He was the mirror I had longed to gaze into and see the reflection of my soul. The days went by quickly amidst laughter, joy and soaking in Guruji's Grace. Spiritual wealth was flowing freely for all alike as Guruji's Love embraced us and our hearts rejoiced.

On an auspicious day Guruji granted me Mantra Diksha and lovingly took responsibility for taking me across the dark waters of samsara to the other shore. My life's only desire had been fulfilled by Guruji. Now my mind was still and the heart was brimming with love, beating effortlessly

to the rhythm of the Universal music! As I sat at Guruji's Feet, I thanked Bhagawan Ramana and all the Divine forces that had conspired to bring me to my Master.

Like a true mentor, Guruji is as transparent as glass letting the light of God pass through him. He is the Light that leads me on, the mirror of my soul. Guruji, I offer my Pranams and all my love at your Lotus Feet!



13. MY BELOVED GURUDEV

– Shivani Mittal

Whenever I read Chapter XI of Bhagawad Gita wherein Arjuna gets petrified after looking at Lord Krishna's Universal Form and requests the Lord to become “normal” again. Saumya Vapur Mahatmanah (11.50), I always thought how true it is. If the Lord has to come in his original form, how many of us can take it? Hence, when God wants to show his exclusive Love to an individual soul, He takes the form of a Guru. The Guru comes to stir us from our sleep and call us out of our dens and holes towards the freedom of Eternal Life. A life of faith and highest understanding, a life of expanded consciousness and Universal Love.

The joy, the Love, the protection a Guru gives is matchless; who else can give? Only a disciple knows that Guru alone completes the meaning of these words. None else can!

I met my Gurudev in the beginning of April 2007 in Vasishtha Guha. He was standing on a platform outside the kitchen and taking bhiksha of khichadi. Clad in ochre clothes, he looked awesomely beautiful and perfect. Gurudev in his unique style laughingly greeted me and took me to his room! The way he spoke, the way his eyes twinkled, his gestures, it all had some rhythm, a Divine rhythm and harmony. This instantly captured my heart; it was Love at first sight.

Each time I think of this moment, a sense of extreme gratefulness and reverence takes over, it is the most treasured moment in my life!

That was my first visit. And later the visit to see Gurudev increased as the days, months and years passed. Being in His presence is like being in the presence of Pure Joy and Love.

Before meeting Gurudev, I had absolutely no exposure to any Scriptures other than some occasional reading of *Ramcharitmanas*. During all the meetings with Gurudev, I heard Him talking about One Absolute Spirit who has become all and his famous electricity example. His expression was so easy and simple to understand yet never losing the profundity of the matter. I can cite not one but innumerable examples where he simply cleared my doubts in the simplest and effective manner. What amazed me more was his authoritative way and use of simple language and it still continues to amaze me.

Things happen around Gurudev which can be termed as miracles. Though I myself have experienced many, somehow it never interested me. I always strongly felt that because of what He is, these things happen naturally. Siddhis, with folded hands and bowed heads, eagerly await the command of a saint and hence it is no big a deal. Secondly, the foremost miracle for me is to change my habits, nature and attitude. I have witnessed such things happening only by being in Gurudev's presence. His Pure Presence has its purifying effects.

Once Swamiji asked me to put protein powder in his milk and stir it. I put the required quantity of protein powder and was about to stir it when Gurudev took it in his hand and started stirring it himself and when it was done,

he handed it over to me and said, “Now you stir it a little more, I will just come.”

I felt this is how a Guru works in a disciple's life. The disciple in his ignorance thinks he is doing sadhana but actually the day Gurudev sets his eyes on the disciple, it is all handed over to Him. Just at the right time, it dawns and not one moment earlier. Till that time, it was patience, practice and prayers, and then a Mantra given to me by Gurudev.

Gurudev is extremely witty and stylish never minces words. Wherever He is, the place becomes a mirth house. No matter how sad and depressed you are, He in a flash, tears off that veil of sadness. It is sheer delight to see him talking. His jokes not only make us laugh but also carry subtle meaning for us to ponder on. I have always been in awe of Gurudev. Such intelligence combined with humor made my mind his captive. From this I also learned that God is not boring stuff.



A picture of joy – Gurudev and Shivani Mittal

One thing which always pulled my attention is his non-dependency on anyone. He, at 85, is independent and this independence is so natural to him. This makes me revere him more. Gurudev's frail frame but high spirits gives me all the strength required to face the trials and tribulations of life.

Before ending this offering, I wish to share my innermost feeling: Guru, God, Heart, and the Self are not different. The Guru is the physical expression of the Heart's innermost desire. The desire which we are unable to hear and understand; to hear the heart's innermost voice, one needs to have a pure mind. The arrival of a Guru in one's life is not an accident but a Divine Plan. To Love Him is to Love God; but Gurudev I always feel I can't love and respect you enough to my heart's content! Please bless me to love you always.

With love at your Feet, I rest, my beloved Gurudev!



14. HARI OM SRI SRI GURUJI

– M.M. Mondal

The First Darshan

During the first week of April 2010, at the initiative of my friend Parthasarathi, we (three families) decided to visit Vasishtha Guha at Rishikesh. Since it was Kumbha Mela period, we had a holy dip at Haridwar on the way from Delhi. Starting early in the morning, we reached Guha in the late afternoon. After reaching Guha, we found Swami Chaitanyanandaji had gone to Lucknow and Swami Shantanandaji was looking after the affairs of the Ashram. After offering our pranams, my friend requested Swamiji for an overnight stay at the Ashram. Swamiji kindly allowed us stay for the night. This was the first visit of my family to the Guha. I had a desire of visiting the Guha for a long time. I heard about Swami Purushottamanandaji and the Guha a number of times earlier. In fact, I used to imagine from time to time how the Guha would be like or how Swami Purushottamanandaji used to stay in the Guha since the day I learnt about it.

First we had Darshan of the Guha and then arranged our belongings and also went to the Ganges for Ganga Darshan and Sparshan. Nothing much happened except attending Sandhya Aarti and a little exchange of words with Swamiji. I was trying to have a close look at the Ashram, the Guha and other surroundings and also sat for meditation inside the Guha for some time.

In the early morning around 4 o'clock, I woke up amidst the musical sound of the flowing water of the Ganga and found through the window of our room that the surroundings are flooded with moonlight. Who can stay inside after seeing such a mystical early morning? I came out of the room and found everybody in the Ashram was asleep. However, the light in Swamiji's room was switched on. I went up to the door of Swamiji's room a number of times, tried to guess what Swamiji could be doing inside. I thought of knocking at the door several times but could not muster the courage and only with folded hands did pranams to Swamiji. I sat for meditation for some time outside the Guha as the Guha gate is usually locked after the evening Aarti.

Slowly the Ashram came to life and the usual routine of the morning puja and Aarti began to unfold. We sat with Swamiji in His room. Immediately, we got absorbed with Swamiji's talks on many subjects including his early visits to the Ashram, His Guruji, His working life, His books and so many other things relating to spirituality. Suddenly he addressed me in clear Bengali and asked, "Are you a Bengali?" On hearing in the affirmative, Swamiji started speaking with me in Bengali about Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Ma Sharada, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and other Bengali books and Bengali writers who wrote about Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

By that time we were mesmerized and started looking at Him very respectfully (we had not heard about Swamiji previously). I could notice that it is very difficult to stare at Swamiji's eyes for long. My mind started wondering "Could He be my Guruji?" Finding nobody around, I expressed my desire by asking him whether I could receive His Grace in

the form of Mantra Diksha. Swamiji said, "Think over it. We can see later on." After that I asked him to clear some of my doubts. Swamiji explained everything to my satisfaction. After this, He told me about his books which are freely downloadable from the internet and made me write the name of the site as well. He also gave me His mobile number if I needed help or guidance. After having another dip in the Ganga, our group started singing Sai Bhajans in front of the Guha.

After coming back to Delhi, I could never forget Swamiji. I started reading Swamiji's books starting with *Musings of a Himalayan Monk* and subsequently read the *Fragrant Flowers* and other books. I would call Swamiji and He answered almost every time. I requested His advice on some of my problems which were bothering me and my family during that period. Swamiji taught me some Mantras over the phone and made sure I wrote them down. I started following his instructions blindly since then.

During August 2010, while I was on a train coming back to Delhi from the South, I suddenly received a call from Swamiji. He was calling from Lucknow. Swamiji told me that He is coming to Delhi at Mr Srivastav's house at Dwaraka and also dictated the address and the phone number of Mr Srivastav. My joy knew no bounds. All his visits to Delhi were like a celebration with pujas and kirtans.

Here are some interesting incidents that happened over the last one year:

During March 2012, my mother aged about 84 years became seriously ill and had to be hospitalised. When I got the news I prayed to Swamiji internally and immediately requested over phone to one of the railway booking agents

in Paharganj area of Delhi to book one ticket in the afternoon train to Kolkata. Since the tatkal time was over, he booked a waiting list ticket. The chance of a confirmation was obviously remote. But as per the advice of the agent, I reached the station one hour before to request the TTE to allow me to board the train. After a lot of requests, one of the TTE allowed me to board the train at the last moment and also allotted his own berth to me by Guru's Grace.

In the mean time before leaving for the station I called up Swamiji to inform him that I was leaving for Kolkata as my mother is very serious. Swamiji, on his own, instructed me to do Mahamrityunjaya Mantra japa and also told me that if it is my prarabdha one cannot do anything. On boarding the train, I called up my brother and told him to write the Mantra on a piece of paper and put it under her pillow. He did as I told. I also started reciting the Mantra while on the train. When I reached the hospital the next day, my brother informed me that she had started getting up and was able to sit up on her own on the bed since that morning which was not possible till the day before. Astonishingly seeing the improvement, the doctor also agreed to discharge her the following morning. Slowly she has recovered after that. May my devotion and faith in Guruji be firm.

The second incident happened during the last week of May 2012. Over phone, I sought permission from Swamiji to visit Sri Kedarnath and Sri Badrinath alone during the first week of June. Swamiji kindly granted me permission but put two conditions: I should not go there beyond the first week of July as rains start in the hills. I must carry two strong umbrellas with me. I was happy because the first

condition was already met as my plan was to go during the first week of June. To fulfil the second condition, I took out my old umbrella but found it was broken. So I decided to purchase two new umbrellas. One day while on my way home from CP, I got down at Tilak Nagar metro station to purchase umbrellas. But unfortunately the shops were closed. The shop I regularly went to was closed. I searched for strong umbrellas from the few shops open that day but could not find a strong umbrella. One person directed me to a shop at a little distance. Umbrellas were available in that shop and it seemed to be as strong as prescribed by Swamiji but the fellow wanted a price which was at least 40% higher than the normal price. I was in two minds whether to buy one umbrella or two. Since I did not want to pay too much, I decided to buy one for the time being and promised internally to Swamiji that I will buy another subsequently. But due to lack of time I could not buy the second umbrella before my journey to Kedarnath and Badrinath. I went ahead with one umbrella but never forgot that Swamiji's instruction has had been carried out.

During the Darshan yatra I did not require an umbrella. It did rain but luckily every time I was at a safe place and never on the road but just one day before the return journey, in the afternoon at Badrinath, I thought of buying some snacks for the long bus journey to Delhi. While in the shop, one Sadhu came and asked me to buy him an umbrella as he was suffering a lot without it. This reminded me of my promise to Swamiji to buy one more umbrella. Gladly I purchased an umbrella of the Sadhu's choice. Seeing that it was being purchased for one Sadhu, the shopkeeper also reduced the price the maximum he could. Thus Swamiji allowed me to fulfil my promise before I left

the Devasthanam. May my devotion and faith in Guruji be firm.

I had a very strong desire to stay with Swamiji for a few days wherever possible. After Swamiji left Delhi in the first week of May 2012 for Bengaluru to proceed to Tiruvannamalai, I spoke about it to Swamiji over phone. Suddenly Swamiji told me to come to Tiruvannamalai and stay for a few days there. I became so elated that tears



M.M. Mondal prays, "Gurudev, let me hold on to Your Lotus Feet always."

started flowing from my eyes. Without delay, I booked my train tickets to Chennai. Since I was not sure of my office priorities, I booked three tickets on different dates based on the availability of berths. One of the tickets was in the last week of August 2012.

Swamiji also advised me to write to Sri Ramanasramam for accommodation sufficiently in advance (at least two or three months ahead of my arrival). I did as Swamiji advised. I received confirmation from the Ashram for a stay of five days from 23.08.2012 although I requested for a stay of three days only.

Earlier I had applied for a job in a Mumbai based company. The interview was long pending. Since the post was for a very senior position in the company, it was expected that the interview would be conducted in Mumbai where its directors are stationed. Suddenly, I got an e-mail informing me that the interview venue is at Chennai on 22.08.2012. The company would provide me return airfare to Chennai for attending the interview. So instead of going by train, I was given the privilege of a comfortable air journey and saved time. When I shared this information with Swamiji, He simply told me that it is God who has made it possible. I quietly held on to my belief that it was my Gurudev, my God who had done it. This helped me get a stay of 3 extra days with Swamiji. May my faith and devotion to my Guruji grow by leaps and bounds.

One day during my above stay in Sri Ramanasramam, when I was alone with Swamiji, I offered some money to Swamiji. As usual, He refused to take anything as is always the case with all His disciples and devotees. But on my repeated insistence, Swamiji showed some extra compassion and took only one five hundred rupee note and

returned the rest to me. I was happy to be able to be of service to my Guruji when He is the one who serves us.

After spending those happy days with Swamiji, I returned to Delhi on 27.08.2012 and went straight to my office from the airport. I never knew that a surprise was waiting for me. On reaching my office I took my diary and after turning a few pages found two brand-new five hundred rupee notes lying there. I tried to recall if ever I had kept these currency notes in my diary; I surely would have remembered well. And then it is not possible for anybody to open my drawer and keep something in it. The thought of someone playing mischief by somebody ran through my mind but I dismissed it. I discussed this with one or two close colleagues but no solution emerged. The next day, suddenly it occurred to me that it is just double the money Swamiji had kindly accepted from me the day before. Things became clear to me then. In my childhood, my father, who was an ardent devotee of Lord Krishna, used to tell all our family members that if anybody unselfishly spends something in the service of our family deity Sri Gopalji, Sri Gopalji surely returns double the value instantly. I concluded that it was Swamiji's miracle to prove my belief in my father's words of doubling the value of unselfish service to God.

Later when Swamiji was in Delhi on one occasion, I asked Him about the secret of doubling the value. As usual, Swamiji laughed and pleaded not guilty. May the Grace of Swamiji strengthen my faith in and devotion to Him.

It was during October 2012 when I was supposed to attend an official training programme at ASCI Hyderabad. I had a desire to visit Sri Sailam, one of the twelve Jyotir

Lingas near Hyderabad. When I expressed my desire before Swamiji over phone, He instantly granted me permission. On the bus, I made friends with five young MBA students who were also visiting Sri Sailam. One of the boys named Murali gave me his phone number and with his help I got accommodation in a dharamshala nearby.

After putting my bags in the room, the boys and I went to have evening Darshan of Sri Mallikarjuna. It was heavily crowded and after about two hours we could get Darshan but from a fair distance. I expressed before one of the staff standing in front of the Garbhagraha that I could not get a good Darshan. He suggested me to buy a ticket for morning Darshan and Abhishekam.

After coming out of the temple, I purchased a ticket for the following morning's Darshan and Abhishekam. I noticed that the ticket was for the time slot between 1pm to 2pm. Since I had to come back to Hyderabad on the same day to catch a flight in the evening to Delhi, I had no option but to return the ticket back to the counter requesting him to give me a ticket for early in the morning. He told me that those tickets were already exhausted. I started requesting some of the temple staff who were manning other ticket counters for current Darshan for an early morning ticket and explained that without this, I would miss my flight from Hyderabad in the evening. They were sympathetic but expressed helplessness. I became dejected and prayed before Swamiji and the Jyotir Linga that another opportunity must be given to me to come here for Abhishekam. One of the staff suggested to me that I could approach the temple management staff for help. I thought of trying that also and slowly started moving towards the main gate of the temple. Suddenly, I heard somebody

calling me from behind. I could see that this man was standing near the counter when I was requesting the person at the counter for the morning ticket. He advised me to buy the ticket presently available and promised that he will manage my Abhishekam in the first time slot which starts between 6am to 7am but I must meet him at the main gate sharp at 6.30am. I could not believe him initially. Sensing that, he informed me that his name is Mohan and he works in the temple guest house and also gave his phone number to me. I purchased the ticket for the time slot between 1pm to 2pm and went back to the dharamshala with prayers of gratitude to Swamiji in my mind.

Next day I called Mohan around 6am. He answered my call and told me to meet at the main gate at 6.30am. I reached the main gate at around 6.15am and waited. Mohan never appeared and stopped answering his phone thereafter. Then I approached the on-duty lady police constable who was checking the entry tickets. She told me to come at the time mentioned in the ticket for entry. I expressed my problem that unless I am allowed now, I would not be able reach Hyderabad in time to catch my evening flight. She did not agree and told me that even if she did allow me, the staff inside would not allow me for the pooja. I had no other alternative but to pray to Swamiji and started chanting my Guru Mantra. It was now almost 7am but Mohan did not appear. Suddenly the lady constable called me near the entry and allowed me to go inside. I thanked her and Lord Shiva for showing kindness to me. Internally I continued praying to Swamiji also. It's a long queue inside before one gets a chance to enter the Garbhagraha for Abhishekam. I continuously prayed to Swamiji that I should not be sent back. Even though there

was a possibility of being sent back, surprisingly no staff bothered to check my ticket or its timing even when they were checking each and every ticket of the devotees before and after me. Continuously chanting the Guru Mantra, I entered the Garbhagraha with one group and offered Abhishekam to Lord Shiva. This is how Guruji's Grace again was shown to me.

Dear Gurudev whatever is written is all Your inspiration and internal guidance, which I place at your Lotus Feet.

My Sashtang Pranams and I pray for Sharanagati.

Hari Om



15. IN THE COMPANY OF A SAINT

– Dr. R.S. Singh

I know H.H. Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj since his pre-monastic days. Per chance I met one of his senior Gurubhais, H.H. Swami Nirvedanandaji Maharaj, on the bank of the sacred river Ganga near the village Kurtha, famous for a great saint Pavahari Baba. Swami Vivekananda also visited Pavahari Baba after Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa left his body.

H.H. Swami Nirvedanandaji Maharaj gave me a book on the life of Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj which he himself translated from Malayalam to English. It was after reading the book that I visited Vasishtha Guha with some of my friends. Since then I used to get an invitation from the Vasishtha Guha Ashram every year for the birthday celebration of H.H. Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj. Regrettably I could never attend any previous celebrations. One year, the invitation card mentioned that Sri K.V. Janakiraman would be reciting the *Srimad Bhagawatam* for seven days. As I have a special regard for our sacred *Bhagawatam*, I always dreamt of meeting this gentleman.

An opportunity came when H.H. Swami Nirvedanandaji was suffering from a cancerous disease called multiple myeloma. I was sent by him to receive Sri K.V. Janakiraman and Madan Babu at Varanasi as they were coming to Ghazipur for the first time. While at Ghazipur

they stayed with me. Next time Sri Janakiramanan came with his wife and I was blessed to be their host. The third time was when he came alone from Chennai. Thus my dream was fulfilled.

H.H. Swami Nirvedanandaji Maharaj left his body on February 28, 1991. Later Sri Janakiramanan took Sanyasa from one of his senior Gurubhais who is my Guru Swami Sankaranandaji Maharaj of Mangalashram, Uttarkashi, and thus got the name Swami Shantananda Puri. After Sanyasa, Swamiji stayed at Manava Seva Sangh Arogya Ashram, Gorabazar, Ghazipur, for his first Chaturmasya, the place where H.H. Swami Nirvedananda used to live in his last days. Here I got an opportunity to serve Swamiji and since then every time he comes at Ghazipur, I feel fortunate to serve him. Two unforgettable occasions when I got an opportunity to serve him were when he was discharged from Wockhart Hospital, Bengaluru, which was like a rebirth and another when his pelvic girdle was fractured at Haridwar.

Swamiji has a humorous nature and is a very good orator on spiritual matters and endears everyone who comes in his contact. Even in your day-to-day work, you will learn many things from him if you are in his company. It is a joy to serve him. Sometimes he scolds you to teach you a good lesson, and afterwards you can experience 'Sant Hridaya Navneet Samana'. I am unable to describe many things I learnt from him. His blessings for me and my family are always there.

While serving Swamiji, I met hundreds of his disciples which otherwise would not have been possible. Some of them mentioned miracles which he denies but it is true that miracles happen when you are in his company. I pray to God and Guru for Swamiji's long life so that I can learn even more from him which will enable me to see God.

16. BOUNDLESS LOVE

– Geetha Ravichandran

Hari Om. Koti koti pranams to my Guruji Swami Shantananda Puri.

When I sit down to do my japam and experience the greatest calmness I ever know, my heart melts in gratitude and reverence. The transformation in my life that Swamiji's grace has brought about is the greatest miracle – the miracle of peace. When I met Swamiji I was an angry middle-aged woman. Life has given me more than my share of material comforts and privileges, but I was deeply restless within. I have been a regular visitor to Ramanasramam since 1998. I had devoured all the literature on Bhagawan, had tried out every weekend work shop on meditation and mind control but was still far away from what I was seeking. Maybe I did not even know what I was seeking.

Ravi and I came to know Swamiji through Amarjeet sometime in 2006. We owe Amarjeet such a debt of gratitude which we can never repay. I got my Diksha in 2009 when I was least expecting it. We had gone to Hardwar to meet Swamiji on the occasion of his birthday. In fact Ravi, without discussing the matter with me, asked Swamiji to give me Diksha. Swamiji replied, “Only if she wants it.” Of course I wanted it, only I did not have the sense to ask! That was how deeply confused I was! Since then, I have run to meet Swamiji so many times, at different places. It is as Anisha put it once – as a calf runs

to a cow. Every time I am with him I experience the greatest happiness I have known in life. The truth of the verse in Aksharamanamalai “Avvai pol enakun arulai thanthenai yaluvathunkadan Arunachala” (You have poured your grace on me like a mother, as if you owe me a debt) has been revealed to me.

When I come back after my visits to Swamiji and replay the recordings of my conversations with Swamiji what strikes me is that all my pretentious questions which show a lack of basic understanding, are answered so patiently, so lovingly. The tender concern Swamiji shows each one of us when we are in his presence envelopes us even when we are physically not with him.

At the beginning I had mentioned how I was this angry woman when I met Swamiji. I also told Swamiji about this on the day of my Diksha. I had already analysed the causes and thought I was making great efforts to purify myself. Swamiji without paying attention to the explanations I wanted to elaborate on, told me firmly it will all go. He sounded so definite, so sure about it. Now when I observe myself calm in situations where I used to be easily provoked, I realize that it his grace at work. As a result, my relationships have improved and I can look upon others with tolerance and acceptance.

Recently I was given an official assignment of a sensitive nature. When I was assigned this job, I was puffed up with importance as it was considered a prestigious posting. When I called up Swamiji to tell him the news, Swamiji who could have possibly had no idea of what my new job entailed, immediately cautioned me. He said I should be careful. I wondered why he was saying so. He also assured me that ultimately nothing would go wrong and that I should have faith in the Divine Mother. Within a month, I realized how prophetic Swamiji's words were.

It was a time of great stress. I weathered a storm. But things sorted themselves out, just the way Swamiji assured me, solely due to his grace and has strengthened my faith in him manifold.

When I see Swamiji put himself to so much inconvenience for the sake of others, to accommodate the demands, which those of us who surround him tend to make, I see the boundless energy of Divine Grace. Swamiji often tells us that the Divine Mother is the living, loving energy, he himself is nothing but that. When I see him treat everyone with an equal measure of love, give each one of us his undivided attention, I wonder at this source of inexhaustible love. Even when I feel that I have fallen short, done a little cheating in the chamber of the heart he has shown me nothing but love and grace.

Last year when I met him at Lucknow he told me something very beautiful – “The Mother's grace is like a powerful wave; it will sweep you away. (In Tamil – “Alai maduri adichundu poydum.”) The sweep of Swamiji's love is so powerful, so inexorable that we'll all safely make it to the other shore.



Gurudev with Geetha Ravichandran and Ravichandran

17. GURU IS THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD

– Shailesh Mohan Sahai

First of all, my koti koti pranams at the Lotus Feet of my Gurudev – His Holiness Swami Shantananda Puriji Maharaj. I am very fortunate to have received initiation from him.

Since my first meeting with revered Swamiji, through my experiences on various occasions and events, I have come to know that indeed Guru is the Manifestation of God.

In the beginning as I recollect, I was always very curious to know about the cause of miseries in everyday life, about the role of fate in our lives and about the existence of the Supreme Power, God. I also wondered whether the actions in our lives are pre-planned, pre-destined and guided by Him or if these could be changed, controlled or checked by our efforts. My beloved Guru quenched my thirst for answers and gave me so much more! Slowly and gradually I calmed down and my queries disappeared. This all happened simply due to the Grace of my benevolent Guru.

I remember the day when revered Swamiji told me about the meaning of a true Guru. He explained that the Guru directs our path towards Truth and sows the seeds of devotion for God. The Guru might be present in some distant place of the world, away from his disciples, but he always looks after the welfare of his disciples and devotees and guides them to tread on the right path. These thoughts greatly influenced my mind and gave me immense strength.

An unforgettable instance comes to mind the day Swamiji graced our home with his presence. After his departure, my daughter Garima experienced a kind of Divine fragrance and an elevated spiritual atmosphere in the house, which I was not able to comprehend. Later I realized that this all was due to the positive vibrations and pious presence of revered Swamiji, which filled our house at the time of his arrival.



Gurudev with the blessed Mr. and Mrs. Sahai

My faith and gratitude for Swamiji further strengthened when we as a family, my wife Mallika, my daughters, Garima and Bhavya and I went to Vasishtha Guha, located on the lap of the mighty Himalayas. There, during the Bhagavad Gita Path, my wife was rendered speechless when she saw the actualization of the same images formed in her mind – Revered Swamiji, pictures of Swami Purushottamanandaji Guru Maharaj and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsaji Maharaj with a Shiva Linga (Lord Shiva) in the background, the exact same way she had visualized in her prayers.

We are blessed to have Swamiji's guidance at every step. We are grateful to our Gurudev for His Love and compassion.

HARI OM

18. MY GURUDEV

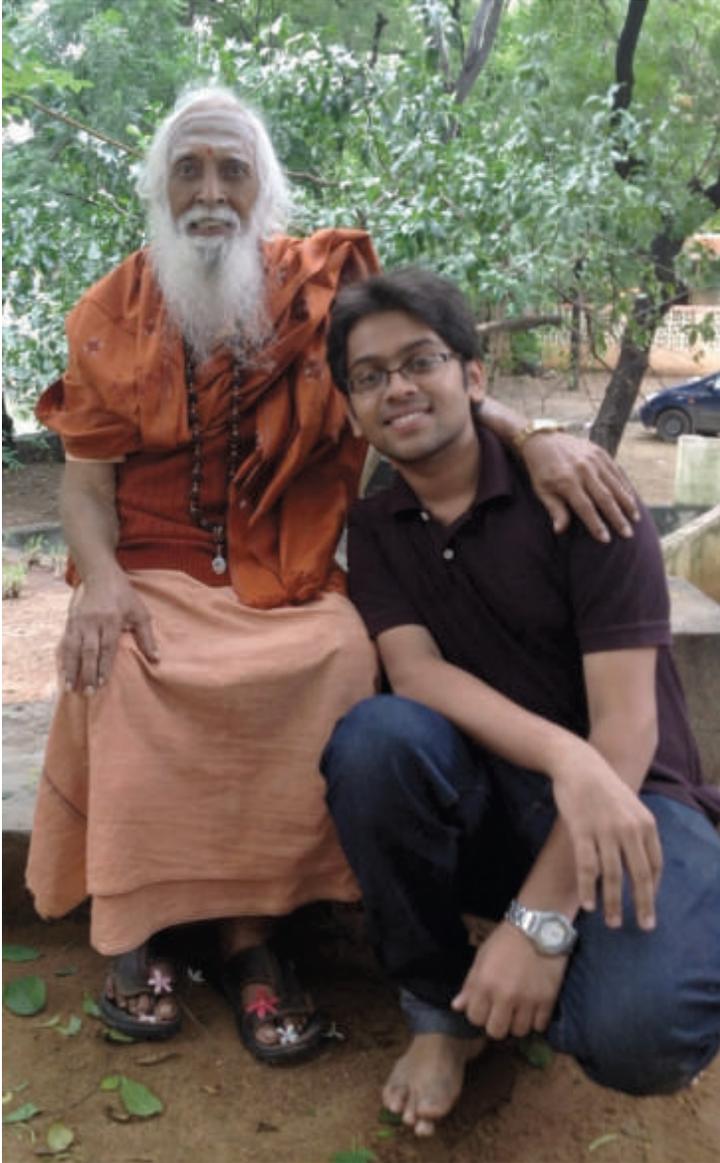
– Sriram Mecheri

I first met Swamiji when my parents took me to him at Sri Ramanasramam at Tiruvannamalai. I was all of 12 summers or so, and spirituality was the last thing on my mind. But something about Swamiji caught my attention. The few hours we spent with Him, listening to his talk, were as I remember, very beautiful. Although the deeper meaning of what He said did not register, I did enjoy the stories, jokes, puns and the occasional snacks that His devotees endlessly brought.

Thereafter I met Swamiji on various occasions at Tiruvannamalai, Vasishtha Guha, and other places. Swamiji is an excellent orator and His knowledge of the Scriptures is unmatched. He grabs one's attention like a fly to a bright light. The beautiful thing about Swamiji is that He has a perfect answer to every question. As you sit next to Him, you find all your worries have melted away and only peace remains.

Swamiji has always quoted, in his books and in his talks, that to realise the Ultimate Truth, to receive a glimpse of the Ultimate Reality, one needs the guidance of a Guru. I was blessed when Swamiji accepted me as His disciple on the day of his Birthday on 6th May, 2012, at Aurobindo Ashram, Bangalore. He is Sat-Chit-Ananda, He is bliss, He is joy, He is Love eternal, and He spreads happiness to every living being around Him. We cannot begin to comprehend the greatness of our Guru, and we are blessed to receive even an iota of His selfless Love.

Hari OM (as Swamiji says “Hurry to your true HOME”)



Gurudev and one of his disciples, Sriram Mecheri



19. MY GURU, MY GOD INCARNATE

– Anita Dwivedi

For over four years now, I can feel around me at all times the presence of my revered Guruji, His Holiness Swami Shantananda Puri. His benevolence is endless. The mere utterance of the name of my Sadguru clears up the maze in my life.

Sometime later after my Diksha, I wanted to be at his holy Feet, to be in his company and listen to his words. I learnt that in the month of May, Swamiji would be at Haridwar, the door to the Abode of Lord, at Aurobindo Ashram. Wishing for his Darshan, I wanted to go to Haridwar. Traveling alone to Haridwar for the first time was not a very exciting thought. I requested for the company of my husband, Dinesh, who agreed, though convinced that his time had not yet come to seek a Sadguru. I managed to get the consent of my elder son Pranav also to travel with us. Due to certain circumstances, Pranav could not reach Bhopal, our hometown, from his college town, Udupi. The two of us booked tickets for Haridwar. I did not inform Guruji about the plans.

During our train journey, Dinesh maintained that he wasn't yet ready to seek a Sadguru, and maybe in few years' time he would contemplate on it. I wondered why, but didn't ask him. Nonetheless, something was in the offing, but I had no idea.

Our train reached Haridwar at night. We looked for a place to stay, but did not get any accommodation. As it was the month of May, the doors of Lord Sri Badrinath had opened and the city was flooded with pilgrims. At 11pm, we knocked on the doors of a dharamshala. I fervently prayed to Guruji seeking his help. Within minutes the doors were opened, and we were informed that only two persons could be accommodated. Although no rooms were available, they had kindly made arrangements for us to stay on the roof top. I thanked Guruji and we moved in, freshened up, settled down, and with Guruji's Grace were pleasantly surprised to be provided with sheets and blankets!

Next day, early morning we left for Darshan of Guruji, profusely thanking the people at the dharamshala. On reaching the Ashram, we were admitted to the chambers of Guruji, and were told that Swamiji had gone for a walk. I noticed Dinesh sitting nonchalantly, looking around Guruji's room. Then something strange happened! Dinesh heard Guruji's footsteps outside the door; he rose, stepped forward, approached the door, and no sooner had Guruji stepped in that Dinesh folded his hands and spoke Sanskrit stuti-vaachan and started crying. Big drops of tears streamed down his eyes, his glasses became foggy, and then he fell down at the Feet of Swamiji, beseeching him to accept him as his disciple! I was awestruck! What happened to him? What had gone wrong or right with him? All these days he was least interested. And now this!

Swamiji blessed him and asked him to get up, instructing him to come the next day at 5 o'clock in the morning. Swamiji gave us a kind, broad smile. Initially I touched his Feet and sought His blessings. Grace was exuding from his benevolent face. Mesmerized, I prostrated

at his holy Feet. Guruji blessed me profusely. I poured my heart out to Swamiji and we talked for a while. Dinesh was silent; I noticed tears in his eyes.

A short while later, Guruji asked us to go and have breakfast. Tarak, the boy who attended to Swamiji at the Ashram during his stay, escorted us. When we stepped outside, he approached Dinesh, holding his hands, and told him, "Please wipe your tears. You should be happy. Yesterday, when I was walking along with Swamiji in the morning, he told me, "Tarak, tomorrow morning two persons will come to meet us. One of them is my Sishya and the other person will seek Diksha." Tarak added, When I asked Guruji who would be coming, he just said, "You will see.""

What Tarak told us struck me with gratitude.

I HAD NOT informed Guruji about my travel plans, I had not suggested to Dinesh about Mantra Diksha. Dinesh had even remotely not expressed any such desire. I was in a daze! Dinesh did not know, but Guruji knew all along his deepest desires. This was out of the blue! I was convinced that I was connected to my Sadguru wholly and the slightest iota of doubt, query, disconnect that may ever have been in my mind was gone. I was completely changed. I could say that I fell in love with my Sadguru, my Lord, my source of energy, my life, the blood in my veins!



20. MY GREATEST GURUDEV

– Sangith Kumar

“No accident is accidental, but it is caused.” So is the case with my meeting with my Poojya Gurudev Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj. I had taken voluntary retirement from a bank, and during my post-retirement days, I used to visit a well-known Mahatma from Palakkad who used to guide me in my spiritual pursuits. One day, he asked me to go to Tiruvannamalai after handing me a letter addressing it to Gurudev, who was in mouna at the time. Gurudev, out of His Love and compassion gave me Diksha the next day. A lady devotee of Sri Ramakrishna once told me that anyone who comes from the lineage or Parampara of Sri Ramakrishna is a blessed soul and ever protected. I wonder if I am worthy of such a privilege and eligible for such a great blessing. But Gurudev has always been gracious enough to shower His blessings and Love on me, my wife and children who are also His disciples.

Prostrations at the Holy Feet of Gurudev. Hari Om.



Gurudev with one of his oldest disciples, Sangith Kumar

21. IN DIVINE COMPANY

– Dr. Sandhya Nanjundiah

It is only God's Grace that can allow a person to be in the company of the Divine. Swamiji's blessed company is a chance to know God Himself.

Entering His room is to leave all our worldly thoughts and troubles outside and to be enveloped in a loving and joyous atmosphere. Seeing His other devotees and disciples enjoying His company, is what takes us to His presence as often as possible. He is freely accessible to one and all, regardless of their qualities. Whether a person is coming for the first time or is an old devotee, he or she is given the same affection and personal attention. People feel He is their very own Swamiji.

Many people have benefitted from Swamiji's advice on personal matters, but His greatness lies in His spiritual wealth and being. Any spiritual question or doubt about sadhana is explained in great detail, according to the capacity of the devotee to understand and assimilate the ideals. Many of our spiritual doubts and queries are not easily sorted out by reading the traditional Scriptures. He gives detailed methods we can adopt to clear our misconceptions and therefore progress in our sadhana. This is done considering the background of the individual so that his mind is cleared beautifully. Swamiji has also written several books which help us along our path.



Dr. Sandhya, one of Gurudev's physicians

Rare is a Guru like Him. He constantly reminds us that we should keep the ultimate goal in mind at all times and under all circumstances. He is always there to hold our hand on this spiritual path. He always entertains us with stories and jokes, but there is always a lesson to better ourselves in all His anecdotes.

As far as Swamiji is concerned, He is the True Self. Several years ago, He was admitted in the ICU of a well-known hospital with multi-organ failure. At the time, I was allowed to see Him. When asked as to where He was, He said that He was in the Supermarket of Gods, and regaling in their company. He was visualizing several Mahatmas whom He had been associated with.

He always tells us that we are where our mind is, and how to proceed. To many he gives detailed instructions

regarding their physical and psychological situations. There is no hesitation in helping anyone in both worldly and spiritual matters. His detailed instructions on Mantras, worship, and the way to lead one's life, and especially on spiritual progress, are a perfect recipe for the fullest life experience. This type of one-on-one advice is extremely difficult to get as there are very few realised Masters who are also accessible to all of us.

How great is our good fortune that we have been able to meet and benefit from Swamiji's company. My Pranams at His Holy Feet.



22. GRATITUDE AT THY HOLY FEET

– Aruna Raval

It was in 2001 when I, a regular visitor to the Shirdi Sai Baba Temple, at Thyagarajanagar, Bangalore, saw a notice on the board saying a Saint from Vasishtha Guha in the Himalayas was visiting the temple in the next few days. With reverence, I went to the temple that day, stood along with other devotees, and saw our beloved Swamiji for the first time. He was first honoured with poornakhumba, and then he walked into the temple. He addressed the devotees for a few minutes. Swamiji was full of compassion, Love and spoke from depths of knowledge and experience, something that you never see. I knew then that I was specially blessed by the Almighty for even a glimpse of his divinity in the form of Swamiji.

In the days that followed, and for the next two years, my daughter, sister, parents and I went to see Swamiji in the residence of Mr. Anand. The Satsang was always wonderful. Swamiji would inspire us with anecdotes, stories, and spiritual truths in such a wonderful way, always peppered with humour and so much brightness. My old notion of spiritual gurus being stern, uptight and disapproving melted away in the presence of Swamiji so much so that I actually felt emboldened to ask a few questions. Here is one who laughs along with us, breaks into jokes, is so informal, and yet gets his message across. Sometimes it was clear that he read my mind and answered my question without my vocalising it.

The Satsangs were varied and full of meaning which I began to understand much later. I realised that even a sentence spoken casually and simply by him, carried a significance that would be obvious later. I often felt that it must have been like this at Shirdi, almost a century ago, with Baba sitting in the midst of his disciples in Dwarkamayi. This was only the beginning of our journey. Since then, my family and I have been brought closer to and inspired by Swamiji, and for this we have to thank his Divine Grace. His mere presence in my life whether he is physically present in front of us or not has been a great gift.

Swamiji's presence has changed the course of my life forever. Soon after, I faced many a trying, difficult and horrible situation in my personal life. Swamiji gave me some advice which sounded weird at the time, but turned out to be 100% true six months later. In that awful foggy state of mind and bizarre circumstances, I survived. I did not realise it then, but I know now that it was Swamiji's presence, compassion and overwhelming Love that has carried me through all those worldly trials. It was like the story of God, and how he carried his devotee across the desert of life. I would not have survived but for the Grace of Swamiji. He has saved my life. My son Aditya, also changed a great deal, but I will leave that for him to write about. The outpouring of Love that we have upon us is something unbelievable.

After the crises abated somewhat, then came the real spiritual guidance. The visits to his room, A1, at the Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai; the hours spent in his presence, what a treasure! I do not know what I have done to deserve this fortune; this is a manifestation of the greatest blessings God ever gives.



Gurudev and Aruna Raval at Bangalore

Slowly but surely, the real meaning and knowledge of Swamiji's words starting filtering down to my dull brain over the years. In a way that only Swamiji can do, I have realised and understood (at least partially) the reason for my existence, the depths to which I must do Sadhana in order to reach the highest, the real meaning and import of the Scriptures, and that nothing else I do is of any consequence. To me, an illiterate in this ocean of spiritual knowledge and being, Swamiji has been Sri Krishna, Shirdi Sai Baba, and the great Rishis, all rolled into one. Is there anyone else who can capture the essence of all Scriptures, summarise it in plain language, so that a dullard like me can even begin to comprehend and experience the depths of truth, and get a glimpse of the great Reality? Swamiji talks not from bookish knowledge, but from actually

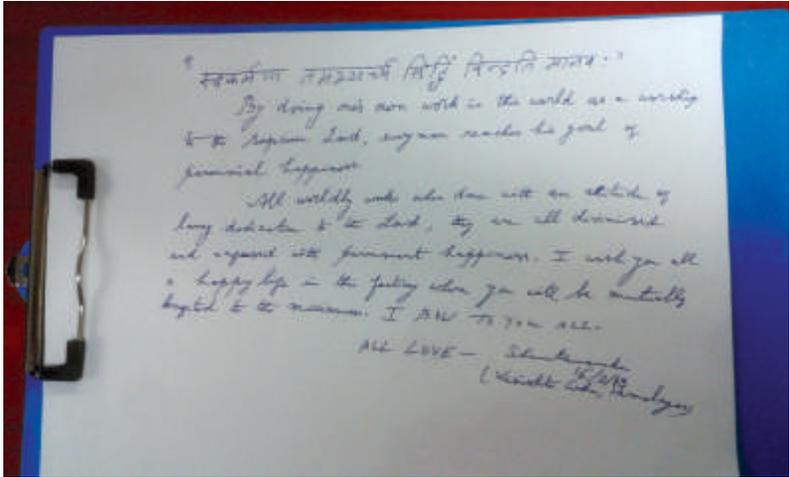
seeing and being, for HE HAS SEEN, EXPERIENCED, and BEEN IT ALL! HE IS!

As the song goes, "How do you hold a moonbeam in your hand?" it is impossible to put into words the gamut of experience, compassion and Love that resides in the persona of our dear Swamiji. How does one talk about him who was diagnosed with multiple organ failure, given a few hours, and then defying medical science walked out of the hospital a week later!

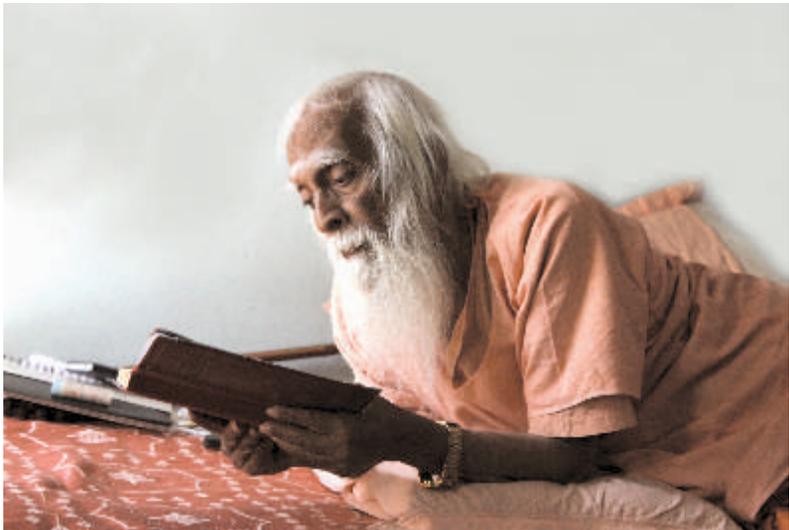
We Love you, beloved Swamiji, we are nothing without you. Please be with us always. If I have erred in any way in this little tribute, I beg you for your forgiveness.

Hari Om





A beautiful message to S. Murali and his staff at General Optics Asia Limited, Pondicherry



The Master Scriptwriter



*Gurudev and one of his physicians,
Dr. Tribhuvan*



*Gurudev with his Romanian disciples
at Vasishtha Guha, Himalayas.
Swami Ajatananda and Ajata are here.*



Gurudev with Dr. Manu at Vasishtha Guha, Himalayas



Gurudev and Bhagyalakshmi Sreedhar



*Gurudev with two beautiful devotees,
Jayaraman and Mythili Jayaraman*



*Srikant Jilla and Jayashri Jilla with Gurudev
at Vasishtha Guha, Himalayas*



Gurudev has yet another physician, Dr. Santosh



*Gurudev poses as a patient
whilst Dr. Sandhya checks his blood pressure*



*Gurudev with Anna, a disciple from Belarus.
Anna is a professional photographer
and one of Gurudev's photographers*



*Amarjeet Singh is all ears as Gurudev speaks to him
and other disciples at Yogi Ramsuratkumar Ashram
at Tiruvannamalai*



Gurudev with his disciple, Mohan



When the Lord's gaze frees you....



Gurudev with one of his disciples, Kalpagam Sarma



23. THE MIRACLE CALLED MY GURUJI

– N. Kapaleeswaran

It was a miracle in itself that happened in my Life when I met my Guruji. I met His Holiness Swami Shantananda Puri Swamigal of Himalayas in the year 2002 at Sri Ramanasramam. He was in Mouna at the time. I was with my friend who later became my wife and she was the one who introduced me to him. He gave me a compassionate look and a broad smile. It gave me a lot of peace and it made me calm. In spite of his Mouna, Guruji signalled us to come to his room. He gave me lots of answers by writing them on paper.

I am an ardent devotee of Shirdi Sai Baba. I have read *Sai Satcharita*. I came to know how Sai Baba performed miracles for his devotees and helped them to grow spiritually.

From my 20th year I was searching for my Guru. At last my quest for my Guru was fulfilled in the year 2003. Guruji is a lot like Shirdi Sai Baba. Guruji's way of treating his disciples and devotees is like Shirdi Sai Baba. At last I got my Guru. My Guruji is my living God to me. From that time onwards my spiritual journey began. Frequently I started visiting my Guruji whenever he stayed at Tiruvannamalai.

His room is filled with disciples and devotees. I sit in front of him with lots of questions in my mind. He looks deep into my eyes and all my questions get answered by

that look. Sometimes he is narrating a story to the people around him. There are answers to your problems in the story. After narrating the story he looks at you with a loving smile.

In the year 2004, one night Guruji called me and told me to come to Tiruvannamalai with a tape recorder. The following day I went with two of my friends to his room. Guruji chanted *Siva Sahasranamam* and we recorded it. Guruji told me the importance of *Siva Sahasranamam*. He said it solves family problems especially between couples. One of the devotees printed one thousand copies of *Siva Sahasranamam*. This is the Grace of my Guruji. I got an opportunity to distribute the CD and the book to the people who were in need of it. This is one of the precious moments of my life.

There are three types of Dikshas: Sparsha Diksha, Nethra Diksha, and Manasika Diksha.

Our Guruji uses all the three to nurture his devotees' growth in spirituality. I have experienced all the three types in my life in different situations.

I am not a scholar in Philosophy nor do I know Sanskrit. All Scriptures and important books like *Vedas*, *Srimad Bhagavatam* is in Sanskrit. But my Guruji has taken pains to write it in simple language so that ordinary people like me can understand it easily.

Whenever His new book is released, He gives me a copy. I trouble him by telling him to bless me by signing on the first page of the book. Every time there is a message signed by him which is a guiding factor for me at that point of time.

There are lots of experiences with my Guruji. There are no words to express His Grace. Only my heart knows the real value of these experiences. Two of my Guruji's books, *Stories for Meditation* and *Stories for Inspiration* changed my attitude towards life. Still the change is taking place inside me. Simple stories give immense knowledge, confidence and courage.

I am blessed in this birth to be with a Guruji who is loving, caring, and compassionate and a realised Master.

He is the One who helps me to grow in all walks of life.

Hari Om



Gurudev at Mr. and Mrs. Kapaleeswaran's house in Chennai



24. MY DIVINE MOTHER

– R.A. Latha Kapaleeswaran

When I first went to meet Swamiji in the year 1999, I was actually afraid. Since a person compelled me to meet Swamiji, I had been there. But on seeing him, I felt relaxed and comfortable.

I wanted to discuss about many problems I was facing at the time, but I did not speak a single word. I was mentally narrating my situation to him. When it was time for me to leave, I did Namaskaram and stood in front of him. He looked at me and said, “Tomorrow I will give you Mantra Diksha. Come to Kotturpuram.” I just said, “Ok” and went there the next day. He gave me Mantra Diksha. When I did Namaskaram, he said, “Sit, you have the family burden on your head. Let me give Mahalakshmi.” I think He gave me Mahalakshmi Herself and not just the Mantra. When did I tell him about the family burden that was on my head? Now readers would understand his power. As days passed, all my problems which were haunting me got dissolved and gradually disappeared. Swamiji's blessings are with me every minute.

As a healer, counsellor, I meet lots of people every day. Sometimes people ask me some tough questions for which I give an immediate answer without knowing the answer and I wonder at myself, “How it did happen?” When I meet Swamiji the next time, He repeats the very same sentences without changing one single word. The room is filled with

devotees but He looks at me and asks, “What Latha Ji?” with a sparkle in his eyes, to indicate to me that it was He after all who had answered my clients. Such incidents happened many times. Many concepts in spirituality open up for me without reading any books and I know it is the Grace and blessings of my Guru.

It is a real blessing and the greatest gift in life to get a Guru and to be with him and spend time with him. It is only because of poorva janma punya we get a good Guru. I am blessed with our Great Guru, who is the personification of the Divine Mother, full of motherly Love and concern. Swami Sadasivanandaji, an American Swamiji, told me once that He had seen Swamiji talking to the Divine Mother many times. As a great devotee of the Mother, Swamiji has become the Universal Mother.

My Swamiji has abundant knowledge and wisdom, but I had never seen him trying to stuff people with his knowledge. He speaks according to the devotee's level. I used to wonder at Swamiji entertaining small children with jokes and stories. On the surface it may appear to be a joke or story but in depth it has great spiritual value. My son was just 10 years old when I started taking him to Swamiji. He used to enjoy coming with me because Swamiji was very kind to him, he knew he would get lots of eatables and get to listen to many jokes and stories. Swamiji used to take pains to write jokes and give my son during his Mouna days. Never had it been a boring trip for my son!

The concern and care he has for all of us, the devotees, is amazing. I have seen him arranging taxi for the devotees many times, fixing appointments with doctors for them when they are in dire need. He has never been unconcerned. We hear only stories about how people take

care of Gurus but here our Swamiji takes care of us like only the Divine Mother can with great Love and care.

I had handed myself to him like a baby. I know for sure Swamiji would carry me with lots of Motherly Love and care, feed me with his abundant knowledge and wisdom as a mother would. Carry me, Swamiji, till where I should reach. There is no qualification required to be a baby. The Mother knows what to do. So, I know I will reach wherever my Guru wants me to reach. I thank the Supreme Divine Mother for coming to me as such a loving Guru.

Hari Om



25. FROM DARKNESS TAKE ME TO LIGHT

– Dr. Ram Shanker Tiwari

He came. He saw. He conquered! That was my first meeting with Sri Guruji. And I surrendered!

Until the age of 73, I was in search of a Sadguru, an Enlightened Soul. But it did not happen. Because of my sanskaras right from my childhood, I had been searching for a spiritual mentor. In the journey of life many ups and downs came, and my spiritual world was filled with questions about beliefs, disbeliefs, acceptance and doubts. As a result of my scientific training, the questions further deepened.

I met many Jnanis, sadhus, philosophers, believers, and non-believers! There were a few occasions when I was on the verge of getting Diksha but somehow it did not happen.

After several years, one day I wrote a letter to Dr. Mohan Bande of Indore who was a colleague. I simply said, "You have found a Guru – a sanyasi, devotee and a knowledgeable soul, but I'm still Nigure (without a Guru)." Bande Ji, very kindly responded about a possibility, and I reached Indore.

It was 'Love at first sight!' I bowed, I surrendered, and Swami Shantananda Ji Puri Maharaj gracefully accepted me as a disciple! My life changed after the initiation. There is a calmness and serenity in my life which is hard to describe in words. I have no words to praise my Sri Guruji. Ever since

I came under the guidance of this gem of a Jnani, all my doubts have dissolved.

The Scriptures say that when your longing is intense, you meet your Guru. This is very true in my case and I feel so blessed to have found him. I am so happy. I adore him, worship him and remember him always. Almost all my members of my family became his disciples including my grandson. We are all part of Guruji's family now.

I do not go for miracles. I got the greatest miracle of peace, Love, and answers to my once bubbling questions about God, Atman, Maya, and aim of my life. Whenever I sit at his Holy Feet, I don't ask questions anymore. All my questions are answered. Whenever there are mundane problems in the family, we ask Sri Guruji for guidance. His advice and blessings are there always. It has always worked, be it a Mantra, Sadhana, a prayer or meditation. What else does one need?

Life is short. The path of Sadhana is long. But the Master is there who knows the way and points us in the right direction. What a fulfilled life!

My humble prostrations at His sacred Feet!



26. ASK AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE

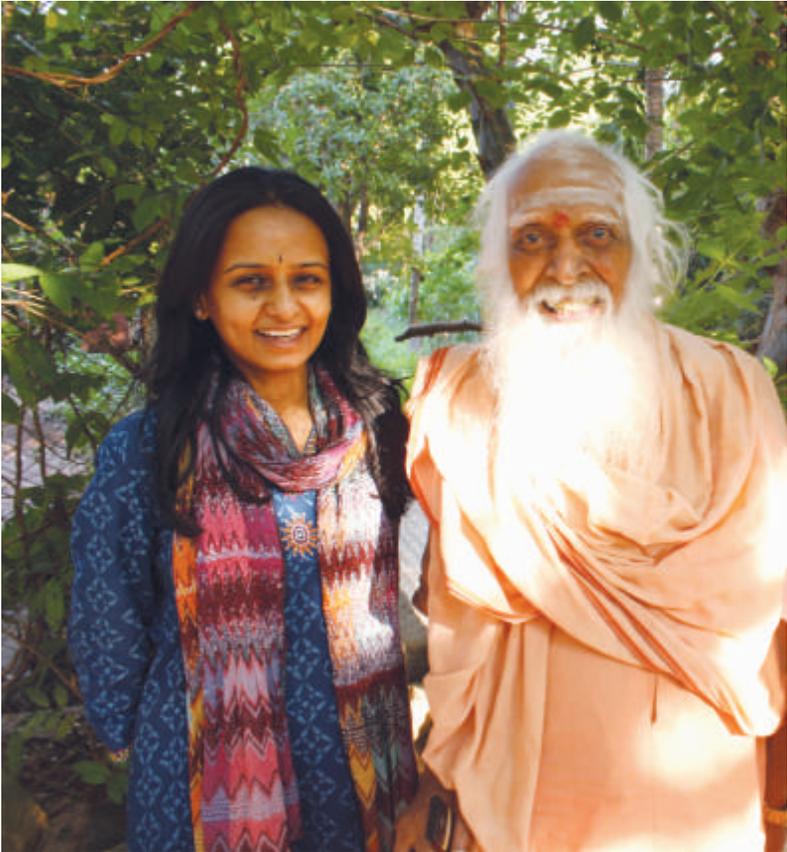
- Sai Guhapriya

The only intention here is to assure anyone who is travelling through this jungle of life, feeling lost like I did; that the Divine Mother is very loving and merciful, and she will reveal herself like she did in the form of my Gurudev.

Mine is the story of a non-believer. Caught between extreme Christian ideologies at school and an extremely conservative Hindu family, I questioned everybody and everything, read every book I could to gain more clarity. The smooth-talking astrologers and the money-seeking temple priests irked me. The rigidness of the church never appealed to me either. I loved Christ, not Christianity. I wandered through life absolutely confused and restless, questioning everything. I read everything from Zen to Osho, attended every class from Reiki to Alpha mind techniques but the restlessness in my heart and mind continued. The happiness offered by the world neither seemed to satisfy me nor calm the restlessness within me.

Then one night in 2000, I was chatting with a friend of mine on the mobile. I received a message from her which read "Sai Baba loves you." Irritated, I asked why she had sent me this random message. To which her reply read, "He is always with you." I was furious at this point. It was well known that I didn't trust the so called 'holy men'! So, I called her and asked why she had sent me such messages. She denied it completely. I refused to believe her as she

was an ardent Shirdi Sai devotee. So, she suggested that I check the chat myself when I reached Chennai the next day. When I saw the chat history, I was shocked to see a completely different set of replies on her chat. It took me some time to absorb the whole thing. I then accepted her suggestion to go to Sai Baba's temple in Mylapore. And when I entered the temple for the first time, I was overcome by such a strong emotion that it's hard to describe in words. This was the first time I felt the Divine



*Gurudev with Sai Guhapriya,
one of his disciples*

presence in my life. Needless to say, I held on to Sai's feet and never let go. He became my father, my friend, and the Divine.

I read the Sai Satcharita every day. There is a line in the second chapter in which Sai says that the Guru is like a guide. If one takes a guide, he will be able to travel through the jungle of life towards God, easily avoiding the pitfalls. Each time I read that line, I wished Sai was alive.

At that point the issues I faced in life were too much to handle. I prayed to Sai Baba for guidance. Though I felt His guiding hand in my life, I was still lost and confused. I wept to Him, pleading that my tiny mind was incapable of recognising His Divine guidance and that I needed someone to verbally guide me through life.

Within a month of my prayers, a friend who practises healing insisted that I met Shantananda Swamiji. I very hesitantly agreed as she said that meeting Him would cure my health problems, which were chronic at that point. I walked into a packed room where Swamiji was sitting on a cot and talking. He asked us to come forward and sit by Him. When people asked me to fall at His Feet, I actually hesitated as I was not used to such things. He said that such formalities were not required and gave me two sweets instead as Prasad. I quietly slipped it to my friend who enjoyed good food of any kind. What I didn't realise then but understand today is that once the Guru takes you under His wings, He constantly looks out for you.

Over the years I kept visiting Swamiji in Chennai and Tiruvannamalai. On every visit I had a bunch of questions which He answered with His unique clarity and wit. He even used science to explain spirituality. His answers were always very clear and he came down to each one's level of

understanding. My friend would have had a different set of questions, but we both got the answer in the same story! And the best part was that she had never even asked Him these questions verbally. She would have mentioned it in the car on our way to Swamiji. That is the speciality of my Gurudev.

My questions continued until I had no more questions to ask. My restless mind now rested on a platform. I didn't realise His importance in my life, until He in all His magnanimity, decided to further His grip on me. Last year I decided to spend a week with Him just because I felt like it – something which I would normally never do.

As I sat with Him listening to Him clear someone's doubt, He looked at me and asked me if I knew about the importance of Mantras and the significance of Mantra Diksha. I replied in the negative. I was instructed to remind Him the following day right after lunch. He spoke for more than an hour on the subject but ended it saying that I needed to select a good guru, but an old man like Him would not serve the purpose! Now I was extremely confused. Was He saying that I take Mantra Diksha or not? So after much debate, I hesitantly approached Him again, and He agreed. Such is His compassion.

The day of my initiation was magical. The heaviness that I carried with me over the years seemed to have disappeared. I was lost in what felt like a trance; but that trance I realise today is the warmth of His Divine Love. I didn't want to step away from that warmth. Foolish as I was, I didn't realise that once Gurudev takes charge of you, He never lets go.

Gurudev showed His constant presence with me in another incident. In January 2012, a dear friend of mine

was upset over a loss and was feeling suicidal. I was very upset because a couple of years prior, another friend had hung himself right after calling me. The sense of helplessness and guilt that I couldn't help him stayed with me always.

Now when this friend started talking along the same lines, I grew paranoid. I sat awake the whole night wondering what to do and how to help him. The following morning around 5:30 am, I was still sitting on my chair and in complete despair when I asked my Gurudev, "You promised to be with me always. Where are You now in my time of need?" Within minutes my phone rang, and it was my Gurudev! His words "Tell Me, Guha, what is troubling you? Don't worry everything will be fine." will stay with me always. Gurudev gently showed me in His loving way, that He is with me always even when I can't see His physical presence I have felt His constant presence in my life ever since. This incident planted my undying faith that my Gurudev was always present in my life, holding my hand and guiding me forward. It also made me realise that wherever I may be, my Gurudev is ALWAYS with me.

Gurudev asked me to come to Vasishtha Guha. I was supposed to travel with a fellow Guru bhen. Due to unavoidable reasons she had to cancel her trip. Since she had booked the tickets, she had cancelled it to get a refund so that we didn't lose too much money. I was okay with it because I didn't think I'd be travelling that far off by myself but Gurudev had other plans. As soon as she put the phone down, Gurudev called and asked me to come. I had a comfortable journey to an unknown place with His Grace.

Vasishtha Guha by itself is very magical and the presence of my Gurudev made it paradise. A couple of days

after I reached Vasishtha Guha, my Gurudev took temporary charge of the Ashram. A buzz of excitement filled the air. On enquiring I was told now that Gurudev was taking charge, everything would be on time and perfectly executed. The meticulous nature of my Gurudev fascinated me. Every little detail was written down and personally overseen. When I asked Gurudev how he is so perfect, He replied, "God is perfection. So to reach Him, we too have to be perfect." Such simple remarks with maximum impact are his trademark. Even the most complex philosophies are given in such simple capsules. It's like a loving father holding the hand of his child within His, and teaching Him to write. My Gurudev is so compassionate and loving. He takes such care of every one of us. All we have to do is follow His instructions and we will reach the Divine more easily.

Another amazing experience that had me in a daze was the miracle of 'twin Swamiji's'. Four of us were travelling with Gurudev to Bangalore from Tiruvannamalai in a van (organised by another gentleman disciple from Bangalore) when we stopped for coffee at a cafe. The driver requested me to take a picture of him with Gurudev. I told him that the light was insufficient in the mobile phone camera. Since he insisted, I went ahead and took two pictures. And of course, they turned out to be really dark. So the second time around, the driver switched on all the lights and asked me to take the picture again. So I took another two pictures, which I normally do so as to have more options. This time both were clear pictures of Gurudev and the driver. He asked me if the pictures were good. I assured him that the lights helped to capture good shots and handed the phone back to the driver. He gave it back to me immediately. I was confused, and it took me a few seconds

to realise what had happened. The second picture did not have the driver...only two Gurujis!!! The driver was actually not to be seen and in his place, Guruji, replicated. The driver's name was Parthasarathi. I don't know if Gurudev was telling us that He is in all of us or that the world is Maya. But whatever He was conveying, the miracle cannot be ignored.

To the sceptics who might assume it's a camera trick resulting in the obvious displacement of light, I checked both the pictures had images of Gurudev and the driver. The transition happened in the few seconds when he stretched his hand to receive the mobile from me and view it! Also to the sceptics I would like to add that I know how difficult it is to accept such incidents but seeing is believing. It is not a second hand experience. So if one seeks the truth, the road will open to him.

My Gurudev has simplified my life, helped me understand the warmth of the Divine Mother, and has started me on the path to realising God. I truly believe that the Good Shepherd gathers every single sheep on the journey home, even the sceptics and non-believers. As my Gurudev says, "Hurry home!"



27. THE GUIDING LIGHT OF MY LIFE

– Dr. Padma

As always said and truly experienced by many spiritual practitioners everywhere, I believe that certain things in life are only to be experienced and words are never enough to express what is experienced. Having said that, I make a humble attempt to describe the indescribable with the intention that it may be of some help to a budding spiritual aspirant.

I saw Swamiji for the first time in 2001 when I first visited Ramanasramam, one of the holiest places on earth. Since childhood, I have been blessed with many opportunities to be with great souls, but somehow it has never been with a Sanyasi wearing the ochre robes. I had little trust in Swamis because of many imposters who were trying to take advantage of vulnerable believers. So when Narthaki Amma, a well-known devotee of Bhagawan Ramana introduced me to Swami Shantananda Puri, I was a bit suspicious of him. I consciously tried to maintain a distance when he was around not knowing it was destined that I would be his disciple.

It was at a period in my life when I was driven by the urge to constantly meditate. I used to get up in the morning, have breakfast in the Ashram, take a parcel for lunch and go to Skandashramam or Virupaksha cave and meditate from morning to evening. One day I had an experience of my body in different ways during meditation. I was curious to know what it was and shared this experience with my mother and she too had no clue of it and came up with an idea to ask Swamiji about it. As I was suspicious of him, I told her to ask him, and she asked him.

Swamiji simply said in his own style, “That is just Sookshma sareera which comes in different forms, don't bother about all that and just focus on God.” When my Mother told me this answer, I was impressed and my suspicion on him started fading away, I started listening to him when he spoke to others near the dining hall outside of Bhagawan’s shrine in the premises of Ramanasramam. I still didn’t speak to him because my trust was not strong yet. During those days Swamiji was giving lectures on *Ashtavakra Gita* in Ramanasramam. I started getting back from the hill early to attend his lectures when I began trying to understand his huge wisdom.

My trust in him slowly grew stronger as I listened to his discourses. When I finally spoke to him, he invited me to his place where he used to reside so we could have a better personal talk. I felt happy and I asked him many questions and he answered all of them with Love. I still remember a few questions and his wonderful responses. I'm sharing some for the benefit of the reader.

Q: I want to spend more hours in meditation these days, so I am going to Skandashramam and Virupaksha Cave daily. Am I on the right track?

Swamiji: “By the time you climb up Skandashramam in this hot sun, your energy is 60% drained and you are left with less energy for your spiritual practices. If you are looking for Divine magnetic vibrations, they exist everywhere in Tiruvannamalai, even at the bus stop. The vibrations are even more in the meditation hall, because Bhagawan spent a lot of time answering questions there. So, if you meditate there you will save the energy you are spending in climbing and you can meditate better and longer.” I was very satisfied with the answer and started spending more time in the meditation hall.

Q. You always talk about detachment, but I am really helpless as I am greatly attached to Ramanasramam. What do I do about it?

Swamiji: "See, some attachments are good. Let this attachment be there, because it helps one in spiritual growth. Your physical presence here doesn't matter. Whenever you want to come here, close your eyes and come here mentally. You just keep practising it and then, there will be a day you will be able to come here in your subtle body and see everything happening here. People here have experiences of some people like that, who were actually not present here physically." Earlier to this, I was suffering because of my attachments and after hearing Swamiji's reply, I was relieved; rather I enjoyed my attachment with the Ashram by going there mentally whenever I wanted.

After answering all my questions, Swamiji told me, "I am not enlightened yet and if you get enlightenment before me, please come back to me and tell me how you got it." Poor me....I believed those words at that moment. Later on recalling these words, I would have a good laugh over them. A decade later I once said to him, "Swamiji, you made me a bakara. I believed your words when you said you were not enlightened." He laughed out loud!

My last question in the first meeting was, "When can I meet you again?" He answered saying, "It will happen according to God's Will". Satisfied I clicked a photo of him and left. Since then, for some years, I remembered him fondly by frequently looking at his photo but never had the opportunity to have his gracious Darshan. Many times I went to Ramanasramam with hopes of seeing him and returned disappointed. With Narthaki Amma no more in

the body, I had no one to ask about Swami's whereabouts. After a gap of three to four years, I was finally able to see him. This time I went directly to his room with the intention of never losing contact with him. I introduced myself to Swamiji and told him about my past experience with him and how much I had been longing to see him again. Thereafter my second innings began.

Swamiji as usual accepted me with all his Divine Love. This time I got the opportunity to get closer to him by regularly attending his Satsangs at the Ashram. My trust grew deeper and I was able to communicate with him more closely.

On one occasion I had a strong desire to offer him a meal, but couldn't muster the courage to ask him. Finally, when I managed to ask him, he agreed to have a meal at my house on his next visit to Bangalore. He soon gave me the opportunity to fulfil my wish. I bought the freshest organic ingredients and chanted the Gayatri Mantra throughout and cooked a meal for him with complete focus on only one thought that I was cooking this meal for my Divine Mother whom I worship every day. I regarded cooking this meal as part of my spiritual practice. I served Swamiji with all my heart and soul. He accepted this offering and enjoyed it thoroughly. Since then, He has given me several opportunities to serve him and every time I truly feel so blessed and drenched in his Divine Love. One interesting thing that happens when I take food for him is that he understands my condition even before I go to him and he first takes care of me and then accepts my food.

One day at the Ashram, Swamiji suddenly told me about a few Mantras from his book, Infallible Vedic

Remedies and said, “You can give the Mantras to people who need them. As you are a psychologist, you can help many people by sharing these Mantras.” Since then, unlimited miracles started happening to people around me. I will share a few instances with the reader. A family was depressed as two of their girls were over 33 years of age and still unmarried. Marriage dates of the girls were settled within twenty days of chanting the Mantra by the family members. The family was overjoyed! Many others were cured of different physical diseases through the Mantras recommended for health. Innumerable miracles happened with Digbandhana Maha Mantra. There is an endless list of such success stories. His Grace on me didn't end there. He blessed me with Mantra Diksha after which my experience and intimacy with the Divine Mother grew stronger and deeper.

One day I asked Swamiji how I should increase my concentration during meditation. Swamiji replied by saying, “Devotion and dedication are the only two Mantras available for it. Just accept all your limitations by surrendering completely. Add rasa to your practice and your meditation will be much better.” I have followed Swamiji's instructions and never turned back. My focus during meditation grew tenfold. I also found that meditating in his presence was beyond anything I had ever experienced.

In spite of my extremely challenging health condition, I am considered a charger for everyone around me. But there are times when I feel drained out. In many such situations, I call up Swamiji who recharges me almost immediately as he is the living and loving cosmic energy.

My Mother has had similar experiences with Swamiji. Once she went to him very tired and hungry after a long journey but she said she was fine and full of energy as long as she was with him. She was oblivious of her hunger and pain while in his presence. Only after stepping out did she remember not having eaten anything. She also shared some of her problems with him and they got solved within no time. She also recalls seeing a big blue aura around Swamiji on one of her meetings with him.

It is not that we will not have problems at all if we are with him, but for sure, we will not be shattered completely with the problems, because his Grace gives us the courage to handle them really well and makes our trust in God even stronger day by day, which ultimately helps us to achieve the highest purpose of human life.

All I can say is that we have studied and heard about people who lived with great saints calling such people very fortunate.

Amazingly we are also one of those blessed and fortunate people to be in the midst of Swami Shantananda Puriji Maharaj who is manifesting as the powerful energy of the Goddess. Just thinking of this gives me goose bumps and my heart fills with joy! For him and for the Divine Mother manifesting in him, all we can say is a small THANK YOU! We can only prostrate before him offering ourselves at his Divine Lotus Feet for giving us an opportunity to be in the shade of his Divine Love.

HARI OM!



28. TRYST WITH GURUDEV

– S. Murali

Sri Gurubhyo Namaha

Just a year ago, in early April 2012, I thought, “I am going to be 60 soon, but I am yet to take to the spiritual path.” I prayed to the Lord to lead me to a Sadguru who will provide me with the spiritual guidance necessary for spiritual fulfilment. I prayed for 3 days and then forgot about it.

First Darshan

Sometime in the second half of 2012, I paid a visit to Dr. B's clinic to consult him regarding an upper respiratory infection, Bronchitis. I saw two small photographs on his desk and asked him who these Swamijis were. He told me about his Guru Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj and his Guru Swami Purushottamananda Puri Maharaj. He also told me that Swami Shantananda Puri was presently at Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, and that he would be visiting Mrs. GP's house and his house the next day (Sunday).

My wife Lakshmi and I seized this opportunity and had Darshan of our “would be” Gurudev at Mrs. GP's house for the first time. In the Satsang that followed, Swamiji answered several questions posed by spiritual seekers including two or three of my own. What struck me was Gurudev's simplicity, honesty and eagerness to satisfy

everyone who posed questions. He was extremely humble. It was obvious that he was a learned scholar, well versed in the Scriptures and Puranas and particularly, the Bhagavatha Purana, from which he quoted often. As Guruji retired for lunch, Lakshmi and I returned home with a sense of peace.

A few months later, Swamiji returned to Pondicherry and I had his Darshan once again at Dr. B's house and Mrs.GP's house. This time, he was joking about Swamijis and spiritual seekers. I noticed he had a keen sense of humor and was able to relate to everybody at their level with no pretense. As he retired for lunch, Lakshmi and I returned home laughing.

A couple of months passed. On a particular Sunday, I sat in my room thinking seriously about succession planning in my company. Lakshmi saw me looking concerned and suggested that I go and meet Swamiji at Tiruvannamalai. I felt it was too much bother to drive all the way to Tiruvannamalai and back (my driver being a staunch Christian, does not work on Sundays). The next Sunday again, Lakshmi suggested that we go to Tiruvannamalai. My mother who requires full-time attention was left to the care of a temporary caretaker and we both set off for Tiruvannamalai.

We met Mrs. GP at Sri Ramanasramam and she guided us to Swamiji's room. We sat down quietly in a corner. We listened to Swamiji's answers to the questions of several seekers including a few from Europe and elsewhere. It was on this visit that I briefly met AA and KS – they were to make a significant contribution in my quest, later on. I did not know this at that time. We returned to Pondicherry with a sense of calm.

The Test and Diksha

Two Sundays later, my mother encouraged me to go to Tiruvannamalai again and we left her with a caretaker and promised to return in a few hours. Something in me impelled me to ask, “Swamiji, will you please initiate us in the spiritual path?” I did not know what initiation meant. And, I did not come to Bhagawan's Ashram with the intent of asking this question. Swamiji replied that he normally gives Diksha only to those who are known to him for a long time. Further, he is 84 years old and that I should seek Diksha from a younger Swamiji like Swami Sadasivananda (an American Swamiji) who was seated next to Swami Shantananda. Swami Sadasivananda just smiled. It was at this time that AA and KS laughed and said that this was the usual Divine Drama of Gurudev. I was surprised at their audacity. AA suggested that I ask Gurudev again. Hesitantly, and with great reverence, I repeated my request to Swamiji. He said that since he had given Diksha to more than 400 seekers, he had no spiritual power left in him and that I should perhaps seek another Guru. AA interjected immediately, “This is a Divine lie and don't believe him.” This time I was stunned – “How could someone take such liberties with such a learned spiritual Master?” But, Gurudev laughed like a child, looking at the surprise on my face. He asked me to come and stay a night at the Ashram and then come to his room at 4.30am for Diksha. Lakshmi and I smiled; we were extremely thankful to AA and KS and grateful to our “Guru to be”.

My mother, being unwell, could not be left alone overnight. At least one of us had to stay with her through the day or night. However, a solution presented itself when Lakshmi's sister and brother-in-law agreed to come to Pondicherry and take care of my mother for two days.

We immediately spoke to Gurudev on the phone and asked him if January 1, 2013, would be convenient for our Diksha. He said, "Yes."

As we could not get accommodation at Sri Ramanasramam, we booked a hotel room and came to have Darshan of Swamiji in the afternoon of December 31, 2012. Swamiji smiled at us and handed over a piece of paper which said he was in Mouna Vratham by the Divine command and that he would continue to be in Mouna for several more days. I was disappointed and thought that I was perhaps not qualified for spiritual Sadhana. AA who was serving Swamiji day and night for several weeks was also on mouna and quietly wrote on a sheet of paper, "Please ask him again. He knows very well that the Sastras permit him to break the Mouna Vratham for giving Diksha." I looked at this piece of paper and smiled. Guruji looked at me and asked me to hand over the piece of paper to him. I hesitantly looked at AA and she smiled and gestured to go ahead. I then handed over the piece of paper to Gurudev. He laughed out aloud. For the next half an hour, he was very quiet. Suddenly, he broke his mouna and said AA was right and then instructed me and Lakshmi on the preparations necessary for initiation on the next day.

Finally, on January 1, 2013, Lakshmi and I were each given Mantra Diksha, separately. We returned to Pondicherry with a sense of satisfaction – our first baby step on our spiritual path was taken (or was it a giant leap? for the Guru now shares responsibility with us!)

The Joy of Pada Pooja

A few weeks later, Mrs. GP called Lakshmi and asked if we planned to do Pada Pooja for Gurudev. I telephoned Gurudev and asked him if we could do Pada Pooja on

February 9, our wedding anniversary. I was to go to Sri Ramanasramam on February 8, 2013, from Bangalore and Lakshmi was to join me on February 9, 2013 morning after arranging a temporary caretaker for my mother. Unfortunately, my mother took ill on February 7, 2013 and Lakshmi asked me to come back to Pondicherry directly as my mother was to be admitted in a hospital. I rushed back to Pondicherry and the Pada Pooja had to be postponed but my mother got well!

Eventually we did the Pada Pooja for Gurudev on February 15, 2013. On that day, I felt a great sense of joy. I never imagined that touching the Feet of a Sadguru would bring such tranquillity to the mind. It was a beautiful day and we took several photographs with Gurudev at the Ashram.

Visit to Holy Places with Gurudev

After Pada Pooja, AA told me many of Gurudev's disciples were planning to go to Bangalore with Gurudev on Feb 23, 2013 and planned to remain with him in Bangalore till the date of his departure to Delhi. Lakshmi and I were not sure when we would be able to meet Gurudev again. So we decided to go over the weekend on February 23 and 24 to Bangalore. My sister and brother-in-law kindly agreed to take care of my mother on these two days. On this occasion, we spent two full days with Gurudev and all his disciples. Despite his indifferent health, Gurudev took us to Sri Rajarajeswari Ma temple and thereafter to the Ramakrishna Mutt in Bangalore. Although I have been to Ramakrishna Mutt and several temples in the past, being with Gurudev at these holy places was a spiritually enriching experience. We returned to Pondicherry with a great sense of happiness.



Gurudev blesses his disciples, S. Murali and Lakshmi, with a visit to their house

Heaven on Earth – Vasishtha Guha

While at Bangalore, AA mentioned to me that some Guru Bhais and Guru Bèhens were going to Vasishtha Guha from March 30, 2013 to April 6, 2013 to be in the holy presence of Gurudev and to do Japa at Vasishtha Guha. I was talking about this to my mother and Lakshmi and both of them promptly said that I should go to Vasishtha Guha. Lakshmi was kind enough to stay back to care for my mother. On March 30, 2013, I set off to Delhi onward to Vasishtha Guha with a group of spiritually evolved disciples of Gurudev. It was on this trip that I met Mrs. Rohini Krishnakumar, the author of *Rays of Grace*, the first book that Gurudev gave me at Tiruvannamalai. I learnt about Guru Bhakti from Rohiniji. Her love for her

Gurudev is unparalleled. Travelling with this group was a wondrous experience.

The next four days at Vasishtha Guha passed quickly in Satsang with Gurudev, and Japa and meditation at Vasishtha Guha. We sat on the banks of Ganga Maa and each narrated their experiences with Gurudev. It was a delightful and joyful Satsang.

Although I had been on many holidays including several jungles and several overseas trips, the visit to Vasishtha Guha, sitting at the Feet of my Gurudev and having Satsang with a wonderful group of dedicated disciples, was the happiest experience of my life. For the first three days, I laughed out aloud – like I have never laughed before. But, on the day of my departure and the day before, I cried out aloud at the Feet of my Gurudev for no apparent reason. Was everything alright with me? I do not know the answer to that question yet. But, I do know that I am a changed person.

Jai Gurudev. Hari Om.



29. GURUDEV

– Reshma Krishnakumar

In this modern era where almost all of us knowingly or unknowingly depend upon mobile networks for communication, I am sure that at some point or the other, we would have definitely grumbled about pure connectivity. The immediate thought which flashes in our minds would be, “How wonderful it would have been if I had some telepathic power to communicate.” Well, I would like to share with you about the uninterrupted Divine network which connects a disciple to his Master.

During my first year in engineering college, it was mandatory for all students to clear a paper on Computer Programming. However, being a science student with a Biology background, my computer skills were limited to just simple basics. I looked upon learning programming as my prarabdha and clearing each levels of examination on the particular paper was equivalent to victory over a major battle.

With my Guru's blessings, I managed to clear the theory paper giving a fair performance after going through all the struggles. But the practical session on programming always remained a nightmare. Weeks before the exam, I was filled with worries about getting the pass mark. During the night before my practical exam, I hardly slept and was completely occupied trying to memorize the 10 c- programs which were covered in our syllabus. I successfully managed



Little Reshma with her Gurudev



*Gurudev, an ocean of smiles,
and a very happy Reshma*

to get 9 programs memorized. As I moved on to the final one, I found that it went on for 5 pages almost and I knew that it would be impossible for me to learn it without understanding the logic. After all, when none of the 9 programs which I learnt till then made any logical sense to me, I decided to take a chance and actually left the final program without even reading it once.

Next day, I woke up with anxiety and nervousness. Before leaving for the exam hall, I rang my Gurudev and sought his blessings. Before entering the laboratory, I looked at my ring which had my Gurudev's photo in it and prayed, "Maharaj, I have fully kept my faith in you and I have done my maximum. Please don't give me the program which I left without studying."

As I entered the laboratory, I was asked to pick a question paper at random and I was expected to do the specific program given in the paper. I closed my eyes tight and prayed to Gurudev and picked a paper. With all the hope, I opened my eyes and began reading the question and found that I had got exactly the program I left. I could hear roars of thunder and flashes of lightning within me and raindrops were of course my tears. I took my seat and all that I did was to complain to my Master. "Gurudev, you blessed me that I would clear my exam and I am going to fail now. Is this what you want? Are you happy? Maharaj, how can you ever go wrong?"

I was simply looking around and did not even attempt to start. The invigilator saw me sitting idle and asked me to write down at least something so that she could consider promoting me. Where was the question of writing a program when I didn't have even the idea about beginning it? I was too busy talking to my Gurudev. Suddenly I felt

something within me saying, “Check the saved files.” I decided to ignore it. I found it absolutely foolish to check the saved file because as a student I knew that before every university practical, the staff made sure all programs were deleted from the computer. However, I repeatedly felt the same and this time, I thought I would check once just for my satisfaction.

The feelings which I went through in the following moments are too difficult to pen down. I was literally shocked to see the same program in the question paper, already solved before me on the computer screen.

When I prayed to my Master to give me a program from the list I had studied, he solved the question for me without making me type a single word. My invigilator who had seen me staring at the screen with a blank expression a while before was equally surprised to see the correct output which was “supposed to have been” programmed by me. She asked me, “Is it for this you got so tensed? You have got the correct answer.” She smiled.

Inside me, I smiled and said, “Yes, Madam, it was my fault making it late to connect to my Guru. His network is always strong.”



30. MY EXPERIENCES WITH GURUDEV

– Miss N

“When one yearns for the Mother to come, that yearning itself brings the dawn of the advent of Her light. The perception of that light creates a yearning for more light.” – Swami Shantananda Puri

This is exactly what happened with me and brought me under to Gurudev's Lotus Feet. My Class XI was the darkest period of my life. I had a terrible time in school as well as at home. I had a teacher in school who used to constantly pick on me in class. Since she was the senior most, all the other teachers followed suit. I used to be scolded in front of the entire class and blamed for something I hadn't done or sometimes for some matters that didn't concern me at all. My grades dropped completely and invariably, my papers were always under evaluation by my teachers. At home, the situation was no better. There was a lot of confusion which did not provide a congenial atmosphere for me to study. Moreover, I had major health complications during that period.

But like they say, the night is darkest just before dawn. All this anxiety and frustration completely diverted me to God. Till date I believe that if not for any of this, I wouldn't have absolute faith in God.

In the month of May, during my annual vacations, I had gone to visit my relatives abroad. During this time I had a

burning desire to have somebody to talk to and pour my heart out to, before I could start the final and the most important year of my school life. I was in such a situation where I couldn't open up to my parents. Basically, I wanted God himself though I was unaware of this fact at that point of time. After we returned home, my mother came to know that a Swamiji, whom she had met earlier while on a trip with her friends to the Himalayas, was in Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai. My circumstances were such that my family would have strictly forbidden me to travel to Tiruvannamalai with my mother to meet a Swamiji. But the way my Gurudev cleared the obstacles and paved way for me to come to him, can be easily compared to the manner in which the infant Krishna was taken to Yashoda Ma.

While on my way to Tiruvannamalai, I didn't realise that this visit was going to have a huge impact on my life and that it was going to change for the better and forever. When we reached the Ashram, we went straight in search of Gurudev. We soon learnt that he stayed in room A-1 and we rushed there. On reaching there, my mother started running. I, not being aware of the reason for my mother's sudden excitement was left with no option but to run behind her. We found Gurudev locking his room door and heading for lunch along with three other disciples. My mother went near him and even without offering him her pranams began saying, "Swamiji, I met you in Vasishtha Guha in April and now I have come just to leave my daughter in your care and custody." Gurudev responded with his usual mischievous smile saying, "Appadiya?" "Is that so?" Right from my first meeting with him, he has shown nothing but motherly Love and affection towards me. My very first experience with him is as an example of this. Since he was going for lunch, he asked us to wait for a while till he returned. He walked a

few paces and turned back and asked us if we had had our lunch. When my mother and I said that we hadn't, he expressed concern which only a mother can raise. He said, "Come with me. The manager of the Ashram, Kannan, will be standing near the dining hall. You can request him for his permission to take Prasad there."

Just before entering the dining hall, he turned back to the other disciples who were accompanying him and told them to assist us in getting the permission from the Ashram manager. After that, he came back twice to ensure that we were allowed in for Prasad. We were immediately granted permission and so we entered the hall and had our lunch. Since it was our first visit to the Ashram, we were not sure if we could get up once we were done eating or if we had to wait for the others as well. In our tradition, we have to wait till all the others finish and hence we waited. After a while, we saw others getting up and so we also got up and went to wash our hands. We saw Gurudev standing outside the hall with his other disciples. When we saw him there, my mother and I rushed to him. Gurudev looked at us and said, "Ah! Come, I am waiting only for you." To be very honest, at that time I only felt bad for making a person his age wait for ten minutes for us to come out. I felt all the more miserable because there was no place for him to sit. But it is only now that I understand the inner meaning of "AH! COME, I AM WAITING ONLY FOR YOU."

As soon as we reached his room, we prostrated and sat down near his Feet. He gave me a copy of one of the books that he had authored, *Stories for Inspiration*. Soon after, he said to me, "Here, note this down. This is my phone number. You can call me anytime." Saying so, he gave me his number. We spent a few hours with him and all the while, I found my eyes moist. I felt like I was in the

company of a grandfather. After a while, he asked us to leave soon as he wanted us to reach home before it got dark since it was a long journey back. Again, he showed the compassion and concern that only a mother can shower to her child.

The next day, I called and spoke to him for no particular reason. I just wanted to hear his voice. He told me his daily routine so that I would know when to call him and be rest assured that he would definitely answer my call. Since that day, anytime I start missing him or feel like talking to him, I do not think twice and just call him immediately. Now, I have God on my speed dial. This has given me immense courage to deal with everything in my life. It is not that I call and speak to him every time I have some problem, but just the very thought that God is just a phone call away is very comforting.

Every time I called him, I would invariably end up crying. So once when I met him, he teased me saying, "Oh! So you will cry to me only over the phone, is it? Not in person?" and he laughed in his usual manner. Before every exam I call and tell him, "Swamiji, tomorrow I have an exam and only you have to write it for me. Please be there on time." Along with this, I also tell him all relevant details regarding the subject, venue, timing, etc., to which he listens in all patience. Gurudev and I struck a deal that I will study for all my exams but I will not write the exams myself; instead he will write them for me. I asked him to study on my behalf, but he laughed and said considering his age, it was difficult for him to study, so he asked me to do it. It definitely is Gurudev who writes my exams for me. This conviction came to me since I have answered certain questions in my exams that I never knew the answers for, on quite a few occasions. In my board exam there was a

question which had an internal choice. I found the first option to be easier, so I decided to attempt that choice. Before answering such questions I had to mention the choice number that I was going to attempt to make it easier for the examiner to evaluate my paper. When I was writing this, instead of writing option 1, I wrote option 2 in the paper. Immediately I corrected my mistake and started attempting my desired choice. Halfway into the question, I realised that I was stuck and did not know how to proceed. So in the end I scored off the entire thing and answered the second choice instead, which was in fact a lot easier. Only then did I realise that it was not a mistake at all and that it was Gurudev who had made me write option 2. My Gurudev has always been there to help me in times of need. The school I was studying in is a very reputed school; they are very particular about marks. Because of this, the pressure to perform well was very high, which increased the burden on me. But ever since Gurudev has been writing my exams, I have felt a tremendous amount of ease and my performance has improved drastically.

After his dramatic entry, my life, which had been a roller coaster with a lot of ups and downs, became peaceful. Though things are not back to normal, I am at peace and forever calm since I know now that whatever is happening is a part of a drama which is being very carefully directed by my Gurudev. I am sure that if he reads this, he will plead innocence and ignorance as he always has, and will tell us his usual theory on how we have started acquiring siddhis (psychic power). But in my heart of hearts, I know that these are his doings. Since then, every time I face a hurdle, I can feel my Gurudev literally standing in between me and my problem shielding me from all harm. Whenever I have complained to him about the indifferent

attitude of my teachers towards me, all that he has said is, "We do not know what personal difficulties they are undergoing, so do not blame them or develop any hatred towards them." Every time I used to receive my exam papers, I have felt him holding me by my arms and leading me to the teacher's desk and taking my paper from her and giving it to me with his signature smile. But none of this is a figment of my imagination. My Gurudev is always there for me during my times of difficulty. He is, in the true sense a knight in shining armor, but in my case he is the very armor which protects me. Right from the first time I met him, I felt that he has taken me under his wings.

All we have to do is to just tell God our desires and he will make them happen. This is exactly what my Gurudev does. For devotees like me who cannot go to him as and when we desire, Gurudev comes to us. Once he came to stay in one of his devotees' house, which happened to be just behind my coaching class. Gurudev had arranged it in such a way that I could go and meet him with my mother after my class without any of my family members knowing, since under the present circumstances, my family does not know about Gurudev. But I am sure things will not remain the same forever as he will ease this situation also, just like he has been doing all this while. I strongly believe that 'THIS TOO SHALL PASS'. When I do not meet my Gurudev for a long time, I have a strong desire to be with him. But if my wish gets fulfilled, I never feel it is enough and yearn to be with him even more! After Gurudev went back to Tiruvannamalai after his short visit, I missed him very dearly and longed to be with him forever. Usually, in such a scenario, I would have just called him and told him, "Swamiji, I really miss you! Please call me to Tiruvannamalai." But this time, I was not ready to settle for

just an “Ok beti (child), it shall be done.” from my Gurudev. I wanted concrete proof from him that I would soon meet him. So I literally demanded him to promise me that I would meet him in the Ashram at the end of that month. He laughed and said, “Ok! I guarantee you that you will come to me by the end of this month.” My joy knew no bounds and I could not wait for the holidays to begin so that I could run to my Gurudev. I witnessed another drama just before my departure to the Ashram. But I was undeterred by it since I knew that it was only my Gurudev who was playing with me. And indeed by his Divine Grace, I went to Tiruvannamalai in spite of it all.

On reaching there, I expressed my desire to get Mantra Diksha from him but my Gurudev said with his mischievous smile, “You must find a guru who is relatively young and will be there to guide you for quite some time, and not an old man like me.” But I was very adamant and caught hold of his legs and told him that if at all I got any sort of initiation, it would be only from him, and if not, I did not want it in this lifetime. Then Gurudev laughed and said, “Appadiya? This is what is called getting Diksha at gun point.” He agreed to give me and my Mantra Diksha the following morning. Gurudev gave me instructions to come early next morning at 4:30am along with a few flowers and bananas. So that night, my mother and I, along with another devotee went in search of a flower vendor. We found one just outside the Ashram. She refused to give us unstrung flowers though had has a few with her, which she was strung into a garland. Since she was the only vendor we could find at that time of the day, we had no choice but to keep requesting her over and over, but the more we asked, the more she got irritated. I immediately prayed to my Gurudev, “Swamiji! You asked me to get

flowers for tomorrow and she is the only vendor that I can find. She is refusing to give me some flowers though she has them. Please help me!" As soon as I finished my silent prayer to Gurudev, the flower vendor looked up at me, and gave me exactly the same number of flowers as Gurudev had asked me to bring. She did so with a smile on her face which showed her total understanding of our requirement.

The room that we were allotted was a five-minute walk from the Ashram. Since it was very early in the morning, my mother was a little apprehensive of walking alone. I was very confident and did not worry much as I was sure that my Gurudev would be there with us throughout and indeed he was. Just as we stepped out of our room, we spotted two ferocious dogs barking loudly twenty yards away. My mother immediately dragged me along with her back into the room. At about the same time, we saw another dog which appeared suddenly out of somewhere and led those dogs away in a totally different direction. Later on in the day, I was amazed to hear Gurudev narrating a similar incident that he had encountered in the North to another group of devotees. Gurudev gave us one of his mischievous grins, when my mother told him about what had happened to us that morning.

The previous day, Gurudev was telling me about how, when many of his other disciples visited him, they would insist on sitting next to him in the dining hall where all the aged people sat. I too had a strong desire to sit next to him, but did not express my desire out loud. That morning, just as we were about to get inside the dining hall to eat, Gurudev said to me, "Aye! Do you want to sit next to me and eat?" I was overwhelmed to hear this and went running behind my Gurudev. Even though I had not voiced my desire to him, Gurudev heard my prayer and

answered it. Again, I was given proof by my Gurudev that he listens to my prayers and fulfills them, however small they are.

Gurudev makes each and every one of us feel very special to him. He assumes whatever form we want him to be, that of a mother, a grandfather or a friend. Though I have known my Gurudev for less than a year, I feel like I have known him for ages. When I expressed this to my mother, she told me that this was not a connection made in this birth alone, but that I have been connected to my Gurudev in my past lives as well, and this was just the continuation and a re-establishment of that special bond. My Gurudev's presence over the past one year has changed my life completely, especially since I know that he alone is the doer who acts through and for me. He is my sole refuge.

HARI OM



31. MY GURU'S GRACE

– Anandhi Venkatraman

In early May of 2011, our family which included my parents, younger brother, my husband, daughter Mahathi, and I went on a pilgrimage to Guruvayoor, Kaladi, Kullur and a few other places. The ancient and auspicious Vadakkunadhar temple in Trichur is famous for the special prayers conducted by Sri Adi Shankara's parents for a period of 48 days, seeking the boon of a child from Lord Shiva. While sitting in this sacred temple, an image of a Rishi flashed across my mind briefly, with a suggestion that the image was that of Sage Vyasa. Quickly followed by this image was a suggestion that Swami Shantananda Puri is Sage Vyasa himself. Though I am not very religious, this vision convinced me that Swamiji IS Sage Vyasa! I related this experience to Swamiji later at Tiruvannamalai. He took an Advaitic stance and remarked that all of us are the Sage himself as the Sage is verily our own Self. He concluded his crisp, decisive explanation on this by saying, "My renunciation was perfect when the call for Sanyas came. I burnt even my certificates before leaving home." He then added that without Maharishi Vyasa we wouldn't have had *Srimad Bhagavatam!* My personal conviction about my experience was later reaffirmed when I read Swamiji's biography written by Dr. Rohini where Swamiji's Gurudev Swami Purushottamananda used to address Swamiji as Vyasaji whenever he wanted him to give a discourse on *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

This offers me an insight into his purity, devotion and renunciation. This vision perhaps is an answer to my wonder about his erudition, intellectual accomplishments,

his ability to be an authentic consultant to people following diverse paths to self-realisation. His readiness, Love and compassion to guide and encourage all earnest seekers in their quest for Truth without ever expecting devotion or surrender to him greatly endears him to me. The grandeur of his compassion is evident in his direct interactions with all seekers irrespective of whether or not they are his disciples or devotees. Sans coterie of attendants, he gives the required time and attention to each and every person assembled in his Divine Presence.

During my next visit to Tiruvannamalai with my family, I mustered the courage to declare to Swamiji that he is responsible for my ignorance, borrowing the line of argument from Swami Ramdas. Swamiji accepted his responsibility compassionately. I knew that my family would be safe at his Holy Feet.

Swamiji has lovingly initiated most members of my family with various auspicious Mantras for surmounting worldly problems. My daughter is fascinated by the Kshipra Prasada Ganapaty Mantra lovingly given to her by him. He has given Guru Mantra Diksha to my mother, brother and me.

The countless experiences in the form of personal interactions with him, dreams, Divine interventions in distress, and many miracles are reserved for contemplation to purify my mind. He is the friend, philosopher and guide to my daughter. My mother and brother adore his God-inebriated state and his mad love for the Infinite. I consider his existence as simply deep, beautiful, intense love for his Guru.

On May 30th 2010, our entire family visited Vasishtha Guha for the first time for a few days for Swamiji's Darshan.

My daughter wanted to capture him in her handycam. He laughingly remarked, "Catch me if you can!" This was his Guru's favourite line to devotees eager to photograph him. I took the cue and asked him if he was indicating his perfect state – Purnathvam. He laughed heartily without any overt disapproval to my surmise. He has been very candid in relating to us his state of consciousness during every Darshan since 1994, when we first met him after his Sanyas, until his grand assertion in May 2010 at Vasishtha Guha. This openness and honesty with his devotees is awe-inspiring, moving and liberating. In moments of loving compassion, he has declared that he is a huge wave in the ocean and that there is no old man but Sri Ambal alone who reigns supreme. To me this blissful form is what is extolled in Soundarya Lahiri in verses 8 and 21. Swamiji himself has declared that he loves these two verses.

On a scorching summer day in May 2012, two months after my mother's hip replacement surgery, we went to Tiruvannamalai from Chennai for Swamiji's Darshan. All through the journey, I silently prayed for rain so that my parents' stay at Tiruvannamalai would be comfortable. Just as we saw the signpost welcoming us to Tiruvannamalai, it started to drizzle, quickly turning into a long, heavy downpour. The weather immediately became cool, pleasant and enjoyable. Swamiji gave us Darshan in the Old Hall which is my mother's favourite place in Sri Ramanasramam.

The following day, I offered my namaskar to Swamiji for bestowing sudden, copious rains to the delight of every one of us, adding that he had performed a miracle like Sri Chandrasekhar Bharati of Sringeri, who relieved the distress of people in Devakottai in the 1950s. Swamiji simply remarked that the Sringeri Acharya had Virata Parvam of the Mahabharata read, while the Acharya

himself chanted Varuna japa to bring rain to the parched land. While he didn't reveal what method was adopted by him for the miracle, he didn't deny my assertion that it was his act of and his Divine intervention. In fact he smilingly remarked that it rained significantly well.

In December 2011, after a miraculous escape from a fall my mother faithfully meditates on her Guru's form all through her wakeful hours.

In January 1999, Swamiji then staying at Sri Ramanasramam, blessed my brother Srikanth by saying if God appeared before him and asked what he wanted, he would ask for seeing Srikanth. He declared his deep love for my brother.

In the year 2010, after Janmashtami one early morning in Mumbai, I mentally fought with Swamiji for not relieving my brother's distress despite professing his Love for him long ago. Swamiji had also declared in one of his general discourses that Indrajala can be performed with the chanting of Sama Veda. I mentally accused him of being indifferent to my brother's well-being despite Swamiji's ability to direct the healing power of Sama Veda to him. In the next few minutes, my brother woke declaring that Swamiji came in his dream in an exuberant state and gave him Mantra Diksha. Unfortunately my brother couldn't recall the Mantra upon waking up. Swamiji subsequently granted him Diksha at Tiruvannamalai by the end of 2010.

In October 2012, my mother, brother and I had the good fortune of becoming Swamiji's disciples. I experience the fatherly Love of the Infinite in His Presence.

Hari Om!



32. MY GURUJI, MY ALL

– Deepti Ahuja

The Grace of Arunachala has been total; it made sure that I got Guruji in my life.

I have been visiting Arunachala for a few years now, and did not have any deep inclination to visit any living saint. However, one day, I was forced by a friend to go and meet Swami Shantanandaji at Ramanasramam. After repeated follow ups and reminders from my friend, as a matter of procedure, one day, I decided to look up Guruji.

I met him just once for a few minutes when I don't know what happened. I went back and met him twice after that. The experience being with Guruji is beyond words.

He has given direction on various matters – spiritual and practical. In the past, I had the opportunity of meeting a few people who would clarify my doubts; however, Guruji's answers were so direct and he knew exactly what I had in mind. On one occasion, a matter of confusion was unresolved and hesitatingly I called Guruji on his mobile phone. In a matter of seconds all my doubts were cleared.

I never imagined that a Guru would be someone who is loving, joking, serious, giving, guiding, instructing and showing the path all at the same time. As a guide and instructor, He once mentioned emphatically, “You are not free until you are free.”

I did not even have to ask him; I could feel His Grace and Love in every moment that was spent with him. On so many occasions, I would have something on my mind and uncannily, he would make it happen in less than a second.

I will never be able to forget his loving eyes and loving touch. In his kind ways, he also gave me the company of some acquaintances amongst his disciples and devotees who are very special and wonderful human beings. Gurujī, the Ocean of Compassion, came to bless the new house Bhagawan and Arunachala presented me with at Tiruvannamalai.

Gurujī is a treasure and will remain the integral force of my life. He is the only One who is and continues to play such a special role. Life has been unfolding beautifully after meeting Him and I am surprised to see the changes in myself.

My dear Loving Gurujī,

You have drawn me towards You in spite of all my impurities. You have showered Your Grace and have given me a sense of direction. Please make me worthy of Your Grace. I wanted to share a few modified lines from Sri Arunachala Akshara Mana Malai; I dedicate this prayer to You:

Shine as my Guru, making me free from faults and worthy of Thy Grace, Dear Gurujī

Grant me wisdom; I beseech Thee, so that I may not pine in the ignorance for Love of Thee, Dear Gurujī

Grant me Thy Grace before the poison of delusion gropes me and, rising to my head, kills me, Dear Gurujī

I am a fool who prays only when overwhelmed, yet disappoint me not, Dear Gurujī

In my unloving self, Thou didst create a passion for Thee, therefore forsake me not, Dear Gurujī



*Gurudev blesses Deepti with a sacred chance
at Vasishtha Guha*



33. GURUJI – OUR SAVIOUR

– Dr. N.R. Bhat

In Aug 2009 we went to UK for one month. After returning to India, I developed severe pain in my left shoulder which was not responding to any medical treatment or physiotherapy. So I got a MRI scan and found out that I had developed a frozen left shoulder. The physiotherapist emphatically said that it would not improve and would lead to permanent disability if I did not do physiotherapy. I consulted Guruji and He gave me a mantra to chant 108 times daily. Surprisingly, it improved in a couple of months without any treatment or physiotherapy, much to the surprise of the physiotherapist!

We were planning to visit Nainital from September 20-25, 2010, after attending a wedding in Delhi on September 18-19, 2010, with another couple, our close friends. I called Guruji and took His blessings. He cautioned me to be ready to cancel our air tickets and return earlier than planned. After the wedding, we went to attend the funeral ceremony of our close friend's father in Ghaziabad (who was supposed to accompany us but had to cancel the programme because of this tragic event.) There we came to know that the road to Nainital had been blocked and all road traffic to Nainital had come to a halt. So we had no choice but to cancel our tickets and return to Pondicherry. To reschedule the same tickets to an earlier date was so complicated, but with the blessings of Guruji, our close

friend, a senior police officer, helped us and by the time we reached the Delhi airport, our boarding passes were also ready without us even showing the tickets in the airline counter!

This time we were planning a tour to Europe and UK from August 16, 2011. Guruji blessed us with a Mantra to be chanted by me 8 times before boarding any vehicle for the first 10 days only. We completed our tour of 10 days uneventfully and we were worried of some imaginary problem we might come across in the highest peak of Europe – Jungfrau! On the 11th day when we were nearing Rome, the coach was going full speed, around 140mph, when suddenly from the opposite side, (wrong side) a red-coloured car with greater speed came headlong crashing towards our coach. The alert driver swerved in time and saved us from the dangerous accident!

The non-teaching staff in my Institute, where I am working, went on strike on February 7, 2012. I asked for Guruji's blessings that everything should end peacefully and not affect the poor sick people who come for treatment. He blessed that it would not last long and would end soon. Surprisingly, it ended much before the expected period, i.e., in 4 days on 11th February 2012, without their demands being met. Guruji Himself called my wife from Rishikesh and told her even before my telling her, “The strike must have ended today!”

Our daughter, Swetha, married and settled in London, was carrying 3 months. One day in April 2012, during my morning pooja I had a flash that her life is in danger. I immediately asked my wife to check with her family

astrologer to look into our daughter's horoscope. My wife's younger sister called in the evening with shocking information that the life of both our daughter and the unborn child was in grave danger and it would be difficult to continue for another 6 months. Meanwhile, the platelet count of our daughter started falling below normal levels which could lead to serious bleeding problems during delivery of the child. We immediately contacted Guruji and asked for His blessings and He solemnly told that He would also pray and suggested some Mantras and to conduct Sri Chakra Puja in Sri Ramanasramam for which He Himself accompanied us. We did other pujas also as suggested by the astrologer (Aslesha Bali in Subramanya on May 7, 2012). In a recorded message to our daughter on July 9, 2012, Guruji clearly told us that the son born will be healthy without even knowing about the child's gender. With the Lord's and Guruji's blessings, our daughter delivered a healthy boy, Aryan, on the same day as my wife's birthday. September 12, 2012, 7.45pm UK time (September 13 IST) and in Aslesha star, 4th part.

Later the child developed unexplained jaundice which kept all the doctors in London perplexed as the cause could not be detected. Finally, they concluded that it is breast milk jaundice, a very rare condition and the baby recovered after more than 3 months of gruelling hospital trips. On checking with an astrologer, we were surprised to learn that had the child been born in the 1st part of Aslesha star, the mother would not have survived. After our daughter Swetha safely delivered Aryan, I met Guruji in the Ashram on November 11, 2012, I told Him that everything had gone off well with His blessings and the Lord's! Suppose I

did not get that message and none of the pujas were done, what would have happened? For that He retorted, "Doctorji, the One sitting up there is not a fool!! He knows what to do and when!!

I recall one more incident the day before Guruji visited Pondicherry. As Abir, Anisha and a few others were walking up with Him to the dining hall on the evening of August 18, 2012, He suddenly asked them, "Who will hold me when I fall? Will you hold me before I fall or after?" Anisha told Guruji, "You are the Lord, and so another form of the Lord will hold you!" He almost fell in Diwakar Bansal's house the following afternoon because of the split level in his drawing room (mezzanine) and both Vandana and I held Him and He miraculously escaped from a very bad fall.



Dr. Bhat and his wife Pushpa with Gurudev

In another incident, Dr. Sandhya had called me from Bangalore and told me to rush to Tiruvannamalai since Guruji was having severe diarrhoea. That night it was raining cats and dogs and no taxi or driver was available. Early next morning I rushed to Tiruvannamalai to find Guruji hale and hearty and He told me, "Do I look sick?" Anisha told me that He was very sick and delirious the night before and no one could believe it!

Our son, Ashwin, would just not agree to meet Guruji for which we pleaded to Him to show His Grace and make him visit Him. He smilingly replied that all will be well in course of time and that we must not force Ashwin. To our utter surprise, our son himself talked to Guruji over phone and came all the way from Delhi to Tiruvannamalai on December 23, 2012 and met Guruji again on January 20, 2013 and left after taking His blessings.

My mother, Sunitha, was critical and was admitted in Apollo Hospital, Chennai, and my sister called and informed me in the evening that she had developed multi-organ failure because of pneumonia and septicaemia and doctors had given up hope and that we should immediately start and come to Chennai. When I informed Guruji, He said that she would be alright and that He did not foresee any unpleasant event. When I repeatedly asked as to what all pujas I should do in case any tragedy strikes, He sternly told me that such a situation would not arise. When we went to the hospital next morning, on January 6, 2013, we found she was on ventilator and kidneys had failed with very minimal urine output. I called Guruji and asked Him to bless my mother over phone by holding the phone close to

her ears. After about 5 minutes to everyone's surprise, the blood pressure which was only 70/40 mmHg (normal is 100/70 to 140/90mmHg) started climbing suddenly and touched 140/80mmHg in 1 minute. Later, in the night the doctors were planning for dialysis and warned that it could be fatal. In the night, the neighbouring patient collapsed and all the nurses went to attend on him. At that time my niece who was attending on her, touched the urinary catheter and surprisingly found the urinary output which was nil, drained more than 1 litre of urine and the dialysis was cancelled and my mother got discharged from the hospital and came home and later blessed our grandchild, our children and us, on January 31, 2013, which appeared a very distant possibility.

We thanked Guruji for His Grace without which she would not have seen the great grandchild. Our prayers were answered.

There are many day-to-day occurrences which will never end but most of all, we are very peaceful and calm in His presence.



34. MY GURU – DIVINITY PERSONIFIED

– Dr. Meenaskhi

I first met Swamiji in May 2006. In fact it was Divine intervention that I met him at that time. On the first day I met him; I sat there barely paying attention and Swamiji was telling us about the world being a dream. All of a sudden, out of the blue Swamiji asked me, “So how do you get out of the dream?”, and he looked at me with his piercing eyes and even without realizing, I said, “Wake up.” From that day forward I could never get enough of Swamiji!

He always knew what I was thinking and would mischievously smile and make it known to me that he was reading me like an open book. Once we had all gone to lunch with Swamiji at Vikramaditya's house and a friend of mine had joined me. Seeing Swamiji taking something out from his bag, I made a silent remark to my friend that how colour coordinated Swamiji's things are. After five minutes, Swamiji called me and said with a twinkle in his eyes, “You see, wherever we Swamijis go, we get so many offerings. So it is mandatory to carry a bag. I just felt it would look nicer if my bag matched my clothes. Don't you agree, Meenakshi?”

Swamiji always guided me onto the right path no matter how hard it might have been and when I used to complain, he consoled me like a Mother consoling her child. He is so full of Love that anyone he takes under his wing is blessed for life. He always says, “Be in the moment and always remember you are not the doer, you are just an observer.”

I have always felt Swamiji's presence beside me at all times, His guiding hands holding my hand and leading the way. Once, while sitting with him in His room at Tiruvannamalai, a family came to visit Him with their 5-year-old son. Swamiji took out a pack of toffees to give him as Prasad. I was waiting eagerly for my turn to receive Prasad and Swamiji smiled at me and said, "Let me give the younger kid the toffee first; don't worry I am coming to you only next."

When Swamiji was just out of the hospital and had a lot of swelling in his feet, it was required of someone to rub oil on his feet every day. I was seated right in front of him and I was praying that he give me the blessing to do so that day. I was very shy to ask him and so I kept praying to him wholeheartedly. After about half an hour when it was time and a couple of devotees started applying oil on his feet, Swamiji looked at me and said, "You know anyone who wishes to apply oil on my feet can do so, please do come, Meenakshi." He smiled. I had tears in my eyes at how kind and full of Love and Grace Swamiji was.

When I was in the hospital after my surgery, I was still unwell and not getting better; Swamiji came and visited me in the hospital and miraculously the very next day, I got well and was discharged to go home.

On my birthday, Swamiji took me along for lunch and gave me food from his plate and let me drink his water, the ultimate Prasad one could receive.

Swamiji installed in me firm faith in God and showed me that God does take a human form and helps his children in need. These are a few of my experiences with Swamiji and I am very grateful to him for the Love and compassion that he has shown me.



Gurudev with Dr. Meenakshi



35. A WARM HUG OF DIVINE LOVE

– Priya Paresh

I would like to offer my humble pranams to our Guruji and start off this small piece on my experiences with Swamiji.

The kindness and benevolence with which Swamiji slowly but surely takes me, tiny step by step, towards GOD is amazing. HIS all forgiving, ever loving self is like the warm embrace of a mother or father to her or his child. Only the magnetic force that Swamiji is, can pull a simple human being like me more and more into the spiritual world. Salutations to the Divine Mother for having blessed me with a Guru filled with great knowledge, love and acceptance.

Growing up we all had a strong faith and love in Goddess Mother. Spirituality and holy company was always a part of our life. My father Mr. Venkatraman was a close friend of Swamiji's and that's how I have always known HIM throughout the years. Our family has known Swamiji for many decades now. Swamiji has always introduced me to others as "his close friend Mr. Venkatraman's daughter." So, right from the beginning, I felt a close connection with Swamiji through my parents' love, faith and immense respect for HIM.

My first meeting with Swamiji was in 2003. I was visiting my parents in Tiruvannamalai with my children from

the United States. My parents kept insisting that I had to meet a great Sanyasi, Swami Shantananda Puri. At the time Swamiji was in Mouna. My son was almost two and was quite sick with some stomach bug. I kept telling my parents, "Swamiji is in mouna, we need not disturb him!" It seemed impossible to go see him considering the circumstances. In our family we were all ardent devotees of Goddess Mother Durga, and I had always had intense faith and love for her. In my mind, I said to her, "Amma, my parents are insisting that I meet Swamiji. He is in mouna, and then my child is sick, how will this meeting happen? Since my parents say you are always with him, make it happen somehow!"

A short while later, Swamiji was at our door! What kindness! Divine power at work! People might say it was a coincidence, serendipity, but to me it is divinity. That year, I never had a chance to speak to Swamiji, but felt this very happy and peaceful connection with him.

My next trip from the States was in 2007 and this time, I spent a larger chunk of my time in Tiruvannamalai experiencing HIS kindness all over again! In 2007, I was going through a slight crisis - my husband was in another state working thousands of miles away, I was managing two small children living somewhere else, and we were trying to sell a home in order to be able to move to where my husband was working. This situation had been going on for six months. My parents advised me to just pray to Goddess Mother and Bhagawan Ramana for things to resolve. I stayed in Tiruvannamalai, going to the Ashram daily, spending a lot of time with Swamiji and experiencing a sense of happiness and peace with Him by just listening to His wonderful stories, many times filled with laughter, not wanting to leave the spiritual oasis that is Swamiji's room, never once telling him what we were going through back in

the US. I also kept doing a lot of pradakshinas around Bhagawan Ramana's Shrine and doing Giri Pradakshinas. One morning during my stay, Swamiji blessed our home with His presence and after a while, I asked my father if I could give Guru Dakshina to Swamiji. Everyone knew that Swamiji did not accept any big Dakshina, so my father said no. I pleaded with HIM to take something and Swamiji said, "When a daughter comes home, she only receives from her parents and doesn't give anything to them!" adding that I was like his daughter! Such kind words and benevolence from him time and time again! What did I ever do to deserve this kindness and generosity from Guruji and the Divine Mother? HE only accepted a tiny amount of money of Rs.10 and I put in a 20 rupee note (could not find a ten) into HIS hand and bowed down to HIM, and HE blessed me.

A few hours later, I got a call from my husband who was in the US saying that his new boss had offered to accept the loss (a big one running into thousands of dollars) that we might incur during the sale of our home! I had not even told Him of the problem in my life and it had been solved so nicely, thanks to the blessings of my Guruji, Goddess Mother and Bhagawan Ramana!!

In 2009, I had come back to India for another vacation. Swamiji was suffering from a hip fracture and I was blessed enough to stay three weeks in Tiruvannamalai and serve him. That was one of the most wonderful experiences in my life - being able to serve HIM, ALLOWED me to serve him and be in HIS presence throughout the day, every day, for three weeks. After that trip, when I was to leave for the US in two days from Chennai, news came that Swamiji was hospitalized in Bangalore. My niece, Kalpagam (who has known Swamiji since she was a young child) unwaveringly and furiously started writing Ram Naam and was sure

Swamiji was going to illuminate our lives much longer. With a heavy heart I went to Bangalore and prayed hard to Sri Rajarajeswari at the temple in Bangalore that SHE should go and look after HER SON, before visiting him at the hospital with my father, Mr. Venkatraman. The day I was leaving for the US, which happened to be Varalakshmi Puja, I heard the wonderful news that a miracle had happened and that Guruji was in recovery.

In January of 2012, when my father had suffered a massive stroke and was hospitalized, unable to speak but able to hear and comprehend some voices, our Guruji spoke to him. My father responded with gestures and within a day had a peaceful leaving of his body. When we informed Swamiji of our father's passing, Swamiji reassured us that he was at the Lotus Feet of Goddess Mother. Every time I visit India, I am blessed to experience his all forgiving, ever smiling, grace-filled, kind self who is pulling all of us towards God realization. My humble prostrations to my dear Swamiji with this offering.



Gurudev and Priya Paresh shares a joke

36. DIVINE GRACE OF MY GURU

– Lily

There is a whisper in my ear,
The secrets of life taught to me,
The beat in the heart is the Mantra,
Stillness in the depth of my heart,
And a reminder to follow the path
When I gaze at His Padukas
Physical parents gave birth to this body,
My spiritual father gave birth
To the way to the Heavenly Father.

Caring, protecting, and nourishing with spiritual support
And leading me in a new spirit.
Ignorance is being erased by his teachings,
Bhakti and Jnana are planted in the soil of deep faith
Only love and love alone for God
Is the pouring of water for its growth.

Short times and sweet memories at His Feet
Where nobles messages are to be chewed and cherished.

Compassion and love is incomparable and for anyone
who comes to Him anytime or anyhow.

Everyone is fed with spiritual and physical food
And goes away experiencing the nectar of life.
Some are bold enough to ask questions
Of their inner thirst, others get answers
Without even expressing themselves.

No one regrets the Darshan of the Guru
 And always wishes to have another.
 Some say, "Look, a great Mahan,
 Another becomes a disciple
 And only some cherish Him till the end.

In the beginning I asked Swamiji many questions and ended up having nothing to ask, it is the blessing of my guru.

I went to Swamiji for ways to solve problems, learned that there is nothing to desire and that the Lord meets all our needs.

Religion was a source of confusion for a long time and a long standing agony in mind, He removed the ignorance. He taught me to understand that there are different paths to reach the same goal. To go beyond them is to realise the oneness in everything and to have faith. Thus there is no need to change one's religion.

Even though I used to teach Reiki and other healing methods to heal people, after meeting my Guru, I learned to heal by constant chanting of Mantra which is the panacea to heal entrenched habits and negative patterns. It helps one transform oneself. We need the blessings of Guru and Divine Grace.

Thrilling incidents which remind me of his kindness are many. On one occasion, Swamiji was visiting Chennai. My husband had a dream that he should send me to meet him. In the morning when we enquired, it was true Swamiji was indeed there.

Once suddenly I felt like going to Tiruvannamalai. It was Guru Poornima and I was so happy to get his Darshan. I generally never intentionally pray for fulfilment of

my desires. I only pray for seeking his blessings for progress in spiritual practice. However Swamiji takes care of even small things. Once it happened that I had to paste some excursion photos for my daughter's project work. They were in the digital camera. There was no one who knew how to operate as my surroundings is a village. I approached the studio and they said that they could not help. I went to two or three places and was tired and helpless. Then I prayed Swamiji and suddenly there came a person asking what I wanted. She was able to help me through her son.

One day I was going to Tiruvannamalai to meet Swamiji with my daughter who was three years old then. One person helped me carry my baggage to the auto stand. Getting down in the bus stand, there were no trollies. There were some students who missed the train with a lot of baggage. They got me a trolley, and helped me to the bus. In this mofussil bus stand we need to walk a lot to get a bus to Tiruvannamalai. And while coming back from Tiruvannamalai, someone I did not know came and put me on the bus.

Once I had been with my mother-in-law to Ananda Ashram in Kerala. We went without prior intimation just to visit the place. Once there I told them that I am Swamiji's devotee. They treated us so well. We were given a room, food, and arrangements were made to visit Swami Nityananda caves. We were given packed food for the journey back and a bottle of ghee as a gift. It was an unforgettable experience to be constantly cherished.

On all my sudden unplanned visits to Swamiji I was unexpectedly supported. I could manage to stay at Ramanasramam and get Prasadam there each time. Most of the time I used to get a lift back to my home. After I

shifted to Kanchipuram, there were once some devotees who wanted to visit Shankaracharya Mutt and they dropped me back from Tiruvannamalai.

I am basically a Christian and first Swamiji initiated me into a Mantra. I did it for a few times and was not very comfortable with it and so stopped doing it. When I went to meet Swamiji with Kasturiji, one of Swamiji's inspiring disciples, to meet him in Ghazipur, Swamiji said generally, that I have initiated some persons into mantra and they have given it up. He added that they would later practice sincerely. This came true in my case when he later gave me a Lord Jesus prayer.

Once Swamiji told me it is enough that you have gone here and there. Do your spiritual practice in one place. His words proved true when I came to stay in Kanchipuram a holy temple city. It is secluded from the crowd. It is an ideal place for spiritual practice.

There are many more inspiring incidents which took place with his kindness and mercy.

How I encountered my guru

A deep desire was growing within me to look for a spiritual director as we say in Christianity.

I was divinely guided by a holy dream. Bhagawan Sathya Sai Baba was standing near a monk who was doing his tapas. I was also having a japa mala. This dream recurred. I was meditating with a japa mala on the mountains and healing people.

I am a Christian and had married to a Hindu Brahmin. I did not have any idea of taking Mantra Diksha. Once I only accompanied my husband while he went to meet Swamiji

in Tiruvannamalai in 1999. I was happy to see a Hindu monk and there was a deeply inspiring conversation between them. I requested Swamiji to give Mantra Diksha and he obliged in Chennai.

It was his kindness that touched me. He was merciful to accept me as his disciple in spite of my Christian background. Even though I was a pious girl since my childhood, I never knew the significance of having a guru. Then onward my life changed and took a new direction.

Holy pilgrimage

Kasturiji, one of Swamiji's devotees, was a channel for me to know Swamiji, and also for taking me to Vasishta Guha and other spiritual places like Ghazipur, Kasi, Haridwar, Rishikesh, etc. Her sincere devotion to the Guru, vairagya in practicing japa, strong will power and courageous attitude is amazing. I thank her for her guidance.

When we reached Ghazipur, the train was late by ten hours. Mr. Singh was patiently waiting for us for such a long time which even a close relative may not do. The reception for us was so welcoming. Swamiji was taking rest there. The conversation with him was very inspiring. It led me to contemplation. I was also so touched to see how Mahatmas were served. The devotion of the devotees to the Guru was beautiful. The holy life of Vasishta Guha, service to the pilgrims, holy chanting, holy bath in the Ganges were all the beginning of my journey and exposure to Indian spirituality. Our trip lasted 15 days. Everywhere we had good food, a comfortable stay and a deep spiritual experience.

Practice of spiritual Sadhana

One mantra, one guru, complete faith and trust in His teaching. Earlier I used to do sadhana for a few hours. However, now due to other responsibilities, my practice is limited. But there is peace inside of me. I do not have many contacts with the outside world or media. Only in my spare time I teach healing to people. Spiritual readings also are limited. I stick to Mantra given for moksha. I am very grateful to have a realised Master for a Guru. Since I have surrendered at his Feet, he is always there for me. Moments happy or sad pass by, with his blessings.

The treasure of a guru,
 Sacred teachings from His lips,
 Compassion and love pouring from his heart
 A piercing glance
 Are blessings of life
 To be experienced and cherished in this birth.

To this great teacher, Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj, I bow down and seek Your blessings. May all your holy teachings be part of my life and that of all the spiritual seekers.



*Lily performs Guru Pada Puja one morning
at Sri Ramanasramam*



37. A SANYASI PAR EXCELLENCE

– S. Bhagyalakshmi Sreedhar

Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya

It was way back in the year 2003 that I had visited Sri Ramanasramam for the first time with my 11-year-old son Sai Pratheek, to meet my Guruji. My stay at the Feet of Arunachala was for one week, which completely transformed me. I embarked on the Royal Path not knowing the word 'spirituality'. When a girl is married and sent to her in-law's place, she feels very heavy in the heart and cries on leaving her parents, siblings, friends and relatives to go to an unknown world. She has to set foot in the new place even without testing the waters. Not knowing the depth of samsara, she plunges into it. Once she takes the plunge, she has to learn to go along with the tide. It is a new and materialistic life which one enters into and this fact is accepted by one and all in our society. There are confusions at every step but we do have numerous teachers to guide us in the form of parents, grandparents and other elders, who out of love and experience, teach us how to adjust in the new house.

The experience of life during my last ten years after stepping on the Royal Path was like stepping on “the road less travelled”. Confusion is a thousand times more on this path. Support from family and relatives is less as seldom people know about it and hence proper and timely guidance is very rare to find for those who want to tread

this path. It is like entering a thick forest blindfolded. Fortunate are the ones to whom God sends his messenger to remove the blindfold and guide them safely through this forest of samsara which is full of pitfalls. This is the most crucial time when we definitely need a hand to take us through this forest as without this helping hand, we would fall prey to the pitfalls like desires, attachments and sense objects which are the traps which can take us astray and make us get lost in the world and thus lose our spiritual path. This helping hand is extended by God out of Love for his devotees based on the merits they have earned. It is out of such merits of the past that I found Swamiji. Let me narrate how I came to find him.

In my first visit to Sri Ramanasramam, I felt sad to leave and my heart was very heavy with pain to leave my newly found home. Ramanasramam had become my home in just one visit and Bhagawan had become everything for me. Love for Bhagawan became so strong that I experienced the meaning of true and pure Love for the very first time in life. For me Bhagawan is not the old hall, Samadhi, sofa or a photo. He is Love which is felt from within and not without. My eyes might see the sofa or his photo externally but I feel him as pure Love from in every cell of my body. He is so nice and pleasant that whenever I think of him truly and wholeheartedly, everything else freezes except the feeling of Love for him. It is like you push the 'pause' button of the mind. When you push the pause button everything freezes but the current is still on, isn't it? My experience is also like that and Bhagawan alone exists as that current which I experience as Love.

With such feelings I was sad to leave my true home and I was crying profusely. Tears rolled down uncontrollably. I was going around Bhagawan's Samadhi saying goodbye

just before leaving home. It was then I noticed a lean old man in ochre robes with a flowing white beard peacefully sitting in the window pane just behind Bhagawan's Samadhi. He looked very calm with closed eyes. I don't know why on seeing him, I just fell at his Feet and cried profusely. I did not utter a word; I was only crying. This was the first time I saw him. He then gently opened his eyes and looked at me and put his hands on my head and said, "Blessed are the souls who leave Arunachala with a heavy heart!" I stood up and again offered my pranams to him. He smiled at me and said, "He will bring you back home soon, don't worry." These are the only two lines he said to me and I left for Hyderabad. He is none other than our Pujya Shantananda Swamiji. He is not just my Guru, guide, philosopher, friend or relative but he is someone beyond all these relationships. He is a God-given relation to me and I lovingly call him Swamiji.

Swamiji is one of the guiding lights that Bhagawan gave me in his own home to tread the road less traversed. As I do not know the Scriptures, they look like an impassable mountain to me. But Swamiji makes these Scriptures easy to grasp like pebbles and gives them to all like capsules for the soul in the form of stories. He makes the stories so humorous that the morals hidden in them get into us subtly and easily and stay in us firmly. I have not seen anyone in my life so far who can make morals look so easy that we find them easy to practise. Suppose a problem in Math looks hard, then our mind mentally rejects it or gets scared to even attempt it. But if it is explained properly to us, we would have the ability to try and solve it. It all depends on the capacity of our Math teacher, isn't it? Our Swamiji is such a teacher who makes even the most difficult task look easy in our mind so that the mind does

not resist it. In fact it will seem interesting, inspiring and motivating to practise what he teaches us with Love and affection in the simplest form of storytelling.

Swamiji definitely knows what to tell us in every situation giving us exactly what we require at that time. Everyone sitting in his room gets answers from his stories in accordance with their questions or problems. No one leaves empty-handed. His life has been an open book and he keeps no secrets. It is up to us to emulate him in all aspects of life. He is as swift as the wind when he walks and as strong as the mountain when he talks. His knowledge and memory of the Scriptures and especially *Srimad Bhagavatam* is remarkable and the way he presents the stories in them is commendable.

One day a lady asked him a question. When the Atma in everyone is the same, how come all can't assimilate spiritual knowledge equally? For that Swamiji replied by giving this example – “There are 60 watt, 100 watt and 180 watt bulbs in a house. The same electricity is flowing in all the bulbs, but the light they give out is in accordance with their capacity. Like that, Atma is the same in all but each person shines differently depending upon his mental maturity.

In my case, personally he never did any miracles where my problems disappeared and solutions appeared from thin air. The miracle he did to me was that he made my mind strong so that the negativity disappeared and I developed a positive outlook. And only with a strong and positive mind I am sailing through the ocean of samsara. During one of my meetings with him, I asked him why I was having so many problems and how to manage them all. Then he told me an incident where he had to give a small talk to some

young girls who were blind. One of the blind girls asked him, "Swamiji, why did God make me blind? Does he not like me? What did I do to be born blind?" For this, Swamiji replied beautifully through an example: "There are many people playing a game of cards. In the game, all can't get good cards and win, isn't it? Some get good cards and some get bad cards. But just because you have bad cards you can't quit and give up as a loser. What you do is to continue playing the game by discarding the unwanted cards and picking up new cards to win the game. Winning or losing is not in our hands but discarding and picking is in our hands only. By quitting, you accept failure and by playing you aim to win. Discard the negativity that you can't see and accept the reality that you can think positively in the mind and aim to win the game of life. A defect in the body is not so bad compared to defects in the mind and character. Moreover, it is very difficult for people with vision to see the light within as their vision is already blurred by the light of the world. But you are gifted not to see the light of the world and thus it is easier for you to see the light of the Lord within. A positive mind is a strong mind and only a strong mind can cross all the hurdles in the game of life." This reply made the young girl strong, confident and happy. With such a fitting reply, I also got to understand how I have to overcome the problems of life. In life, problems due to our own accumulated karmas bog us down. But fortunate am I to get such a guiding light who is ever shining bright with wisdom.

On one occasion, I was sick and suffering with severe health problems. During that visit, on seeing Swamiji, I asked him, "How are you?" He said, "I don't have any problem but my neighbour is having a severe back and leg pain due to a fall and fracture of the hip bone. See the



*Gurudev with Sreedhar and his wife
Bhagyalakshmi and Sri Kodandaraman*

reply he gave that the pain he was having was not for him but for his body which was only his neighbour! This shows how he is detached from his body and its pain and suffering. He was thus setting an example for all of us to emulate. He did not want us to identify with our body which is constantly subject to misery due to our karmas of the past. His reply was fitting enough for me to think less of my physical problems. I may not be as evolved as him but definitely I found a way to keep my mind away from pain by thinking of Swamiji and his management of pain. I thought that if he could manage such a great pain so easily, why can't I manage such a small pain? By such thinking, I was able to make my mind strong and positive and my health problems began to look smaller. By thinking of Swamiji, my mind was able to become strong and easily disconnect from the thought of the pain in the body.

Initially, I used to get a lot of dreams, all unpleasant, which never gave me proper sleep. I asked Swamiji, "Why do I imagine so many things in a dream?" For that he said,

“Even in the wakeful state the mind imagines many things good, bad and ugly. Here you are very much awake, alert and watchful but still cannot control your mind from imagining. Then what control can you have on your mind in sleep when the intellect is not functioning to control it? Let it do its work of imagination but you don't even pay attention to it, don't give it a second thought. Let it come and let it go. In the wakeful state you can't leave anything; at least, in the state of sleep, leave it. For example, your son Pratheek is going to college on a motorbike. You may imagine that he will go fast or he will fall and break his hand or leg and in this manner your mind will take you on a roller coaster ride for free. But just because you imagined, will it come true? Truth is something which is beyond one's imagination. What has to happen will surely happen. So why imagine? Just leave it. What the mind imagines in the waking state or the dream state is all false. So learn to ignore it.” Saying so, he patted my head and smiled and asked me, “Did you understand?” When his replies are so short and simple, why can't we understand? From then onwards, I practised to ignore my dreams. Now I seldom dream in the wakeful state or in the sleep state.

Swamiji has the art of performing miracles, by making me understand my mind, by making it strong, by giving me proper understanding of the situation. When we understand a situation, the solution comes automatically. Every problem has a solution and only a strong mind can analyze a problem positively and get an appropriate solution. This strong mind was given to me by my Swamiji. Every time I go to him it is like charging a battery. The mind that reacts and weakens as it faces the problems of life has to be recharged and made strong. And that charging takes place at the Feet of our Masters – the invisible Arunachala and Bhagawan, and visible Swamiji and Guruji.

During one visit, I was feeling low and lost due to a financial problem. An incident happened in Swamiji's presence where he set an example once again for me to emulate. He had to buy some medicines and he had money which was enough only for buying his tablets as he had undergone a major surgery a few months ago in Bangalore. The disciple who was looking after him at the time said, "If the money is over, how will you pay for the taxi to go to Bangalore next week for a checkup?" Then Swamiji said, "When I was in pain and in hospital, I had no money. God alone took care of me then. Now also he gave me money for buying medicines and like this, he will take care of my hospital visit also and there is nothing to worry about." He said that he would leave it to Him and He would take care of everything. Then I thought, "With so much of backup, I am feeling helpless and Swamiji is so confident without any financial backup. Where is his confidence coming from?" His confidence is coming from his firm faith in God, his Guru and Bhagawan. He had totally surrendered to them. Because of such total surrender, he is not worried about tomorrow but always lives only in the present. He asked us to take care of the present and the future will take care of itself. He is always confident about facing tomorrow. I felt ashamed of myself for becoming so dull and depressed for the sake of money. Is this change of mind in me not a miracle?

For me his miracles always came in the form of positive thoughts which in turn strengthened my mind. Swamiji made me strong to face all my problems physical, mental and financial. Today also I have many problems but he has given me the strength of mind and understanding to see through them. A problem can sweep me off the ground only for a little while in the form of an emotional reaction

but I can quickly control it by thinking of all my Masters back home. I am not a saint not to have reactions but want to be like a saint who will not have reactions. My Swamiji has set an example here by living in samsara and gracefully coming out of it. For him, even his own son is one among us, and we are like one of his children to him. He sees no difference. He can effortlessly relate to children, youngsters and adults alike. He is a scholar to a scholar and a layman to a layman. There are many things to learn from him. We should be keen and observant to learn from him and live like him. This is the best gift we can give ourselves.

My husband Sreedhar, my children Pranav and Pratheek, my sister, brothers, cousins and their families and friends and myself – almost a hundred of us – have the benefit and good fortune to have come into the fold of this great Himalayan monk, our beloved Swamiji. Our lives have been transformed by his Grace. Inner transformation is the best miracle and this is what a Guru like Swamiji does. This is the greatest miracle that God and Guru perform in our lives.

While the external miracles are temporary and sometimes distracting, the miracle of inner transformation, though difficult to perceive from the outside, is the best thing that can happen to oneself as the rewards are permanent and they help us evolve faster and attain the Supreme Goal of life. We only wish that Swamiji's blessings are there for all of us till we breathe our last so that we can go to lofty heights. "Where eagles dare, stay there," he says. "Keep your mind high above the world and keep your vision sharp to pick up the gems from your Masters and then only peace will prevail upon you." A peaceful life is all that I want. I wish that this guiding light should shine in our hearts brightly. I thank Bhagawan for giving me such a beautiful, peaceful and truthful relation to cherish.

38. THE MASTER STORYTELLER

– S. Sai Pratheek

The first thing I remember about Swamiji is his masterful art of storytelling. Swamiji never runs out of stories with valuable morals. Besides Swamiji's immense spiritual knowledge and understanding of life and its ways, he is also a master of the mind, a Divine mastermind. He never fails to throw a witty question at you. From Swamiji's wit and subtle sense of humour, I understood that one must be clear in mind and thought. Swamiji sets a perfect example for us to realise that the body is only as young as the mind as he runs like the wind despite his aged body, shaming even us youngsters with his speed and agility. Watching Swamiji, I tried to emulate him in many ways so as to develop a clear mind and also be energetic through a disciplined way of life. Swamiji is ever so simple and down to earth and spends so much of his valuable time with me on every occasion I meet him. May he give me his blessings to always stay on the right track in life.



39. DIVINE GRACE

– Anju

Hari Om

My humble pranams at the Lotus Feet of my Gurudev. I surrender myself at his Lotus Feet.

Where should I start? His Grace is immeasurable. Can anyone measure a Mother's Love? He is the Divine Mother. This is an experience which cannot be described in words or by any other means. Every moment of my life is filled with His Grace only. He is Karuna Sagar.

Even though there are innumerable instances, I would like to share only a few.

It was during winter on a Sunday evening. In Iowa, USA, winters are terrible. My younger daughter, R, and I drove to Iowa City about 33 miles from our house to visit my elder daughter, S, in her University. I failed to check the weather forecast. After visiting my daughter, we started back towards my town when it started snowing. I thought I could reach my destination before it turned bad. However, within ten minutes of driving, the snow began to fall heavily and quickly turned into a blizzard. I could hardly see the road. In a couple of minutes I had to take the interstate, but since the road was not visible I pulled over. There was no sign of the blizzard stopping and the weather forecast on the radio was not promising. No one soul was passing by and I needed to get help, so, I called 911. The cops advised me to stay in the nearby hotel, and they found my car stuck in the snow,

unable to move an inch further. The officers told me, "No one will be out tonight to tow the car, and there are a lot of accidents on the highway and many vehicles are in ditches." The police then dropped us safely to a hotel.

Even my friends were unable to pick me up because it was not safe to drive. Stuck in the hotel, I called the towing company and was told that the cleaning would start the following day.

The blizzard stopped the next day. My friend picked us up and asked us to stay in her house until the car would be ready. On the way back to their home, I searched for my car; it was down the road in the centre of a triangle space buried under the snow. I later got a call from the towing company that they could not be there on time. With no tools to dig out the car, I felt like crying. I prayed to my Gurudev, "You are the only one who can help me." All of a sudden from nowhere a truck passed by and stopped in front of us. The passenger asked, "Need help?" I desperately said, "Yes, please." The truck driver immediately took a shovel from his truck, cleared the snow and asked me to start the engine. Thankfully, the car finally started and I thanked him. I did namaskar in our Indian style, tears rolling down my cheeks. The Life saver appeared radiant with a beautiful smile and with compassion in his eyes. He nodded his head. I silently thought to myself, "Oh My God! He is my Gurudev who protected us from taking the highway and got us to a safe place. Had I hit the interstate, it would have been a disaster. Not only that, Gurudev came over to help us take the car out without spending a single penny. While driving back home, we saw many cars in the ditch yet to be towed. Anantha koti Namaskaram at His Holy Feet. Thank You, Gurudev, for protecting us!

Another snow incident happened last year in 2012. The winter was not as bad as the previous years. After my

daily prayers, I took the car key and placed it under Guruji's photo. It was 7:20 in the morning, the usual office hour, and the roads were icy and narrow. I was crossing the railway track and on the right side was a big field filled with snow. On the left, there were oncoming vehicles. My car started skidding and I lost control. My car was sliding towards oncoming vehicles and all the cars behind me along with the traffic on the opposite lane sensed it and stopped. My car was rotating 360 degrees and came back to my lane facing the opposite direction. All I could do was helplessly watch the scene unfold around me. My car landed on the snow field. Nothing happened to me or the car. Not even a scratch. Thankfully, all the vehicles on the road were safe. The only kavacham I had with me was my Guruji's photo and a small piece of ochre cloth that was given to me by Guruji.

A young man who had volunteered to help stranded drivers pulled over to see if we were alright and later came and got the car back on the road. Eventually, I arrived at work on time. Who else could have protected me other than my Gurudev? When a mother hears her child crying, she drops all her work and runs forward to care for her child. However, my Gurudev always comes to rescue me even before he is called upon. There are no words I can find to describe his Karuna, his eternal Love.

A few years ago while conversing with my Gurudev one night, He instructed me to go to Satsang. I told Guruji that in my town there is no Satsang, but a small temple. Again came the instruction, "There IS Satsang and you must go there." I was confused until I opened my email the next morning. It was an invitation to Sri Ramakrishna Satsang conducted regularly by a Bengali couple. Thank you, Maharaj, for holding my hands forever. Unn Arulal Unthal Vanagi!

Guru Maharaj Guru Guru Jai Jai
Para Brahma Sat Guru Guru Jai Jai!

40. A DIVINE FORM

– T.V. Seshadri

According to the Scriptures, it is a rare blessing to obtain human birth, desire for liberation, and the company and opportunity to serve holy men. In my 16th year, I came under the influence of His Holiness Swami Sivanandaji of Rishikesh, Himalayas, by studying his books which inspired and kindled my interest in Hinduism. I missed the opportunity to physically meet Swamiji both in the South when he toured across the country in 1952. Neither could I meet him in Rishikesh. Nevertheless, I have consoled myself for having missed the opportunity to meet this Himalayan sage and mentally accepted him as my 'Manasika Guru'. I am an ordinary member of Divine Life Society set up by the Swamiji Maharaj and began serving the Ashram indirectly.

As my long drawn out quest for a LIVING GURU took a deep hold over me, I began poring over books on Vedanta. This resulted in strengthening my belief in Advaita philosophy.

In August of 2010, Mrs. Sethu Ramaswamy, a 90-year old staunch devotee of Ramana Maharshi gifted me a copy of *Fragrant Flowers* authored by Sri Swami Shantananda Puri. This unique book rekindled my interest on this path which, I should admit, was dying due to materialistic influences of the world and catapulted me to greater spiritual heights. As a result I became a sadhaka of Ramana's philosophy by daily studying *Ribhu Gita* published by Ramanashramam,

Tiruvannamalai, and became a subscriber to the Ashram's magazine, *Mountain Path*.

May Swamiji live long and that is the only prayer to the Almighty.



Gurudev with T.V. Seshadri at Aurobindo Ashram, Haridwar



41. AN EMBODIMENT OF DIVINITY

– G. Narasinga Rao

If a tree outside Room No. A1 at Ramanasramam can take the shape of the Divine, just imagine what can happen to people with six senses who have the ability to mould themselves more easily! Yes, there is so much each and every one of us can change, if only we can remember and put to practice what this humour-filled wise being teaches us so patiently. The fun-filled talks I hear from Swamiji on many occasions are so good and easy to follow provided we put in the effort to implement them. Pranams to you, Swamiji, the Master of wit and wisdom. I had the good fortune to visit Swamiji not only at Sri Ramanasramam but also at Vasishtha Guha. May He give me his choicest blessings for my speedy progress in life.



42. EPITOME OF COMPASSION

– Nikhil

My father is a disciple of Poojya Gurudev and this was how my acquaintance with Gurudev began. I used to visit Tiruvannamalai during my vacations in high school with my father. My first meeting with Gurudev was during my class XII vacation, and was probably for 30 minutes or so. He was in mouna at the time. Through his actions he advised me to come often to Tiruvannamalai. He took a rechargeable torch lying on his bed and pointed towards the plug indicating to me that I should come and recharge myself often. While leaving his room, my father was the first one to step out when Gurudev clapped. I turned back, and saw him stand near the door of the cottage. He pointed to Bhagawan Ramana's photo and gestured to convey, "Always hold Bhagawan's Feet," and then smiled. This was my first message from Gurudev which is always in my memory.

My next meeting with Gurudev was almost three years later in August 2006 during Sri Krishna Janmashtami. I had a desire to ask for Mantra Diksha from Gurudev. I decided to ask for it this time. Gurudev immediately declined it asking me to search for somebody younger as a Guru. All those expectations that I would get Diksha were shattered. I was disappointed. I thought probably I was not eligible for it. The following morning, while doing pradakshinas around Bhagawan Ramana's shrine,

I happened to see him sitting on the window sill behind the Samadhi. He told me to come to the room so that we could discuss about the Diksha. I agreed and went to his room after breakfast. When he asked me about the Diksha, I wept uncontrollably. Gurudev, out of his compassion, agreed to give me Diksha. Even after so many years, he laughs when recalling this incident, saying that I wept for it. It is only because of his Love and compassion that he was ready to accept me as a disciple. It is only his Grace and blessings that is guiding me in my life.

Prostrations at your Holy Feet.



Gurudev and Nikhil at Nikhil's home in Kerala



43. SARVAM GURU KRUPAYA

– Anu Bhaskar

Shantam Anantam Brahmam
Our sashtanga Namaskaram to Swamiji

Our family's association with our Lord is nearly two decades old or young. His Satsangs at our house in Trichy, Mylapore, and Prem Nagar were only on Vedanta. He listened to him in Anandashram, Saradhasamithi homes and even during Arunachala Girivalam, he spoke to us in a language that was simple, scientific, rational and easily digestible. We are blessed as He is, in fact, a gift given by Sri T.N. Sivaramakrishnan, our father figure. What drew us to him was that we saw in him a unique combination of Paramacharya of Kanchi, Sri Ramana Maharshi and Sri Ramakrishna.

Whenever Swamiji spoke on the phone, we would be absorbed by his unique Divine Love, which brought tears to our eyes. We were blessed to listen to His Ramana Suprabhatam in his own voice.

Yetra yetra mano madheeyam
thatra thatra thava Bhava (Brahma) swaroopam

Yetra yetra siro madheeyam
thatra thatra thava paada pankajam

Swamiji is Bliss in a human form, yet so simple.

Namaskarams to our Guru now and forever.



44. SWAMI SHANTANANDA PURI

– Sri Gopalvallidasan

Given below is the translation of the spontaneous outflow from Sri Gopalavallidasan after his first visit to Swami Shantananda Puri Maharaj at Tiruvannamalai.

The one who has surrendered everything to God is a Sannyasi!

The one
who has no thought of the morrow
who accumulates nothing for Himself
who loves everyone equally
who speaks highly of others yet is modest Himself
who is unbound while being amongst the worldly
who destroys the ignorance of the deluded
who is wisdom personified yet greets others with humility
who is immersed in the Bhagavatam, which is His voice
who attracts others but is Himself unattached
who establishes God wherever he goes
who wears saffron robes and flashes a brilliant smile
whose years have filled Him with wisdom but is childlike
who was drawn by the grace of Purushottama
to be His noble servant
who enters the cave of Vasishtha's heart
and gives Himself up
who is peaceful and blissful
who lavishly confers peace and bliss is a Sannyasi!
The one who encompasses all of this is a great Sannyasi!
Yes, such a one is Swami Shantananda Puri!

Grey beard, pearly teeth, and tender fingers,
Saffron robes, motherly love incarnate, smiling visage,
Warmth in speech, Satsang embodied, a devotee of
Bhagawatam, A Sanskrit scholar, unmindful of his body,
Bounteous to devotees, a servant of the Lord,
That is Swami Shantananda Puri!

Jai Swami Shantananda Puri!



Gurudev with Sri Gopalvallidasan



45. GURUJI, THE VISIBLE FORM OF GOD

- Krishnakumar

The Guru is the ultimate and Supreme Power who appears in front of his disciple when the appropriate time arrives. The proverb “Guru can do what God cannot” really applied in my life on many occasions.

In the year 1999, I was forced to be separated from my wife Rohini and daughter Reshma as a part of my destiny which took me initially to East Africa, and later to Muscat (Sultanate of Oman). This separation from my family was unexpected and came as a big blow to me. With God's Grace I got a job in Muscat in a decent company. Since then I was trying all efforts to bring my family to Muscat until I left Muscat in 2004, but all my efforts were futile. During this tenure, I prayed to God intensely to help me bring my family. I even tried fasting many times to beg God to accept my prayer, but he was quiet. My various requests to the management were kept pending and every time I got the same answer, “Please wait. We will provide family status later.” I was fed up with this answer and so I decided to resign and go to Dubai in 2004 when I happened to be in touch with my Gurudev through Rohini. As per Guru's instruction, I reached Dubai and immediately I got a very good job and in three months' time, I brought my wife and daughter to Dubai.

As Head of Sales, I happened to face tough times on many occasions in the form of material delivery

commitments or collection of huge amounts from the clients. Every time things have gone out of hand, I have sought help from my Gurudev. The moment I surrender to his Holy Feet, the problems disappear forever.

MY LORD, KINDLY ACCEPT MY PRANAMS.



Gurudev with his disciple, Krishnakumar



46. KARUNAMAYEE MA, MY SWAMIJI

– N. Arpana

Since my childhood, I have been coming to Tiruvannamalai with Souris Ma. After Souris Ma's nirvana, I began to feel very lonely. I felt there was nothing in my life. I felt I did not want this life anymore. In 2011, I had gone to Ramanasramam wondering if I would meet any sage or saint. I met a foreign lady in Bhagawan's Samadhi Hall who told me about Swami Shantanandaji. I went to meet Swamiji the following evening. The first impression I got about Swamiji was his simplicity. I did not know that day that Swamiji was going to enter my life. In November 2011, I went back to Ramanasramam. I went to have Swamiji's Darshan again. Swamiji was about to leave for Vasishtha Guha in two days. I came back to Madanapalle.

After a few days since my return, I had a dream. In it, I saw Souris Ma giving her Asana (throne) to Swamiji. I soon forgot about the dream.

In 2012 on Guru Poornima day, I suddenly landed up in Sri Ramanasramam. I went the same day to meet Swamiji. Swamiji lovingly gave me a copy of *Ribhu Gita* with the words "Soubhagyavati". I told Swamiji in surprise, "I am not married." Swamiji then sweetly explained to me the meaning of Soubhagyavati, and said, "You have come here and doesn't that make you Soubhagyavati? The fact that you have come here is the greatest fortune (bhagyam). Even after that, I did not understand that Swamiji had

already entered my life. He became my Guru even without my realizing it.

In August 2012, I went to Tiruvannamalai having planned to stay there for two months. When I went to have Swamiji's Darshan, I realized that Swamiji had indeed entered my life. I also realized that my life is not in my hands. I felt that Swamiji started a new chapter in my life. Swamiji changed my name from Aparna to Arpana. I had a rebirth in this birth after having come to Swamiji. I extended my two months' stay to five months. Swamiji would tell people again and again, "She has come from nowhere all of a sudden and has attached herself to me." Having met Swamiji, my search came to an end. My thirst was quenched. Swamiji's Grace is such that I cannot employ words to describe my gratitude. His Love for all is such that even a mother cannot give her child. When we compare a mother's love to His, we see how immense and boundless Swamiji's Love is.

Swamiji's teachings are so simple and easy to understand and practise. Whoever comes to Swamiji has his or her wishes fulfilled. Swamiji is none other than the Divine Mother. He is the embodiment of Divine Love. When my aunt's health was fragile, Swamiji told me to go to Madanapalle to see my aunt. I did not have any heart to leave Guruji and go to Madanapalle. I always wanted to stay with Swamiji. Swamiji lovingly made me see that even Adi Shankaracharya had gone to see his mother just before she left her body. Swamiji, the omniscient One, sent me to Madanapalle. After the final rites of my aunt, I came back to Swamiji. Swamiji always gets something or the other to eat from his share of food.

When Swamiji had oedema, the doctor had advised Swamiji to wear a bandage on his feet. I was given a rare

chance to tie the bandage for Swamiji every day. This was my chance to hold His Lotus Feet for a while every day. I felt in reality that I was holding the beautiful Feet of the Divine Mother. When Sri Rama placed his feet on the rock, Ahalya was set free. I do not want what Swamiji did to me when he allowed me to touch His Feet every day during that period. Swamiji did not initiate me formally but he has more than accepted me as his disciple, devotee and child. Without a Guru, life is empty. I offer my million pranams at the Lotus Feet of Swamiji, my eternal Guru. I pray for His Grace, Love and Mercy to be on me always.

Hari Om.



Karunamayee Ma's tender concern for Arpana



47. LOVE AND BEAUTY

– Charlie

My name is Charlotte but my friends here in England call me Charlie. When I came to have Gururji's Darshan for the first time in Sri Ramanasramam in Tiruvannamalai a few months ago, he called me Charlie. I was surprised but I am not now. Love is everywhere and no detail can escape it.

Dearest Gururji,

The love and beauty that shines from You is something I treasure each day. I sit in silence and feel Your presence and try to forget what I am not and see who I am through Your eyes, the love and beauty and disappearance of one's false self and the merging of all in Love.

Yours gratefully,
Charlie



*The happiest moment in Charlie's life.
A moment in the presence of Divine Love and beauty*

48. SWAMIJI – SIMPLICITY AND WISDOM PERSONIFIED

– B. Srinivasa Reddy

By the grace of Bhagawan Sri Ramana Maharshi and with the help of my well-wisher, Sri Anand, I came in contact with Poojya Swami Sri Shantananda Puri Maharaj about 8 years ago. My first Darshan of Swamiji was at a devotee's home in Jayanagar in Bangalore. At that time, we had just completed the construction of Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi Ashram on Hosur Road, NH 7, 26kms from Bangalore. I requested Swamiji to visit our Ashram to which he initially replied that he would come some other day. Just half an hour later, to my pleasant surprise, he suddenly decided to visit our Ashram the same day. I was immensely happy at this unexpected pleasant decision of Swamiji, which perhaps had happened with the Divine call of Bhagawan Himself.

I took all the devotees present there to the Ashram by 2.30pm. Swamiji sat in silence in the Meditation Hall for about 15 minutes. It was a clear sunny day till the time we got ready to leave the Ashram when to our surprise, there was a sudden downpour for about 15 minutes! We then got back to Bangalore to Sri Anand's residence where Swamiji normally resides when he is in Bangalore. This was the beginning of a beautiful spiritual journey I'm glad to have embarked on 8 years back. Thereafter, almost every year on Swamiji's birthday which is on 6th of May, I've had

the fortune of participating in the celebrations at Bangalore, of which an integral part has been the release of a book written by Swamiji every year.

Many of the devotees who have had much closer and longer interactions with Swamiji would have written more in detail in the several articles published in this book. In addition to the Darshans at Bangalore, I also go to Tiruvannamalai to see Swamiji when he is there for about six months during Chaturmasa. Although I've wanted to spend more time with Swamiji, I haven't been able to do so, owing to my preoccupation with the job and thereafter in other spiritual and philanthropic activities of the Ashram. Nevertheless I've never failed to remember him every morning as it is on his advice that I write Sri Rama namavali first thing in the morning before I start my daily chores. This has helped me to see my path clearly and focus on my activities.

Recently, Swamiji was graceful enough to bless me and gave me Diksha at A 1 in Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, something I've been longing for over the last few years. I cannot explain in words my feelings about Swamiji and I feel really blessed to have Swamiji as my Guru for the rest of my life.

Swamiji was kind enough to visit our Ashram on the morning of 23rd February and bless the residents of the Old Age Home in the same premises. One elderly couple who were unable to come downstairs were blessed by Swamiji from the ground floor itself as they stood in the second floor corridor. The same couple who were having health problems are feeling much better now and all the residents of the Old Age Home always express their happiness and ask me about Swamiji's next visit to the Ashram.

Swamiji, despite his mastery over the Upanishads, Bhagawad Gita, etc., and his time spent at different places in the country with devotees from different walks of life, some of whom hold quite high positions in the society, he still remains a very simple human being, accessible to every devotee irrespective of their positions and background. Everyone can relate to him comfortably.

The very fact that Swamiji is still going strong at the age of 86 despite all his health problems proves his point that these problems are only to the body and has nothing to do with the soul. Swamiji neither believes in nor displays any siddhis and whatever good happens to the devotees by way of his blessings, he humbly tells the devotees to attribute the same to God and to pray to God daily.

Before ending this article, I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to some of his ardent devotees who are taking care of Swamiji's health and serving him with so much sincerity and dedication. Few of them I have to mention here are Sri Anand and family, Kalpagam, Guhapriya, Sri Venkiteswaran, Sri Suresh and Mrs. Usha, Sri Ravichandran, Dr. Santosh, Dr. Sandhya and quite a few other friends and doctors in Bangalore and other parts of the country. Swamiji has been able to retain his health to this extent because of such dedicated services of these devotees, who I feel are really more blessed than the rest of us.

May Bhagawan Ramana Maharshi bless our sweet Swamiji and give him many more years of vibrant life for the benefit of devotees like us and also to the society.

Om Namō Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya



*Gurudev blesses B. Srinivasa Reddy and his family
at his house in Bangalore*



49. GOD IS GLORIOUS IN HIS SAINTS

– Swami Sadasivananda

In an attempt to convey the profound impression that occurs when in the company of the Holy, the mind reflects on the wisdom of the Bible where it is said, “God is glorious in His saints.” Arthur Osborne once said something similar regarding Sri Ramana Maharshi. “The specious theory that Bhagawan was not a Guru had simply evaporated in the radiance of his Grace. Moreover, I now perceived that, far from his teaching not being practical guidance, it was exclusively that.”

Within nearly ten years of living and moving with Swami Shantananda Puri, I have found that this description of one whose life, teaching and grace-filled presence both pleases God and uplifts mankind can without reservation be applied to him.

Probably the most dramatic evidence that supports such a truth is that Swami Shantananda will be the first to deny such a statement. But as the age-old epithet declares, “the proof is in the pudding.” And the pudding cooked up by Swamiji is irresistible to the spiritual palate. Those who have the great good fortune to come to him for guidance, or those who happen to meet him as a surprise acquaintance, all come away with a mind changed and a heart uplifted by his presence. The reason for this is not his renowned knowledge of Scriptures, or even his adorable aptitude for storytelling. The transformative effect Swamiji has on one and all comes from the irrefutable

truth that his life and spiritual practice pleases God. Can there be any better definition of a saint? I am not using the status of saintliness lightly, but many who know better than I say, “saints are easy for God, it is man who complicates the attainment.”

Swami Shantananda's earliest recollection, which he himself conveyed to me, was that from the age of 6 he was taught to seek and find the Mother of All through a life of remembrance of God's Holy Name and service to God's creation.

Swamiji's constant guidance to me was straight and unassuming. He echoed, like his own guru and master, the traditional truth proclaimed by the sages from time immemorial; “Prayer and effort yield the crown of creation – a heart full of love for its creator.” Many respond to such a statement by bluntly saying, “This is easy to say, but it is altogether something else to do it!” More than any other, Swamiji knows this is true. So his response to the 'Doubting Thomas' in all of us is none-the-less profound. Swamiji would say, “Then just fake it, and one fine day the Divine Mother will say to our hearts and souls, My dear, I am tired of your faking devotion for Me. So now I will make it real, come now and love Me!”

One look into Swamiji's eyes as he is telling you this is enough to convince you of this Truth. Nevertheless, although Swami Shantananda's spiritual attainment and erudition of all Holy Scriptures are renowned throughout India and abroad, he shies away from even a glimmer of self adulation. I know this for a fact, for I was once standing next to him one pre-dawn morning before the Samadhi shrine of Bhagawan Ramana. Tears were rolling down his cheeks, as he stood transfixed before the living

presence of the Maharshi as he prayed, "O Bhagawan, somehow make me love you!" If we are still trying to define saintliness, perhaps now it is becoming clearer.

Swamiji once reminded me of the Buddha's words, uttered just before His departing from this world, "Days and nights are flying by, flying by, so what are you doing right now!" In an attempt to do justice to this wisdom I tried to imitate the schedule that Swamiji himself followed. Though myself being still young (or perhaps youngish), and Swamiji now well into his eighties, I would try to get up for prayer and meditation even before he would. Once while traveling with him and staying in Gujarat, along the banks of the Holy Narmada, I prided myself after arising just past midnight to pray to Narmada Devi. I was staying in a room just above his, and I gazed out toward the Mother I noticed the darkness of the dead of night was being illuminated by a reflection from below. Swamiji had already risen and was dressed and deep in meditation.

Although it was clear to me after years of close guidance, and even more evident to those who knew Swamiji for decades, that regardless of the clear radiance of grace that flowed from him, this man of God was still weeping within his heart, "O Divine Mother, somehow make me love You."

As the years have rolled on, and circumstance has caused me to be away from Swamiji to a point that rends my heart in two, I know from his guidance the prayer to God that can heal even the greatest human despair. I utter it daily, and sometimes even the grace of tears descends upon me as I say, "O Mother, by the grace of God and Guru, make me love You."



*When one saint feels the presence of another –
Gurudev and Swami Sadasivananda*



50. MOST REVERED SWAMIJI – LOVE PERSONIFIED

– Sanjay Singh

My family is closely associated with Swamiji and Vasishtha Guha since 1997 continuously. From my college days, the saffron colour has always attracted me. It may be due to my mother who always used to take me to have Darshan and Satsang of great saints who would visit my native place since my childhood. I have been fortunate enough to have very good teachers at IIT also who made it possible for me to have close interactions with several scholars and spiritually evolved persons during my college days. But I have found that Swamiji is a class apart. Apart from the fact that Swamiji is a great scholar (Jnana Murti) of scriptures and a master of Mantra Sastras, he is very humble, merciful to all at all times, absolutely free of ego and likes to teach all in a very simple and interesting manner.

Swamiji is a great storyteller and is an encyclopaedia of anecdotes. Several true and inspiring incidents from life of great saints flow from his mouth so naturally and without any effort as if Ma Saraswati herself is sitting there and giving sermons. His stories are so compelling that my son is the first person in our house to read his book as soon as a copy was received from the press and this has been the case since his school days.

There is another speciality of Swamiji. He has been a grihasta (house holder) and also a Government officer who completed his full Government service. Therefore, he understands very well the problems faced by a common person or a house holder and thus solutions provided by Swamiji are immediately accepted by a suffering man who approaches him. Everybody finds Swamiji very close to him; this is a sign of true Mahatma. The wit and wisdom of Swamiji is unparalleled. He cracks jokes and in the same moment he links it with a subtle point of Vedanta.

Swamiji has authored more than 32 books and several articles since 1998 which are all very highly scholarly works. I came to know how much his books are liked by people around the globe when I uploaded all of his works on Scribd website (www.scribd.com/vedavita) in August 2009 and it got a huge response.

I firmly believe that the so-called miracles in the life of a spiritual seeker are nothing but instances of grace of the Lord expressed through Poojya Swamiji. Such instances are countless in my life too but they are irrelevant to others and too personal in nature and I am too small to put infinite love and compassion I have been receiving from revered Swamiji in words. May the Lord grant our Swamiji a long life with great health so that the suffering humanity can find solace in his company.

Hari Om



*Gurudev with Sanjay Singh
at Aurobindo Ashram at Haridwar*



51. LASSEED BY PURE LOVE

– Abir and Anisha Bordoloi

...and so it happened one day. Pure Love whistled, lasso in hand, and our feet had little choice but to respond. We walked into Room A1 at Sri Ramanasramam at Tiruvannamalai with empty hands and heads filled with screaming desires. There came a need to have Swami Shantanandaji's Darshan. It was a little more than a year ago. "I was anticipating your visit because of which I kept this book for you. You have been sent by your Guru, Swami Virajeshwara Saraswati Maharaj from Anusoni." The book was one of Gururji's many treasures called *Gems from Ashtavakra Gita*. We seemed to have followed an unspoken instruction. God waits on us at every nook and cranny; He comes to us in different forms to keep us perennially hungry for the Truth.

Since Love knows no rules or gives no room for thoughts, we chatted to Gururji clumsily with no fear or hesitation. We told him, "Gururji, we love Bhagawan Ramana so much. Why did it take us so long to come to Arunachala? A secret childhood need to visit Tiruvannamalai was granted only now!" Before He could say anything, we said to him, "Gururji, you are God." Quick as only God can be, he shot back, "You are dreaming, wake up." We struggled to keep pace but found an answer, "Well, you are God in the dream if you will. How does it stop you from being God?" He laughed it off and cleverly changed the subject.

Guruji's genius puns and delicious stories held our attention but more importantly, He entered our hearts to stay. We remember having left His place happy and light. As things unfold in the most magical way, we came back to be with him for a week against His usual "I need a lot of rest. Please come later as I will not be in a position to talk to people." This one week was enough to experience Guruji's mercy on mankind. He accepted us with all our rough edges, million vasanas and the horrendous inner enemies that hold us hostage for lifetimes. He showed us that little place in His Heart, promising we would be safe there, a promise that was given without the aid of language.

Guruji works on our hearts so subtly that we often miss it. He patiently reminds us that all we need to do is remember the Lord and see Him in every form. "The living and loving cosmic energy works as each and every being and even inanimate things in the exact same way as the same current flows through bulbs of different shapes and sizes."

We remember having cried to him, "Guruji, when will our vasanas leave us?" He consoled us, "Your vasanas do not exist. These hurdles are just products of your imagination. If you let go of them in the mind, you really are free. Tell yourself as often as you can, 'Nityoham shuddhoham buddhoham muktoham. I am eternal, I am pure, I am enlightened, I am liberated.'"

The Creator of wit says to us, "Laugh your way to God."

"Guruji, we have a problem. We...."

"How can a problem have a problem? How can a thought think? Who are you? You are a thought of the Cosmic Thinker. You are a puppet in the hands of the Divine Mother."

“Guruji, I bashed my head against the car while trying to get into it.” Our beloved Guruji, quicker than lightning, chuckled, “My Lord! Is the car all right? I'm worried. Anyway, it is a good thing because some of your brain cells will get activated!”

You have no choice but to split your sides. After a few laughs came these words of caution. “Remember that if you don't bend the ego, life will continue to give you such bumps on the head.” “Crush the ego, Guruji, even if takes a million blows.” And then just how beautifully Guruji dismissed the thought of pain! “All reactions are false,” he reminds us. “When every reaction stops, you are a Jivanmukta, that's when it is pure choiceless action!”

The most potent reminder to us which rings loud and clear every other minute is: “Don't spend your so-called spiritual life trying to analyse the greatness of Gurus and paramparas (lineage) and the spiritual qualifications of aspirants. Don't quantify sadhana and waste time comparing yourself with others.”

What is singularly special about Swami Shantanandaji? The freedom and closeness He has allowed us is the grandest generosity we will never see again. Where else can you walk in the door of a Jivanmukta, sit through the day, unburden every woe that troubles your heart, cry your eyes out, and laugh with him as if he is just any of us? We tell on his time assuming divine beings don't need rest but never has he told anyone off. He chisels away, happily and tirelessly, all the non-Christ bits so we can shine as the Eternal Christ.

Guruji is Love incarnate on earth. He is wisdom in this utterly beautiful form. He is compassion without rhyme or reason. Born free, Guruji lives free, and every breath of his

is for our final emancipation. Every word from his lips saves a life, every pause protects us from our destructive tendencies, and every gaze reduces to ashes countless sins. What about his innocent laughter? They melt away arrogance and doubt in seconds.

Guruji's concern for one and all cannot be defined, measured or expressed. He is Love and extends Himself EQUALLY to every living being and non-living thing. One can never imagine this equal vision if the mind is engaged in furious calculation and anatomisation. He responds to both an earnest question and a not so sincere display of devotion with the same compassion and patience.

The presence, guidance, proximity, time and help of a Master is not to be taken for granted; we pray that we are worthy of Guruji's mercy. We have begged him for sincerity more than once, "Guruji, when will we be beings of pure Love? When will we be Your reflection? How long will we lie and pretend to be devotees? When will this hypocrisy end?" He, who is none other than the Universal Mother, Sri Rajarajeswari Ma, says, "Why do you worry? Fake it till you make it!"

"So, Guruji, here we are, two fake devotees, seeking Your Divine Will to turn us into true beings."

A million books in a million lifetimes cannot give us the clarity, conviction and confidence, and here in Swami Shantanandaji's presence, hearts are poured with the unasked gift of Divine Love silently; how can one not feel gratitude and a sense of surrender?

A miracle is not just limited to an event in the empirical world. The real miracle is the seed of Love sown by Guruji in your heart after which all that it cries

helplessly for is the death of the ego. The real miracle is that whilst nothing changes on the surface, the dynamite of Love shatters your ghost desires and stubborn attachments. The real miracle is when you see Love in every inch of everything and everyone, just everywhere. The real miracle is when you realise you are that very Love yourself.

Divine Love has come as You, Guruji; You have us lassoed firmly to take us Home.

Your most troublesome children,

Abir and Anisha



The Universal Mother poses with two devotees



*Thank You, Gurudev, for drawing us to Your Lotus Feet.
Please bless us to think of You constantly
and be Your reflection in thought, word and deed.*

HARI OM



The pure essence of being
Consciousness -
Manifests its radiant sublime beauty
As the immortal swan.

This compelling consciousness of love,
Dances into dreams and floats in melodies,
Nourishes, as it sheaths the wanderer
From the ravages of ignorance.

In the divinity within,
Peace and bliss
Dwell as compassion -
An immense energy.

This infinite voltage of love
Unmasks reality and invests the courage to see
That, the soaring mountain
And the roaring ocean are One.

It only takes half a smile
To discard the mind and dissolve
In this steady immanent glow.
Such is the grace of the Guru.

Swamiji is the Hamsavatar of our times. I've heard him tell the story in his inimitable style without for a moment letting on this secret. The Hamsa is radiantly beautiful, bold and direct. It conveys its powerful message in half a sentence, as Swamiji says, "*Madroopam ubhayam tyaja*". Swamiji in his infinite compassion absorbs us into himself. He tells us very simply to junk the mind, the source of the junk. A hint of a smile on Thakur's lips was all it needed to break the resistance of a hardened skeptic like Girish Ghosh. All we need is the Kataksham, a sideward glance for Swamiji's grace to consume us.

Geetha Ravichandran