

Still in the Flow



By Sushumna Dasi Herz

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Edited by Serena Jaia Punniya

Dedication: To **Sakthi Amma**
49 Chapters on Her 49th Birthday

Without Her, there would be no stories!

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Chapter 1

There Is Always A Beginning.

How easy it is looking back twenty-five years to my first visit to India.

Searching... but for what? My three daughters were each on their happy paths and I was free, at sixty-five, to explore. Meditation? Wonderment? Questions: 'Why are we on this planet?' and more importantly, 'what can we do to make it (and ourselves) better?'

I shared my thoughts with an Indian buddy in my meditation group in Berkeley, California.

"I know a family in Chennai who has the answers." He said. "Their daughters are friends of mine and their dad is a professor of Hindu studies at the Calavala Cunnan Chetty Hindu University. Really, they're great fun. They'll lead you in the right direction."

'Well, why not?' I thought. 'I'm open and ready for whatever!'

. . .

I don't know what I would have done without the Rao family. Mrs. Rao instructed her girls, in Hindi, to take me to purchase six yards each of orange cotton and the same amount of silk. These were then to be wrapped and pinned to form a sari. Another lesson was how to eat with your hand (right only) using a chapati. I'll leave out the bathroom lesson I received about the hole in the floor.

Dr. Rao suggested I visit a young man in Vellore, a few hours drive west. His son had only just met him, when he visited Singapore.

“He is like a real God and he's only twenty-five years old,” Dr. Rao told me with an inquisitive frown. “He's an avatar of Narayani, a goddess who lived on earth a thousand-years ago. Even though he's a guy, the energy is female and... super powerful.”

Well, why not? I was in a taxi by the next day. The driver pulled up to a grass section near a small barn, where I found three young men sitting on the ground in a circle near a wooden building. One was reading a newspaper. No one spoke. Finally the newspaper came down, and the handsome young man, who was wrapped in orange fabric, said “Why are you here?”

I told him about Dr. Rao's son in Singapore. “Put out your hand.” He said. A huge amount of red powder fell into my right hand. Shocked, I looked up, but there was no tree. Where had it come from?

One of the men dipped his finger in the fire-red substance and pressed it into a bump on my forehead. Another produced a piece of newspaper to protect the rest of it.

In perfect English, the finger-dipper said “This is *kumkum*. It's a powder used as a religious mark, made from turmeric and lime. It's a reminder that you are a devotee of God. It also has the medical power to reduce headaches because it relaxes the muscles of the forehead.”

I could tell he was proud of his English, as his chest puffed up.

“Let's go.” The powder producing guy said. We went into the simple wooden building, which turned out to be a cow barn.

Inside, a beautiful golden goddess sat on top of a little table. Mesmerized, I watched my first *puja*.

I confess - it has never changed in twenty-five years!

Afterward, Sakthi Amma showed me the surrounding dirt, mud, rocks and huts, assuring me matter-of-factly that in twenty-years time, there would be 35,000 people visiting daily.

And yes, there would be. Today, in this very spot, there is the most incredible golden temple, built in 2007, covered in 1500 kg of pure gold. Around it, there is a path in the shape of a star. Multiple temples are placed along the path, for all to visit, just as Sakthi Amma had described.

On that first trip, Amma said (right before I was to leave): "Sushumna, you will be a writer."

"Who... me?" I uttered. "I can't even spell... and I always avoided composition classes in school!"

. . .

She gave me a look of deep inner knowledge. "May I take your photograph, where we had the *puja*?" I asked. A final affirmative head nod ended the day. Hint - have a look at the back, back cover.

Chapter 2

A True Washing

I was hooked, and so little-by-little I saved my funds and returned, for years, to witness miracle after miracle.

“Mom,” said my daughter Betsy, “why don’t you spend more of your time in India? You are happy there.” My other daughters agreed. I had retired from being the sales manager at a company that manufactured chemical dishwashing machines, so I thought... why not at least give it a try?

...

That was twenty-five years ago. I always felt so happy and loved, along with the hundreds of Amma’s other devotees. We would laugh and giggle like children. *Pujas* occurred, just as they do today.

The word came from one of Amma’s young priests: “Sushumna, Amma wants you to hold the stage curtain and move inside when the curtain is closed, for Narayani to have her final washing and dressing.”

I took my job very seriously, but really I had no idea what an honour it was.

Prabha, the main singing lady, said, “Why that one? She is just a foreign white lady”. This I heard from her years later, and we laughed together.

I finally realized Amma was washing the hell out of me: ego, self centeredness, non-compassion and all that went with it.

...

The following year I was granted a new *seva*. I was to

place a large red dot of *kumkum* on each of the three-hundred cows in the *ghoshala*. In my defence, I wasn't as egotistical by then; nevertheless, I had everyone's life figured out and often told them. I analysed every approaching moment. I felt that I could manipulate all - what a snotty brat!

Wrong! I paid such close attention to every moment, watching each cow in fear that I would get trampled, butted, bitten or kicked. Yet, another lesson!

In my defence I have never stopped being impressed with 'the moment'. It has been a slow process: I have had a good scrubbing inside and outside, and to be honest, there is still work to be done!

. . .

"Walk the star path at least two times a day." Amma told. I have been doing it ever since, and something new arises each time. I often meet others on the path

and we share: "Where are you from?" or "Why are you here?" I confess - just being in silence is my favourite.

The goddess Lakshmi teaches me inner wealth. Ganesha helps me to stay in 'the moment' as he removes obstacles, and Vishnu is still working on me. The girls at His counter tell me He gives us gold. I wonder whether they realize that it's not mere physical gold, but inner gold that He gifts.

It has brought me such joy and understanding, without losing the inner crazy fun of 'what if?'

What if, for example, I was the one made of silver, who

had to listen to everyone requesting... requesting... requesting... to have obstacles removed?

Would I pick and choose who gets the grant?

. . .

It's not that different from my three mile walk in Tucson, Arizona on the bike path, where I similarly recite my inner chant of "Om Namo Narayani."

'Why am I still here at ninety?' is a big question. "Well... it's your genes," a doctor devotee of Amma's tells me. "Maybe not," I retort ... "Mom died at fifty-four".

'I am proud of my three daughters, their kind husbands, my five grandchildren and my first great grandchild, Henry,' I'm thinking, as I'm enjoying my morning walk on the star-path. Then, it pops up right in front of me. Surely, I have walked passed it for fifteen years. Amma's knowledge, on a literal sign. The answer!

You suffer because you don't know really who you are. You think you are just the physical body, but once you realize the Divine is in you in the form of soul, you will see yourself in everything and have only peace.

While sitting in the evening *puja*, I digress, as Narayani gets her second splash of holy water and is rubbed with oil. 'Writing a book about my experiences would be fun... but it does seem a bit egotistical. On the other hand, it is such a pleasure to remember some of my everyday stories. It's always as if Amma is playing with me, and at ninety I don't want to forget her games'.

I leave, after waiting in the line for our taste of the *puja*. It's cute because the guy who serves us knows I can't handle the well loved spicy treats. I tip my head and smile as he presents me with a huge portion of a different share. Yum. Often this is my evening meal.

A young woman approaches me. "I just want you to know I hear you are going to write a book about Amma. I can't wait to read it."

I smile and almost choke to death! Amma's answer... "write away Sushumna, and have fun!"

Chapter 3

Ganesha

Breakfast, at 10am. I must say - I enjoy the colorful array. Fruit, veggies, curd and yummy potato something.

I'm dressed in a pant outfit, ready for my first slow morning walk on the star-path.

Yeeks... I see Amma's car... in front of the Ganesha temple. Something must be going on. I zoom over and am able to cram in. People are so nice about squeezing in together and sharing space. It's an abhishekham bath for our beautiful silver elephant. Must be an important day for him.

My one and a half inch Ganesha, that Amma materialized for me 19 years ago, is in my room. 'I'll bring Him to get blessed tonight', I think. He has truly taken care of removing obstacles. "Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha," I am used to saying, even when looking for a parking space in San Francisco, with Ganapathy on my dashboard. Always, a space opens.

...

"Amma, He is still taking care of me." I proudly say, holding the tray with His little body in the middle.

Amma pours holy water over him, saying, "He is almost out of his teens, Sushumna". She has a huge smile.

"Yes," I mutter with a fluttering heart, "He is nineteen."

How does Amma remember? Really, I feel like I'm going to faint. What an honour that the Divine not only remembers me but is aware of the time line of events. (We met 22 years ago). 'So sweet,' I'm thinking on my way back to the guest house.

...

A large man who I haven't seen in a few years approaches me. We exchange pleasantries.

"I have something for you. Come into my store." He ushers me into where they are making laddus.

"This is for you." He hands me a tennis ball size piece of dough. I'm not a sweet eater and the combination of all of that dough and sugar is overwhelming. Then I get it. Laddus are Ganesha's well known food. It's for him, and surely is Amma's joking treat.

Yum... Nothing happens by coincidence here! Amma is up to her tricks. What a lovely evening.

True confession: the entire laddu was delicious. FYI, I have seen them for sale on the star-path.

...

Ganesha also has a huge bathing - four days after the full moon. It has to do with the angle of the sun and moon, which makes it very auspicious. I find myself lusting for the panchamrutham, which is five types of fruit mixed with honey. Even His consort, the rat, gets the same treatment.

Afterwards we get to bathe our stomachs in it as well! No doubt... there are no obstacles in my life!

Thank you, Ganesha.

Chapter 4

Hazel

I no longer drive a car in the U.S.: with all the gas emissions, the planet doesn't need me to dirty it even more. Age might also have something to do with it. My girlfriend, who's a year older than me, has totalled two cars in the last year. "Why?" I asked. "I just forgot to stop." She said.

I ride on the bike path, with a good sized basket for grocery shopping.

Actually when it comes down to choosing doctors, instead of their medical school credentials, I check their addresses for closeness to the bike path.

. . .

I'm impressed with the Sri Narayani Holistic Center. I love my weekly killer strong body massages. There is also shirodhara, where they pour herbal oil on your forehead, herbal facials and more. A bonus is the free car service to and from the guest house.

Again - exhaust fumes, gas etc. Alternatively, there is a sweet dirt path through a bit of countryside that I can walk. Only a few big snakes to sidestep. A third option is the sensible backroad, much like my Tucson bike path, so why not get a bike?

Nathalie helps me find a purple Indian bike with a huge metal sign displaying her name: Hazel. No doubt - in Amma land everything and anything is possible!

Hazel takes me everywhere, although just like in the U.S. I don't ride on the main road. She takes me to the *ghoshala* where

someone usually shouts hello and I jingle the bell in response! She takes me past the emus, the goats, the deer park and to our huge statue of Shiva. All convenient back road trips.

When I left last year, I gave Hazel to Green Shakti to be used in my absence.

Now that I'm back, I am in search of the old girl.

Like magic, I find her alone against a fence. I leave a note in her basket. After two days, there's no response and she is unmoved. So there I am, ready to be off and running.

Oops, the brake wire is broken and she is a bit rusty - 'but aren't we all?' I'm thinking, 'when we first come back to Shakti Amma?'

There is always a solution. I meet Siva, the manager of Block A. He is such fun to talk with and is the bike person. He sends her off to Vellore for a tune-up.

Back she comes - set to go. First day on the road, I zip along happily, from Peedam to the holistic center for my treatments. I stay for a yummy lunch and visit our guests who are staying there. Afterwards I visit the small Narayani, who resides in the back herb garden. Then I feed the seven (almost eight, as one looks due soon) donkeys: bananas, watermelon rind and old chapatis.

On the way back, on the main road, I pass a guy riding a blue bike and notice the name Diane. 'Wouldn't he prefer Joe or Bob?', I chuckle.

‘Ding-a-Ling’, Hazel announces at the huge metal gate that leads into the Peedam road. The guard is always smiling and happy to let us in.

I have permission to let her rest outside Amma’s house, under the protection roof, where all the ‘important’ people park their motorcycles.

After our evening washing of Narayani, Amma gives us a splash of the sacred liquid. I happily thrust out my cupped hand.

“So,” says Amma. “Did Sushumna enjoy her bike ride today?”

I feel the heat of my blush. How does Amma know what I am up to? “Yes, Amma, thank you.”

Well there are times when you say things and you wish you could take them back. Nervousness or silliness, or just plain stupid, but I said....

“Amma may take Sushumna’s bike for a spin anytime. Maybe at night when no one is around.” I bow and smile.

I mean Hazel would love it. Right?

The Divine just smiles.

Chapter 5

The Star-Path

“Walk the star-path at least two times a day.” I was told by Amma and have been doing for the last fifteen years. Something new comes up each and every time.

The small Ganesha temple is first. “Om Gam Ganapataye namaha,” I mutter as I walk up to him with clasped hands. I know for sure that he will remove any obstacles - even those I haven’t discovered. The priests are always ready to help with their blessings.

Next is the Golden Temple, where I stroll around the inner temple and look at the mountains, greenery and well kept property. I silently thank the hundreds of land workers who devote themselves to the place. Often I wave to them and bow, as if to say ‘*super work...*’ They get it, and smile.

I remember when it was first constructed. Like little kids, we’d run up the main (very important) direct path to Lakshmi. If we did that today, I’m sure one of the guards would throw us into a nearby pond. Actually, as I’m thinking about it - ‘why not give it a try?’.

Despite any event, Goddess Lakshmi always awaits. Just to sit quietly in front of her is heavenly. Maybe not so much for her, as she is busy working on inner wealth for each of us. I always nod to Sunderaison, who is one of the young guards. Actually, not so young. He’s now married with two children. We use to joke because I could never remember his name. “Who am I?” He would ask with another guard listening. Proudly, after three years, I could remember. He is always ready for everyone,

with a great smile. Often when I receive a kumkum packet I give it to someone waiting in line to see Lakshmi. I notice that it's usually to an older woman.

The Vishnu Temple is next. 'Man, is he huge, maybe twenty-five feet tall.' I'm thinking. I know he was Parvati's brother and he introduced his friend Shiva to her. It was Shiva who started me on my path in Trinidad. Vishnu's jewelry is over the top, and I find it interesting that men wore their wealth around their necks in those days. Here I sit with my tiny gold earrings with a few small diamonds. He is loaded! It's no wonder that we have all-night-men roaming around with watchdogs.

For me the true diamonds are the conversations that I have on the path. I love meeting families and always have fun talking and playing with the children. We smile, throw kisses to each other and even skip. Mom or dad ask where I'm from and why I am here. I love to respond by talking about Amma and asking them where they live.

These are the real gods and goddesses on the path. Sometimes a path visit will take two hours. I love every moment of it. We are all Amma's jewels.

. . .

If it is my evening walk, I finish with the fire puja at the beginning (which is also the end) of the path. They call it Lalita - She sits on a lion. I think of her as Mata Durga, who has given me my powerful strength through the years. Actually, I think of myself as Durga - a bit feisty. A few friends claim to be/feel the same. I agree with them, and we laugh.

“She has many names but they are all one.” One of the seven young priests tells me. “The fire is super powerful and anything you ask for will come true.”

How can I resist? She catches me each evening, seven until nine. I am never without food for Her fire. Usually it’s about world peace and the end to man’s inhumane treatment of one another and the universe.

This will change soon and we will have a Lakshmi fire to care for all.

Chapter 6

The Holistic Healing Center

It started way back. I'd heard about the 'pulse taking' Ayurvedic doctors, who could supposedly tell your ailments just from holding your wrist.

"No way." I say to myself. "They must just read your mind." Nathalie takes me to a large building nestled near the green forest.

'Ayurvedic Center' is written in bold letters. This is before I own Hazel, or maybe why I decide to buy her.

A guy walks down the front steps, with both his ankles wrapped in serious bandages.

"Oh, no." I say aloud. I stop and point in sympathy. "Yes, it's my knees." He says in almost perfect English.

I bite my lip to keep from laughing. But what is the word for ankle in Tamil?

. . .

In we go, met by three sweet friendly faces in a comfortable waiting room.

A young woman emerges from an office, with 'Dr. Janani' written on the door.

A sweet smile. "Come in Sushumna, we have been waiting for you." I sit down in front of her putting out my left wrist.

But as I am doing this with a smile, I start my mental song. "Mary had a little lamb, little lamb. His wool was white as snow..snow .. ta da ta da snow snow." No way am I going to think

of my physical conditions and risk giving her a clue.

In less than three minutes she nails me: “You have a shoulder problem... arthritic... it has been painning you for a while. Actually we have a therapist who is excellent with heated rice pounding. It will solve your pain and give you more mobility. Also you are having a sleep problem. We will give you an exercise to do before you go to bed. Also it is best to take a warm bath, and meditate before lights out. Older adults spend more time in earlier light stages of sleep and less in the later, deep stages. Aim for seven hours per night and exercise during day. You will be fine.”

Holy cow, I can't believe it. How does she know all of that just from my wrist?

Needless to say, I have been singing her praises ever since. I haven't found one person who isn't astonished with her knowledge.

There are brochures that list all of the marvellous opportunities to take care of our beloved bodies. Male practitioners for the men and female ones for the gals.

There are also other doctors, a friendly dining area and accomodation, which serves as an alternative to our guest house, Kamala Nivas.

Every year I go in for a check up and like everyone else, I consider her a dear friend. She is always there for us.

At the back of the center, there is a lovely paved walk

which leads to a Narayani statue. Every morning, She gets a washing, prayers, new outfit and fresh flowers. I never forget to bow and talk to her.

The entire area has been donated to us by a sweet couple, in memory of their son. I must say it is not only peaceful but filled with butterflies, which have always been my messengers from Amma. I have been dozens of places in the world and when I find myself surrounded by butterflies, I feel protected.

Wait ... wait ... There is more! Most people don't know, but there is also a small cow enclosure, a zoo-like set up with goats of all types and a donkey pen (with four adults and three babies).

Hazel and I ride over for lunch and afterwards I distribute my banana stash to socialize the donkey crew. I have a secret goal - to get the donkeys out on morning walks with any interested brave soul.

Actually, when I start walking the animal path with my treats, one of the donkeys starts to bray....The animal caretakers and I laugh in wonderment. How does he know that I'm coming way before I get there?

Chapter 7

Puja On The Front Porch

Amma conducts the Narayani washing on the front porch of Her home. 'All are welcome': is the group text that comes through on my phone.

We gather at the entrance gate. I notice new faces in the crowd: mostly women in bright colours. 'Which country?' I wonder in silence. I'm early and excited, as my treat will be to sit on the floor in the front row. It's been a while. I'll be close to Narayani and see every detail of our beautiful statue. Well, not only our goddess - I'll get to witness Amma's tender loving care. Never a quick splash, as we might have done to our children after weeks, months and years of washing them.

"Om Namo Narayani," I chant within.

. . .

The sweet faced guard opens the gate to the front steps. I'm sure I detect a smile from him saying 'good Sushumna. You will get a front row seat.'

Suddenly I'm jerked forward... no, pushed from the right ... then another shove from the left. Oops, there is a hand on my right elbow, holding me back.

I cautiously ascend the four steps to the porch but a hip bumps me to the right, far from the center where I had envisioned myself.

I sit down on the floor, feeling at least safe from a fall. Then one of the young priests ushers me back further to forge a narrow path for people to move back and forth during the puja.

Well, so much for my plan. Sitting on the floor has always been my favorite. It's when I feel the most full-on vibrations in the spiritual moments with Narayani. It currently feels like there's not an inch of comradery, nor an ounce of compassion for my white hair. I don't expect special treatment because of age, but what is fair is fair, and I was first in line! I pout quietly.

When I was the director of a co-operative nursery school (where parents took turns teaching) in Sausalito, California we would have the children line up by size.

The little ones always got to go first. Maybe that could be our solution.

I try to peek through the arm of the lady in front of me but no luck. I sway a bit to the left. Again, impossible. No... wait... I see the top of Amma's head. The puja continues. I mean, I appreciate the music and all but where is our Narayani?

Talk about hurt and shocked.

Twenty minutes go by and suddenly there is a bright flicker in my forehead. A huge, sparkling, golden plate slowly turns around and around in my brain. It feels clean, clear, exciting... and yes, Divine.

I get it - this is Amma's scan. No matter where you sit, she is never far: she is always in our head.

Thank you, Amma.

I'm still a bit shaky, laughing to myself that 'I'm afraid those people will trample over my skinny frame... or bite me.' I'll look into the idea of sitting in a chair instead, but there is no doubt that wherever you sit, the Divine will find you.

Om Namo Narayani

Chapter 8

Can I Steal Narayani?

It's an afternoon puja. I feel sad as I rehearse what to say to Amma. I always plan in my mind what I will speak to or ask about when I receive my heavenly liquid from Narayani. The funny part is that it never comes (out of my nervous self) the way I've planned it. Amma must think I am such a jerk. Often She tilts Her head and says: "What?"

Ok, so I'm next in line. She looks at me; but then again, maybe She is just scanning the hall. "Amma, Sushumna is planning on getting a new hip when she returns to her home in Arizona."

She looks hard into my eyes, then nods, turns, takes the lime from the top of Narayani's head and drops it into my open palm.

'Yea - whoopee - waa-hoo' filters through my brain.

She then says Her famous and sought after words: "Amma will take care".

My entire frame is weak and shaky and I am embarrassed to tell you what I said next. . . but here I go... true confession...

"Amma, Sushumna needs to take a part of Narayani with her... but she will return Her soon." Which piece of our divine goddess was in my mind? I'm not sure. Maybe Her hand that heals all, the smile we all love, the golden neck, Her kindness or the knowledge She gives us. It could be the harmony She teaches, the constant joy and sharing or the way She shows us how to live in amazement and listen to what is beyond sound.

I swallow and take a breath. "Sushumna will only borrow Her for a minute or two, when under the doctor's knife."

Did I get a nod? One can only imagine - when in the forcefield of the Divine, seconds and minutes can seem to take both millions of years and no years.

. . .

Bottom line is - Dr. Smith slipped in a new hip at six in the morning and sent me home at five in the afternoon.

"Easiest operation I have ever performed. No problems. You will be fine.

Tomorrow - walk, but stay off of your bicycle for a few weeks. I'll see you in three weeks."

"When can I travel?" I ask.

He smiles, "No worries. I get that you will do what you want to. Go for it."

Chapter 9

Home Again, a Typical Day

Travel is easy from America to India. The time change puts me in a zombie- like state, but at least it's a happy zombie-like state.

Here we go.

I promise I'm not making this up. So - I'm sitting at breakfast with my note pad, having filled my tray with a yummy buffet of vegetables, fruit, two types of cereals and secret Indian sauces to go with my chapatis.

Freedom sticks her head in the door. "Don't forget my cow puja in half an hour - it's for my dad who passed away in July."

This particular puja is a famous one - it's lovely because the cow and her calf are donated to a poor family. I can't help thinking about how much it will mean to them. Fresh milk for the entire family and an opportunity to appreciate and love our animal kingdom. The cow barn has by now exploded in size, from three-hundred cows to seven-hundred, including so many adorable calves.

Twenty-two years ago Amma gave me my first seva: to put a red dot of kumkum on the forehead of each of the three-hundred cows. Wow... imagine now - seven hundred. Impossible!

Back from the barn, I take my first walk of the day on the star-path, knowing that I'm still requested to take *two star-path walks* a day. Each one becomes a story in itself!

“Why are you here?” I’m often asked. I always have a question for them too.

Today, a couple in their early twenties, dressed in fancy attire, stop me with the usual question, but this time the man continues before I can answer -

“We were just married.” He speaks in halting but happy English. “It is an arranged marriage. She -” (he points to his slim, seemingly shy wife, who is dressed in a navy dress with lovely jewelry) “- finished college. I only went through tenth grade. We live three miles from here, but it’s our first time to the temple.”

“Oh, you must come often.” I giggle. “I have been coming here for twenty- two years.”

“Why?”

“Oh my... it is like the jewels from heaven. You guys have been led here. You will have a glorious happy existence together, but don’t forget to come back often, and meet Sakthi Amma who has made this all happen and whose energy is right here with us.” He smiles. She, the college graduate, radiates with softness and gives me a slight tip of the head. I have a feeling she just might be the one in charge.

In the afternoon, there is a celebratory opening of four new greenhouses at Green Shakti. Nathalie has diligently worked on the environment, planted trees, and empowered loads of local men and women through their employment in the program.

Then it’s back to the guesthouse, where the manager Siva, who somehow keeps all of us informed and happy, is ready and waiting to tell us that Puja will be on. As an aside - I

must check with him, but I believe that he's had the job for as long as I've been coming. It seems impossible though, as he looks about twenty. I am sure he didn't start work at age ten!

"Amma's *puja* at nine." he tells me.

A quick shower, a change into a sari, and I'm en route to the fire *puja*, which I love to attend before the finale (Amma's Puja). It's located at the beginning of our star-path. I put my hands together and tip my head to Lalita (who I think of as Durga, on the lion). It is heavy duty stuff. We even get to touch a coconut wrapped in pure silk, and say our name plus anyone else's that we wish to add to the fire.

Nightly, I find myself asking for the end of man's inhumanity to one another. Tonight I make similar healing wishes and mention the couple I met today: 'may they have a long happy life together, with healthy children and an association with Sakthi Amma.'

One of the attendees always has their phone near, and signals when we get the message from Siva that Amma's evening puja is soon to begin.

"Yes", someone else usually signals in agreement. We get up and walk through the gate to Amma's front porch. There, we stay in heaven for a time, in an intimate opportunity to watch Narayani get her night-time bath. Of course, really we are the ones getting cleaned!

Several hours go by and the curtain closes for Narayani's dressing. I'm now free to enjoy dinner, which is served in the small building outside of Amma's house. I'm hungry and although I consider the food blessed, it is usually so spicy that

the Indian devotees laugh, both at and with me. One of Amma's male devotees usually brings me a piece of chocolate to sooth my mouth afterwards.

I take off for a secret walk to the elephant barn. Our two elephants are usually laying down snoring at this time of night. It's such a treat. It never occurred to me that elephants could get down, much less snore. I mean consider their size, and how the sound of the snore has to travel through their huge sleeping trunks. In contrast, the two (very special) white horses nearby sleep standing up. Two hours later it's the final dressing of Narayani. The curtain is open and we not only watch Her goodnight blessing, but have the opportunity to stand in line and give Amma a gift. It could be a mala, fruit, a container of ghee for the many fire pujas or another sacred offering. Of course, no gift is required - just standing in front of Amma with our hands held in a little cup shape, ready to receive a sip of Narayani's blessing, with an open and grateful heart, is purely divine.

That's it. Time to flop in bed. I'm a little ashamed that I'll miss the 4:30 a.m. bathing of our Gods and Goddesses tomorrow and even missed my second star-path walk today, but they forgive me. It's bed by one-thirty in the morning - I'm sure they understand. However, I do call their names: Narayani, Ganesha, Lakshmi, and Vishnu before my head hits the pillow.

Chapter 10

Lord Shiva

It is March eighth; we are to celebrate Lord Shiva.

He is the one who started me on the beautiful spiritual path, so I visit his huge likeness everyday. Sometimes it's just a nod and *thank you*; other days it's more.

Today it is more. I'm sitting, watching Shiva's unchanging face and chanting: "Om Namah Shivaya." I notice three stainless steel containers, way to the right of the altar. I know they carry holy food for Lord Shiva. I'm shocked and fascinated: a large monkey is approaching the largest pot. He picks the top off and digs into it with her/ his right hand - a serving of a good size mouthful. And then again, no fear or concern that I'm not far away. I hear a light chipper as two smaller monkeys arrive to similarly dip into the open container. I'm quiet. Actually I love watching them but am totally respectful, not only in case of diseases, but because they might attack me. No joke - when finished the larger one puts the top on and they leave!

Who knows... 'maybe they are relatives of Hanuman?', I'm thinking.

My phone jingles with a text from a friend: "Be at the Shiva temple by eleven tonight. Amma is to lead an all-night-celebration."

...
How exciting - Later, I watch Amma climb the sixty rickety stairs to Shiva's head. She then pours huge baskets of flowers over it which flow down the eighty-foot statue.

"Whoo Hoo!" I shout along with the crowd, thinking and knowing: 'That's my Shiva'. What a treat.

A fabulous and late night. Amma pours at least forty huge baskets over Shiva, then disappears. We all carry on with lots of singing and even some dancing. All are in high spirits: Indians, Americans, Malaysians, Australians and more.

The next evening when I go up in front of Amma for a sip of theertum, I say “Amma, aren’t your arms sore from dumping all of those baskets over Shiva?” (Secretly my arms are paining, as I must have been using my muscles just watching Amma pour.)

Amma looks quizzically at me. “Amma doesn’t feel like that. Amma doesn’t even know tired.”

‘Oh well, it was fun anyway. We had a blast.’ I’m thinking to myself.

The evening is now finished. Bhuvana, a lovely devotee of Amma’s, comes up to me, while we are tasting our prasad.

“You know, Sushumna, Amma was a thirteen-year-old boy when Narayani chose to come into Him. So, picture that thirteen-year old growing into what we see today at forty-seven. Maybe a bit heavier, because Amma enjoys my cooking and also She is a good cook. Mixing spices is one of Amma’s specialities. Have you tried some of them?”

I nod my head and feel my mouth watering.

“But, remember, Sushumna, Amma is the body. So when you asked Her how She felt, She could only relate in her head which is Narayani. Narayani doesn’t belong to or even care about the body.”

I'm thinking: 'WHAT? Why are we even having this conversation?

Furthermore, she was not anywhere near me when I was talking to Amma.'

However, I remember Amma telling me that "Amma doesn't know pain or tiredness. Narayani doesn't belong to Amma's body. She is the constant spark of loving care for all of mankind."

There is no doubt in my mind, Amma has sent Bhuvana to me to confirm what I need to learn and understand.

Om Namo Narayani and Om Namah Shivaya

There are always lessons to learn and the Divine ones are the best!!!!

Chapter 11

Seva

I guess besides learning the inner spirituality that underpins our existence, doing service to others is super important. We certainly have plenty of opportunities to do it here. Everyone has something they can give of themselves to the universe, even if it is just petting a dog or cat.

The school is a perfect example. I once took a ten-year old and her grandmother to visit. The last room we saw was the library, which brought back memories of other years when I had helped students with reading.

Seventy years ago, when I was in school, we were first taught one way to address the written word and then in sixth grade the system said ...oops! We must now work with phonics. We had to forget everything we already knew....even today I find myself to be slow - I struggle if I have to read aloud.

“Are you interested in outside help?” I asked Lakshmi, the principle.

“Oh how we would love to have volunteers to listen to students read aloud.

It’s so needed.”

That day, upon returning to the guest house, I knocked on the wrong door in search of my buddy, Nicky. Another devotee opened the door. We chuckled and I told her of my experience at the school.

“Well you wouldn’t believe this, Sushumna. I went to the school and asked to help. They wanted me to give classes about

how to use a computer, and, well, I freaked out. I said yes, but was planning to cancel. However... I would love to give a few hours each day listening and helping students read. Not only that - I know two others who would like to do the same."

This is how it works: life is just meant to be if we pay attention and get into the flow. We now have a committee of ten, including our ten-year-old who only wants to work with the younger students. I love listening to them talking about life in between their reading practice.

...

Nathalie captures me, "Come on Sushumna, we need you to help clean the forest in front of Amma's house."

"No way". At my age I'm of no value, I don't even have the strength to lift up a branch."

She laughs. "No problem, I promise. You will be perfect. We'll meet near the beginning of the star-path tomorrow at nine."

Five devotees meet to work with three ladies, dressed in green, who I have seen cleaning here and there. I have always smiled, clasped my hands together and dipped my head, meaning *thank you*, to them.

It turns out the forest is the one that runs from the beginning of the star-path down the paved path to Amma's house. Along both sides of the path, paper cups have been thrown in the bushes. There are hundreds of card-board bowls (the ones given to us filled with holy food): "How can people eat the divine snack and then litter?" I mutter to myself. The ladies carry black plastic bags and we load them up with paper tissue,

discarded flip-flops, candy wrappers, a cigarette stub, a sock, an old shirt, a wash rag and so on (and on).

After two hours of pick-up, we smile and commensurate over the stupidity of people's lack of concern for our environment. There are plenty of dust bins - what is wrong with them?

Well, now I hate myself. Wherever I walk, I see garbage. On the star-path, on the way to the guest house, in front of Narayani's temple and even on the street. I have to pick it up. Looking for the closest garbage bin, I chuckle to myself. I'm sure the locals have nick named me Dust Bin Dora. I should be thinking of our heavenly leaders: Lakshmi, Ganapathi, Narayani, and Vishnu - instead I see trash.

"Thank you, Nathalie." I say aloud in a huff. But, yes - it's a needed 'seva!'

. . .

There is plenty more to do. I won't go on and on but another one of my favorites is serving at lunch time. We have a large building next to the Star-Path; it houses a huge eating area. We serve at least 5,000 people a free lunch everyday.

We walk along with the regular servers, pushing containers loaded with rice, vegetables, sauces of different colors... on and on. It is our choice as to how we wish to help. Some walk with pitchers of water, filling cups, talking, smiling... or whatever.

I love to serve one of the vegetables and joke with the people. Of course it's always 'Where are you from?' My favorite

is to mess with the kids...saying “More vegetables?” or “How are you?” But secretly I feel happiest when they just look at me and treat me like one of them, by sternly pointing to their plate showing where I’m to place the food. I dip my head and smile, feeling so lucky to be part of it all.

Last month we had a devotee who wanted to celebrate his birthday by inviting friends to dinner. Then he changed his mind.

“Why not feed all - *a lunch* for my birthday? He donated \$1,200.00, and we served. It still brings tears to my eyes. It was such a beautiful experience, blessed by Amma, but of course anyone who serves also gets to sit in the private dining room and be served as well, afterwards. YUM!

Om Namo Narayani.

Chapter 12

Narayani's Bath

Surely this has happened to others. I sit as close to Narayani as possible while She is having her bath. Anywhere on Amma's porch is okay but at Peedam it's best in the first fifteen rows. So - Amma starts, there is a splash of water, then oil, cream and... suddenly Narayani disappears. She turns into a different figure, playing with my head. It's been my experience that once She changes character, She usually stays the same during the wash, even if I blink, squint, or shake my head.

Choice number one is a clear profile of a beautiful twenty-five year old woman with long dark hair. She always looks to her right but not at Amma. This is one of Her favorites, as I see it often.

Choice number two... She becomes a young man with a beard. He is handsome and again in a profile. No expression. He is just there and doesn't move or change his ways.

I have also seen Narayani be an old man and a middle aged woman. Nothing out of the ordinary - just regular folks, but never changing their expression during the entire washing. Well, that isn't entirely true. Lately Narayani also becomes a regal king with a huge crown. He stays that way the entire time Amma is washing.

Other times, Narayani might slip back to Her sweet self, while being rubbed on Her shoulder or elbow. However, I always watch closely, as She might go right back to being whomever She has originally chosen for the day or night.

'Come on,' I'm thinking, 'Is this real? Who is doing this? Amma, Narayani, or Sushumna?' I could ask Amma, but I'd

rather live in wonderment of the inner world of the Divine and *isn't this washing process being done to us too?* There are times when the liquid is poured over Narayani and I shiver. Is it too cold? Definitely not, but I do notice others watching who also shiver at times. We are all being cleaned.

Tonight is a big first. She becomes Ganesha. His eyes sparkle, but lower than Narayani's real eyes. Ganesha's nose is proportionate and not over done. 'A good fit', I think to myself. No matter how many times I blink, She remains the same.

I am positive that Narayani doesn't let Amma know any of this. Actually I have never talked to Amma about it. Sort of not wanting to be a tattletail, I chuckle to myself.

However, there is one thing I am very sure of. She does not dare to change or mess around during the full moon puja. This is the big time - She is working hard for not only us watching but for the Universe.

Om Namo Narayani and thank you.

Once the curtain is closed and She is dressed in all of her finery, there is no doubt it's our Narayani we see next. A powerful, beautiful woman. She never (and I mean never) changes herself into anyone else after washing, dressing and nestling into the variety of fresh flowers.

Om Namo Narayani

We love you, your sense of play and your endless, insightful love and care for all.

Chapter 13

Man in the Window

It is eight-thirty in the morning and I look out my window. Across the roof and building, I see him on the walkway that leads to the star-path. He is tall and slim with dark hair. Could be thirty-five but I always make people younger than they are, so let's say fifty.

He is dressed in an orange doti and a clean well pressed white shirt worn outside, not tucked in. His shoulders are back and he is slim, without the Indian belly that I so often notice.

That is the outside appearance, but his body language is sad. His head tips forward and he is no longer standing erect. He takes a few steps to the right then back to the left. I can see him so clearly, but not his face. He looks like many of the men who work here at the golden temple or maybe in one of our offices.

He definitely is not happy. What could make him sad? I wonder. I see only deep joy and love energy around here, but then again I don't have to turn it into a job to support a family.

Oh there it is. The answer. He rubs his stomach with his right hand. The arm goes down, I see or imagine a few deep breaths and he walks to the right, then turns and walks back to his original standing place.

"Aaah Haaa..." I say aloud. "I bet you are debating: 'should I go to work or go home and rest?'. Poor guy, people pass but no one seems to notice him.

"Come on. Feel better... you surely are loved. No one wants to feel crummy and then have to go to make others

happy." It's interesting - I'm cheering him on - "You can do it, go for it." I have no idea who he is, and I haven't even had my morning coffee.

Suddenly, and I swear this is true, his shoulders shiver and he stands taller.

He then looks up toward my third-floor window for a full minute. I promise it is impossible for him to see the building, much less through the branches of the tree at my window. It feels as if he is looking right into my eyes. It's frightening. It is impossible that I could have interfered with his situation. Right?

He turns and walks with a tall healthy gait, his arms swinging in a positive way, to wherever. No body language of a stomach disorder or depression.

"Wow... fun to feel what it may be like, being in a little piece of Amma's life and energy. She certainly takes care of all of us." I shudder in delight, deep wonderment and imagination.

I get it. We have to enjoy a positive, loving outlook. What will be, will be.

Om Namo Narayani

Chapter 14

Yantra

On the star path there is a huge photograph of Amma. It is always adorned with a fresh rose or tulsi mala. Today it's a rose one, at least twelve feet long. There is a standing wooden pedestal; on it is a silver square frame with fresh flowers.

"Push the flowers away and put your hands on the silver star/map. Say the mantra Om Shakti Sri Durga", Adam, the ten year old son of a family from Bali, tells me.

My right hand, with left on top, is approved by him.

My arm begins to shake, my head twitches, my left shoulder jerks. My neck twitches side-to-side. Actually my whole upper body is in motion. I'm not a dancer - I've never had the rhythm or understood how people jiggle on the stage floor with the band playing.

This is wild. "Try your left hand," Adam's fourteen year old brother says. "Wow, the same. It feels great. Like real energy, and I'm a bit out of control.

All worldly filters seem to disappear. I'm a lot lighter than my one hundred-fifteen pounds. I even feel like dancing."

I turn to Piotre, the boys' Dad. "We should get everyone to try this. It is super terrific."

"No, no, Sushumna. Look, there are four people near watching and I'm sure they wouldn't try it. They think you're a nut case."

. . .

This is one of my favorite stops on my twice-a-day star-path walk. I'm thinking maybe it is a Divine clearing... or a Divine giving. The best thing is - I become forgetful as to the proper mantra, but it happens anyway. No one seems to be able to tell me how it was formed and why.

Well, that's not entirely true. I checked with a few who seem to have inside knowledge. One said, "I have a four-hundred page book on spiritual designs. I'll get you the name of it, you can buy it on Amazon." One of our tour guides said: "Amma designed the shape with the etching of a star. It's suppose to give you Amma's energy but I don't know any more about it."

It has been several months of '*Divine Shaking*'. I try to approach the pedestal when no one is near. It never fails me!

One of my secret finds at Peedam is Janardhan, his lovely wife Bhuvana and their two amazing kids (I should say young adults), Kalplatua and Ambasadhan.

Their names are enough to floor me but their heart-warming knowledge and sweet humor is outstanding.

I find Janardhan and ask him: "What is the proper mantra to say when looking at the large photograph of Amma at the Yantra and furthermore how are you suppose to place your hands when in front of the silver design?"

"No, it's not like that, Sushumna." He gives me a soft smile.

"You should just look at the photo of Amma, clasp your hands in prayer and bow slightly. That's enough, but some say a

mantra: ‘Om Durga Devi Sharanam.’ Or you could just feel happiness. Stay as long as you wish. You surely will merge with some of Amma’s energy.”

I chuckle to myself. Yes, I do merge... *Big Time*, I’m thinking.

Om Namo Narayani.

Chapter 15

Vishnu

The Vishnu temple is located at the end of the star path, across from the yantra. He is the newest of our gods. True confession: He's huge, and as soon as you step into His space, he is sort of in-your-face. Not only that, but he wears an over-the-top amount of jewelry. In my life I have often felt people wear jewelry to hide behind their insecurity. Well...there is no insecurity here!

It is Saturday, which is special because His *abhisekam* washing is at twelve- thirty in the afternoon instead of the usual time of five o'clock in the morning.

I'm patiently waiting outside of the Vishnu temple at twelve-fifteen, knowing the bathing will be at least one and a half hours. It's so worthwhile: I feel it's a full cleaning of each of us. However, 'I don't need to be cleaned at five in the morning', I chuckle to myself.

I think He represents law and order. The correct way. From the looks of things we'll give Him a lot of work today. There are many businessmen, ladies dressed to perfection (loaded with jewellery) and plenty of inquisitive devotees, like me.

"Okay." The guard motions his hand. We walk in and sit as close to the bathing area as we're allowed.

All sorts of liquids slip down His black marble body. Rose petals are scattered head to toe and a yummy fruit mixture (pomegranates, oranges and apples) is applied.

Then three vessels of a white mixture are poured over him. This changes His eyes - suddenly I perceive another face. The eyes are on either side of his regular nose. It is as plain as the palm of my hand: a smaller face with another nose and mouth appear. I am one hundred percent present as each liquid is applied. This new face isn't the happy big one. There is sadness, and the face changes with each liquid added. It is as if He is showing me His true feelings.

I'm mesmerized and humbled to be given this sight. It's truly there for all of us. We just have to look, maybe with a different eye.

At the end, the small sad face merges with the large happy one. Vishnu must be pleased with the bathing. I wonder if he is especially touched by the the close attention paid to his left heart, which has special orange liquid smoothed over it.

This is the heart that Amma gave Him for Lakshmi.

The curtain closes. As we leave we are given a taste of His divine liquid. As I walk away from the temple, I overhear a businessman explaining something about the washing.

"Excuse me, but can you tell me the meaning of the abisekam?" In a way I am innocently asking but also hiding an inner chuckle as I feel I just had an experience with Vishnu's soul.

"Sure, it's a cleaning for us to be able to make more money." I secretly think he looks like he is making plenty of money.

“Oh, thank you.” I interject. “I was told yesterday by a man that Vishnu grants us a full life after death.”

“No, it’s about this life. I know these things.” His friends nod in agreement.

I smile, thank him, thinking ‘I’m going to ask Amma.’ I know those two faces are there for all of us to see, and the happiest moment is when all is cleaned and they merge into one. To me this means the universe is corrected and there will be an end to man’s inhumanity to man.

Chapter 16

Forehead

Go ahead, throw black paint on my grey silk sari. Take red die, pour it all over my gold and white sari and spray floor cleaner on my new orange sari. I don't care.

But do not - I mean *do not* - touch my forehead!!! It is a map of my day.

Before bed, I look in the mirror, shocked but delighted with my mess.

There is a line of grey ash that I apply each morning to announce my surrender to the divine and a red dot of kumkum to centre myself and thank my soul for being alive.

Tonight there is a another small red dot below the one I put on. One of the ladies who takes care of Mira, our sacred cow, touched Mira's red powder-blessing and dotted some on me. "Oh how special", I said to her.

I have a slash of orange (sandalwood, maybe) across three-quarters of my forehead, swiped on by one of the priests at the Vishnu abhishekam.

I have a swoop of grey (my gift from Ganesh at his temple) and a big splotch of kumkum placed by the priest who was doing the puja for Mary (who was donating a cow and calf to a family in need).

There is a black dot from my visit to the hospital prayer room, where I like to add a quick prayer for everyone who is being treated. One could write a book on the healings and professional care we get there from the dedicated doctors,

nurses and front office staff.

Now it's evening and I'm dressed in one of my favorite grey silk saris, as if I'm going to the symphony. As always: rudraksha beads for Shiva and a crystal mala for Narayani.

I'm honoured to be sitting in front of Durga on Her Lion at the Lalita Yagam. When finished with all the prayers we will have Her be Lakshmi, I'm told.

I remember when my pundit from Trinidad came to visit. He told me, "This is a super powerful fire puja. Put any of your requests in the fire. I'm sure they will be granted."

And so I do. Mainly asking for world peace and the solving of any immediate problems. The priests present us with fruit and rice. They also place a black dot on our foreheads (for protection) which has been made from burning kush grass in the fire.

. . .

Nicky from New York (a photographer) says "Sushumna I want a photo of your forehead. It's a colorful work of art."

We laugh, and I say: "You know I wouldn't trade one inch of my forehead for anything. It's my life, my day, and not only that - but each swoop was made with love.

"Wait!" She says. Click. another click.

"Well, someday we can do books. You can write about it and I will make a book of photographs." We chuckle and skip off to puja.

‘Hmmm...’ I think, ‘I’m always asked about how I first met Amma. Maybe it’s time to write it down, again. In many ways it seems like yesterday. And most importantly Her knowledge keeps coming.

Why can’t the world get it?

We are only human and we try! Right?’

Om Namo Narayani

Chapter 17

The Olden Days

“How did you first meet Amma?” I always smile and feel my eyes water and my heart thump. I love telling the story, over and over. And over and over again. I am so lucky.

It's 1998 and I'm visiting a doctor in Chennai. His son in Singapore calls: “Dad, there is a young boy who is like a real God visiting here. You should check him out because he lives not too far, in Vellore.”

“Why don't you go Sushumna, and give us a report?” Dr. Rao says. “I'll order a cab - you can go tomorrow.”

I nod my head in agreement.

I'm already heading to Bangalore for an International conference with Ravi Shankar. I am weeks early, so why not?

The next day it's a beautiful three-hour drive through the countryside. I witness morning rituals, people setting up their stalls, children in uniforms headed to school and villagers walking in distant fields with pots in hand.

Eventually the driver stops at a grass section near a small barn. “Get out.” He says.

I grab my backpack and jump out, wondering where and what?

A man runs up to me flailing his arms. ‘Wow, there must be some sort of emergency.’ I'm thinking.

He points to my feet. I look down at my new leather black pumps; nothing wrong.

The driver says “Madame, we don’t wear shoes on holy land. Put them in my car and I will keep them for you.”

Next I follow the man (in a long orange skirt and white shirt). A few yards away a small circle of three men sit on the ground, all wearing the same orange colored skirts. One is reading the newspaper.

My leader signals, with his finger to his lips, not to speak. Probably a good idea, as I am just about to question ‘What is going on here?’

He points to the ground, smiles gently and commands: “Sit!”

Then the newspaper comes down. A young handsome dark-haired man with a beard and lines of grey ash across his forehead, wearing an orange wrap and an orange shawl says-

“Why are you here?”

“I’m on my way to Bangalore but my friend Dr. Rao said to come here first.”

“Put out your hand.” He demonstrates - hand out with the palm up. I follow.

Suddenly, red powder flows into my open cupped palm. I look up. No tree. Where did it come from?

I look at each of the guys - no answer coming. One approaches me with a piece of newspaper, signals to tip the powder into it and then gestures to his forehead. I realise they all have a dot of red.

He sweetly nods to sort of ask permission, dips his finger into my powder and touches my forehead.

The newspaper-reading red powder guy stands up and says "Let's go."

I shakily follow, to about six yards into a small cow barn. It smells deliciously of cows and there are about fifteen people sitting to the right. I sit with them.

There's a table, and by now I have it figured out. This is the very man that Dr. Roa's son was talking about.

He gently removes a piece of silk fabric from a standing idle.

"Guess who?" I say to anyone who I am telling this story to. Over and over. And so that was it. My first puja with Amma and Narayani.

. . .

Afterwards, Amma introduced himself/herself and took me around the dirt and trees describing exactly what the buildings would look like today, twenty-six years later. The Narayani Temple, and each of the temples including a golden temple made of real gold.

However, the most important thing is that we have Amma and She is here for all of us, to keep us healthy, happy and in love.

Om Namo Narayani

Chapter 18

Little Lakshmi's Bath

Amma is celebrating the seventh year of little Lakshmi's arrival. She too is on the star-path, across from the stairs that go up to the huge Lakshmi. I get it: it's an opportunity for people to do puja on a deity/idol.

Well, I'm not so big on Her temple area. Men always have their shirts off and people pour water over Her, all day. Poor thing! How would we like to be cold and wet all of the time? Not only that, but I have never been much of a follower of Hers. Isn't it about wealth and beauty? I ask for neither of those. To me, wealth comes from spirituality, deep within, which is not necessarily easy to find. It's about letting go, and it's taken me sixty to seventy years to *think* I get it.

At eight o'clock in the evening, I have on my same outfit from the morning.

I've taken a nap and decide to take one last stroll on the star-path.

Ramu sees me and says: "Come, Sushumna. We must hurry, Amma is coming." I follow, and am led to a line of devotees holding roses to drop at Amma's feet. Some are plunked in my hand.

Amma arrives; as Amma passes by within three inches of me, my roses fall to Her feet, and She stops to talk to one of the men in charge. Oh My God, She is right in front of me - no table in between. I could pinch her cute little chubby cheeks. I feel warm and so trusted. She knows that I know my place and I honor it,

big time. I'm so blessed that Amma trusts that this little devotee in her day - old - clothes would not reach out.

It so happens that Amma is to perform the washing of little Lakshmi and I am pushed into the front row, sitting on the cement floor. Everyone else is in their beautiful silk saris, and there I am like a scullery maid. Someone produces a cushion to ease the bone-on-cement pain.

The evening is long and beautiful, and the bathing slow and tender with Amma's soft approach. The curtain is then closed while Lakshmi is dressed. I find the person who had saved my poor body with an extra cushion - thank you, again, Sukhi.

The curtain opens to reveal the most beautiful, artistic dressing I have ever seen. What an evening! To be given front row center by women dressed in their finest. "Thank you, thank you!"

Guess what I do the next day?

I pay my one-hundred rupees and wash Little Lakshmi. 'No, she isn't cold and wet. She is thrilled, because we shower her with love.'

I am humbled. We really are lucky to be here. There's always something to learn.

...

Speaking of learning, I found out that men, because they have lots of chest hair, take their shirts off to gain more spirituality. In the olden days women were not to get a heavy hit

of spirituality, as it might have resulted in them not wanting to take care of the household.

Hmmm - Interesting. I'd call that old fashioned. We are equal, yes?

Well... I'll keep my top on Little Lakshmi, and there is no doubt... you are the *One!*

Chapter 19

An Overnight

Sunderesan, my favorite guard, is not at his usual place at The Golden Temple; I find him in the small Ganesha temple.

“What are you doing here?” I ask as we exchange our usual friendly smiles. “They needed help today.” I see and feel his pride.

“Come back at six o’clock for the evening feeding puja where we say goodnight to Ganapati.” He turns and points with an open hand to our large silver idol and bows.

“Sure, I never heard of it. Nighttime is great. I can’t do the five and six o’clock in-the-morning washings. I’m still snoring at that time.”

We both laugh. “Surely, I’m far too lady-like to snore!” Ha.

. . .

I arrive at five forty-five.

It is beautiful. They feed, swoop candles and recite prayers to Ganesha. His silver shines and He looks so soft and happy.

‘Hmmm, why can’t my Ganesha have an over-night right here?’ I’m thinking. I get it that we common folks can’t go into the actual resting place of the Gods or Goddesses. But He is a Real God, materialized by Amma nineteen years ago, so why can’t he?

He has never had a night away from me. Maybe after nineteen-years, it's time.

No harm in asking. I would love it. He has always been there for me, removing all silly (and some not so silly) obstacles over the years.

I ask the sweet faced handsome priest, using my best sales pitch.

"No, way. Not allowed." Kindness on his face but definitely a stern negative head-shake.

"What?" Now my feelings are hurt. Ganesha is right there in my open palm, listening.

"But He wouldn't bother anyone. Just sit in the corner all night." ('And,' I'm thinking, 'soak up super heavy duty energy and probably get a whole lot of advice from the Big Guy.')

The priest sees my flushed, hurt, ninety-year old face and with a sympathetic look, whispers: "There is a camera in there." I guess meaning he couldn't sneak Him in. But I take it as: 'Great that means He will be protected'.

I need Amma.

Om Namo Narayani.

Chapter 20

A Bit of Gossip

We were sitting at Peedam on the floor waiting for the puja to begin. The curtain was closed. My friend from Germany was sitting next to me. I was quietly sneaking looks around the room.

I noticed a lady with a shiny, perfectly shaved head. Sort of like my friend Simon, who also had a glistening-shaved head. However, in his case it was because a monkey had pooped from a tree, straight into his hair. The problem: he couldn't shower it out. The good news for him was that the shaved head turned into the fast route to spirituality: he almost immediately had loads of awakenings, although we know it was with Amma's help.

I lean over to Andrea. "Have you ever thought of shaving your head?" She could see where I was looking.

"No, never!" Her face scrunched up. "What about you?" She asked.

"No, me neither." I snickered. "But I was in Haridwar and there were lots of people getting their hair cut off. Some, I think to sell for wigs, and others to send a message to God somehow asking for good health."

"Yeeeks". We both laugh and the music started for puja.

. . .

The full evening was over. Lots of new people and Amma smiling and glowing as always.

I was feeling filled up but not quite ready to walk back to my room. It's safe at any time to walk on the side-road, and it's well lit. I was sort of humming to myself, taking one step forward and one step backward or to the side. 'I probably look drunk', I chuckled to myself. 'Well maybe I am! This spirituality is loaded with spirits!'

A man and lady approached me from behind. "Excuse me", she said.

I turned. 'Oops, she is the one with the shaven head. Now I'm really being punished.' I thought, feeling ashamed of myself.

Feeling my eyes widen, there was sweat on my upper lip and I noticed no one was around to protect me. I stopped, nodded shyly and smiled. She was now right next to me and thrust out her hand. "What are these?"

Looking down, she had two bottles of *theertham*.

"Oh my, those are filled with a healing liquid that comes from Amma. Did She give you those tonight?"

"This is our first time here. Yes, I mentioned that I have to have an operation.

Well, then these were given to me. But I have no idea what to do with them." "Oh... well... first of all let's start with... welcome." I looked at both of them.

"Where are you staying?"

The man pointed to the left and said "One of the hotels on the main road. Our friends suggested we come."

“I’m glad you’re here. Next time when you come, stay at our guest house. It’s just a block to the right. We are all devotees of Amma, so you will hear lots of stories and the food is delicious. As far as the bottles - it really is your choice as to when and how to take the liquid. If it were me, I probably would sip one the day before the operation and the other after. It’s very safe and filled with holy healing energy.”

We arrived at the main road. “I’m Sushumna, and it was a pleasure to meet both of you. Please come back and find us soon. Good luck with your operation. You have nothing to worry about.” We smiled and parted.

I don’t remember if they gave me their names. I was still feeling guilty about asking my friend if we should shave our heads and giggling, thinking of what we would look like.

No doubt, I was at the right place at the right time! Maybe it was a message from Amma. ‘Maybe?’ For *sure* it was. Possibly a wrist slapping for me. ‘That’s okay’ I thought, ‘I can handle it’. We never stop learning and Divine messages are the best!

Om Namo Narayani.

Chapter 21

The Gods Talk to Us

There is no doubt in my mind: the Gods, all of them, talk to us. It's just that we haven't been trained, in their silent language, to fully be observant.

I'm sure I've missed many moments of higher development. They must silently shake their heads. Or maybe they talk about us after midnight.

Nathalie and I are walking the path. She always buys coconuts at the Ganesha temple to smash into a large cement bowl in front of His entry path. It's a symbolic offering to Ganesha, asking Him to remove all obstacles.

She hands me one. I take it but shake my head side-to-side.

"No way, not me. With my arthritic shoulders, I can't. Anyway I have no known obstacles."

Zap! Another zap, and another. I'm impressed - she slams each into the vessel and they break open perfectly.

She turns to me.

My ego pops up! Of course I want to be stronger and more powerful than I am.

"Ok, here I go." At least the coconut lands in the bowl. It even breaks a bit open, because I can see new juice.

Then... "Nathalie, look! There is a perfect heart on the

outer skin of my coconut.” We both look in amazement.

Thank you, Ganesha.

Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha

. . .

It’s a Saturday washing of Vishnu. I pay close attention to every single rubbing He receives: some have tulsi leaves for protection, some red rose petals, maybe for sweetness, and on it goes. I even keep an eye on the mirror, high on the wall behind us. I’m sure it’s for the priest to double check his work. But now that I think of it, maybe it’s so Vishnu can look into it and admire his impressive self.

The curtain is closed; we stand in preparation to receive a splash of the liquid that has been cleaning him.

The priest pours into my hand, like everyone else. But there it is again: one tulsi leaf or a rose petal. Surely - a Divine Gift.

I mention it, as I’m salivating with the leaf in my mouth, to one of the Divine souls who lives here.

“Yes, isn’t it fabulous when we get one? Like our Vishnu gift for the day.” He says with a far off look of divine light.

. . .

I’m at the top of the Golden Temple. Sunderesan ushers me to go ahead and sit in front of Lakshmi with the small group who are just settling in.

It feels soft and super powerful. ‘I’m so fortunate,’ I think to myself. After ten minutes, we’re finished and Her guard signals for us to get up. I turn to leave when one of the men looks at me

with a furrowed brow. "How did you get here? We are all men and wanted to keep it that way."

I look at him in shock. Then I look at Lakshmi - I swear Her eyes sparkle even brighter. Surely, She is saying "Well, do you really think men alone are more powerful?"

Thank you, Lakshmi, I so love and respect you.

. . .

I don't like to miss the Lakshmi fire that begins at six in the evening and usually ends at nine. I load it with my requests of the day, always asking for more compassion in the world, country to country. Sort of man's (and women's) inhumanity to one another. Of course, I throw in health and happiness for my beautiful family and friends.

Last week was special. I learned that Max (my oldest grandchild, a doctor in San Francisco who is studying emerging diseases) and his wife are to have a baby. They have been married for six years; both have been too busy to stop and raise a child.

'Waaa-Hoo, now it's their time!' ran through my heart and head that night. My hands open in my lap, I looked down. A piece of black ash, 2 inches by 3 inches, had floated from the sacred fire into my right palm, not even hot.

What more can I say? I placed it in a small box. Am looking at it with tears of gratitude, at this moment.

Chapter 22

My Weakness

(Amma & Elephant–The Same)

I can figure out what it would be like to be most people. I can watch their body language, read about them or talk to them. I mean, all sorts - from presidents of companies, to drug cartel chiefs, doctors, lawyers, the most powerful sports players, the boys who clean my room, and on and on. However, here is the big one: I cannot in my wildest dreams figure out what it would be like to be Sakthi Amma.

My second problem concerns elephants. What is it like to be an elephant? Dogs and cats are sweet, you can pet and cuddle with them, and dogs especially will run to greet you.

Actually, when I first arrived for this current stay at the guest house and was walking in the driveway, a dog zoomed up to me and jumped up.

“Yeeeks,” my friend shouted, throwing up her hands.

I too was put off, thinking, ‘you leave the area because of covid for what has been maybe six-years and they let the dog training go to hell in a hand basket!’

“She has even scratched the skin on my leg. It will probably cause infection.” I muttered to myself.

Two weeks later, living here without one dog jumping on or near anyone, I realize the happy dog was Sakthi, the one who I brought up seven years ago. Now I can’t find her, as I’m sure I hurt her joyful feelings. They are all super well trained.

Sakthi where are you? I’m sorry.”

Anyway, have you tried petting an elephant? They couldn't care less. Actually I don't think they even feel your tap-tap-tapping on their skin. We have two of them. Karpicum and Vaishnavi; 25 and 27 years old.

They bow when accepting the afternoon blessing and are always ready to accept money with their trunk and pass it over to their pagan (trainer).

. . .

I visited them on my bike on the way to the healing center one afternoon. Karpicum was standing near his washing area, dancing. I'm not kidding - he was jiggling to the right...jiggling to the left! I of course stopped on the road and just watched for at least twenty minutes, taking a video with my phone. Never have I seen such an adorable sight. He appeared far lighter than I would be on a dance floor. He would even pick up one foot, which must weigh at least fifty pounds and jiggle it.

I called out to their caretaker. "Why is he so happy?"

"I don't know, it's not feeding time. He's just happy." "Are you playing any music?" I ask.

"No, he must just have the music in his head."

At night, between puja-bathing at Amma's, I walk up to the elephants' area to listen to them snoring. They both snore, either standing or lying down.

At times, I've seen them move from standing, to kneeling, to lying down.

They roll back and forth to raise up and stand. I actually can relate - getting myself out of bed, rolling from side to side.

Well, how about moving their ears? We can't do that! On and on in wonderment.

. . .

Okay, you can by now get where I'm going with this.

How in the world can we understand Amma? How many hours does She need to sleep? How can She be so clear-headed when talking with you, while She is taking care of everyone else in the same head? Does She know each of our futures and if so, does She decide who should know theirs and who shouldn't? Can She change our future? I could go on with pages of questions.

Maybe we could all coordinate a questionnaire:

1. What is Her favorite food?
2. How much sleep does She need and does She dream?
3. How does She know your very thought even when in a puja of a thousand?
4. Does She know our future and can She change it?
5. When someone is to have an operation does She manage the surgeon?
6. If someone is having an issue with someone Amma doesn't know, can She influence the unknown person?
7. I can chant 'Om Namo Narayani' on my bicycle on the bike-path in Tucson, Arizona and She is *there*. Can She do that with everyone at once?

. . .

There is a young fifteen year-old from Canada who tells the story of a canoe tipping over. He couldn't swim - he describes the feeling of water in his nose, throat, and eyes. He shouted in his head: Amma - Amma!

Actually there should be a book with testimonials of 'saved souls' by Amma.

Of course it would be too heavy to pick up!

. . .

And so here is my secret. I have two desires. I want to be like Amma and I want to be an elephant. Neither do I want to be for more than a day or maybe a week.

We all should try it. Right?

Chapter 23

Practice, Practice, Practice

Between Narayani's washing and Her being dressed, is often a mentally heavy ninety minutes. Heavy because we need to plan our moment with the Divine. Moment is for sure: we have about one minute in front of Amma to accept theertum, make our request or tell our story. Also, of course, everyone is trying to hear what you are saying.

For me it's the usual: "Thank you, Amma." I don't mean for the theertum. It's a thank you for being YOU, and all of the wonderful things that are going on around us.

However, tonight is different. There is a big problem. How can I explain my situation, and ask for a solution that I have been told is just plain 'not allowed'?

Actually, *forbidden!*

I'm not alone. I notice others with similarly furrowed brows, sitting or nervously talking... 'blah, blah, blah' to make the time shorter.

I go for a night walk along the path from Amma's house to the ghoshala. To practice: "Amma, Sushumna has a problem..." tears flow.

"Amma, you will think Sushumna is crazy but..." more tears. More walking.

My throat is tight. 'How am I going to be able to do this? I'm such a jerk!'

'I'll put my Ganesha in a basket. That will give me a moment to deep breathe and say: "Amma, we have a problem..." oops, how am I going to handle my hand shaking, quickened breathing and now even more tears?'

Ninety minutes pass as if it is four minutes.

Here I am next in line, no basket - I'm just going for it.

A deep breath - calm, no tears (yet). "Amma, Sushumna went to the Ganesha Chaturthi Yagam and abhishekam - it was beautiful. She would like for her Ganesh to spend the night inside of the temple with our big beautiful shiny Ganesha. She has been told by the priest that it just is not allowed... and... well, it would mean so much to Him. He could be all by Himself, away from me, after Amma materialized Him nineteen years ago. He has been taking beautiful care of me but we would like permission for Him to be on his own and spend time with His mentor."

I sigh. A huge deep breath... 'Yeah! I did it... Not even a shake or a tear!'

...
Amma looks at me as if it is an every day normal request - not a request from a nut-case devotee. It's the calm half smile that melts me - the relaxed smile that comes from a satisfied mother, even knowing Her child has misbehaved.

The head nods 'yes.' "Amma will give permission."

Chapter 24

There Is No Other

I think of my Ganesha as being ten feet tall. Actually, in spite of His height He can do anything and has proven it to me many times. He's super wise, beyond His years.

Tonight, for the first time, He will leave me. I confess - I've left Him many times, but I always know where He is and I always return. This is a huge first!

Amma has given permission for Him to spend the night with His hero, the great big silver Ganesha, in the temple on the star path. This truly is a big favor.

"Never is this allowed." The priests had told me. "We even have cameras in the security area to protect the Gods." All the priests had told me.

'A whole night in there without me - well... maybe I'm not so important to Him at the moment'.

I go into the Ganesha temple to talk to the security guard, G. Swamy, and the priests ahead of time to make sure they are okay with the plan. Also - I want them to know: He is no slouch, He is nineteen years old and has travelled many important places with me. We set His arrival time for tomorrow at eleven in the morning.

. . .

This is great, 'You will get a full twenty-four hours with your idle', I'm thinking as we walk to the temple.

Mamiss, the handsome young priest, is waiting for Him. They place Him on the pedestal next to our large six foot silver Ganesha.

He looks adorable (I'm thinking). Then the priest places a small rose next to Him, takes the flaming gold dhoobhakal aarthi and aarthis Him alone - a total one inch of bronze statue. At first I think big Ganesha might be jealous but then I realize that I should let Him know the importance of the new arrival. My guy stands proud and I'm slumped with tears streaming. (Actually, as I write this I'm weeping like a proud fool.)

I leave. 'A full walk on the star-path will calm me, as always', I'm thinking. And so it does. Upon returning, I take the longer route to pass the Ganesha Temple. The priests are outside, nodding - they assure me He's okay. It is their sweet way of saying 'move along and leave it up to us'.

. . .

Eleven sharp, the next day, I arrive. I want to be totally scientific to show I'm not a goo-goo head.

Ganesha, still one inch tall, SHINES.

Even the bronze part of Him shows a tiny peaked hat.

The upper part of the hat is ringed with yellow - sandalwood.

The lower part of the hat is ringed with red kumkum and there is another circle, in black.

His trunk sparkles with a black pointed area... maybe His mouth. The rest is the same except the flower is larger than yesterday's.

He is sitting on a large fresh green leaf. The kind the priests use to give prasadam.

I can say no more. It's obvious that He has received true loving treatment.

It is such fun to see even the very serious security guard, Govenda Swamy, turn into the sweet handsome shining light that he is. We all are here for fun and love!

I take Ganesha home and later deliver boxes of my favorite: Pure Magic - coco and hazelnut filled cookies as a thank you to those involved on our adventure.

Om Gam Ganapataye Namaha

Chapter 25

Three Young Priests

It's late morning and I've finished my breakfast. Three young priests, not from here but dressed in orange, are a yard ahead of me on the star-path. They turn to go up to Lakshmi (I had planned to do the same). When at the top I hesitate going through the gate that allows us to sit closer to Her.

The usher nods and his body language indicates to go ahead, as if to say 'She is for all of us'.

. . .

The three are oblivious to me being right behind them. Their deep but quiet voices begin sounding a mantra. I, of course, have no idea what they are saying. It's almost like a jingle you might hear on the radio - maybe an advertisement for soap powder or soda pop. These thoughts result in a head-trip, which in turn causes me to chastise myself. 'What kind of mental thoughts are these, Sushumna, in front of such a Divine Being?'

I'm totally mesmerized. Such young boys, maybe late twenties, and they are obviously devoting themselves to their spiritual depths. Why do I always seem to look for the humor - thinking of their advertising jingle, instead of the seriousness of life?

'Humor is serious, too.' I'm cogitating, and so goes my wonderful time with Lakshmi and the deep male vocal chanting.

. . .

When finished they jump up and leave in silent unity.

I stagger, my old bones taking a bit longer to recover. As I leave the guard hands me a plastic bag. I peek inside; it is a rose mala and a pink lily - I'm sure they have been on Lakshmi. Wow!

'There are always nice surprises for us here in Amma's land.' I'm thinking, on a slow contemplative walk back to my room. 'I wish all of the world could experience the same.'

'Well, maybe I'll take a little rest.' I flop down on my bed. Two hours later, I wake.

What in the world was in those mantras? I wonder.

Om Namo Narayani.

Chapter 26

Let's Play

One of my favourite devotees (really all are), is Nicky. We have known each other for many years. I have even seen her in New York.

She stands in front of me in line to get our sip from Amma.

Her voice is loud, and I hear her say “Amma, why is Nicky so insecure?”

. . .

‘What?’ I’m thinking... ‘Nicky, are you crazy?’

Amma gives her a hard inquisitive look. “Nicky should eat cabbage and broccoli.” Straight from the Divine with hardly a breath, but a twinkle in Her big brown eyes. Amma turns, chooses a yellow string and pantomimes ‘put it around your wrist.’ The guards send Nicky on her way.

After my silent sip, I say to Nicky, while tying the string around her wrist: “So you’re starting to become one of these devotees who wears wrist strings practically up to their elbows.”

“Well, you should talk, Sushumna. You always wear all those glass bracelets.”

“Hang on, there’s a good reason why I wear them, and always nine. First, for good luck, and second, they jingle, reminding me to listen and keep in the moment - no wandering mind. Actually in North India we would trade bracelets, or just give them to one another. They don’t do it here but maybe

someday we'll start. The street vendors have plenty for sale, and it's a good way to communicate. How about taking two of mine and listening while you eat your cabbage?"

"Ha ha, very funny. Speaking of communicating, how are you doing with your book?"

"It's coming along. You gave me the name: STILL IN THE FLOW, but I'm thinking of changing it to: LIFE IN WONDERLAND. Hopefully I can get a few of your photos for it.

Definitely for the cover."

"Sure. As it turns out I'm making a photography book of all of my treasures throughout the years."

"Shhhhh" comes from the staff.

'Just two old ladies talking.' I think to myself. We sure are having fun!

Chapter 27

Food For Thought

“Sushumna, what do you eat?” I have no idea why so many people ask me the same question. I’m thinking maybe I look over weight or underweight. Or are they worried as to how I spend my money? Go figure!?

Anyway here I go with a full answer, after keeping a food diary for three days.

Breakfast: Delicious. It is always the buffet at Kamala Nivas. I’m late - ten o’clock. Usually no one else is around, but it’s not a problem. The employees are always available and friendly. If I were them I would be thinking ‘Oh her again...’ but not once have I felt unwanted; as a matter of fact, they make me feel like I’m the first of the day. They open cauldron after cauldron. We laugh, as to some I say ‘no’ before they’ve even opened them, or they deliberately tease and hold them closed. Usually there’s two chapatis, a yummy potato mixture with cashews, a vegetable mixture (green beans, broccoli, & carrots) and a skinny dark yummy noodle. Nothing is ever over-cooked.

There are three cauldrons of sauces: all scare me as I don’t do heavy spices. However, my server automatically goes into the secret refrigerator and dishes out a healthy portion of yoghurt. I indulge in serving myself the fruit of the day - either watermelon, grapes, cantaloupe, apple slices, or papaya. That does it for me, although there is another table with a toaster, bread and fruit juice. I confess to one cup (it must not be paper) and saucer of coffee, plus a full water glass of the same, so that it’s cooled down by the time I’m ready to pour my second cup.

My day begins - could be writing, walking, or biking to the Heath Center.

Today it's to the Center to supervise the vet who will clip the feet of our eight donkeys. I have a huge bag of old bananas (one of our street fruit vendors saves them for me) to bribe the donkeys as they don't really enjoy pedicures.

Early evening is time for our fire yagam. Afterwards, at about eight o'clock, we are given an organic paper bowl of blessed rice mixture, and an orange. My second taste of the day.

Amma's program (bathing Narayani) begins around nine o'clock. Two hours later there is a break for us while Narayani is dressing, from about eleven o'clock. Food is available in the small house outside of Amma's gate. Zoe is in charge; we help by placing banana leaves, and paper cups for water. I then sit and have learned to sprinkle water on the leaf to assure it's cleanliness (although it always looks so).

She approaches each of us, offering cauldrons of colored rice, chapatis and a vegetable laced with gravy.

Amma and Narayani finish. Narayani's *theertham* is offered to each of us from Amma and the final prasadam awaits in the small house. We are offered an organic paper bowl with a choice of sweet, less sweet or bland.

Answering the question of 'what do you eat?', Other than breakfast I seem to eat only what has been blessed and comes from the Divine.

I couldn't be more satisfied!

There is a quote: 'You are what you eat.'

Now that I'm contemplating it, I think of my mom's old expression: "Food for thought."

She didn't mean my interpretation. Or did she?

Chapter 28

Mantras

‘I am here, only human and maybe a bit egotistical.’ I’m thinking. ‘But what am I supposed to do next, like right now? Amma disappears from our view all morning. I do some seva but there are times I think I’m just handling everyday unimportant stuff.’

There are other spiritual places I have been where they need extra support.

I’m a pretty good organizer and I have a positive attitude.

On the other hand, there is Narayani. I never have felt any God or Goddess to be as close as we are able to get to Her. But it’s only in the afternoon or evening, and with Amma’s help.

‘Okay, there is the answer.’ I think. ‘I will ask Amma what to do when we are finished with Narayani’s dressing tonight.’

...
The puja is finished and I’m in line practicing what to say to Amma. I even have a basket with ghee to present. This is not only a bribe but it will slow Amma down because She’ll have to pick it up, turn and give it to one of her young priests. During this short time I’ll blurt out my problem.

A deep breath...HERE I GO.

“Amma, how can Sushumna get closer to Narayani?”

She turns back from giving the ghee away, pours *theertham* into my sweaty palm and says: “Chant *mantras* to Her. When we chant mantras it helps us to raise that divine consciousness within.”

“When? Sushumna doesn’t know any mantras.” I say with a furrowed brow. “Then chant Om Namo Narayani... That is good enough.” She says as I slurp my liquid.

I actually laugh. “Amma, Sushumna chants Om Namo Narayani all over Tucson, Arizona. When she hikes the mountains, rides her bike on the bike path and even when she walks to and from the supermarket. Actually ‘Om Namo Narayani’ is always, I mean always, being chanted in my head.”

Well that was it. The boys push me away... I bow.

...

That night I have a dream. Is it a dream though? Narayani comes to me.

There is no talking. Her body sways. Just sways and sways... but there She is... a clear heavenly delight - in a super bright light.

That does it for me. The next day I begin a quest to find a mantra for Narayani so that when I find Her I can keep Her around. I want Her to stay!

My first attempt is at the ghoshala where the sweet young priest is doing a cow-giving-away puja, requested by my friend Martha.

Afterwards, I ask him to teach me a mantra.

“Sure.” He says. And even writes it down - The *Gho Mata Gayatri*:

*Om loka mathaya vidmahe
Sarva siddhai cha dhimahi
Thanno gavo Prachodayat*

‘Not bad’, I’m thinking. I can pronounce the words but I’m not sure Narayani wants to talk to me about the cows. There is no doubt I am far out of my comfort zone.

Two nights pass. I think I see Her but only for a brief incident. Is She waiting? I wonder.

I approach anyone who will listen. “How can I find a few simple mantras?”

The general opinion is to go to the internet. This is by far my most unfavorable thing to do. I just plain am not into technology. My grandfather couldn’t even wear a watch because of his energy, he told me. I can make watches work, but I feel the inner energy of cell phones, internet, and wifi are out of my range so I always get friends to help. Then again, I may be using it as an excuse.

Mantras...safari...google...come on, this is ridiculous.

OOPS...There it is. Thank you, Siddarth.

Sarva mangala mangalye

Sive sarvatha sadhike

Saranye tryambake gauri

Narayani namostute

I actually know this mantra, well, and can say it by heart. There are a few other mantras I say along with the priests, but I never really know what they mean. This is wild.

Catch this: my now best friend (the internet) tells me the meaning.

Salutations to you Narayani

Who is the auspiciousness of all that is auspicious, the consort of Lord Shiva, who is the means of accomplishing all desires and who is the refuge of all, the cohort of the three eyed Shiva and the Fair Complexioned One

‘Fantastic!’ I think. ‘At least it is a good beginning. I can’t wait to go to bed tonight!’

Chapter 29

The Gem Show

I live in the desert town of Tucson, Arizona. We are known for our yearly 'Gem Show.' There are plenty of International buyers along with our American clientele.

I've visited it many times, always amazed at the size of raw crystals and other sparkles of nature.

My lifestyle is happy. I ride my bike, have friends to chuckle with, and I'm an easy distance to visit my families. However, am I being true to my inner self? If I put my morning Kumkum on my forehead as I do in India, to show and feel my humble self, most Arizonians would think I've been shot in the head and am bleeding to death.

On the other hand, let's look at *Amma's* gem show in India.

Nathalie began Green Sakthi, raises funds for our needs and in my mind is responsible for every forest we have here.

Zoe runs Amma's preschool, feeds us, and helps Amma finish the day by giving us the final prasadam from the evening puja.

Siva not only runs Kamala Nivas but knows the answers to our questions (and if he doesn't, don't worry - he will find out!)

Siddarth is brilliant on computer knowledge (this book would not be if it were not for him and many others) and a super overseer of the main office.

Praveen is always there for us with the backgrounds of the Gods and Goddesses.

Kalyan leads new visitors and explains all about Amma: why we are bowing, sitting on the cold stone floor or looking suspiciously blissed out, like we are in the heaven that we are in.

Vijaya Lakshmi (Viji) not only has a beautiful smile but cooks treats for Amma and occasionally gives me a secret sample. I'll try to get one of the recipes that is a favorite of Amma's.

Janardhan is always ready to give the Vedic background knowledge that I request, and his wife Bhuvana helps me to understand the depth of it all.

Pedro is always chipper - when he was doing the morning cow puja, I remember him saying "It felt like I was doing the puja to 330 million Gods and Goddesses in the Universe."

There's Mrs. Revathi who cuts through all of our medical problems and sends us directly to the right professional at the hospital.

There's a man called G. Dharni who supervises the ladies that fill the theertum bottles. I have also done this job and it is so worthwhile.

There are the ladies making kumkum, our chef Prasad... the list goes on and on.

. . .

All willing and happy devotees. Siva is in this group but it feels as if he is one of us - he is so giving, and always smiling.

I have known most of them for at least fifteen years. Never have I heard a complaint: all always in a positive spiritual mode, ready to help.

As long as we are still talking about jewels, let me bow down to the musicians and all of Amma's priests. There always seem to be new ones in training: how fortunate for them.

So there you have it. I'm on my final destination to the gem show. Guess which one?

The one and only *Sakthi Amma's*.

Chapter 30

Make A Wish

There is no doubt that there is a tremendous power that flows through all of Sri Puram. The land has been super charged for years because the goddess Narayani found the perfect family and chose to settle down.

Let's fast forward and grant a wish. One wish, to this mostly normal devotee who is writing Amma's story from her perspective.

"Truly, the gifts have never stopped. Just to be in the environment and feel the love is enough. Not only the love but the wise, oh so wise, answers to our concerns."

Sushumna bows and accepts after twenty-one years of loving, learning and sharing.

...

I am going to accept. Although life's pleasure has been my delight... but hey, I'll never refuse a gift.

"You, Sushumna, may choose to wish for anything but there is one hitch. It must be related to Sri Puram; therefore, World Peace, stopping man's inhumanity or ending diseases won't work.

"Oh my, I accept." I'm thinking about everything I have already received: I so love being a mother; a grandmother and now a great grandmother with two new great grandchildren, Henry and Maisie. I'm proud of my three daughters, but Narayani can't claim credit for any of that. I'm in good health and having fun.

...

How about a larger cow shed...? Already in the works.
What about a sandalwood forest...? Already planned.

Then a larger area for the donkeys... Again, already set to be near the meditation center.

The dogs are in need of a full time vet and separate building... Yep. Already on paper.

Then what?

Hmmmmmm... I've got it!

There is a tradition among Indians. Women make a wish on one of their glass bracelets and then hurl it into the water.

My wish is that we collect all of the glass bracelets that have been thrown into the water surrounding Lakshmi's domain and make their wishes come true.

I remember skimming my orange bracelet ten years ago. It worked! Thank you, Amma, Lakshmi and all.

Chapter 31

The Invisible Power

For the first time in twenty two years, I arrive at Peedam with a heavy heart.

The back story: there is such joy in my family, because my grandson Max and his wife are about to have their first child. Max, a doctor at San Francisco General Hospital, also studies malaria (a leading cause of death in the world) with a group in Nigeria. Turns out, there is a new mosquito causing the problem. His lovely wife is in charge of a group that does podcasts in California, on Audible.

After six years of marriage they decide it's baby time. With modern medicine they already know that it is a girl. Her name is to be Maisie Greenberry McClure.

I buy my air ticket to Peedam for two weeks after her due date. Well, who knows or who is supposed to know when babies will arrive? Maisie is two weeks late. Poor beautiful mom - she is huge when I leave, but good natured, saying: "a late baby is an easy baby."

I am at the San Francisco airport when I get the news from my daughter: Maisie has arrived; however, she can not breath on her own and is in an incubator on a respiratory machine. She is in good hands and both mom and dad are near.

What should I do? Pray, yes. But turn around?

'No.' I sternly tell myself. Best to find Amma. She is the true incubator.

During my layover in Singapore I phone my daughter (the new grandmother of a girl!). She is already spoiling Henry, my

great-grandson. (Whose mom, Kelsey, visited Amma for a summer when she was sixteen-years old, became a O.B.G.Y.N. Doctor and loves being the mom of Henry.)

. . .

“She’s good mom - breathing on her own, but she needs a feeding tube. She isn’t ready to breastfeed.”

Oh no. We are a family of doctors: her dad, Max, her aunt, Kelsey, and her grandfather and yet ‘we are trapped’, I’m thinking.

I start my prayers to Amma in the airport and burn them like crazy in seat number 21 on Singapore Air.

Arriving at Peedam weak and shaky, I am taken to Amma. She nods with what seems to be prior knowledge and sympathy. Her head shakes side-to-side. “Amma will take care.”

The next morning I jump into the Ganesha *puja*. Ganapathi will also help. I tell Vivekanandhan Vijayan, the priest, about Maisie. After half an hour of prayers to and with Ganesha, he turns to me with all the confidence in the world, looks me in the eye and says:

“There is no problem. She will be fine.”

I breathe deeply for the first time in forty-eight hours. Ganesha has always removed obstacles for me, but this is a heavy duty medical problem. How does He know? Furthermore, how does Vijayan know, with such confidence?

Taking theertum from Amma, I get a smile with a head nod and a look of compassion.

My daughter phones. Maisie is now nursing. They are

confident that she is okay. But they will do an MRI just to double check her brain and vitals.

. . .

In the Ganesha morning *abhishekam* two days later, my phone jiggles in my purse. I peek at it, although I never approve of phones or being distracted while in *puja*.

There is the most beautiful photograph of Maisie sleeping with the caption ALL IS CLEAR. MRI is one hundred percent - brain and heart perfect.

.. Tonight Amma is giving *theertham*. The young couple in front of me are holding and ‘cooing’ over what looks like a two month old baby. Once they are in front of Amma, the area is cleared so that he/she can lie on their back. It is the most adorable moment. Amma gently applies tiny sips of *theertham* into the baby’s mouth, one taste at a time. Amma turns, fills the scoop again and cautiously offers more.

The infant smacks its lips. This child is really lucky. ‘Just wait until Maisie can come’, I’m thinking. I chuckle to myself and murmur “I never get two scoops!”

“My turn.” I say as my sip is poured into my cupped hand. “Thank you, Amma. Maisie has been given the all-clear from doctors and machines.”

“Very good.” Gulp...Gulp.

I’m in bed and start laughing when I realise that I was given two scoops - the first time ever! One for Maisie, I guess.

Often when I see Vijayan, he will say to me with a smile, “How is Maisie?”

Chapter 32

Animals

Never can enough be said about cows. Most nights I visit three of them, who reside in the small Peedam ghosala (where I saw my first bathing of Narayani twenty-two years ago). One is black and huge; I ask the guy in charge if he would bite me. Shaking his head and laughing he shows me the soft spot under the enormous horned-head. "You could stroke here, under his chin, all day. He wouldn't mind." There is a calf nearby who is always looking for attention, and Lakshmi sits next to her, not the slightest bit interested in me. She's been through a full day of socializing by the looks of the red dots and dashes on her white fur.

Tonight the curtain is closed while Amma dresses Narayani. I saunter into my small 'olden days' *ghosala*. No one is around but the enormous black cow sees me. Weighing at least 1,000 pounds, he looks up, literally wags his tail and reaches his heavy horned head to the ceiling. To me, he is pantomiming 'scratch me' and 'you know where I like it.' He then rises on all fours. Well, you can imagine what happens next. We stay in heaven for ten minutes, me scratching and talking.

. . .

Another adorable story about cows from our big 700 cow *ghosala*:

The babies are kept in a separate area (all one hundred of them). When it is feeding time, one by one they are released to go to mom for their milk. Believe me when I say: there is no roaming! I mean - they know exactly where their mother stands.

. . .

Walking the star-path is where I often see dogs, cats and even puppies totally knocked out from an evening of adventure. Maybe that's why I've never seen a mouse or rat in my twenty-two years of strolling. On the way out, after seeing Lakshmi, I look up at the ceiling and see bears, lions and zebras. They know their place!

Every night at five there is a blessing at the fire yagam. Our elephant is first, second is one of the two white horses (I never can tell if it is Athiatha or Raviglo), and third and final is a cow. They each stand properly, with appreciation, and humbly accept the flame as it circles them.

I bow, appreciating the depth of the ritual. However here is a bit of a pinch.

Why not a dog? Surely we could instruct one to sit properly. We have a kennel of ten trained guard dogs who roam the property all night, every night with their trainer.

On another note, I'm proud to say that there is a new program to come. We are building an office and operating clinic to house a veterinarian, who will take care of our beautiful dog population.

Chapter 33

Sharing In Silence

The word spreads rapidly: Amma will give *theertum* to everyone and anyone walking the star-path, starting at six-thirty. I shower and change, a little late, but we regulars usually sit on the side watching until one of the guards signals ‘Come it is your turn.’

I make my usual stop at the *yantra* for a quick Amma energy hit, placing my palm directly on the sacred map. Saying “Durga...something...” always works. I look up at Amma’s photo and try to control my wild energy hit!!

Afterwards I walk around the bend to the back of the Vishnu temple where Amma is said to be giving *theertham* to all.

There are at least twelve people, and from my perspective they look like family and relatives, from ages five to eighty, sitting on the ledge of the grass area where there is a photograph of Amma.

“Why are you here?” I ask. I mean, the opportunity of having Amma just yards away, sharing blessed *theertham* in the back of the Vishnu Temple, is the treat of a life-time!

Oops. They don’t understand me. True, I’m ashamed that I don’t speak their language, but this is super important.

I’m in a hurry but I want them to experience our beloved. We wouldn’t have this Golden Temple, and all they have experienced while here if it were not for Sakthi Amma. How can I get them to understand? There isn’t a guard in sight.

I begin to pantomime. I wave my arms to refer to everything around us - I then bang an invisible hammer and nails into my hand, pointing to the Ganesha Temple and the covered walk-way. I force them to turn around and look at the photo of Amma, slurp invisible liquid from my hand, and mime speed walking to the temple with my legs and shoulders lifted.

They scratch their heads; my head sways side-to-side.

. . .

‘Oh well.’ I tried. Vishnu and Amma here I come. I wave goodbye.

I take the secret route, not waiting in line but sitting on the floor where we foreign devotees watch Amma giving, knowing we will get our treat once all have been served.

. . .

My eyes close in silent bliss. It’s a time to live in appreciation and wonderment.

Suddenly I am touched on the shoulder. Looking up, it is the man from ‘that sitting group’ smiling and nodding a thank you. Behind him a grey haired women makes a thank you prayer sign to me. Two kids follow grinning, each showing me a packet they received. Next follow the rest with soft spiritual looks and thank you nods. They are the ones to now be pantomiming, and happily!

I am thrilled for them; actually, I’m thrilled for all of us.

Om Namo Narayani

Chapter 34

The Ghosala

I'm so proud of our *ghosala*. Twenty one years ago Amma gave me the *seva* to place *kumkum* on the forehead of each cow.

Today it would be impossible - we have 700 cows. I meet with Dr. Jaya Gopi who has been our veterinarian in charge of the *ghosala* for three years.

He proudly gives me the list (I will add it at the end of the chapter) of our native breeds and explained how important it is to preserve them. We have a male and two females of each breed. However if anyone (and I mean anyone) wants to get rid of their cow(s) we always take them. Never do we refuse, and each one is kept until they finish their natural life, which is usually about eighteen years.

Our goal is to serve the animals, but I must say: they take care of us. They are milked twice a day and the milk goes directly to the pujas.

Of course our one-hundred babies come first.

As he tells me this, it is the afternoon. The babies are being released from their nursery pen. They freely walk to find their own mom, out of the six-hundred. It is unbelievably adorable.

"Our fifty-two employees keep our environment immaculate, with the understanding that it is an honor to care for every single cow and calf. And, well, they all have their personalities." He continues with a chuckle. "We inoculate all of

them every six months for Hoof and Mouth Disease. Believe me, they all are in good health!”

“If I understand correctly the cows are artificially injected to make babies. Is that true?”

“Yes, except for one special breed: Punganur Kuttai from Andhra Pradesh.

They are taken to a mating pen when the female is in heat. Then, and only then, will she allow the mating to take place. It is a monthly event and she is very particular.”

“This must cost a fortune. Between the fifty-five employees, the medical expenses, and the feeding, what is the cost?”

“Around \$55,000 rupees per day. Just imagine - the gods and goddesses are bathed with the freshest of fresh milk from our holy cows, two times a day. As for me - my time is service, so I volunteer.”

“Every January 3rd, on Amma’s birthday, She donates one hundred and eight cows to poor families.”

I smile in wonderment. “This place is really run beautifully and with love.” I say and bow in sincere awe.

“However Dr. Gopi, there are times when I am walking the star-path in the morning and I see a black cow who has prayer markings on her, roaming through the green area eating and seemingly moving in a known direction.”

“True. Our night crew take her to the Lakshmi fire temple at the start of the star-path. She receives a morning blessing for

all cows. After a bit she is left to walk back to us through the star-path grounds. Don't worry about her. Maha never gets lost." He says with a chuckle.

Om Namo Narayani.

The native breeds of India that Sri Sakthi Amma wants to preserve in our ghoshala:

Punjab & Haryana:	Shindi Shalwal Tharparker Hariyana
Gujarat:	Gir & Kankrej
Rajasthan:	Rathi
Maharashtra:	Deoni
Kuttai (A.P):	Punganur
Tamil Nadu:	Kangeyam Unlachi
Kerala:	Vechur
Andhra Pradesh:	Ongole

Chapter 35

Green Shakti

It seems like yesterday that our Golden Temple was erected and yet in reality it was well over twenty-five years ago.

As I take my daily stroll on the Star Path I look at the mature plants, both flowering and standing proudly tall.

‘What is going on below them?’ I wonder. I’m sure the root-system is nature’s work of art. ‘Do roots twist independently or do they gather within each other and share in their growth?’

I remember when the distant mountains were nothing but dusty brown dry dirt. Amma requested Nathalie to have trees planted. “In that way rain will come.” She wisely told.

Why Nathalie? Once again: the Divine knowledge. She knew she was the one! And plant she did! Actually, casting my eyes throughout our campus it is very difficult to find a patch of ‘just dirt.’ We are covered in living Divine green nature.

I visit Nathalie and find out how Green Sakthi began and works so successfully today.

...

“‘What do we do at Green Sakthi everyday?’ Are you kidding, Sushumna?”

“I’ll try to be brief. We empower local women with jobs: at the tree nursery, the fruit orchard, the organic vegetable area (we donate the food to *Anna Dhanam*/free food program) and in the green belt area. We have two young women, both graduates in horticulture and agricultural science, who supervise the programs. We donate about 30,000 fruit trees to farmers every

year. Each year we create a new forest, the most recent being the food forest behind the Sri Narayani Holistic Centre; within its first year it is already giving fruit. Amma says that the mantras make everything grow much faster. It is a miracle to witness!”

“You’ll love this. Amma says that each tree is a temple. This is why we see images from ancient times of sages sitting under a tree. Each tree acts like a yantra, absorbing the cosmic energy through its leaves and branches, pulling it into the earth through its trunk. Amma’s favorite temples are: Sripuram Golden Temple and ‘Forests’.”

“Oh my God, Nathalie, you are right, I love it. My two pet peeves are seeing men cut down our carefully planted trees for their firewood, and seeing sticks used to hit the dogs.”

“That’s not the end of it. Every year, with The Green Sakthi Club, we educate 600 students from Amma’s school with a ‘hands on’ environmental class. The kids actually plant trees!”

“I love it. Of course the big question is where or how do we get the money to pay for the labor alone? I have already spotted the many men and women dressed in green who I’m sure are employed to help our land. Manny is one, he always has a smile and seems off on a mission every minute.”

“Good question. Amma suggests a Green Sakthi Monthly membership. There is no amount mentioned.”

Every rupee is filled with divine energy!!

Om Namō Narayani.

Chapter 36

Requests

In a way it would be fun to know all of the requests Amma handles in a twenty-four hour period. I suppose we would have to be an invisible being floating over her right shoulder to hear about a few of them. Of course, it is none of our business, but it is fun to hear what some of Her devotees ask for and imagine what others are requesting.

For example, what do the politicians who arrive with an entourage of uniformed guards and cars (filling the parking lot of Kamala Nivas) ask for? I imagine them in front of Amma, asking to have their past karma removed in order to start anew to help their constituents. That works for me.

A few of us share our requests.

“I feel silly” I tell a group at breakfast. “My grandson is on the soccer team at Cornell University in New York. This is his first year, he is a goalie and the coach is not playing him. He calls me. ‘Please ask Amma to have the coach put me into play.’ Anyway, I will leave it at that, but I did tell Amma!”

A devotee from Canada shares: “My son wanted to play hockey. I use to be a big hockey player and he wanted to follow my path. So he actually talked to Amma and asked Her to help him skate backwards. You know - it worked.”

Another devotee shares that her only request is to meet someone to have a family with. “I asked for a husband, and Amma said she would bless me. I did meet someone...but he

was terrible! I'm hoping he wasn't the one Amma meant!" We all laugh.

I have another one pending. Lindsey, my granddaughter, wants to go to Harvard Business school. She has finished college and has a good job in medical finance but she wants more. She was to have an interview with the powers that be at Harvard and felt she needed extra help in the meeting.

"Sushumna, would you please ask Amma to help me get in?"

"It's cute because here she is this grown-up adult, scared. The next day at theertum I explain Lindsey's worry to Amma.

Amma's answer was: "Tell her to chant Om Namo Narayani three times before she goes into the interview."

So she did chant and she said it was a great interview. No news as yet.

And, well, there is the Maisie story.

Thank you Amma. "Life" is wonderful.

We all want more stories about our Sakthi Amma. How about a book on lives and situations saved by our Amma?

Chapter 37

Diwali

This is a huge holiday in India. As best as I can understand, it is to celebrate good over evil: light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance and hope over despair.

We look to Goddess Lakshmi and Vishnu to energize our souls.

To celebrate, Amma gives a gift to each employee and devotee, numbering well over fifteen hundred: the land workers, cleaning folks, security staff and even the important front-office staff. Not just a gift - it is a huge box of fire crackers and a smaller box of sweets. All are invited and look forward to the occasion. I mean - a gift right from the hand of our Sakthi Amma.

I personally have watched in past years, and frankly I am not impressed with the idea of giving everyone a huge box of dangerous fire crackers. I enjoy a quiet late dinner and well...go in search of the group. 'There would be far too many deserving employees waiting and lusting for a gift from Amma for the event to be in Peedam auditorium.' I think. 'I'll bet they are in the full moon hall.'

Wrong, no one is there and I don't see anyone to ask. I start back but a guard spots me and with a smile points to the feeding hall.

'Got it!' I think.

Walking in, the place is jam-packed with people and I can see a line of mostly men heading towards, center stage - sitting Amma.

The overseas devotees this year look to be about two

hundred. Apparently they arrived early and were seated in a special area on the floor, for easy watching.

No sitting for me; I find a place to stand and watch at the side with a few of the locals. What a thrill to see the faces of each as they humbly accept their treat straight from the hands of the Divine. Amma looks directly at each employee like it's their first time meeting, and dips Her head in a thank you gesture.

I'm watching the full staff of workers I have often seen in the ghosala. How sweet to see them in another location, filled with excitement and anticipation. 'A night of wonderment!'

Next all of the sitting devotees stand and line up one-by-one to receive their firecrackers and sweets. I'm glad I'm hidden from the group. 'What are they going to do with the firecrackers?' I wonder. Also - we are the ones who are taking Amma's energy and not really giving in service. Well, maybe spreading the Divine knowledge. But firecrackers?

. . .

Suddenly I hear "Sushumna." Kirpa, Amma's priest, is flailing his arms around and looking at me in the far corner.

I'm embarrassed. What does he want? Then I hear: "Sushumna. Come."

'Oops. Busted.' I'm thinking. But really, ninety-one years old...and getting firecrackers?

I humbly move forward in awe. How, after all of those people, could Amma know that there was one who didn't get the box because she was secretly in hiding, boycotting fire-works?

I accept my gift with tears in my eyes, thrilled to be right in

front of Amma - I mean, not even a table. Just imagine: all were trusted to come before our Divine Light and receive their gifts: firecrackers and candy.

‘Wouldn’t it be fun to just jump into her lap?’

It turns into a late night, so there is an announcement that fireworks will begin tomorrow at eight pm, where the helicopters land.

Walking back to Kamala Nivas, I find a local devotee who I know has a few children. Gesturing with my open arm holding my firecrackers, I give a positive shake of my head.

“Sure, we would love them.”

Ah, to bed. Well not exactly. I dip into our other gift, a small green square box of Sripuram Traditional Sweets.

The next morning I wake up at eleven. I definitely want more of that candy!

...
At eight in the evening, I am talked into getting into the bus to the fire-works. ‘Been there done that.’ I’m thinking, but I don’t want to be a poor sport.

...

Amazing! Amazing!! Never in my whole life have I seen such beautiful fireworks. We sit in chairs shouting with joy over the beauty, amount of designs and light in the sky. My phone-camera is filled with them. And there isn’t even a hint of the burning smell.

Hurry back Diwali, I’m willing to celebrate good over evil any time!

Om Namo Narayani

Chapter 38

Giving a Mala

Usually I give a lime mala to Amma, meaning ‘thank you.’ My thought process is that the flower ones look beautiful but they become compost. The limes are turned into juice and made into kumkum. On the other hand, we are supporting the creative hard work of the flower ladies. It is such a treat to see the many baskets filled with colorful nature.

Another practical ‘thank you’ approach is: we can purchase a container of the ghee that is used in the puja from the Peedam office.

It just feels good to give, right?

It seems to me - Amma accepts our malas and by placing them over Her head She is accepting whatever we have silently or not so silently projected.

Mary Anne says “No. Sushumna, it isn’t like that. Amma will heal any problems by putting the mala over Her head. Like - my daughter was having an operation. I told Amma as She was putting the lime mala over her head. It’s like that! And I must say my daughter was super healed!”

“True, it’s all with good natured love and respect. On the other hand isn’t it sort of a bribe? I know She is the Divine but what if I knew someone who had Covid? If Amma put the mala that represented the disease over Her head does Her energy have to fight it?”

“Oh, Sushumna, don’t get so detailed but, yes. Over the head - She will keep the problem until it resolves itself. Just give

it a rest. Om Namō Narayani.”

...

Tonight I am holding a silver tray with a lime *mala*, circled with the gathering part towards me, not toward Amma.

Okay, here I go.

“Amma, Sushumna is holding this lime *mala*, not to be put on. There is a really big problem in the United States. Tonight’s news just showed that Trump won to be president by a landslide. He is a money-mad, egotistical business man who doesn’t care about spirituality, medical care for the poor or to help those who wish to come to the United States to live.”

I turn the mala around and say “Sushumna doesn’t want Amma to take on any of this problem by putting this *mala* around Her neck. Please, just take care of us.”

She reaches out, takes the mala and holds it in front of Her for one whole minute.

She gets it. She smiles, holds the mala for an extra minute and places it to her left saying: “Kali Yuga!”

Meaning: age of darkness.

We both smile and shake our heads.

...

There is more to this story but I’m not sure I should write it down.

For one reason, it is private. For another, it is maybe ‘tattle-tale’ing on Narayani.

Oh well, here we go:

During the entire puja, as I am thinking about my country and what trouble we are going to be in with our political situation,

Amma is involved in Her usual washing of Narayani and fixing all of us, slipping into the heads and hearts that need slipping into.

Narayani, while being washed, turns into Ganesha. Yes, She still is being rubbed and polished, but She is Lord Ganesha and there is no doubt about it. Her eyes are bigger and She actually has a long trunk. My eyes are glued to Her and I'm talking internally.

'It's a big problem for our country and I am just a small citizen - I can't make a difference. We need all of the help we can get.'

She never changes for one full hour. She is Ganesha. Ganesha, as we know, is the one who will clear all obstacles. I get it!

Thank you, Narayani and yeah: U.S.A.

Chapter 39

Hospital / Dhanvantari

Near the reception of the hospital, there is a large room for prayers. At nine thirty every morning a fire puja is performed by one of Amma's young priests, Deepak. We pray to a large marble statue of Dhanvantari, the God of Healing.

*Hari Om Namo Bhagavate
Vasudevaaya Dhanvantaraye
Amrutha Kalasa Hasthaaya
Sarvamaya Vinaashanaaya
Trilokya Naathaaya
Om Sri Mahaavishnave Namaha*

A loose meaning is:

I bow down and pray to Lord Dhanvantari who
is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu.
Oh Lord, you can remove all disease and fears.
You protect the three worlds
You are the Lord of Ayurveda
and the manifestation of Lord Vishnu
You are the ultimate healer of all the living creatures
We worship and pray to you.

Our hospital is amazing. I understand it was originally set up for the villagers suffering from ailments, with three hundred beds and over seven hundred out patients receiving treatment every day. We also perform kidney transplants, lung operations, brain surgeries and eye operations, all at a subsidiary price.

The waiting rooms are jam packed. Everyone always seems to be waiting patiently. Here's where there is a bit of a

secret. We foreigners can visit the front office and meet with Mrs. Revothi. We then get fast tracked to see whichever specialist we need. In my country we have to wait weeks to seek help, unless there is an emergency. We have a huge shortage of physicians - the doctors in my family (son-in-law, grandson, and granddaughter) can attest to the same.

I have met with many patients here in India through the years. Once in our hospital room, all are equal. They are well cared for by the nursing staff, doctors and kitchen!

This year I find myself in a bit of trouble. Arthritis in my shoulders. In America I receive cortisone injections into the shoulder area every three months. Well, my three months are up and I've left it, naively thinking 'Amma will take care.' And so She has for an extra month.

Hurting, I decide to slip over to the 'care giving office.' Mrs. Revothi is still very much in charge, with at least six ladies in uniform to partner with us to find the proper building, office and doctor for our needs.

In my case, it is Dr. Rejith Mathews Philip in the department of Orthopaedic Surgery. The area is bustling with gurneys being pushed with bandaged bodies. Nurses move quickly here and there with authority. There are several desks, computers and friendly faces; I am gestured to sit at the closest desk.

Within ten minutes I am ushered into Dr. Rejith's office. Within another ten minutes I feel we are best friends; I have a cortisone shot, and have been taught new exercises for my shoulders.

What more could I ask for? Thank you to each smiling face who happily runs here and there taking care of all!

. . .

I confess to doing a bit of healing. I had forgotten, that years ago when living in Trinidad, Steven Alibocus, an energy healer and friend, taught me about energy.

Occasionally when wandering around I find a friend or two with knee problems. The guy who gets Hazel out from the motor cycle shed at Amma's is an example. Certain days he will be limping, probably according to the weather.

No problem - I make him sit for a minute. My hands without touching him move through his clothing in front of his bent knee. I actually can see white energy come from my fingers. Go figure - but it works! I remember doing full clothed bodies when I was the manager of a spa in Mexico. People would lay down and my hands would wander around about a foot over their form and find their weak/hurting spot.

They would want to pay me...I could only laugh and explain: "It isn't me, it's just pure energy going where it needs to be."

Want to give it a try?

I wish I could do it to myself. My shoulders are killing me with arthritis but I can't reach up there!

Om Namo Narayani.

Chapter 40

Puja On The Front Porch

Oh my, I can't believe it. I am in one of those late pujas. Amma is bathing Narayani after nine-thirty. Maybe because She was waiting for Lakshmi's yagam to end.

This is great for me. I get the information on my phone that sits in my purse next to my upper leg. That way, if there is a message I get a jiggle without needing to look at the phone, keeping it invisible. I'm totally against using technology when we are in the middle of Divine care and intervention.

'Beautiful.' I think. 'I will be first in line because Lakshmi's *yagam* is right across from the gate to Amma's house where the *puja* will take place.' I smartly head over, thinking '*Puja*, dinner in the little building outside of Amma's and then a slow walk on the path before the last part of the *puja* and Amma's gift of *theertham*... which will be a late ending. But who is to complain, it's all about Divine Time.'

We are ushered in and YES, I am in the front row just to the far right: my favourite place to watch both Amma and Narayani.

As always it is a beautiful washing. There is always something to learn about myself and how to better share in the universe.

Dinner in between. Zoe likes to be the server and the food is always simple and good; actually, it is there for the priests before the evening begins but we are invited to partake while Narayani is being dressed. Tonight it is two kinds of rice, a yummy mixture of onion in curd and the pomegranate fruit that has been part of Narayani's bathing. Delicious!

Next, I walk my usual path. It's well lit and a lovely time to check my head and heart. Tonight, for the first time, there is a dog on the path. I reach down and pet him. Actually I have seen him many places on the property, even on the star path. Shiny black with a white fur bindi mark on his forehead. He is like me, I chuckle, a roamer. I go for three miles a day but I bet he doesn't keep track.

As I approach Amma's house he stops. I turn to encourage him to continue.

There is a 'sorry, Sushumna' look on his sweet face. 'I'm not allowed.'

Sad, I would have loved sitting with him in my lap during the second half of puja.

I'm not as lucky this time - I'm third row center, sitting on the brick area. This is when it happens!

She is at the side, but in front of me. She turns and says "Would you like to sit in front of me?" A sweet face, I'm thinking.

She continues in a whisper: "Actually I have extra room on my mat if you would like to share."

I smile, shake my head 'no' but silently whisper "thank you" and touch my hand to my heart.

I wonder where she is from. Probably outer space. No one has ever offered their front seat!

Chapter 41

Yagam

What is this business about *yagam*? I'm thinking of: the daily fire at Peedam to bring rain, the morning hospital fire for Dhanvantari blessings, and the evening Lakshmi fire at the beginning of the Star Path.

We arrive, there is a fire, we sit and do nothing. Maybe we chant along with the priest. It could be for two or three hours. When finished, we receive a taste of the liquid used, along with *kumkum*, ash, and burned black *kush* grass, for protection. That is it!

. . .

I mean - think of it - you take lots of time to mop, wash, and polish the floor. But you only notice how bright and shiny it is when you leave. 'Job well done', is the result in your head. 'There must be more to the reason that we sit there.' I'm thinking.

I decide to look in one of Amma's books, 'Connect With The Divine'. There must be more to this *yagam* business.

Talk about auspicious: 'Connect With The Divine' Volume 10, page 108!!! Is Amma playing with me or what?

"We transfer the energy to either Divine statues or to yantras (sheets of conductive metal inscribed with sacred geometric designs) or to the place which needs to hold the Divine Energy. Most of the time, we transfer the energy from the kalasam to Divine statues."

So these deep *kalasam* prayers are going into the water;

therefore, these must be going into our bodies too. After all, we are made up of at least forty percent water. The Divine statues are sharing it... there is no doubt.

We are getting energized, washed and polished just being in the ritual of the yagam! It is true when I think of it - I do feel different after sitting for an hour or two.

I'm not finished. I am truly hooked on sitting in the Lakshmi fire *puja*. The big shock is that usually no one is there. It is wild.

The fire is constantly fed and the chanting of six priests is ongoing. Then there comes a time when we get to place our hands on the 'silk wrapped likeness of our soul.'

Sometimes I mention someone who I know is ill or having a hard time, and sometimes I mention the seven females in my family. We all want spiritual wealth from Lakshmi. Although, aren't all women beautiful as long as we are kind with good thoughts? 'To float on a lotus leaf!' is my wish for all.

Lately I have been feeling very centered, warm and thankful. I want to go to the internet and find out more about Lakshmi and what She is sending to me. It occurs to me that maybe I am being given treasures from Her. Not only me, but I represent seven females in my family: three daughters, one daughter-in-law, two granddaughters, and one (remember Maisie?) great granddaughter.

All is food for thought.

*Om Namo Narayani
And thank you, Lakshmi*

Chapter 42

Chanting

I remember Miss Yates, my fifth grade teacher, in detail. Short, blond hair and a lot of teeth. “Tomorrow we will have ‘try-outs’ for choir.” She says.

‘Yeah.’ I’m thinking. I’m always singing around the house. At times, Mom jokingly holds her hands up to block her ears.

I practice the songs Miss Yates has given us for the test, happily looking forward to the big day.

A little nervous but ready, I’m number five. I walk up with my paper in hand. I belt out the first song.

“EEEEEEYOUUU!” comes from Miss Yates, who then throws up her hands and screeches “STOP - STOP! I can tell you have a bad cold.”

I am crushed to the core and never sing again.

. . .

Fast forward to Amma and chanting. Needless to say, I feel super shy about my ability to use my voice for anything but talking. Not even whistling, although I think I am pretty good at it when no one is around.

Little by little I hear my own sound when trying to chant.

I’m doing it just for myself and I’m beginning to like what I hear. There is a vibration occurring in my heart area.

It’s like a tune for my soul and it doesn’t have to be in any correct pitch!

I have a few favorites and can share them on paper; don't worry, I won't sing them!

This is for Sakthi Amma:

Gnana Roopaya Vidmahe
Sakthi Amsaaya Dheemahi
Thanno Sakthi Amma Prachodayaat

...

And for Narayani:

Om Sarva Mangala Mangalye
Shive Sarvartha Saadhike
Sharanye Thryambake Gauri
Narayani Namostute

...

The Gayatri Mantra:

Om Bhur Bhuvah Swaha
Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi
Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayat

...

For purification:

Om Asato Ma Sad Gamaya
Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya
Mrityor Ma Amritam Gamaya
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti
Sri Gurave Namaha

This last one means: lead me from the unreal to the real. From darkness to light. Lead me from death to immortality. Let there be peace, and peacefulness. I bow to the Guru within.

. . .

Go ahead and try that, Miss Yates!

There is no doubt that the repetitive chanting causes positive energy. With continued practice, it will keep growing and connecting to the soul, which will become stronger.

Repetitive is best for me as it doesn't tax my memory and is more relaxing.

Chapter 43

Rules in Amma Land

The way I see it, there are three rules in 'Amma Land.'

The first and most important is to feel love and to give love in return. It's really easy, and if not just ask someone, they happily will give. It is so wonderful to feel showered with it.

The second comes from the ancient book of Hindu knowledge, the Mahabharata.

The story goes: a devotee went up to her guru with long flowing hair... and... it caused a life time of bad luck to the guru.

In a way it's difficult because we women have always been proud of long thick curls. But here, and with many of India's spiritual teachers, it is an insult.

I look at this as inner knowledge - never have I heard it as a request from Amma. It just is a fact!

Another known 'no-no' is to never show or point the bottom of your feet toward a holy person.

One more definite fact. Never are women to attend any spiritual ritual when they are on their menstrual period. There is no slacking of this rule. Please adhere, be it a yagam, a talk, chanting or any other activity.

In one sense it's kind of nice as we get to meditate on and to ourselves about life in general.

On the other hand, what about men?

I guess it is because we women are so special!

Om Namo Narayani

Chapter 44

Kum Kum

It was my first visit to Peedam. My taxi took me to a vacant area and the driver announced “this is the place.”

I was told to get out of the car, and a man in a white dhoti pointed at my feet, meaning ‘take off your shoes.’ Three men were sitting on place mats in the dirt. One was reading the newspaper. The dhoti man put his finger to his lips,

pantomiming ‘silence.’ Lucky for me that he did, as I was just about to blurt out “What is going on here?”

We sat in silence. I checked out each guy, trying to figure out why they wouldn’t even make eye contact. I mean, I was dressed quite nicely as I was

supposed to find someone called Amma, but there I was sitting in the dirt.

Suddenly the newspaper came down to reveal a young handsome man in orange robes. He asked: “Why are you here?”

Well, I’m not stupid; I figured out this was the one.

“I was told I should come here and meet with Amma.” “Put out your hand.” He said, pantomiming an open palm. And so I did. (Fortunately it was my right hand.)

Suddenly huge quantities of red powder fell into my palm.

I looked up to see if it came from a tree: no tree. I looked at each of the men.

No answer. They all had a quiet, soft, natural look (not at me).

I tell this story over and over...I so love it. Shall I repeat it once more or wait until next time?

Anyway the same man that helped me came over with a piece of newspaper and gestured to place the powder in it.

He then put his finger in the heap and placed it on my forehead, saying “*kumkum*”

I remember it as if it was yesterday. My first experience with Sakthi Amma. And yes, *kumkum* is important, as I feel more centered, relaxed and open.

Actually, I don't feel dressed without it. However when living in the U.S. they would

think I had been shot in the forehead if placed there. So I would bless water and dot the forehead with that each day instead.

But here I am, back in India for good. Lots of *kumkum* on my forehead, feeling love and protection. Many of the priests after a *yagam* will plunk a dot on my forehead. I like it.

I always carry a container with me. Often we have new devotees, so I suggest they put it on, or there is someone who has forgotten. I get it, but it becomes a habit eventually. It is super helpful and reminds us of openness, love and the Divine.

I decide I want to know where it comes from and so I request a *kumkum* tour.

Really you only have to wish for something and the right person gets in contact. In this case it is Srimathi who is a Public Relations officer for the Golden Temple.

“To tell you the truth Sushumna, I don’t know how it is made - even though I have been wearing it forever. My mom would put a dot on my forehead before I left for school. All of my friends also had their red dots. We were told it was the dot of love, caring and protection. None of us felt right without it. This will be good for both of us.”

. . .

We walk into the shed behind the feeding hall. I remember it used to be where Vaishnavi, our elephant, resided years ago.

There are fifteen women filling small red plastic containers with the red powder.

“These will be for sale in the temple shops.” We are told by the gentleman in charge, Mr Senthil. “Other days they fill packets, with Amma’s face (and blessing) on them, to be given out freely at Sripuram.”

Mr Senthil, it turns out, met Amma twenty some years ago, and we remember each other. There is sort of a gang of us from the olden days.

“These containers (probably ten large ones) are filled with a mixture of crushed turmeric, coarsely crushed alum and lime juice. They will stay for several days to absorb, the color will change from yellow to red, and it will dry into a powder.”

This is the reason I give a lime mala to Amma: it does double work. One - ‘thank you, Amma; Sushumna is in need of

help' and another - the juice is used for *kumkum*.

"The dried mixture is then sieved. Finally we add a few drops of sesame oil, and extract of screwpine or *thazampoo*, a plant flower, for scent."

. . .

"What are the benefits of wearing it?"

"By placing a dot on the *Ajna Chakra*, we believe it will enter our system and detoxify the third eye from all negative substances and energies, giving one clarity and accurate perception of life."

"Well that certainly improves my depth of knowledge. I thought it was giving respect to the divine and addressing our inner spiritually."

"That too, Sushumna."

"It symbolizes purity, devotion and blessings to and from the divine."

Om Namo Narayani

Chapter 45

Theertham

Back in the olden days, the *theertham* bottles were filled at the back of Peedum. It was, and still is the liquid that is poured over Narayani during Her bathing. There were a few us, ignorant to the full power of *theertham*, who after spending several hours filling bottles, would capture a bottle and slurp it down, believing we had the world in our hands.

Wrong!

The sheer beauty is that *theertham* liquid is pure, straight from bathing Narayani with Amma's blessings. However, this holy liquid is ready to accept the healing instructions that come from the Divine. So we totally missed the point. That's okay - it is all part of growing up and understand the power of the Divine. However, looking back, for sure the cosmos' energy was still taking over! Our intentions weren't to be robbers - we wanted to get closer to the Divine. I am sure Narayani must have chuckled, thinking: 'silly kids, This warm water has been poured over me and therefore you are on your way.' Maybe even 'and you watch out, Sushumna, as you will be living here, and soon!'

In the olden days, between our giggles and wonderment at being given such a powerful job, we began to realize that Amma is the One who gives the final miracles.

Today the *theertham* bottles are filled at the golden temple with Mr. G. Dharni in charge. I have made a date with him to be able to help fill the bottles. Sort of remembering the olden

days. But this time with a deeper sense of the honor attached to it.

I so respect the liquid once it gets in Amma's hands. She mentally fills it with healing energy that will cure anything!

I plan to find out what it is made of. I do know it has covered Narayani in her daily bathing. Really, that should be enough for me!

I fold my right hand over my left, drinking from the base of my thumb. No slurping, as I don't want to waste a drop. However, just to make sure, I place my right hand over the very top of my skull to saviour even the tiniest bit of remaining blessings.

Om Namo Narayani!

But here is the big question... There is no doubt, that there is no other place in the whole world, that I would rather be. Did my old theertum days have anything to do with this?

Chapter 46

Dichotomy

We wait. The word arrives that Amma's puja is to begin at Peedam.

Dressed and ready, we leave the driveway of Kamala Nivas out onto the common street, Sri Puram Main Road. Turn to the right, and the world takes over!

There are hoards of people milling around the entrance courtyard of the Golden Temple. Kids are throwing up some gimmick on a string that twirls with bright colours against the night sky.

Next, we pass a group of men dressed as women in colorful Kurtis.

Occasionally they may offer advice and/or friendship.

Whipping on but carefully watching, we see mats placed with sales offerings of plastic trucks, jewelry, balloons, pink furry teddy bears and more.

One woman has jewellery, a young man has plastic cars, a girl has hair decorations, on and on. Looking up to the right is the outside Ganesha temple. The two priests are always ready to give a blessing to any of us. I notice they are involved with couples tonight.

Moving on. One debates whether to cross the busy street with *tuk-tuks* lurching and take our life in our hands or not. We also need to be aware of motor cycles, cars, and dogs. Once on the other side, we pass more curbside stalls, well lit with

offerings of garish gold necklaces, loads of glass bracelets, diamond hair ornaments, men's shirts and jackets, and a hanging array of skimpy women's tops. Then more plastic: horses, trucks, dolls, cricket bats, on and on over the next two blocks with colorful shoppers and active sales staff. As if we are blind and deaf - they encourage us to buy stuff, loudly!

Finally we hit the corner tea stand and turn into the wide street to Peedam, where we encounter the flower-selling men and women who sit outside the temple. This is their last ditch moment to sell their beautiful hand made malas and hair ornaments. A full array of flowers and choices.

Then its a rush to dump our shoes in the shoe stand; usually there are at least fifty pairs flopped on the floor of the enclosure. I drop my chappels among the seventy or more tonight.

Phew. This is where the dichotomy comes in. There is a huge contrast between the two happenings: the loud and bustling outside world, followed by the

temple. We enter into Amma's puja. It is quiet. We sit on chairs or on the floor, breathe deeply and relax, feeling peaceful and very much 'at home.' There is nothing or no one who can disturb us. We are at one with the Divine.

Thank you, Amma. We are good for at least an hour! Then we leave while Narayani is dressed and many go for dinner.

The second half is when we get to be in front of Amma, receive *theertham* and give gifts of flowers and/or more. It's a soft quiet time to be near the divine.

For me I usually thrust out my right cupped hand to receive *theertham* and say with a big smile, “Thank you, Amma.” Not just meaning thank you for the liquid, but for love and life.

Once we leave, ‘blessed food’ is offered at the entrance of the temple. By now the server knows I want a double dip. He wiggles his head and loads me up. The street is amazing by now, with hardly a soul in sight. It is loaded with trash (which will magically disappears by morning), but no cars... just a few dogs. All is peaceful and heavenly. As I pass the bus stop, I walk up the wide steps. There are a few blanket covered souls asleep on the cement floor. I give my offering to an old man who seems to live there. He is just sitting on the cement bench. I know nothing about him but he always says “Thank you Mam, and bless you.” It might be his only food for the day. I think he shares it but I don’t stay around to find out.

My food is getting the ‘blessing.’ And to all a goodnight!

Om Namo Narayani.

Chapter 47

Abhishekam

Abhishekam is a Sanskrit word. It means sprinkling or ‘wetting’, and refers to the Hindu ritual of pouring water or other sacred substances on a deity while chanting mantras. This fits right into Amma’s ritual of pouring and adding different liquids to Narayani’s daily bath while chanting mantras to Her.

It is beautifully done with total love and surrender to our divine, Narayani.

...

Now, let’s selfishly think of ourselves.

We have each started our lives with a bit of *Abhishekam*. We were washed and swaddled with a wrapping at birth.

...

Now here we are again, having the opportunity to cleanse our bodies and purify our minds. These days, it is a soft nudge in the direction of more spiritual cleansing.

However in the early, olden days with Amma it was heavy work: ego, desires, wants, lack of compassion and so on. Using steel-wool would have helped! Surely it would have been a faster track. I still bow my head in thanks to the cows who taught me to stay in the moment in the process of trying to place a dot of *kumkum* on them.

Today I still honour *abhishekams*. We are lucky to have many to choose from and/or to identify with, everyday:

4:30 a.m.	Lakshmi at the Golden Temple
4:30 a.m.	Narayani at Peedam
6:30 a.m.	Ganesha in His temple on the Star Path
12:30 p.m.	Vishnu - Saturday only

Of course there is Narayani's *abhishekam* done by Amma everyday. No doubt it is the treat of treats and zings right into us.

The purifying liquids seem to include warm milk fresh from the morning milking of our cows, yoghurt, ghee, honey, oil, and fruit juices, to name a few.

Often we are given a 'taste - treat' after the ceremony. My most favourite is the *panchamrit*, which is a mixture of five fruits. The mixture represents the five elements: it is asked of the deity to purify those elements within ourselves as well as the corresponding five senses: vision (water), taste (earth), hearing (fire), smell (ether) and touch.

YUM!

Chapter 48

Thank You, Narayani

Amma was born with spiritual symbols on the forehead, and with a *chakra* and conch symbol on either shoulder. Also, it has been said that there was a noticeable Divine glow!

After early childhood, Amma often skipped school to visit temples and become involved in religious activities in the area.

. . .

It is no surprise that Goddess Narayani chose this teenager to carry Her message in May of 1992. Ever since, miraculous powers were made clear.

Goddess Narayani showed Herself in place of the young boy and said, “I take birth in the world as Narayani. My name is to be Sakthi Amma.”

Afterward, giving remedies for problems and ailments, and providing *pujas* for all to view became daily events for Sakthi Amma. Her (Narayani’s) main mission is to encourage spirituality and self realization, and bring peace to all.

She also has the goal to promote wisdom, prosperity and good health.

. . .

Thank you, Narayani for finding Him!

Really there could be a huge book of stories of lives that have been changed because of our Sakthi Amma.

As a matter of fact, we are beginning a new book - a documentary put together about how Her devotees found Her.

Contact sushumna@sushumnadasi.com We would love to hear your story. We are all so lucky to have our Amma!

Om Namo Narayani

Chapter 49

Never An End

Walking the star path, I constantly feel the presence of those who have left

I remember Dr. Rao in Chennai who helped me to find Amma.

There was Jo who loved to sing (I round the corner and expect to see Jo) Amma's father Pruba who always had a smile, and gave loving Amma knowledge and a happy singing voice, Suresh's dad, Meenakshi who greeted each of us with a cheerful thought. We can't forget Andrani of course, our beloved cow... And on and on.

...

There is no doubt in my mind that a wealth of spiritual souls are roaming with us.

It is a happy, far reaching deeply connected feeling. Life isn't short at Peedam; it is forever!

There is sharing and caring. We are all one in many ways. At first some try to

be first in line or be in the front to be seen by Amma. What they don't realize is that Amma checks the last in line first.

This is not just the physical world; it's the everlasting love and respect world, forever!

Yes, there is a beginning, but there is no ending here. There is a heavy drug that takes charge.

It is from the Divine and is called love.

We each are our own God. Om Namō Narayani

THE END

THANK YOU

Because you own this book, all the rupees went towards the care of our small animals.

21 years ago I first came to Sakthi Amma and slowly fell in love, including with the animals. True - the cows were, and continue to be, cared for big time. But what about the dogs?

I watched the Indian women with their families. When a dog approached with a wagging tail, they would screech with their hands thrown in the air. "Eeee Yaaaow. Watch out for that 'thing.' He'll bite you!"

Of course, the poor dog was terrified that those hands in the air might hit him, so he might growl or even bite in response. On top of that, my fear was that he hadn't been taken care of - no rabies shots, mange treatment or general check-ups.

We had our first and only rabies clinic where two veterinarians in Vellore volunteered their time and a pharmaceutical company gave us free vaccines. We paid 50 rupees to anyone who brought us a dog. Kids scoured the neighbourhoods and brought us animals. Pick-up trucks arrived filled with dogs. We were even clever enough to swab a bit of tattoo liquid on the inside of the animal's ear to avoid repeat customers!

We are also a haven for kittens. Sometimes, Amma will be having a puja on her front porch, when a kitten will wander from her Mom, probably wondering where the energy is coming from.

We are now in the process of building a veterinary office on our campus, which will house our own vet just for small animals.

Again, a big thank you!

Of course, donations are always welcome.

Om Namo Narayani.



“ It is not possible to measure God with your wealth or power. You cannot ever know God through your wisdom or your knowledge. You can only surrender to God. You need nothing in order to surrender. ”

- Sri Sakthi Amma