NANDAKAM

"The Source of Joy" · My Autobiography



SADGURU ATHREYA

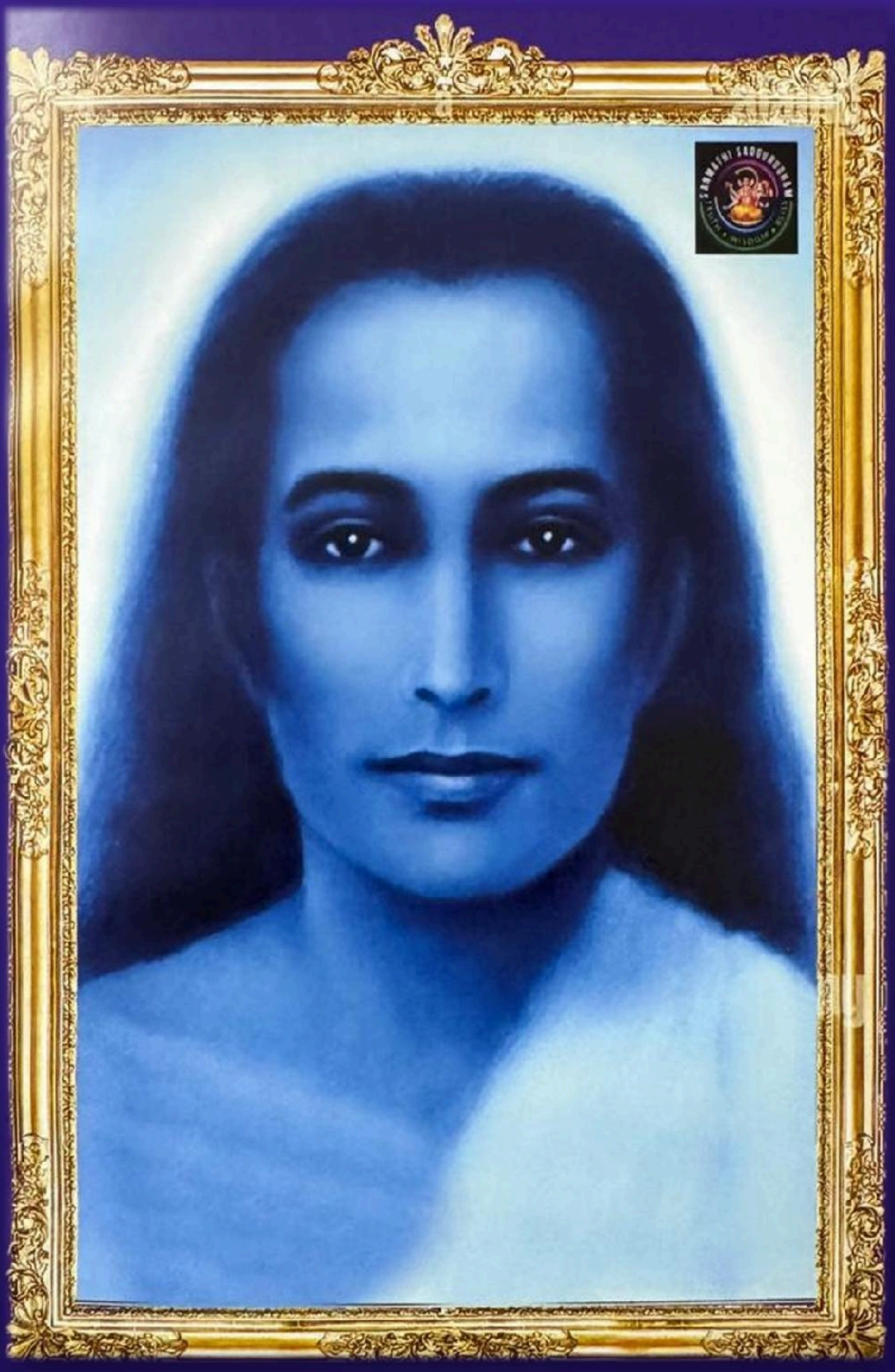
NAMASSUMANJALI

A Reverent Offering of Salutations



The late Smt. Visalakshi & Sri Suryanarayana Sastry

My parents, my first Gurus



My Revered Gurudev

SRI SRI SRI BABAJI MAHASAYA

NANDAKAM — “The Source of Joy”: My Autobiography

by Sadguru Athreya (Akundi Srinivasa Sastry)

English translation by Damodhar Achary, from the original Telugu edition, Nandakam: “Anandamulam” Na Atmakatha.

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A Note on This Edition

Nandakam is the spiritual autobiography of Sadguru Athreya (Sri Akundi Srinivasa Sastry). It was first written and published in Telugu. This is its first English edition.

The English translation is by Sri Damodhar Achary. It aims to carry the devotional spirit, the voice and the teachings of the original to readers who do not read Telugu.

On spellings and terms

Sanskrit and Telugu words are written in simple Roman letters without diacritical marks, in the form most familiar to Indian readers of English: Shiva, Krishna, Jnana, Chitta-shuddhi, Atma-vichara. Names that already have a well-known English spelling keep it (for example, Paramahansa Yogananda). Sanskrit verses are given in transliteration, usually followed by their meaning. Honorifics such as Sri, Smt. and Garu are kept as in the original.

Words that recur often, such as Atman, Sadhana, Darshan and Samadhi, are explained in the Glossary at the end of the book.

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The Word in My Mind

Nandakam, is a book of resplendent reflection of the sublime feelings that arose within my heart during my quest for Truth, governed by the divine wisdom graciously granted by the Supreme Soul for the attainment of eternal bliss.

What began as a search clouded by numerous doubts gradually evolved into a path illumined by knowledge, ultimately leading to a state of spiritual serenity and spiritual bliss.

It was this sacred pursuit of Truth that led me to the lotus feet of my revered Gurudev, Sri Sri Sri Babaji. By His boundless grace, I was blessed with the rare fortune of beholding Him, touching His holy presence, and conversing with Him. Through the divine vision of my Gurudev, His sanctifying touch, and His compassionate words, all my doubts were dispelled without remainder.

The mind rejoiced! Wisdom blossomed!

Bliss unfolded! Truth was realised!

The soul awakened into direct experience!

The word *Nandakam* signifies "The Source of Joy". In the sacred tradition, Nandakam is the celestial sword wielded by the Supreme Being. Its divine purpose is to dispel the gloom of ignorance residing within humanity, awaken true wisdom, and ultimately access the exalted state of *Brahmananda,* the bliss of union with the Absolute.

The Supreme One, who is the very embodiment of Knowledge and Bliss, fulfils this eternal and ever-renewing divine mission through His enlightened representatives, the noble Gurus and the spiritual preceptors.

The foremost purpose of my writing is to place before you the true essence of the sacred word *"Nandakam",* as it truly exists through quest for truth, thoughtful discernment, and perfect bliss.

In the spiritual sense, *Truth* signifies that which is eternal, conscious, and all-pervading, the Supreme Reality that forms the very foundation of this universe, the essence of the *Atma* and the *Paramatma*.

Spiritually, *Knowledge* denotes pure and complete wisdom, the state of fully understanding the true nature of existence. *Self-knowledge* is the direct realisation of one's own essential being.

Spiritually, *happiness* signifies eternal fulfilment, a state beyond desires, attachments, and impurities. To attain such supreme bliss, every living being must realise its true nature and directly experience the Self within.

Then, every living being itself becomes the embodiment of *"Nandakam"*.

That is to say:

"I am Truth! I am Knowledge!

I am Bliss!" This very state of *Chidananda,* the eternal union of Consciousness and Bliss is verily Shiva! Shiva!!

Your affectionate friend,
Sastry Athreya
(*Akundi Srinivasa Sastry*)

CHAPTER 1

My Childhood, My First Teacher Was My Father

I was born on 1st December 1963, during the concluding hours of *Kartika Pournami*. My revered father was Sri Akundi Suryanarayana Sastry (1911–1999), and my revered mother, Srimati Akundi Venkata Ramanamma (1929–1995). The virtuous and devout couple were blessed with fourteen children, nine daughters and five sons of whom I am the youngest.

As a devoted housewife, my mother dedicated her entire life to the care of her family and children, embodying the noble virtues of sacrifice, compassion, and unwavering maternal affection.

My father pursued his studies at the esteemed Sri Maharaja's Sanskrit College, Vizianagaram. After earning proficiency degree in both Sanskrit and Telugu languages, he embraced the noble profession of teaching and rendered service in the field of education for fifty one years from 1933 to 1984. During this distinguished period, he held various academic positions in several colleges and in three universities across the State of Odisha.

Even after his retirement at the age of fifty-eight, his commitment to the dissemination of knowledge remained undiminished. He continued to serve for another fifteen years as a teacher at ADAV High School, HAL, Sunabeda, Odisha, enlightening and guiding countless students through his wisdom, discipline, and dedication to learning.

He established the *Gita Prachara Sangha* and devoted himself indefatigably to the propagation of the sacred teachings of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Under his compassionate guidance, many boys and girls committed to memory all the seven hundred verses of the *Bhagavad Gita*, along with their meanings and spiritual import. Among his notable literary contributions are the poetic work *Pratyaksha Ramayanam* (*Pratyaksha Atmanubhuthi Ramayan*) and the prose rendering *Srimad Adhyatma Ramayanam* (*Uma Maheshwara Samvadam – Andhra Bhashanuvadam*). These sacred works were published with the generous support of his family members and the blessings and assistance of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams. In due course, they would be held in great esteem among spiritual seekers and devotees.

With boundless affection, humility, and devotion, he nurtured and guided a vast circle of people without causing hardship to anyone. While discharging his

professional duties with exemplary sincerity and discipline, he also offered wise counsel to all who approached him seeking guidance. To those burdened with difficulties who came to consult him regarding their horoscopes, he instilled courage and hope, while earnestly praying to Lord Sri Rama for their welfare and peace.

I was personally blessed to witness the noble life he lived, a life wholly dedicated to imparting spiritual wisdom to many, actively participating in programmes that fostered patriotism and social upliftment, and courageously facing every challenge with steadfast resolve. Through disciplined practice of *Karma* and *Jnana*, he strove earnestly for self-realisation. Constantly meditating on the Lotus Feet of Sri Raghava, he sought the attainment of devotion, wisdom, and renunciation. Through purity in thought, word, and deed, he pursued Truth throughout his life and inspired countless individuals, who came to him as disciples and seekers.

My revered father authored numerous literary and poetic works. He attained remarkable mastery in the sacred science of astrology and brought solace and confidence to many through predictions and insights that often-surpassed ordinary imagination. In time, he became renowned throughout the State of Odisha as a distinguished and highly respected astrologer.

With mind, speech, and action wholly dedicated to the worship of the Supreme Almighty Lord Sri Sita Ramachandra, my revered father lived a life adorned with devotion, wisdom, detachment, and unwavering spiritual discipline. Ever yearning for the direct *darshan* of Sri Raghava, he sought the vision of Truth through Self-knowledge and, by the divine grace of the Supreme Soul, attained profound inner realisation of the Self. Foreseeing the approach of his earthly departure, he compassionately informed his descendants in advance. In the year 1999, my revered father, Sri Suryanarayana Sastry, peacefully merged with the Supreme Soul on the eve of the total solar eclipse.

Om Shantih Shantih Shantih ॥

It is my firm conviction that, through the accumulated merit of previous births, I was blessed with the rare fortune of having my own father as my Guru and spiritual guide.

CHAPTER 2

The Knowledge Bestowed by My Father

From the time I first gained the ability to understand and learn, my revered father would lovingly make me memorise many sacred verses. Before dawn each day, he would seat me in his lap, patiently correct the mistakes in my recitation, and graciously explain the inner meanings of the verses. To the best of my recollection, he taught me nearly a hundred such verses during my early childhood.

After I crossed the age of twelve and gradually gained greater maturity and discernment, I began to realise that my father had already attained an elevated spiritual state. I would often hear many of his close associates and companions speak among themselves with deep reverence regarding his spiritual stature and inner realisation.

By the time I reached the age of sixteen, he had taught me more than two hundred significant verses from the *Bhagavad Gita*, together with their meanings and spiritual interpretations. During those years, I also had the blessed opportunity of listening to his teachings as a student at school. In the way he instructed his students, I could clearly perceive the remarkable excellence, discipline, and mastery he possessed as a teacher.

From my revered father, I learned how to harmonise the path of *Karma* prescribed in the Vedas with the path of *Jnana* expounded in the Upanishads. The profound explanations he gave, supported by meaningful examples, regarding the principles of Truth and Dharma embedded within the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*, have remained permanently engraved on my heart and mind.

The words often spoken by my father *"Realisation of Truth is the ultimate goal of life"* became deeply rooted within me.

Truth itself is the Supreme Soul. A living being that fails to recognise Truth cannot reach the Supreme Reality. Dharma arises from Truth, and any Dharma devoid of Truth can not survive for a long time. Without Dharma, peace, love, and non-violence can not survive in this world. Therefore, the sacred instruction repeatedly given by my father, *"Seek the Truth"* remains an eternal guiding principle throughout my life.

According to my revered mother, my father was, during the earlier years of his life, deeply devoted to ritual observances and Vedic disciplines. With great precision and sincerity, he performed the prescribed rites in a scientific and scripturally ordained

manner. He regarded *Sakama Karmas* actions performed with expectation of results as a means necessary for navigating worldly life and fulfilling its responsibilities. Gradually, however, a profound transformation took place within him. His outlook evolved from *Pravrtti* to *Nivrtti*, from outward worldly engagement towards inward spiritual renunciation.

Thereafter, he began performing all rituals without desire for personal gain or expectation of results. As a consequence of this inner transformation, he encountered several financial hardships and worldly difficulties. Yet, with unwavering courage and spiritual steadfastness, he faced every trial bestowed by the Supreme Soul. Never once did he abandon his faith. Instead, he surrendered completely at the divine lotus feet of Sri Raghava, making them the supreme goal of his life. Even now, my heart is moved to tears when I recall the words once spoken by my mother that my father would intensely yearn for the direct *darshan* of Lord Sri Rama with deep devotion and longing.

“Can such a life truly be possible?” this thought arose within me with wonder and amazement as I observed the manner in which my revered father practised philosophy in his daily life. My heart overflowed with joy, and an indescribable courage awakened within me. From that day onward, I began listening with deep attention and reverence to every word spoken by my father.

My first Guru, my father taught me that the divine life of Sri Sita Rama stands as the supreme embodiment of true Dharma. He explained that the essential wisdom contained in all the Upanishads finds its very essence in the *Bhagavad Gita*, and that one who truly understands both the life of Sri Rama and the teachings of the *Gita* will find the path of Truth-seeking greatly illumined and made accessible.

Thereafter, by surrendering to and serving a noble guru with devotion and humility, one gradually attains *Atma-Jnana*, Self-knowledge and ultimately realises the vision of Truth.

My father would often say that the attainment of a true guru depends on one’s own spiritual maturity. If a seeker pursues Truth with complete sincerity, purity of intention, and without hesitation or ulterior motive, the Guru will naturally come into that seeker’s life by divine grace.

He further taught that the result obtained in spiritual practice depends entirely on the inner attitude and purity with which one practises. The Supreme Soul grants such power and capacity to every living being. Therefore, in philosophical and spiritual discipline, purity of inner feeling and intention is of the utmost importance.

According to his teachings, the inner disposition of the mind inevitably expresses itself through outward actions. Hence, the foremost duty of a seeker is to practise mastery over the mind and gradually bring it under disciplined control.

The mind, he taught, is the primary cause both for the attainment of wisdom and for continued existence in ignorance. The mind can become either our greatest friend or our fiercest enemy. Thoughts and desires arise within the mind, while the senses function under its direction. Though the senses themselves cannot independently determine action, they possess the power to influence and agitate the mind.

A spiritual aspirant, my father taught, should commence *sadhana* only after fully understanding these truths. Otherwise, he would repeatedly caution that spiritual practice undertaken without proper foundation and inner preparedness would inevitably falter midway.

With great gentleness and wisdom, he would explain that just as a structure can endure for ages only when its foundation is firm and stable, so too can spiritual life attain fulfilment only when it is established upon a strong inner discipline and clarity of understanding.

I held an unflinching faith that my father's blessings would surely guide me along the sacred path of Truth. It was indeed through his grace and spiritual influence that I was blessed with the divine fortune of meeting my revered gurudev.

By that immeasurable blessing, I attained the rare privilege of beholding my venerable Gurudev, touching His holy presence, and conversing with Him directly.

CHAPTER 3

The First Step to the Search for Truth

I began to contemplate deeply on the Truth that my first Guru, my revered father, had repeatedly emphasised. Having studied numerous scriptures on Truth, along with the teachings of many preceptors and noble souls, my yearning to realise the Supreme Truth grew stronger with each passing day.

The deeper I delved into this sacred enquiry, the more profound revelations unfolded before me. I was taught that this quest is not confined to a limited span of time, but is a lifelong spiritual journey, and I continue to pursue it with unwavering devotion. Gradually, I came to realise that there exists nothing higher or beyond Truth itself. Thus, my search for Truth continued unceasingly through many years.

At every stage of this pursuit, countless questions, doubts, and misconceptions arose within my mind. Yet, as the intensity of the search deepened, the appropriate answer to each doubt revealed itself in due course.

It was clearly impressed upon me that, in the pursuit of Truth, Truth alone is of supreme significance. Any attempt to overlook or disregard it leads only to abysmal ignorance, thereby segregating one from the inner bliss of the soul.

Present-day society is witnessing, in countless forms, attempts to portray what is claimed to be the ultimate Truth.

Many of the scriptures and literary works available to us have examined Truth in great depth. Numerous sacred texts and religious treatises have expounded upon Truth in their own ways. Those works that failed to elucidate Truth with clarity and conviction have gradually faded into obscurity.

This “Quest for Truth” does not merely pertain to the ordinary “verbal truth” employed in daily life. Rather, it concerns that Supreme Truth which is the very root cause of this entire creation. Upon what primordial Truth has this living universe come into existence? Why was it created? How did it manifest?

What is the Truth underlying the existence of both the animate and the inanimate? What is the profound mystery behind the birth, upon this earthly plane so familiar to us, of extraordinary beings endowed with supreme wisdom and divine knowledge?

Why is it that only one who possesses profound wisdom strives earnestly to realise the Truth? How does such a person attain such exalted knowledge? Does this imply that, even if ignorance within humanity is dispelled, this Supreme Truth still cannot

be imparted? Does it further suggest that, even though complete analysis and intellectual understanding, Truth can not be fully assimilated?

Countless devotees, spiritual aspirants, priests, intellectuals, prophets, teachers, masters, theists, and even atheists: all, in essence, seek responses to the very same questions: “What is Truth?” and “What is falsehood?”

“Vedahametam Purusam Mahantam Adityavarnam Tamasas Tu Paare”
“I have realised that Supreme Purusha, resplendent like millions of suns, who exists far beyond the darkness of ignorance.”

What indeed is the profound Truth concealed within the declaration of the *Purusha Sukta* — “Vedahametam Purusam Mahantam”, “I have realised that effulgent Supreme Purusha, the Supreme Truth”?

It is not something that can be comprehended with ease. Mere accumulation of merit, performance of rituals, observance of austerities, or acts of charity alone cannot lead one to its realisation. To truly understand it, one requires intense yearning, deep enquiry, and sincere spiritual practice. If one is destined and prepared, it becomes attainable; otherwise, it remains beyond reach.

Only those who have transcended attachment to merit, ritual observances, external supports, and worldly dependence may approach that state of realisation. However great one’s aid or scholarship may be, in the end, what remains is but hope and longing for the Divine Grace.

Truth within illusion, and illusion within Truth, this indeed is the eternal mystery of existence that envelops human life. Countless doubts arose within me regarding these profound realities, and thus I began my search for Gurus who could bestow the right understanding and reveal the true answers.

CHAPTER 4

Searching for Gurus

I realised that the ultimate Truth can be digested only through true knowledge. Yet, I continued searching for the means to attain that knowledge. During this quest, I encountered many who had gained prominence as Gurus. I observed them with convincing care and discernment. Before long, however, I came to conclusion that none among them had truly attained Enlightenment. Many functioned merely as external Gurus. Surrounded by large numbers of disciples, their establishments flourished. The disciples, too, became deeply attached to their Gurus, for some of their worldly desires appeared to be fulfilled to a considerable extent.

Many are drawing people towards themselves in the name of religion. Some possess considerable scientific learning and remarkable eloquence, yet they have not realised the Truth. Others are well-versed in the Puranas and sacred lore, but remain without Atma-jnana (Self-realisation). Some are entirely absorbed in preaching prophecies and doctrines, while undermining the ultimate Reality. There are even those who appear on television channels, spreading ignorance and falsehood in society through sponsored programmes that advocate mantras, alterations of names, or numerological practices.

Some proclaim themselves to be Gurus from the very outset and thereby attain material prosperity. Others profit by keeping ordinary people in ignorance, while externally claiming to disseminate knowledge. Many are regarded as Gurus on account of wealth, prestige, intellect, or partial scientific understanding, yet no transformation is transparent in their inner nature.

The true Gurus who had attained self-realisation did not remain merely passive or indifferent. Thus, many years passed. Reflecting within myself, I wondered whether the fault perhaps lay in me. Thereafter, resolving never to underestimate anyone, I began seeking the Truth with a more positive and humble outlook. I met many learned and wise individuals. Though each displayed exceptional mastery in his respective field, I observed that their doubts concerning the Truth were even greater than my own.

For a long time, the world around me appeared profoundly real. Every living being, every passing moment, seemed ceaselessly engaged in activity. Human life was immersed in countless occupations. I know that my own life, too, has remained overloaded with endless busyness for many years. Indeed, without even realising it, I always choose to become increasingly occupied.

Many people around me, including myself, are unable to spare even sufficient time for food or proper rest. I began to reflect deeply, wondering what hidden mystery lay behind humanity's willingness to spend so much of life in restless pursuit, while true inner peace stayed ignored insignificantly.

It was widely believed that a man must labour indefatigably throughout his life for the happiness and welfare his family. Many people affirmed this conviction convincingly.

He would often state eloquently that the mark of a wise person lies in providing every possible comfort and necessity for oneself and one's family while the capacity and resources still remain. Many spoke affectionately of him, saying that if he continued to toil throughout his lifetime, his family would one day live in great happiness. Others declared that a life without wealth, financial security, and social standing was meaningless.

Many openly expressed the view that, in this modern age, only wealth, authority, and prestige can command respect; that only such people are able to live honourably in society; that this alone is the truth of life; and that searching for any higher Truth is merely a futile endeavour leading only to hardship and disappointment.

Though there appeared to be a measure of truth in these assertions, I could not perceive the ultimate Truth within them. For I observed that, however intensely some struggled, the fruits of wealth continued to elude them. To others, prosperity arrived effortlessly and unexpectedly. Yet even when wealth was attained, happiness often remained distant. And when happiness did arise, sorrow inevitably seemed to follow close behind. These are not merely observations, but experiences, I have personally undergone and also heard narrated by many others.

Upon deep reflection and careful examination, I realised that all these worldly attainments are temporary and fleeting, not eternal. It is Truth alone that is everlasting.

One day, while reading a book, I came across these words of Swami Vivekananda:

"Childhood means simplicity. Look at the world through the eyes of a child, it is very beautiful."

After reflecting upon this profound utterance, my search for Truth took an entirely new direction.

CHAPTER 5

Words of Wisdom That Contribute to the Quest

Amidst the multitude of thoughts arising within me, I began to reflect deeply on the words of wisdom enshrined in the sacred scriptures of various faiths and proclaimed by many great souls through the strength of their profound experience.

“Truth is abandoned, and righteousness stands imprisoned.” — The Vedas

“Truth, Knowledge, Infinity — Brahman.” — The Upanishads

“Truth is the guiding rudder.” — The Brahma Sutras

“Only the one who knows the Truth can truly understand Me.” — Bhagavad Gita

“Truth is that which made me what I am.” — Zoroaster

“Truth is the very seed of Ahimsa (non-violence).” — Mahavira

“Without Truth, there can be no world.” — Gautama Buddha

“If one realises the ultimate Truth, what else remains to be known?” — Socrates

“The bond between My Father and Me is Truth.” — Jesus Christ

“Only Truth can unite man with God.” — Madhvacharya

“Truth is One; the wise expound it in many ways.” — Adi Shankaracharya

“The true purpose of Truth lies in sharing it with others.” — Ramanujacharya

“Truth is the very purpose behind my birth.” — Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)

“The answer to the question ‘Who am I?’ can be discovered only through Truth.” — Ramana Maharshi

“The pursuit of Truth is the very goal of my life.” — Mahatma Gandhi

Holding these sublime declarations of wisdom within my heart, I began to observe and examine this world anew.

CHAPTER 6

The Nature of the World and Human Life

For a long time, the world around me appeared exceedingly truthful and real. Every living being seemed constantly engaged in one activity or another, passing through life in relentless motion. Human beings appeared deeply absorbed in countless pursuits. As far as I understood, my own life too was moving swiftly. With each passing day, time itself seemed to flow even more rapidly.

Alongside me, I observed many people around me sacrificing even their rest and sleep, ceaselessly striving without pause. Witnessing such tireless exertion, a question gradually arose within me: *What is the hidden mystery behind this hurried passage of life?* This tremendous thought prompted me to reflect deeply and contemplate.

At first, it appeared that human beings labour intensely for the happiness and well-being of themselves and their families. Many strongly affirmed this belief. They declared with conviction that a wise person is one who diligently gathers everything necessary for oneself and one's household.

Many believed that if one toils throughout life and earns wealth, then the family would live happily thereafter. Some even asserted that life without money and material comforts is meaningless. According to them, in the present age, respect, honour, and social recognition are attained only through wealth, status, and worldly possessions. They maintained that such a life alone is true success, and that searching for any higher truth beyond this is merely an effort in futility. Many expressed these views with avid assurance.

Though there appeared to be some amount of truth in these arguments, entire truth still eluded me. For, despite enormous effort, many failed to acquire wealth and prosperity, while others received them effortlessly. Yet, even among those who attained material comfort, true happiness often remained distant. If joy came for a moment, sorrow seemed to follow close behind. These were not merely observations of others, I myself experienced them, and many shared similar experiences with me.

Upon careful reflection, I realised that all these are temporary conditions and not eternal truths.

Sufferings, difficulties, and disparities are present throughout human life. It became increasingly evident that no living being can entirely escape them. The difference lies only in how each one faces them. Even animals, though possessing limited

awareness, endure hardships in their own manner. The distinction appears only in the degree of understanding.

Food, sleep, and physical reproductive needs are common to all living beings. Yet human beings alone possess countless additional desires. Moreover, everyone knows that such desires have no end. Even if all wishes are fulfilled, they remain only until the end of one's mortal existence. Still, man continues to crave endlessly.

Though every person knows that death is inevitable, none truly knows when it shall arrive. Therefore, all attachment, accumulation, and worldly ownership are but temporary. The happiness experienced today may vanish tomorrow. What belongs to us now may belong to another in the future.

Some people perform noble deeds throughout their lives yet continue to suffer hardships. Others engage in wrongful actions and still enjoy pleasures. However hard some strive, desired results often remain unattained, while others receive success without visible effort. Sudden and unexpected events occur in everyone's life.

What is the mystery hidden behind all this?

No one could provide a completely satisfactory answer. Yet many thinkers proposed that these experiences arise according to the law of *Karma,* the invisible consequences of one's actions. Some suggested that this profound mystery can be understood only through spiritual wisdom. According to them, the doctrine of Karma offers a meaningful path in the search for Truth.

The wise declared that, to rise above this cycle, all actions must be performed selflessly, without attachment to personal gain. Behind this teaching, some perceived the presence of a Divine Power and referred to that Supreme Force as Bhagavan.

Others argued differently, stating that there is no external Divine intervention, and that everything proceeds solely according to the inherent force generated by one's own actions.

Some maintained that only through union with that Supreme Divine Power can one transcend the binding cycle of Karma and attain liberation.

CHAPTER 7

Karma – What Is It? What Is Bondage through Karma?

With noble and profound contemplation, countless scriptures connected with all branches of knowledge have been composed. Many great sages, through their strictly spiritual experience, have expounded the doctrine of Karma. Desiring to understand this philosophy, I began to reflect deeply on it.

During that astute investigation, certain doubts cropped up within me, and the answers that emerged are presented here.

What is Karma?

The actions performed by a living being through mind, speech, and body are called *Karma*.

What is Bondage Through Karma?

Suppose a person prepares a dish of delicious food. The cook is the doer (*Karta*).
The preparation of the delicious dish is the action (*Kriya*). Thereafter, the taste experienced on eating it is the fruit (*Phala*) as outcome. Now, from where did that taste arise? Did it emerge merely from the act of cooking? Or from the manner in which it was prepared?

Surely, it is not merely from the act itself, but from the method and intention behind it that the taste, the result arises. Karma is precisely of that nature.

Hence it is said that one must inevitably experience the fruits of one's actions.

The one who performs is the *Karta* (doer). The deed performed is the *Kriya* (action). The manner in which it is performed is *Karma*.

Thus, the nature of the result or outcome depends upon the spirit and mode in which the action is carried out.

Is It mandatory to perform Karma?

It became evident to me that no person can remain even for a single moment without engaging in action.

The wise have classified actions into three kinds:

- **Nitya Karmas** – duties that must be performed daily and unfailingly.

- **Naimittika Karmas** – actions performed on special occasions or for particular causes.
- **Kamya Karmas** – actions undertaken with a specific desire or objective in mind.

No one can find an escape from these karmas. Therefore, one must necessarily live while performing actions.

Yet there is another truth hidden within this. Karma itself is not eternal. Actions change according to time, circumstance, and need. Consequently, their results too are temporary.

Still, people often say, "I am performing these actions." Herein lies the subtle bondage.

Man is by nature bound to action. One can not avoid performing Karma. Some perform righteous deeds desiring noble outcomes, while others, driven by selfish motives, engage in wrongful actions. According to the scriptures, both good and bad deeds inevitably yield corresponding results.

The joys and sorrows experienced by human beings arise from the Karma they themselves have performed. The realised sages have declared that the results of actions performed in previous births must also be experienced in this birth. Such indeed is the doctrine of Karma.

Are the Sorrows and Joys of Life Caused by Karma Alone?

A being is born in Karma, grows through Karma, and departs amidst Karma. Therefore, Karma alone becomes the cause behind the happiness and suffering of life.

Do Actions Themselves Grant Their Results?

Karma by itself is inert; it possesses no independent power to produce results. The Supreme Divine alone dispenses the fruits of Karma. Yet, for every action performed by the individual, the Divine remains the witness.

Does Birth Continue So Long as Karma Exists?

Karma and birth are interlinked; one follows the other unfailingly. As long as Karma remains, birth too continues.

Must All Fruits of Karma Be Experienced in This Birth Alone?

Not necessarily. Some fruits are experienced in this very birth, while others remain to be experienced in future births. The wise have divided Karma into three categories:

- **Sanchita Karma** – the accumulated Karma gathered over countless births.
- **Prarabdha Karma** – that portion of accumulated Karma which has begun to fructify in the present birth.
- **Agami Karma** – the Karma being newly created, whose results are to be experienced in future births.

How Should One Perform Karma So That It Does Not Bind?

If actions are performed without selfish attachment, they do not produce bondage.

What Is Nishkama Karma?

Nishkama Karma means performing actions without desire for results and without egoistic ownership.

Actions done merely with expectation of reward lead to bondage. The very feeling, "I alone am the doer," becomes the seed of attachment. From that arises binding Karma and its inevitable fruits.

But when one understands that everything belongs to the Divine, where then is personal ownership?

Perform actions in a spirit of surrender and offer them unto the Lord.

"*Sarvam Ishwararpanamastu*", "May everything be offered unto the Divine."

We utter these sacred words, yet if actions are performed with ego and attachment, one cannot escape experiencing their consequences, whether pleasant or painful.

Therefore, actions that must be performed should be undertaken with wisdom, without possessiveness, and without egoistic feeling. When performed in such a sacred spirit, the Lord Himself accepts them.

Then Karma transforms into *Karma Yoga*.

Whether one is a householder or a renouncer (sanyasi), this spirit of desireless action alone becomes the foundation for spiritual realisation.

To obtain the grace of the Supreme Lord, this indeed is the exalted path placed before humanity.

CHAPTER 8

The Role of the Mind, Intellect, and Ego in Karma

What is the Mind? What Is Its Nature?

The *Manas* (mind) is the birth place of thoughts and imaginations. All anxieties, desires, impulses, and emotional agitations arise through the mind. Every experience first touches and is received by the mind. In the journey of human life, the mind plays a most significant role.

It is the mind that governs the *Pancha Karmendriyas* (the five organs of action) and the *Pancha Jnanendriyas* (the five organs of perception). Every desire to act first arises within the mind itself.

The function of the mind is to receive impressions of the external world through the sense organs and convey them to the intellect (*Buddhi*). Thereafter, it executes through the organs of action and the decisions are determined by the intellect.

The *Buddhi* is the faculty of discrimination and decisive understanding.

The mind is by nature restless and fickle. Though difficult to restrain, it is not impossible. To overcome its instability and wandering tendencies, one must first understand how such tendencies enter the mind.

In fact, these agitations do not inherently belong to the individual soul. Through ignorance and lack of spiritual awareness, they gradually gain entry.

The mind by itself is inert and incapable of functioning independently. Because of the presence of the conscious *Atma* within the being, the mind appears enlivened and active.

Once this truth is realised, the mind gradually loses its overpowering hold. When the mind becomes supportive and disciplined, *Jnana* (spiritual wisdom) begins its sacred work, and through wisdom, the realisation of the Self becomes attainable.

The mind alone conceives a form for the Divine, a sacred Name, and a Mantra. Faith, doubt, desire, aversion, affection, contemplation, all arise through the mind.

Everything originates in the mind.

Whether one worships the Lord in a manifest form (*Sakara*) or seeks to realise Him as the Formless Absolute (*Nirakara*), the mind remains the primary instrument.

Therefore, a spiritual aspirant must gain a complete understanding of the nature of the mind.

That towards which the mind repeatedly runs, and that which constantly occupies one's inner attention, becomes one's inner orientation.

It is the mind that creates thoughts and counter-thoughts. Likewise, it is the mind that becomes the means for *Upasana* (spiritual worship and contemplation). Through a purified mind alone can the Supreme Reality be realised. For *Atma-anubhuti* — the direct experience of the Self, the mind plays a central role.

An Illustration -

Through books, spiritual discourses, elders, and Gurus, we learn many sacred truths and noble teachings. Yet the mind does not immediately accept them.

It reflects, questions, raises doubts, discusses them with the intellect, examines them through the lens of ego, and searches for flaws within what has been understood.

The mind possesses tremendous strength. A person may appear outwardly calm, while inwardly remaining deeply disturbed.

Nothing can be truly accomplished unless the mind becomes inwardly aligned. For any undertaking to succeed, the mind must first cooperate. It must harmonise with the intellect.

Only when such harmony arises does the intellect begin to function with clarity. Gradually, a noble conviction dawns that all forms indeed belong to the Supreme Divine alone.

Then once again the mind reflects deeply and arrives at a firm and settled understanding.

The truth is that the mind, intellect, and ego are all part of the subtle material constitution. They arise from the Self and ultimately merge back into the Self.

When the mind becomes wholly absorbed in higher contemplation, wisdom begins to unfold naturally.

When the mind and wisdom unite in harmony, Self-realisation can be easier to attain.

The mastery of the mind can be achieved only through true spiritual wisdom.

Indeed, the mind is restless and unstable. Though difficult to restrain, it is certainly not impossible.

To free oneself from restlessness and instability, one must first understand how they entered the mind. They are not intrinsic to the soul. Through ignorance and spiritual forgetfulness, they gain entry into human consciousness.

By relinquishing ego, purifying the inner being, and through the light of wisdom, one must gradually cast them out.

The renunciation of ego is the final step in Karma Yoga and the very first step in Jnana Yoga.

CHAPTER 9

One Has the Right Only to Perform Karma, Never Cherish Fruits

According to *Sanatana Dharma*, Karma is inseparably woven into the very order of creation. Actions arise through the influence of the *Trigunas* — the three fundamental qualities of nature. Though Karma itself is subject to defects and limitations, living beings nevertheless remain bound by it.

To perform Karma is far nobler than to abandon it. Without action, life itself cannot continue.

No being can remain without action even for a single moment. Since the fruits of Karma are inevitable, one must engage only in righteous and noble deeds. Man possesses authority only over the performance of action, never over its fruits. By offering the fruits of Karma unto the Divine without expectation or attachment, the individual attains freedom from the cycle of birth and bondage. Such indeed is the profound declaration of *Sanatana Dharma*.

Karma itself is inert; it can not bind anyone independently. It is only the feeling, "I am the doer," (*Kartrtva Bhava*) that creates bondage.

So long as the sense of doership remains, the effects of Karma continue to influence the individual. Where there is no egoistic doership, there remains no binding effect.

When a person acts with the feeling, "I alone perform these deeds," and engages in Karma with attachment to results, he must inevitably experience their consequences. If all the fruits can not be exhausted within one birth, further births become necessary. This alone is called *Prarabdha Karma*. Thus arises bondage through the fruits of Karma.

The human being unnecessarily assumes upon himself the burden of doership. Nothing truly belongs to him, nor does anything accompany him permanently.

Before birth and after death, who indeed remains? To realise that Eternal Truth, one must undertake sincere spiritual enquiry. Then it becomes evident that it is the Divine alone who governs the vast cosmic order.

The sages proclaimed that Supreme Reality as *Parabrahman*. Through His will alone the universe functions. All creation, moving and unmoving, exists as but an expression of Him. The human being is merely an instrument. It is He alone who

causes all actions to take place through us. He alone is the inner director and sustainer of the infinite cosmos throughout endless time.

Actions performed through body, speech, and mind are called Karma. Yet, while the body outwardly performs action, it is the mind that experiences and retains its impressions. Therefore, the fruits of Karma adversely affect the mind.

When one enquires, "Who is the doer behind the mind?" the answer "I" naturally arises.

On deeper reflection, however, this "I" is found to be neither the body, nor life-force, nor mind. All these merely belong to the "I"; they are not the true Self. The real "I" stands apart as the witnessing consciousness.

That true "I" is none other than the Supreme Divine.

When the Supreme bestows complete wisdom on the individual, the delusions of mind, intellect, and ego gradually dissolve. Yet, because the embodied being continues to perform countless actions under the influence of these modifications, further births become necessary to experience their accumulated results.

Still, Karma itself remains inert and powerless to grant fruits independently. The Supreme Lord alone dispenses the results of actions, while remaining the eternal witness to all Karma performed by beings. Hence the *Bhagavad Gita* teaches that actions which must be performed should be carried out with wisdom and without egoistic attachment.

When actions are performed without possessiveness or selfish identification, the Lord Himself accepts them. Then Karma is transformed into *Karma Yoga*. To attain Divine Grace, this alone is the exalted path available to humanity.

Whether one is a householder or a sanyasi, desireless Karma alone forms the foundation of spiritual realisation.

Karma and birth remain mutually connected. As long as Karma persists, birth too continues. There can never be a state devoid of Karma while embodied existence remains. Therefore, Karma is inevitable. One must perform Karma without attachment (*Karmany Akarma*) and perceive inaction even amidst action (*Akarmani Karma*). This is the state practised by Yogis, and it is known as *Vairagya,* true detachment.

Just as the ignorant become absorbed in worldly action, the wise to continue to act, but solely for the welfare of the world.

Without condemning those immersed in action, the enlightened should gently encourage them towards righteous Karma. The ignorant, owing to ego, imagine themselves to be the sole doers of all actions. But the wise, who understand the truth of the Gunas and Karma, do not become entangled in such delusion.

The answers to all these spiritual enquiries were ultimately found in the sacred path of *Karma Yoga*.

CHAPTER 10

Nishkama Karma – The Sacred Union of Karma and Jnana Yoga

The Vedas have taught humanity the path of *Karma Yoga* to cleanse the accumulated impurities gathered across countless births. Through *Jnana Yoga*, the Upanishads have revealed the wisdom of the Self to mankind.

Though humanity has evolved through the ages, the inner tendencies of the senses, the mind, and the intellect have not fundamentally changed. Owing to these inner modifications and impurities, man fails to recognise the infinite power of the Atma residing within himself. Thus he continues to perform innumerable actions, experiences pleasure and sorrow through their consequences, undergoes death, and is born again endlessly revolving in the ocean of worldly existence.

Actions performed with attachment, desire, expectation of results, and egoistic feeling are merely *Karma*. Such actions create bondage. But actions performed without attachment, without expectation of reward, without selfish desire, and without ego become *Nishkama Karma*, Karma transformed into *Karma Yoga*.

Is Such a State Possible?

Indeed, it is possible. For what have we truly brought with us into this world? And when we depart, what can we carry away? Wealth, land, possessions, relatives, and worldly status, all must inevitably be left behind in this world. When one reflects deeply upon this truth, the path of *Nishkama Karma* naturally becomes accessible.

Do the air, water, fire, earth, and trees serve humanity expecting any reward in return?

Through one's actions, the true nature of an individual is revealed. The predominance of *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas* within a person manifest outwardly through actions. However skilfully one may conceal oneself, these qualities inevitably become visible through conduct.

Therefore, the true importance lies not merely in performing or avoiding action, but in purifying the heart and cleansing the mind of impurity.

Action without wisdom is incomplete; wisdom without righteous practice is equally fruitless.

Some scholars create divisions between Karma and Jnana and engage endlessly in philosophical arguments. Yet even for a *Sannyasi*, Nishkama Karma alone forms the very foundation. If that foundation is firm, even while remaining amidst worldly life, one may realise the Supreme Brahman.

Yajna Performed with Wisdom

The Karma performed with spiritual understanding itself becomes *Yajna*.

The one who performs the Yajna, the sacred offerings, the sacrificial fire, and the oblations, all are verily manifestations of Brahman. Likewise, the fruits of Yajna too are Brahman alone.

Similarly, during sacred *Shraddha* rites, the one who performs the ritual, those who partake of the offering, the food offered, and the result of the rite, all are forms of the Supreme Brahman.

To perform all actions in life with the spirit of Yajna is called *Brahma Karma Samadhi Nishtha*.

One who attains such steadfastness reaches the state of Brahman-consciousness.

Yajnas performed merely through material wealth and external offerings are inferior to *Jnana Yajna*, the sacrifice of wisdom. For all Karma ultimately culminates in Jnana alone.

Some regard charity itself as Yajna; some consider austerity as Yajna; others see Yogic discipline and Vedic study as Yajna. Thus, through diverse paths, seekers engage in *Jnana Yajna*. Certain Yogis regulate the vital airs through *Pranayama*, offering *Prana* into *Apana* and *Apana* into *Prana*.

Other Yogis offer the individual self into the fire of Brahman-consciousness through the light of inner awareness. One must approach such realised souls with humility, reverence, surrender, and service. By questioning them sincerely at the proper time and in the proper spirit, true wisdom may be gained.

The fire of Jnana burns all Karma into ashes.

In this world, nothing exists more purifying than Jnana. Through wisdom, supreme peace gradually dawns within.

Therefore, the Karma that must be performed should be carried out with wisdom, without egoistic attachment, and without possessiveness. Then the Lord Himself accepts those actions, and they become transformed into Karma Yoga.

To attain Divine Grace, this alone is the supreme path available to humanity. Whether one is a householder or a yogi, Nishkama Karma alone becomes the sacred foundation for Atma-anubhuti, the direct realisation of the Self.

CHAPTER 11

Karma and Jnana – Their Sacred Union

The organs of action have been given for the performance of Karma.

The intellect (*Buddhi*) has been granted for the awakening of Jnana.

The mind serves as the bridge amalgamating these two aspects.

Therefore, all actions performed by us must be guided by wisdom. Through Jnana, the Supreme Reality may be realised with considerable clarity.

To know the Eternal Truth, Jnana is essential. Yet for Jnana to arise, purity of mind (*Chitta-shuddhi*) is necessary. And to attain such purity, all scriptures unanimously declare that one must practise *Nishkama Karma,* selfless action without attachment to results.

Many realised sages and noble souls have affirmed this truth.

Everyone desires Truth and Wisdom, yet the real difficulty lies in attaining purity of mind. Without performing actions free from selfish expectation, such purity cannot arise. However, to act without expectation itself requires wisdom.

Thus, all these are deeply interconnected. In spiritual practice, ego, the feeling of "I" and "mine", repeatedly obstructs progress. From ego arise selfishness, desire, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and jealousy.

Hence, in the Vedas, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and all scriptures belonging to *Sanatana Dharma*, both Karma and Jnana are accorded equal importance.

The *Bhagavad Gita* especially emphasises the profound significance of Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga. Even Adi Shankaracharya, in his celebrated commentaries, harmonised these two paths.

Through the sacred union of Karma and Jnana, one can realise not only the Divine Presence pervading the universe, but also the inner Divine Consciousness residing within oneself.

The Supreme Reality is Truth itself. To realise that Truth, one must harmonise Karma and Jnana inseparably.

Why Must Truth Be Realised? Why should one seek Truth with such intensity? What is gained by realising it? Is it not enough merely to live one's life, perform rituals, offer worship, and engage occasionally in charity? Many people think so.

Yet, without realising Truth, true peace can never be attained. A life devoid of inner peace remains incomplete, however much wealth one may accumulate, however great one's fame, honours, or achievements may be. During my reflections, I observed that countless people live outwardly successful lives while inwardly burdened with unrest and dissatisfaction.

Why does such restlessness arise? People suppress the turmoil of the mind and outwardly pretend to live peacefully. But inwardly they continue to suffer.

All great sages and realised souls have proclaimed peace alone as the supreme necessity of life. Why have all faiths and spiritual traditions placed such importance upon peace? Can there exist any greater blessing than true inner peace?

The Cause of Restlessness

No amount of wealth, possessions, status, or worldly success can bring consummate contentment. The desire for "more" never truly ends. That endless craving itself becomes the root cause of unusual unrest. From restlessness, wisdom decays. And a life without wisdom loses its true purpose.

Thus human life becomes consumed by acrimonious endless doubts and disappointing dissatisfaction.

Therefore, all scriptures exhort humanity to realise Truth. When one sincerely begins the enquiry into Truth, gradual transformation takes place. As understanding deepens, peace slowly dawns. The mind becomes lighter, the intellect gains clarity, and the seeker experiences an indescribable inner bliss.

This state has been described variously as:

- *Advaita Siddhi*
- *Brahma-sthiti*
- *Prajna*
- *Moksha*
- *Mukti*
- *Brahmananda*
- *Samadhi*
- *Atma-anubhuti*
- Liberation and Realisation

Such attainment cannot be granted externally by another person. It must be realised within oneself.

To know Truth is to rediscover the source from which we have come and unto which we must ultimately return.

Therefore, the wise have called this path *Yoga* reunion with the Supreme.

Indeed, the very word "Religion" itself carries this deeper meaning of reunion.

The Nature of Truth

Liberation means freedom from all bondage. Realisation means direct knowledge of the Eternal Truth.

The philosophers and sages have declared that the Infinite, Eternal, and All-knowing Reality is the Supreme Lord, *Parabrahman*.

All beings and all existence are but manifestations of that Supreme Reality.

The universe has emerged from the Divine and ultimately merges back into the Divine. Many scriptures have explained this truth in diverse ways.

The sages explained that In *Sanatana Dharma*, Truth itself is symbolically worshipped through the *Linga*. From every direction, the Linga appears the same, signifying the indivisible and all-pervading nature of Truth.

"That from which the entire universe emerges and into which it finally dissolves, that alone is the Linga."

Likewise, Truth has been contemplated as *Purna* the Absolute Whole. The sacred *Shanti Mantra* declares that the Supreme Truth is eternally complete and perfect.

Truth has also been worshipped as *Omkara* composed of *A*, *U*, and *M*, symbolising creation, sustenance, and dissolution.

Adi Shankaracharya declared that Truth is One, though the wise describe it in many ways.

The Divine has been described as Truth, Wisdom, and the All-pervading Reality.

The Supreme Truth exists everywhere and in all forms.

Truth is auspicious, beautiful, and eternal.

The sacred declaration:

"Satyameva Jayate", "Truth alone triumphs"

proclaims that only Truth ultimately prevails. *Satya* (Truth), *Dharma* (Righteousness), *Shanti* (Peace), *Prema* (Love), and *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) are upheld as the noble principles that every human being must practise.

Many Yogis, Gurus, and realised masters have trodden this sacred path and attained the vision of Truth.

Among them are revered souls such as:

- Sri Krishna
- Mahavira
- Gautama Buddha
- Jesus Christ
- Adi Shankaracharya
- Ramanujacharya
- Guru Nanak
- Ramakrishna Paramahamsa
- Ramana Maharshi
- Swami Vivekananda

and many other great realised beings who attained Self-knowledge and became guiding lights to humanity.

By carefully studying their lives, one understands that Truth resides within us alone. In every being, it shines as the Atma. That Atma itself is the very form of the Supreme Divine.

The body perishes, but the Atma never dies. It alone is Eternal Truth. Yet man, identifying himself merely with the body and becoming attached to worldly pleasures and desires, performs innumerable actions driven by lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride, and jealousy. Thus he experiences joy and sorrow, dies, and is born again to exhaust the remaining fruits of Karma.

As Adi Shankaracharya declared:

“Punarapi Jananam, Punarapi Maranam” “Again birth, again death…” Thus man continues revolving within the endless cycle of birth and death.

Then how is *Atma-anubhuti* to be attained?

Sanatana Dharma has shown a clear and sacred path for that highest realisation. I therefore began to contemplate and examine that path deeply...

CHAPTER 12

Devotion, Knowledge and Detachment

Devotion, Knowledge and Detachment are the successive steps that lead one towards Self-realisation.

Devotion (Bhakti) steadfast faith in that which is true and eternal.

Knowledge (Jnana) the realisation of the Eternal Reality.

Detachment (Vairagya) renunciation of that which is transient and unreal.

Devotion, Knowledge and Detachment are inseparably interwoven, each supporting and strengthening the other.

In its simplest and highest sense, devotion is the supreme love of the individual soul for the Supreme Being.

Devotion is the sacred bond that unites the Jiva (individual soul) with the Divine.

Through devotion, may the soul attain immeasurable bliss and spiritual fulfilment.

If the body and mind are not stirred by divine joy and inner exaltation, it cannot truly be called devotion.

Where there is genuine devotion, there can be no fear.

Where fear prevails, devotion becomes nothing more than outward pretence.

Devotion may broadly be classified into three forms.

Sakama Bhakti (Devotion with Desire) Such devotion may help fulfil worldly aspirations and personal desires, but it does not, by itself, lead to Self-realisation.

Nishkama Bhakti (Desireless Devotion) In this state, desires gradually cease to exist. Ignorance is dispelled, and devotion becomes pure, selfless, and free from expectation.

Ananya Bhakti (Single-minded Devotion) This is unwavering and unconditional faith in the Divine, without any reservations or worldly motives.

Through such exclusive devotion, one attains direct spiritual experience and true wisdom. Gradually, the devotee realises the profound truth that the Supreme Self and one's own Self are not separate, but One.

This is the path followed by countless devotees. By worshipping the Lord with love and surrendering oneself as His humble servant, the ego of the individual gradually

diminishes. In the initial stages of spiritual practice, this is among the easiest and most accessible methods.

When good deeds are performed out of love for God, selfishness slowly disappears. However, such actions should arise solely from devotion to the Divine and never from fear, personal gain, or selfish motives.

By practising **Sakaropasana**, the worship of the Lord through sacred forms such as images, pictures, or consecrated idols, with unwavering faith and devotion, and by engaging in actions that are pleasing to the Divine, one attains the highest spiritual benefit.

Whether one's pursuits are material or spiritual, virtuous or otherwise, the essential requirement is devotion, devotion alone.

The primary purpose of devotional worship, which begins with offering external flowers to the sacred image of the Lord, is to gradually elevate the devotee to the stage of offering the flower of the mind itself at the feet of the Supreme Being. The worship of the Divine in consecrated forms serves as a sacred means to attain this higher state of inner devotion.

To transcend the notion that God exists only in a particular form and to behold the Supreme Being in all living creatures is known as **Parabhakti** (Supreme Devotion) or **Vishishta Bhakti** (Exalted Devotion).

In the **Bhagavad Gita**, the Jagadguru, Lord Shri Krishna, teaches that rather than merely offering back to God the objects He Himself has created, a devotee should offer unto the Supreme Being a mind purified through sincere self-endeavour and spiritual discipline.

The flowers offered in external worship eventually fade and wither. However, the virtues employed in the worship of the Supreme Lord, self-control, compassion towards all beings, non-violence, forgiveness, peace, austerity, truthfulness, and meditation, constitute the sacred **Eight Flowers of Worship**.

These divine flowers never perish nor lose their fragrance. Instead, they continually blossom within the heart and lead the devotee towards Self-knowledge and spiritual enlightenment.

Through this sublime path of devotion, one should strive to discipline the mind and establish it firmly in the Self. When this is accomplished, the mind gradually loses its separate identity and shines forth as pure consciousness.

For liberation pertains to the mind and not to the Atman. The Atman is ever free and remains untouched by the bondage or liberation of the individual being.

To attain the state beyond rebirth, the individual soul must realise and abide in its eternal source, the Supreme Self.

The Atman is eternally pure; purity is its intrinsic nature. It is only the mind that requires purification. When the mind becomes pure and stainless, reflecting the innate purity of the Atman, the individual attains the exalted state of **Kaivalya** the supreme state of absolute freedom, spiritual perfection, and union with the Eternal Reality.

In the **Bhagavad Gita**, Lord Krishna, the **Gitacharya**, instructs **Partha** the representative of all humanity, that this supreme state may be attained with great ease through **Bhakti Yoga**, the harmonious union of devotion, knowledge, and detachment.

This is made possible through unwavering and undivided devotion to the Lord. One must firmly hold fast to the Divine Feet and never relinquish them. When all other means prove inadequate, the Supreme Being extends His compassionate hand to the devotee, raises him up, and lovingly absorbs him into His own Being.

Just as a living being is born in a state of purity, so too should it depart from this world in purity.

During the course of life, regardless of the trials, hardships, and obstacles encountered whether arising from **Maya** (ignorance) or from the accumulated effects of previous births, this purity must be regained and preserved. This is the highest goal that every living being is destined to attain.

The **Jagadguru**, Lord Shri Krishna, counselled Arjuna that among all spiritual paths, the path of devotion is the simplest and most accessible.

Through such devoted worship, sincerity and purity of heart gradually blossom. Thereafter, the devotee acquires the discrimination, wisdom, and spirit of enquiry necessary for the practice of **Nirguna Upasana,** the contemplation of the Formless Absolute.

The spiritual journey that begins with the attitude of **“Daso’ham”** (“I am Thy servant”) ultimately culminates in the realisation of **“Soham”** (“I am That”).

There must be knowledge within devotion.

Where there is true knowledge, there arises detachment.

Where detachment abides, there the Supreme Being reveals His presence.

So long as the mind remains attached to external objects, the vision of the Self cannot arise. The attention that is directed outward must be gently turned inward. This

inward journey constitutes the first step towards devotion, knowledge, and detachment.

True detachment is cultivated through the disciplined practice of **Karma Yoga** and **Jnana Yoga**.

For this reason, the wise dedicate all their actions to the Divine. Performing their duties solely through the senses, they remain free from personal expectations and from the involvement of ego, mind, and intellect.

Detachment born of disappointment, frustration, or aversion is not enduring. Such dispassion is temporary and can not lead to lasting spiritual attainment.

When one performs one's duties without the sense of personal credit or ownership, genuine detachment gradually blossoms within.

With the sacred awareness, **"Thou art my very Self"** and **"All my actions are offered unto Thee,"** one continues to perform every duty as an act of worship.

Vairagya is not the abandonment of action; rather, it is the performance of action without attachment, ego, possessiveness, or expectation of reward.

Such detachment purifies the heart, deepens devotion, and prepares the seeker for the direct realisation of the Supreme Self.

CHAPTER 13

Truth, Knowledge, Infinity and Brahman

Having realised that the nature of Truth is expounded in great depth within the **Prasthanatraya,** the **Upanishads**, **Brahma Sutras**, and the **Bhagavad Gita,** I commenced a sincere study of these sacred scriptures.

To understand Truth, one must first comprehend the underlying **Tattva**, the essential nature and reality of a thing.

The **Prasthanatraya** teaches that one should understand and live in accordance with **Sahaja Dharma**, the natural and eternal law that governs existence.

Throughout the ages, countless sages, seers, and philosophers, driven by a profound yearning to perceive the Truth, have undertaken intense spiritual enquiry and austerities. Through their penance and contemplation, they realised the highest truths concerning the universe.

They sought answers to fundamental questions: What is this universe? How did it come into being? Who is its creator and sustainer? How long will it endure? What is its ultimate destiny?

Having realised these truths through direct experience, they compassionately bestowed their wisdom upon humanity.

Moreover, they taught that this Truth can be realised only through **Tapas,** earnest spiritual striving born of an intense desire to know Reality.

Tapas does not merely signify physical austerity. It encompasses the disciplined control of the senses, mastery over the mind, steadfastness in spiritual pursuit, and unwavering dedication to the quest for Truth.

It is through such sincere effort and inner discipline that one gains both the strength and the courage necessary to realise the Supreme Reality.

The sages taught that the mind must be brought under disciplined control and steadily fixed upon a single, noble objective.

The declaration **"Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam Brahma"** signifies that Brahman is the all-pervading and self-existent, Eternal Reality. Having directly realised this Supreme Truth and experienced the bliss of Brahman, the great seers compassionately revealed the path to humanity.

In this sacred Mahavakya, **Satyam** denotes absolute Existence, **Jnanam** signifies Pure Consciousness or Divine Knowledge, and **Anantam** denotes the Infinite and Eternal. The harmonious unity of these attributes is referred to as **Brahman**.

Brahman is the Supreme Reality that pervades all things and is, at the same time, the very essence of everything that exists. This alone is the Ultimate Truth.

The sages have explained that the universe of names and forms is but the manifestation (**Vibhuti**) of that Supreme Reality.

This true Brahman permeates all animate and inanimate existence alike. The entire creation is sustained through the interrelationship of the sentient and the insentient. Perceiving the Supreme Principle underlying this vast cosmos, numerous sages and ascetics explored its mystery through deep contemplation and spiritual realisation, and conveyed their wisdom to humanity through the **Upanishads**.

This constitutes the **First Prasthana**.

The essence of all the Upanishads is embodied in the **Bhagavad Gita**, which forms the **Second Prasthana**. The essential teachings of both the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita are systematically expounded in the **Brahma Sutras**, which constitute the **Third Prasthana**. Vedavyasa offered these three sacred foundations of Vedanta, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Brahma Sutras, have been bequeathed to humanity through the timeless wisdom of the **Vedas**, serving as an unfailing guide to the realisation of Brahman.

The scriptures referred to above are vast and profound. To comprehend them fully and assimilate their teachings is no easy task. It was for the spiritual upliftment of humanity that **Jagadguru Shri Adi Shankaracharya** distilled their essential wisdom and presented it through his illuminating commentaries in a clear and accessible manner.

Inspired by this noble endeavour, I too have undertaken a humble effort to study and understand these teachings for the attainment of true knowledge.

At the very outset of this spiritual journey, I was deeply inspired by a sublime **Shanti Mantra**:

Om Purnam Adah Purnam Idam

Purnat Purnam Udacyate

Purnasya Purnam Adaya

Purnam Evavasisyate

The essence of this sacred mantra is that the Supreme Reality is **Purna,** perfect, complete, indivisible, and infinite. From that Supreme Being, this entire universe has emerged. It exists in Him, is sustained by Him, and ultimately merges back into Him.

Yet, to ordinary perception, the world appears to exist as something separate from the Supreme Reality.

This apparent separateness is the result of **Mithya**, **Maya**, or **Avidya** illusion and ignorance.

When this veil of ignorance is removed, it becomes evident that the Supreme Self alone is the Truth, the Eternal, and the Perfect Whole.

Naturally, the world appears real to the individual being. This is because most of one's life is intimately bound to worldly existence. From birth until death, the living being remains closely associated with the world and its experiences.

Through these associations arise numerous relationships, attachments, and emotional bonds. Gradually, a deep attachment to the material world develops, causing the individual to identify more with the transient and the external than with the eternal Reality that underlies all existence.

He comes to feel that his life is a waste if he does not have certain things and certain people. With some fear and some devotion, he begins to worship the God of his choice. With that belief, he prays to God to grant him what he wants.

If they are fulfilled, he praises God as being very great. If they are not fulfilled, he blames God. If suddenly some are fulfilled, he again believes in God and starts measuring even more. The way of measuring changes. A little pomp and modernity is added. He increases the expenditure in worshipping God.

He increases his credit. He increases his belief that the God he believes in will never deceive him. He starts seeking new and expensive desires. Slowly he comes to the realization that all this pleasure is the result of his previous birth.

Thus, ego increases, faith in God decreases. Fear increases, and true devotion decreases.

In this state of confusion, he ignores the real truth. He makes no attempt to know the truth. He lives in illusion all his life and dies in illusion.

He takes another body to experience the results of his good and bad deeds. But the eternal, indestructible soul alone remains within him as a witness.

The body of every living being that is born changes and eventually perishes. The only thing that is truly changeless and eternal is the soul.

This eternal and true soul resides in every living being. Every living being is an embodiment of soul.

Among all living beings, the human being is naturally endowed with the highest capacity for knowledge and discernment. When the senses, mind, and intellect are harmoniously coordinated, a person lives wisely and joyfully, established in Self-awareness. Yet the very same individual, if unable to govern and integrate these faculties, may disregard his true nature and make life burdensome through ignorance and confusion.

The knowledge bestowed by the Supreme Being is intended to awaken the Divine Self that resides within every individual.

Indeed, spirituality is nothing other than the sincere pursuit of Self-knowledge.

However, under the influence of **Maya** and ignorance, a person comes to regard the physical body as the ultimate reality. Unable to restrain the senses, unable to govern the desires arising in the mind, and constantly driven by worldly cravings, he engages in countless actions that strengthen attachment and bondage. Thus, failing to attain Self-knowledge and unable to perceive the Ultimate Truth, he eventually reaches the end of his earthly life. At that moment, the eternal and pure **Atman** departs from the body.

Throughout the lifetime of the individual, the Atman remains merely as a witness within the body. The actions performed by the embodied being do not affect the Atman in any way. Whether those actions are virtuous or sinful, it is the individual soul, identified with the body and mind, that must assume another birth in order to experience their consequences.

To realise the Self is to transcend the binding effects of all karma. This state of complete freedom is what the sages describe as **Liberation (Moksha)**.

The attainment of Self-knowledge begins with sincerity of purpose, purity of heart, and earnest spiritual aspiration.

A restless and agitated mind can never perceive the Self. Only a mind that has become tranquil, disciplined, and inwardly focused is capable of recognising the eternal presence of the Atman.

Therefore, the seeker must first cultivate inner sincerity, steadiness, and self-discipline. When the turbulence of the mind subsides, the light of Self-knowledge shines forth naturally, revealing the Supreme Truth that has always dwelt within.

To purify the mind, the ego, the sense of “I” and “mine”, must first be dissolved.

This is the foremost step on the spiritual path. Can such a transformation occur in one who thinks only of personal gain at every moment? Can it be attained by one who performs every action solely for self-interest? **Sanatana Dharma** affirms that it is indeed possible through steadfast and uncompromising spiritual practice.

The seeker must first develop a clear understanding that the same **Atman** dwells within every living being. Thereafter, one must cultivate the noble disposition of viewing all creatures with equal vision and impartial compassion. This effort should be continuous and unwavering.

To achieve this, every action should be performed without selfish desire and without expectation of personal reward. Such action, offered in a spirit of surrender, gradually purifies the heart and frees the mind from attachment.

One should possess firm faith that the Divine provides what is truly necessary, even without being asked. Such faith must be accompanied by courage, patience, and perseverance. The seeker should constantly strive to perceive the underlying unity that pervades all existence.

The **Puranas** and **Ithihasas** should not be approached merely as narratives of the past. One must seek the deeper significance concealed within them. Likewise, the truths embedded in the **Shastras** should be explored with reverence and discernment. Beyond the stories themselves lie profound spiritual principles intended to guide humanity towards Truth.

If one clings only to the literal narrative, doubts inevitably arise and persist. When doubts dominate, the deeper truth remains concealed.

Similarly, the seeker must strive to understand the inner significance of the karmas prescribed in the **Vedas** and realise the wisdom expounded in the **Vedanta**.
The external practice is but a means; the ultimate purpose is the attainment of spiritual understanding.

One should patiently await the guidance of a true **Guru,** one who has realised the profound mystery of **"action in inaction and inaction in action"**, and who embodies the purity of the threefold path of devotion, knowledge, and selfless action.

When faith becomes complete and unwavering, the Guru need not be sought. By the grace of the Divine, the Guru Himself appears and guides the sincere seeker towards the light of Self-realisation.

CHAPTER 14

Atman, Paramatman and Self-Knowledge

What is the **Atman**? What is the **Paramatman**?

What is the relationship between the individual Self and the Supreme Self?

The Atman can not easily be described as a particular object or entity, for It is that which exists equally in all things and pervades all existence.

The Atman is the One who is adored as the Supreme Reality, who manifests as the vital life-force, and who dwells within all beings.

The sages declare that the Atman is the **ear of the ear, the mind of the mind, the speech of speech, the life of life, and the eye of the eye**. It is the innermost source that empowers every faculty and every function of existence.

That towards which the mind repeatedly turns, that which it constantly seeks to know, and that which remains the ultimate object of its deepest contemplation, that is the Atman.

This very Atman is known as **Brahman**, the Supreme and Infinite Reality.

Though beyond the grasp of the senses and the intellect, it is the eternal witness of all thoughts, perceptions, and experiences. Ever-present, self-luminous, and unchanging, the Atman shines alike in all beings as the essence of their existence and the source of their consciousness.

To realise this truth is the highest Self-knowledge and the ultimate purpose of human life.

Just as water and air assume the form and characteristics of the objects with which they come into contact, so too the individual soul appears to identify itself with the various bodies and conditions through which it functions.

Just as an object shines when illumined by the light of the sun, so does every form of life become conscious and active when enlivened by the presence of the Atman.

The Atman, which is Brahman itself, is eternal, self-luminous, all-pervading, and ever-present as the witness of all experiences. Residing within all beings, it is realised through true knowledge. This Self-consciousness remains forever as the foundation and witness of every thought, perception, and act of knowing. This alone is the Truth.

Though distinctions appear to exist between the bodies of the individual soul (**Jivatman**) and the Supreme Soul (**Paramatman**), the Consciousness that shines within both is one and the same.

As its very name implies, the body is the dwelling place of the **Purusha**, the indwelling Self. One who meditates upon that Divine Presence is freed from sorrow and attains inner peace. While the body gradually ages, decays, and perishes, the Atman remains eternal and assumes another body in accordance with the cosmic law.

This body serves as the field of experience for the **Jivatman**. Likewise, the entire universe serves as the cosmic field of expression for the **Paramatman**. The Supreme Soul is the underlying unity that pervades and sustains all individual souls.

That Reality which remains connected with the universe through all states of experience, whether waking, dreaming, or deep sleep, is the one Supreme Self. It shines within all beings as the very essence of their existence.

The One who bestows the sense of life, and the One through whom all beings receive that life, is none other than the **Paramatman** Himself.

Thus, the Supreme Soul dwells equally in all beings, silently sustaining, guiding, and illumining all existence from within.

The power that governs and sustains the orderly movement of the planets, stars, and celestial bodies in their prescribed courses throughout the cosmos is none other than the **Paramatman**, the Supreme Spirit.

The Supreme Soul manifests as the individual living being by imparting life and consciousness. When the vital force that animates the body is withdrawn, the individual being ultimately returns to its source in the Supreme Reality.

The **Paramatman** is the very essence of the universe. In truth, there is no real separation between the world and the Supreme Being, for all existence is pervaded and sustained by Him.

This is the inner significance of the declarations of the **Upanishads**: **"Brahman is the Atman; Brahman is the Jiva; Brahman is my very Self."** These sacred teachings proclaim the essential unity of the individual soul and the Supreme Reality.

From That which the individual being has emerged, to That it must ultimately return. The **Jivatman**, having manifested from the **Paramatman**, must once again realise and abide in the Supreme Self. This alone is the true destiny and essential nature of the living being.

It is this union that the sages and elders have described as **Yoga**.

Only when this union is attained does the drama of worldly existence reach its fulfilment. This culmination is not brought about merely by the death of the physical body.

So long as the individual soul has not realised its unity with the Supreme Soul, the cycle of birth and death continues unabated.

It is **Knowledge (Jnana)** that unites the individual being with the Supreme Reality.

Such knowledge is attained through the practice of **Nishkama Karma**, selfless action performed without attachment to its fruits.

To know one's own true nature is **Atma-Sakshatkara** (Self-realisation), **Atma-Darshana** (vision of the Self), and ultimately **Isvara-Darshana** (vision of the Divine).

The Self-realised sage, having directly experienced that Supreme Spiritual Reality, transcends all limitations and attains the ineffable **Brahmananda,** the boundless bliss of Brahman.

Established in that state, he remains ever free, ever peaceful, and ever united with the Eternal Truth.

CHAPTER 15

Time, the Timeless, and Eternity

From time immemorial, human beings have sought to understand and measure **Time**. Throughout history, man has organised his activities according to the passage of time, recording events, regulating duties, and assigning specific periods for every aspect of life.

Scholars and astronomers have determined the measurement of time through the movements of celestial bodies. Different systems of timekeeping have been established across nations and cultures. Time has been further divided according to regions and localities. Even the vast distances between planets and heavenly bodies have been calculated with reference to time.

Our ancient seers displayed remarkable wisdom in their understanding of time. They classified and measured it through various units such as **Vighadiyas**, **Ghadiyas**, **Horas**, **Lagnas**, **Sandhyas**, days, months, years, **Yugas**, and **Kalpas**.

Throughout the ages, countless thinkers and scholars have undertaken extensive studies and experiments to determine the nature and measurement of time. Numerous methods of calculation have been devised and practised.

Some systems remained in use for a period and were later replaced by others as human understanding evolved and new methods emerged. Yet, despite these varied approaches to measuring time, the mystery of Time itself continues to inspire enquiry and contemplation.

For while humanity may measure the passage of time, the deeper question remains: What is the true nature of Time, and what lies beyond it?

Many such systems have gradually fallen out of use and disappeared with the passage of time. Indeed, the measurement of time is not a simple undertaking, for the true nature and ultimate mystery of Time itself have never been completely comprehended. Consequently, all systems of timekeeping are, in essence, human constructs devised to facilitate the orderly conduct of life.

Throughout history, numerous calendars have emerged, often associated with great emperors, renowned personalities, and the traditions of particular regions and civilisations. Different nations have developed their own methods of reckoning time according to their geographical conditions, cultural heritage, and religious practices.

In our own country, a variety of calendrical systems continue to be in use. Several **solar** and **lunar calendars** are followed, while some systems are based upon the transit and cycles of **Brihaspati (Jupiter)**. Over the centuries, refinements, corrections, and adjustments have naturally been incorporated into these systems in accordance with astronomical observations and evolving understanding.

In more recent times, distinguished scholars such as **B. V. Raman**, **N. C. Lahiri**, **Dwivedi**, and **K. S. Krishnamurti** devoted themselves to extensive research in the field of astrology and astronomical calculations, providing authoritative almanacs and ephemerides. Their contributions have earned recognition far beyond traditional astrological circles, and many of their calculations have proved valuable in the study of celestial phenomena and space exploration.

By the grace of the Divine, I had the privilege of studying astrology under the guidance of my revered father for nearly fifteen years.

During this period, I gained an understanding of the solar system and the **Navagrahas** (Nine Planetary Influences), their positions, distances, characteristics, governing principles, classifications, and movements. I studied their influence upon the Earth, their effects upon human beings and other living creatures, the role of gravitational forces, their orbital periods around the Sun, and their subtle relationship with life, including their influence upon the developing foetus and the various stages of human existence.

I also became acquainted with the principles of **Kendras**, **Konas** (angular houses), **Rasis** (zodiacal signs), **Astakavarga**, planetary aspects (**Drstis**), **Dasas**, **Antardasas**, and other predictive systems. Furthermore, I studied the interpretation of various astrological charts, including the **Rasi Chakra**, **Navamsa Chakra**, **Arudha Chakra**, and the analysis of the birth horoscope.

Through these studies, I came to appreciate not only the complexity of cosmic order but also the profound wisdom with which our ancient seers sought to understand the relationship between time, the cosmos, and human life.

My studies encompassed numerous aspects of traditional astrology, including **Lagna**, **Chandra Lagna**, **Gochara** (planetary transits), **Kuja Dosa (Mangala Dosa)**, **Bhrigu Satkam**, ascendant strength, the strength of **Guru (Jupiter)**, various **Yogas** and their results, planetary conjunctions, **Astangata Dosa** (combustion), **Chandalatva Dosa**, **Kalasarpa Dosa**, **Balarishta**, **Ardhastama Sani**, **Astama Sani**, the interpretation of female horoscopes, **Muhurta** calculations, **Adhika Masa**, and **Sunya Masa**.

As I pursued these studies, many questions arose in my mind.

What influence do these planetary configurations truly exert upon the material world, and how long do such influences endure? Do they genuinely alter the course of human life? If so, to what extent? Are all the events that unfold in a person's life entirely governed by planetary positions?

If the effects of past karmas are real, are they merely reflected through the movements of the planets, or are they independent of them? Are the latent impressions (**Vasanas**) accumulated through previous births also subject to planetary influences?

Is the Supreme Being truly employing these celestial bodies as instruments in the administration of cosmic law? Do the planets possess the power to alter the destiny of human beings, or are such beliefs merely matters of faith and interpretation?

Should planetary movements be regarded simply as a means of measuring and indicating time, or do they possess the capacity to shape the fortunes and experiences of living beings?

Consider the case of twins born at nearly the same moment, under the same ascendant, with identical planetary positions and almost identical horoscopes. Why then do significant differences often emerge in their lives? Are the planets the governing force, or are they themselves subordinate to the law of karma?

Do all events in life unfold strictly according to predetermined cosmic timing, as some scholars maintain? What is truth, and what is merely assumption? What is reality, and what is misconception?

What did the ancient sages truly teach, and what have we, in the course of time, understood or misunderstood from their teachings?

These questions compelled me to look beyond the external framework of astrology and seek its deeper purpose.

For the true intention of **Jyothishya Sastra** was never to encourage blind dependence upon celestial bodies or to transform human beings into worshippers of planets. Rather, astrology was intended to serve as a guiding light, directing mankind towards Truth, self-understanding, and the recognition of the Divine order that governs the universe.

Its ultimate purpose is not merely prediction, but illumination.

That is why it is called **Jyothishya,** the Science of Light.

Over the course of time, however, some have altered its original spirit and transformed it into a discipline that instils fear rather than understanding.

Though astrology possesses the ability to calculate and interpret the movements of time, it has been employed by different people in different ways. Some accept it out of fear, while others reject it altogether. Much of this confusion arises because its true purpose and underlying principles have not been properly understood.

No genuine science is meant to frighten humanity.

Its purpose is to reveal truth.

Every branch of knowledge raises questions and invites enquiry. Certain truths can be understood only through study, reflection, and personal experience.

It is through the divine gift of intelligence and discernment that human beings are expected to resolve such doubts. One should not remain permanently trapped in uncertainty. For this reason, the elders have always emphasised that true knowledge is indispensable for the realisation of Truth.

This principle applies not only to scientific enquiry but also to the understanding of our sacred scriptures and traditions. To comprehend the deeper significance of the **Puranas**, profound knowledge and discernment are required.

Why did **Maharshi Vyasa**, the embodiment of wisdom, compose the **Ashtadasha Puranas**, the Eighteen Great Puranas? What truths did he seek to convey through them? What deeper meanings lie hidden beneath their narratives?

Most people recognise the Puranas merely as collections of stories. However, when they are approached with wisdom, contemplation, and spiritual insight, their inner truths gradually reveal themselves.

Behind every narrative lies a profound philosophical principle, a moral teaching, or a spiritual truth intended to guide humanity towards higher understanding.

It was with immense compassion and extraordinary effort that Maharshi Vyasa bestowed these Puranas upon the world. Their purpose was not merely to entertain or preserve history, but to illuminate the path of wisdom and help seekers realise the eternal truths underlying human existence.

When studied with knowledge and reflection, the stories disappear into the background, and the Truth they were designed to convey shines forth in all its splendour.

Each **Purana** reveals a distinct aspect of Divine Philosophy. Behind every philosophy lies a profound spiritual truth. If the Puranas are viewed merely as stories, they will remain nothing more than stories.

In time, their deeper significance may be forgotten. It is therefore the responsibility of the wise and discerning to preserve them as invaluable repositories of spiritual wisdom and knowledge. We must recognise that if these sacred teachings are distorted or misunderstood, we risk losing touch with the very foundations of our cultural and spiritual heritage.

However extensively humanity may divide and measure time, **Time itself never pauses for anyone**. It moves ceaselessly forward, fulfilling its own eternal purpose.

This leads us to a deeper enquiry: What is the ultimate truth that lies behind Time?

What is the governing principle that directs the movement of time throughout the universe?

Who is the One that presides over the flow of Time?

Who is the embodiment of Time itself?

Who is the One that transcends Time, the Timeless Reality?

If the answers to these questions are truly realised, there remains no time to be wasted.

For the seeker who understands the mystery of Time discovers that behind all change stands the Changeless, behind all movement stands the Motionless, and behind the ceaseless flow of time stands the Eternal Reality.

To know That is to know the Truth. To realise That is to transcend the limitations of time itself.

CHAPTER 16

Human Intelligence, Technology, and Knowledge

In the present age, man strives to analyse everything through the lens of technology and scientific reasoning. In this endeavour, he has achieved remarkable success in numerous fields. Yet, despite extensive research and relentless exploration, there remain certain truths upon which he has not attained complete clarity.

He acquired the knowledge and skill to replace the human heart, yet he could not identify the true nature of the mind. He has been unable to perceive the subtle patterns of thought that arise within different individuals. He demonstrated the ability to alter and influence the brain, yet he could not discern what knowledge resides within each mind.

The knowledge possessed by humanity has not been sufficient to unveil the unseen Truth. However much effort may be expended, however many rituals may be performed, and however many traditions may be established, only a rare few have been blessed with the vision to behold the Ultimate Reality.

Man has discovered countless medicines, yet new diseases continue to emerge as formidable challenges. When bacterial diseases were brought under control, viral diseases appeared. Even today, there is no definitive cure for the common cold. It is often said that a cold lasts seven days if treated and seven days if left untreated.

He has identified numerous forms of cancer, yet a complete cure for every type of cancer remains elusive. The fundamental causes of many cancers continue to be the subject of ongoing research. As human intelligence advances, new challenges arise alongside it.

Likewise, not everything can be explained through the technology and knowledge presently available to us. It is true that certain questions may never find complete answers. We must learn to accept this reality rather than seek to challenge it endlessly. In the same manner, research continues into the origin of life itself.

Even today, humanity does not possess a conclusive answer to the question of whether life emerged from pre-existing life or arose from non-living matter.

A question then arose within me: *"Does one require vast knowledge and learning in order to realise the Truth?"* With this thought, I began my exploration. The remarkable discovery was that extensive worldly knowledge is not a prerequisite for

attaining Self-knowledge. Spiritual realisation is not dependent upon academic learning or worldly scholarship.

The life histories of many great saints and realised souls teach us that what is truly required is an earnest longing to know the Truth, coupled with the sincere discipline and practice necessary to attain it.

In recent times, we have come to know of great souls such as Tulsidas and Kabir Das, Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Sri Sarada Mata, Sri Anandamayi Mata, Sri Mother Teresa, Sri Tajuddin Baba, Sri Gajanan Maharaj, Sri Ammajan, Sri Yukteswar Giri, Sri Manikya Prabhu, Sri Shirdi Sai Baba, Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati, Sri Upasani Baba, and Sri Paramacharya Chandrasekharendra Mahaswami, attained self-realization through practice without pursuing any secular education.

The practice of devotion, knowledge, and renunciation made them see the truth. Bhakti is unwavering faith in the Supreme Soul. Many people have expressed this devotion in many ways. Whatever the form, the basis of devotion is unwavering faith and courageous patience. If these two are lacking, the practice of devotion will falter midway.

Devotion, practiced with care and patience, gradually dispels ignorance. The divinity seen in an idol or a person gradually becomes visible in all things, in everyone, and everywhere.

This knowledge is the beginning of knowledge. Everything appears as the Supreme Soul. Illusion and delusion disappear. Pure knowledge arises.

The truth begins to be discerned!

Dispassion is achieved through the wisdom of knowing what is true and what is illusion!

Let go of illusions and the real truth will emerge!

One gets the darshan of the pure Brahma, the Supreme Soul!

The world around us is ever changing. That is the nature of the world. But within it lies the eternal truth of the Supreme Being. This entire world is the manifestation of the Supreme Being. It belongs to no one but Him.

If we look at the world with such a vision, the Supreme Being is visible everywhere. The feeling of “I am” and “mine” does not arise. Then all the actions performed by a living being naturally become irreligious (without expecting results).

That is why the Upanishads indicate that wise people perform actions with such a sense of sacrifice and attain self-knowledge.

Sri Adi Shankara's doctrine is that self-knowledge is salvation.

The implication here is that "all actions for knowledge are asceticism."

The real secret of this theory is that those who follow the path of karma merely for the sake of reward (desire for results) without attaining self-knowledge are bound to be reborn according to the results of their karma.

The Supreme Soul is the ultimate meaning. That is all that the living entity needs to know. There is no living entity without the soul. The senses of the living entity can not perceive the soul. The soul is faster than the mind. The soul is the eternal truth.

Self-knowledge is like light. Without it, everything appears impenetrable. Then Maya/Avidya/Ignorance takes over. Everything visible to the eye appears as truth. Running after them, the living entity cannot recognize the eternal truth, the Self.

CHAPTER 17

Today's Youth and Spiritual Awareness

A section of today's youth regards spiritual enquiry as something outdated and irrelevant. However, if they sincerely ask themselves why it appears outdated, they may discover that such a perception arises only from their own viewpoint.

But is this truly so? Let us all reflect deeply and seek the answer within ourselves.

Spirituality does not merely mean leaving one's home each morning to worship God, nor does it mean visiting a place of worship every day. True spirituality is the process of knowing one's own real nature. This principle applies equally to followers of all faiths and religions.

How can one hope to know God without first knowing who one truly is? Let us contemplate this deeply.

If we reflect deeply, our own conscience tells us that much of our devotion and faith is often practised because of reverence mixed with fear of God, because others around us do the same, because our forefathers followed these traditions, or because we believe it is our Dharma and therefore our duty to observe it. There is certainly value in such observance. Yet, if we continue in this manner alone, have we truly attained the Darshan of the Divine? Have we genuinely understood His real nature?

It is for this reason that, in order to understand the Divine, one requires not only the mind and intellect but also true knowledge. The Paramatma, in His infinite grace, has bestowed mind and intellect upon every human being. But what is knowledge?

Knowledge is the complete and proper understanding of a subject or reality.

Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of knowledge, material knowledge and spiritual knowledge.

Material knowledge explains the physical properties and characteristics of matter.

Spiritual knowledge is the understanding of the Chaitanya, the Divine Consciousness or Quintessence that pervades and sustains all existence.

Likewise, scriptural learning constitutes a form of knowledge. This includes the study and understanding of the Vedas, Upanishads, Shastras, Puranas, Itihasas, and other sacred texts.

Yet, above all, experiential wisdom is the cornerstone of spiritual education. Practical realisation born of direct experience is the true foundation of spiritual growth.

To realise the Atma, a living being requires not only intelligence but also true knowledge illuminated by experience. Knowledge that remains confined to theory and is not supported by personal experience serves little purpose. The Ultimate Truth can not be comprehended through intellectual or scientific understanding alone.

This is a matter that deserves deep and careful contemplation.

Just as every mango blossom does not mature into a fruit, not every spiritual aspirant attains the realisation of the Paramatma. Many discontinue their journey midway. Some fail at the very stage of spiritual awakening due to ignorance, while others progress to a certain level of understanding but become entangled in worldly attractions and material desires, thereby losing their way.

What is the reason for this?

They may possess abundant theoretical and scriptural knowledge, yet lack experiential wisdom. Therefore, both forms of knowledge must be harmonised in the pursuit of Truth. Spiritual practice (*Sadhana*) is the continuous and steadfast effort undertaken to attain a sacred goal.

Such practice must be carried out in the light of the knowledge and experience one has acquired. For the impurities accumulated in this life, as well as the latent worldly tendencies carried forward from previous births, to be completely removed, a living being must gradually gain mastery over the mind through constant and dedicated practice.

The mind, which relentlessly pursues fleeting sensory pleasures, must be redirected towards the eternal and everlasting Paramatma. Having acquired knowledge, one must cultivate detachment (*Vairagya*) through disciplined practice. Through experiential wisdom, one should develop equal vision towards all living beings. Through meditation (*Dhyana*), one should gradually withdraw attention from worldly distractions. Through self-enquiry (*Atma-vichara*), one should strive to realise the Supreme Reality.

Who is God?

What is His true nature?

How can one attain Him?

These are questions that have engaged and challenged humanity since time immemorial.

No matter how much scientific knowledge humanity acquires, how many wonders it accomplishes, or how advanced its technology becomes, this question remains timeless and ever relevant.

The reason is threefold.

Firstly, it is exceedingly rare for an individual to realise God through direct experience.

Secondly, there are many who expound spiritual teachings without truly knowing the nature of God or understanding the Reality they seek to describe.

Thirdly, there are only a few who possess a sincere and unwavering desire to know God in His fullness.

While many among our youth are gradually drifting away from spiritual enquiry, young people in other parts of the world are studying spirituality with great interest, exploring its depths and discovering new dimensions of understanding.

Unfortunately, many of our own youth remain confined to the prophetic narratives and external accounts found in the Puranas. They often regard these stories and legends as the entirety of spirituality, without seeking the deeper truths that they are intended to convey. When spiritual traditions are questioned or ridiculed, they frequently find themselves unable to provide thoughtful and convincing answers. Likewise, they are often unable to present to the world the profound Dharma that has been expounded for the welfare of humanity with such depth, wisdom, and scientific precision.

Truth is the very life-breath of spirituality.

Self-discipline, self-transcendence, and Self-knowledge are the principal means by which Truth is realised.

Truth itself is the Paramatma. Only that Dharma which is founded upon Truth can be lived, practised, and realised in its fullest sense.

These are the eternal principles that Sanatana Dharma proclaims without compromise. For the benefit of all humanity, these truths have been expounded through the Vedas, Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, and the Bhagavad Gita.

However, in the present age, those who can speak courageously and authentically about these profound truths are exceedingly rare. Many have come to believe that spirituality can be sustained merely through elaborate rituals, external display, and grandiloquent discourses.

This is a misconception. It appears that very few emphasise that true knowledge is the very life-force of this Dharma. Instead, we often fail to recognise that through meaningless practices and superficial observances, we are gradually diminishing its true essence.

Why is it that so many people ridicule idol worship and dismiss it as a primitive or irrational practice?

Who is encouraging superstition in the name of various oils, incense, and mantras?

Who is misleading people through claims associated with shells, dice, coloured stones, changes of name, and promises of mystical powers?

Are we not, in many ways, responsible for this ourselves?

In ancient times, the Rishis, who may be regarded as the true scientists of spiritual wisdom, investigated the nature of Brahman through profound enquiry and direct knowledge. Having realised the Ultimate Truth, they prescribed certain disciplines, practices, and virtues solely for the welfare of the world and the well-being of all beings.

They designed these spiritual paths with great insight and precision, always keeping the supreme objective in view, the realisation of the Ultimate Reality. They harboured no selfish motive and pursued no personal agenda.

They did not recognise divisions based on caste or religion. Their guiding ideal was only: **"Sarve Janah Sukhino Bhavantu"**, *May all beings be happy and prosperous*. Such universal welfare was the foundation of their vision, their teaching, and their way of life.

Spirituality was established with such a lofty and noble vision. For thousands of years, people have embraced and practised it with profound faith and devotion. The reason for its enduring influence is that spirituality is founded upon Truth. Alongside Truth, it embodies knowledge, selflessness, and the welfare of all beings.

As time passed, however, many changes took place in spiritual thought and practice. The core values of Truth (*Satya*), Righteousness (*Dharma*), Peace (*Shanti*), and Love (*Prema*) gradually receded, while personal interests and selfish motives began to occupy their place. Numerous new customs and traditions emerged. As a result, spirituality, which was once simple and accessible, gradually became increasingly complex and difficult to comprehend.

The youth of today often view many of these later additions and practices with scepticism and doubt.

How, then, can this challenge be overcome?

Unless we understand the answer to this question, a lasting solution cannot be found. Years may pass, centuries may pass, and even millennia may pass, yet the problem will remain unresolved.

What began as a small issue has, over the course of time, grown into a matter of great concern.

Is there no remedy for this problem?

Certainly there is.

Sanatana Dharma has profoundly examined the principles of *Karma* and *Jnana* that contribute to the preservation, progress, and upliftment of living beings. It has presented these truths to humanity through numerous sciences, sacred texts, teachings, and devotional compositions. It has also explained the methods by which these principles may be practised and realised in daily life.

With a sincere desire for the advancement and welfare of humanity, many enlightened sages and noble souls undertook years of intense tapas, profound contemplation, and dedicated research. Through their direct realisation and tireless enquiry, they presented to the world a systematic path of spiritual practice and self-transformation.

Their efforts were guided not by personal gain, but by a compassionate aspiration to lead humanity towards Truth, wisdom, and ultimate fulfilment.

Within it, there is scarcely any aspect of human life that has not been addressed. It speaks of the challenges encountered in daily living, the pursuit of sensory pleasures, the emergence of the six inner enemies (*Arishadvargas*: lust, anger, greed, attachment, pride, and envy) the influence of the three *Gunas*, jealousy and hatred, the restless wanderings of the mind, distorted understanding, ego-consciousness, the consequences of Karma, birth and death, karmic impressions, rebirth, Self-knowledge, Self-realisation, liberation (*Moksha*), and countless other profound subjects.

It is truly an inexhaustible treasure-house of wisdom. The deeper one delves into it, the more it awakens fresh insights and reveals truths previously unknown. It imparts practical guidance for righteous living. It promotes longevity, health, prosperity, and well-being. It purifies the heart, bestows inner peace, refines the intellect, strengthens courage, and nurtures true knowledge.

Above all, it ultimately reveals the answer to the most fundamental question of human existence "*Who am I?*"

It is for each individual to study these teachings with sincerity, understand them thoroughly, put them into practice, and thereby progress towards the highest goal of life.

CHAPTER 18

The Greatness of the Guru and the Nature of the Guru

Many noble souls have striven, inquired, and undertaken profound spiritual research in their quest for **Atma-jnana** (Self-knowledge) and the realisation of the Supreme Truth. In the course of this spiritual pursuit, numerous faiths, traditions, and systems of thought came into existence. Over time, people assigned different names to them and identified them as distinct religions. Though the fundamental essence of all religions remains one and the same, each came to promote its own unique traditions and practices.

The enlightened and discerning understood the underlying Truth that lay behind these various paths. However, the common people remained perplexed by their apparent differences. Consequently, humanity became divided into various religious groupings.

Furthermore, within these very religions, new doctrines and movements gradually emerged, leading to the formation of different sects and sub-sects. Thus, concerning the one Eternal Truth, countless interpretations and divergent viewpoints came into being.

The Real Truth gradually became obscured, and distinctions based on caste and community began to take shape.

Even some among the learned used these divisions as a foundation for their own selfish interests, dedicating their lives to propagating such misconceptions. They projected themselves as gurus and spiritual authorities, and in doing so, some have contributed greatly to the moral and spiritual decline of humanity.

The sacred teachings of the sages were with the passage of time forgotten, while new customs and traditions slowly emerged in their place. During the past two centuries, many great saints and enlightened masters appeared and endeavoured to correct this course. Some people understood their teachings, transformed their lives, and embraced the path of wisdom. Others, however, misunderstood their message and continue to remain immersed in ignorance.

Human beings are, by their very nature, creatures of action (**karma**). No person can exist without engaging in action.

Recognising this truth, the wise prescribed certain sacred disciplines, observances, and spiritual practices for humanity. Their noble intention was that, through the sincere performance of these prescribed duties, individuals would cultivate purity of heart, steadfastness, and sincerity, thereby becoming fit to attain **Atma-jnana** (Self-knowledge).

Indeed, this was a most exalted and benevolent vision.

However, with the passage of time, human beings began to modify these prescribed practices according to their personal needs and worldly conveniences. They introduced alterations and additions for the sake of their own survival and interests. As a result, instead of progressing towards Self-knowledge, they laid the foundation for fresh doubts and misunderstandings.

Neglecting the deeper Truth and spiritual purpose underlying these prescribed observances, they turned away from their essential significance and, in doing so, invited many avoidable difficulties and afflictions into their lives.

In this manner, man misuses the knowledge bestowed upon him by the **Paramatma** (Supreme Soul). Thus, he draws a veil of confusion over himself, adding further weight to his ignorance and becoming a victim of inner restlessness and suffering.

Was this what the **Mumuksus**, the earnest seekers of liberation taught? Was this the ultimate purpose of their ceaseless spiritual striving and relentless search for Truth?

Must the life of a living being end in such ignorance?

Are we destined to remain distant from the Truth?

Why do we fail to heed the words of the wise and the elders?

Why do we not direct our thoughts towards that higher path?

Why does man knowingly move towards sorrow and suffering?

So many questions! So many doubts! So many elusive answers! Yet, with every unanswered question, the thirst for seeking grew ever stronger.

Are there no teachers who impart righteousness and virtue?

Are there no masters who proclaim the Truth?

Or is it that we ourselves have failed to become worthy recipients of their grace?

With these thoughts deeply stirring my heart, I resolved to read the life histories of the many saints and sages available to me.

Many people endeavour to follow this path by studying and practising the teachings left behind by realised souls, whether through sacred books or through those who preserve and transmit their wisdom. Yet, to place unwavering faith in, depend upon, and render selfless service to a living **Guru,** one who grants the blessed opportunity to behold Him, touch Him, converse with Him, and experience His divine presence directly through purity of thought, word, and deed is by no means easy.

Such a path demands profound spiritual maturity. The yearning for Truth must be intense and unwavering. The quest for Self-realisation must burn brightly within. Above all, the knowledge of the Self must be deeply contemplated, properly assimilated, and fully understood.

While noble and realised Gurus are still living amongst us, the number of disciples who truly seek refuge in them is often very small.

Yet, after such great masters have relinquished their mortal bodies, millions proclaim them to be their Gurus.

Regrettably, this has been the fate of many exalted teachers. Such occurrences are not uncommon, and we are all aware of this reality.

What I realised, though somewhat late, was this:

The discovery of a true Guru depends upon the intensity of our spiritual quest, the purity of our thinking, and the steadfastness of our faith in the path of Truth.

True Gurus are all around us.

The greatest obstacle preventing us from recognising them is our own pride and ego.

Once a seeker is accepted as a disciple, there is nothing that a true Guru can not accomplish for his spiritual upliftment.

The Guru first purifies the disciple's mind. Through His divine power and grace, He gradually turns the disciple's outward-directed vision towards the inner Self.

By sincerely practising the spiritual disciplines prescribed by the Guru, the disciple comes to realise that the **Atma** alone is the Truth. He begins to experience the presence and awareness of the Self.

The Guru, abiding in the subtle form of pure consciousness, remains ever with the disciple, continuously guiding, teaching, and uplifting him.

In that exalted state, the disciple directly experiences that the **Paramatma** (Supreme Soul), the Guru, and his own **Atma** are not separate entities but are, in essence, one and the same.

Even after the Guru has cast off the physical body, this sacred relationship continues uninterrupted.

Such is the eternal bond between Guru and the disciple.

This entire process is profound and far-reaching. Along the path, the disciple will encounter numerous doubts, questions, and inner challenges.

The Guru subjects the disciple to various tests and trials. From among those who steadfastly endure and successfully overcome them, He selects those who are fit for His divine purpose. To such worthy disciples, He bestows **Atma-jnana** (Self-knowledge), supports them in every possible way, and moulds them into the highest state they are capable of attaining.

There is a deeper purpose behind everything a Guru does. The one who understands and accepts that purpose is the true disciple.

Therefore, regardless of which **Sadguru** a seeker approaches, he must be prepared to undergo such a process.

Just as a **sadhaka** engages in spiritual discipline for many years before ultimately seeking refuge at the feet of a Sadguru, so too does a Sadguru spend many years observing and guiding aspirants before accepting a select few as true disciples. According to their nature, temperament, and mode of thinking, He prescribes an appropriate path of **sadhana** for each one.

Some do not appreciate the discipline prescribed by the Guru. Others, expecting to acquire great spiritual knowledge quickly, abandon the path midway.

Many continue their practices independently, only to become entangled in fresh doubts and unanswered questions. Unable to resolve these uncertainties, they pass away carrying those doubts with them, only to be reborn and repeat the same cycle once again.

For this reason, in the end, every Guru is often left with only one or two disciples who persevere to the very end.

The Sadguru understands this reality completely and therefore continues His work with patience, compassion, and unwavering determination.

The relationship between Guru and disciple must be a bond of the soul, not merely an external association based upon physical proximity, emotion, or worldly considerations.

Even if the Guru does not outwardly display extraordinary powers or miracles, even if the disciple has not yet experienced the presence of the **Atma**, the relationship

between Guru and disciple remains confined to the acquisition of worldly or intellectual knowledge. In such a case, the deeper bond of the Self has not yet been established between them.

The Guru imparts the wisdom that He possesses, while the disciple understands only to the extent that he is inwardly prepared to receive it. If the disciple becomes dissatisfied with the Guru, he departs. If the Guru finds the disciple unfit for the path, He may distance him from His guidance. Yet, even when none of these circumstances arise, **Atma-jnana** (Self-knowledge) cannot be attained unless the inner spiritual connection is awakened.

A true **Sadguru** never expects material gain, personal benefit, or worldly rewards from His disciples. Rather, He engages certain individuals in the sacred work entrusted to Him by the Supreme Lord. Through them, He spreads noble teachings and spiritual wisdom among many people, thereby contributing to the welfare and upliftment of society.

To become worthy of such a responsibility, the disciple must surrender completely at the feet of the Guru.

The Sadguru beholds the Supreme Reality everywhere as Pure Knowledge. He constantly abides in the experience of **Sat-Chit-Ananda,** Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss Absolute.

He teaches only that which He has directly realised and experienced. He speaks not of things beyond His own spiritual vision. Though capable of accomplishing all things, He remains inwardly detached and free from all personal motives.

In the authentic **Guru–Shisya Parampara** (Guru–Disciple Tradition), there is no place for pretence, display, or artificiality. Such external embellishments are merely human inventions and have no true spiritual value.

The relationship between Guru and disciple is, in essence, a sacred bond between Spirit and soul, a divine communion that transcends the limitations of the physical world.

When the **Atma** is beyond all names, forms, and attributes, why should there be so much pretence and artificiality in the journey towards its realisation?

The very word **Guru** is often interpreted in a profound spiritual sense: *Gu* signifies that which is beyond the **gunas** (qualities or attributes), and *Ru* signifies that which transcends all forms. These are indeed characteristics of the Supreme Reality. Therefore, the Guru is regarded as none other than God Himself.

For this reason, the first verse that naturally comes to mind whenever the word *Guru* is uttered is:

Gurur Brahma Gurur Vishnuh

Gurur Devo Maheshwarah ।

Guruh Sakshat Parabrahma

Tasmai Sri Gurave Namah ॥

The Guru is Brahma, the Guru is Vishnu, the Guru is Lord Maheswara (Shiva); the Guru is verily the Supreme Brahman itself.

Unto that revered Guru, I offer my salutations.

Many sacred scriptures, while extolling the greatness of the **Sadguru**, explain this principle in various ways further emphasising the incomparable position of the Guru through a well-known spiritual maxim:

"Brahma sthane kritham papam, Vishnu sthane vinashyathi,

Vishnu sthane kritham papam, Shiva sthane vinashyathi!

Shiva sthane kritham papam, Guru sthane vinashyathi

Guru sthane kritham papam, naasthi sthane vinashyathi!!"

Mistakes committed before Brahma may be remedied through the grace of Vishnu. Mistakes committed before Vishnu may be rectified through the grace of Shiva. Mistakes committed before Shiva may be forgiven through the compassion of the Guru. But mistakes committed against the Guru can not be easily remedied by any other agency.

Thus, the scriptures solemnly proclaim the unparalleled sanctity of the Guru's position and exhort seekers to approach the Guru with humility, reverence, sincerity, and unwavering faith.

CHAPTER 19

Few Noble Gurus, Their Teachings, and Certain Sacred Guru Sthanas I Visited

At various periods throughout history, many exalted souls and realised beings have incarnated upon this sacred earth. Through steadfast effort and sincere spiritual practice, they followed the paths they deemed true, realised the Supreme Truth, and attained Self-realisation.

*Perform every action you undertake with devotion and wholehearted dedication. In due course, purity of heart, sincerity, and true wisdom shall naturally arise within you. When spiritual practice is guided by right knowledge, the realisation of the **Paramatma** (Supreme Soul) becomes both natural and attainable. Such a path enables one to attain **Moksha** (Liberation) in this very birth.*

- The eternal **Jagadguru** (World Teacher) is **Lord Krishna**.

By following **Dharma** through the **Noble Eightfold Path** and dedicating oneself to the service of society, one attains the state of a Buddha.

Realise the Truth!

— Gautama Buddha

Ahimsa (Non-violence) is the highest Dharma. There is no religion greater than Ahimsa. Through the practice of non-violence, it becomes easy to realise God.

— Mahavira

Through loving service to all beings, attain your Heavenly Father in the form of the Holy Spirit. — Jesus Christ

By worshipping the **Paramatma** with devotion (**Bhakti**), knowledge (**Jnana**), and detachment (**Vairagya**), one can easily attain His divine vision.

Everyone is eligible to realise the Supreme Soul, for Consciousness is the very essence of all beings.

- Sri Madhvaacharya

He is the Creator. By taking refuge in His Divine Name and chanting it with devotion at all times, one can easily attain His sacred presence.

— Ramanujacharya

People engage in countless pursuits seeking happiness, yet they fail to place faith in the great Mahavakya, **"Tat Tvam Asi"** — *"Thou Art That."* Through comprehensive spiritual understanding, this Truth can be realised with ease.

— Adi Shankaracharya

The Supreme Soul dwelling within all beings is One. Through kindness and compassion, that Truth can be readily realised.

— Guru Nanak

Allah may be realised through service to all, practised in a spirit of peace, harmony, and universal brotherhood.

— Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him)

We readily trust the stranger who passes by, yet we hesitate to place our trust in God. *Uttisthata! Arise! Stand up! Begin striving to behold Him everywhere!*

— Swami Vivekananda

Even though the scriptures repeatedly proclaim the great Mahavakyas, **"Aham Brahmasmi"** (*I am Brahman*) and **"Ayam Atma Brahma"** (*This Self is Brahman*), living beings find it difficult to believe them. The reason is **Maya** and ignorance. Unless these are completely removed, one cannot behold the true "I" that resides within.

— Sri Ramana Maharshi

Know yourself through devotion and patience. Why have you come into this world? Is it merely to gather insignificant things?

— Samartha Sadguru Sri Sainath

Self-knowledge can be attained only through **Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Love, and Non-violence**. Whatever you do, offer it unto God.

— Kanchi Paramacharya Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Mahaswami

The teachings and sayings of these great souls contributed immensely to my search for Truth. By the grace of providence and through the opportunities that came my way, I was fortunate to visit many sacred **Guru Sthanas** associated with realised masters.

Kaladi (Adi Sankaracarya), Pithapuram and Kuravapur (Sripada Srivallabha), Karanja and Ganagapur (Sri Narasimha Saraswati), Kalyani and Manik Nagar (Sri Manikya Prabhu), Akkalkot (Sri Swami Samarth), Shegaon (Sri Gajanan Maharaj),

Nagpur (Tajuddin Baba), Ahmednagar/Meherabad (Meher Baba), Sakori (Upasani Baba), Shirdi (Sadguru Sainath Maharaj), Golagamudi (Venkaiah Swami), Tembe (Vasudevananda Saraswati), Arunachala/Tiruvannamalai (Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi), Belur Math (Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Holy Mother Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda), Sarnath and Bodh Gaya (Lord Gautama Buddha), Shravanabelagola (Digambara Jain tradition), Hazrat Nizamuddin (Baba Nizamuddin), Hazratbal (Srinagar, Kashmir), Amritsar (Har Mandir Sahib), and Nanded (Takht Sri Huzur Sahib), Mantralayam (Sri Raghavendra Swami), Nellore (Mastan Dargah), Ongole (Sri Ekkirala Bharadwaja), Chivatam (Chivatam Amma), Chirala (Chirala Avadhuta), Ammajan of Pune, and Shantiniketan (Rabindranath Tagore) were among the sacred places I had the privilege of visiting.

Everywhere, I experienced the same profound truth.

God is omnipresent. He dwells everywhere and in everyone.

What we need to cultivate is the vision to perceive Him in that manner.

This is a truth known to all, yet it is exceedingly difficult to live by it. That is the great challenge before humanity. We perform countless rituals related to God, place our faith in Him, and worship Him with devotion; yet when it comes to seeing Him in all beings and in all circumstances, man finds himself unable to do so and raises his hands in helplessness.

We study numerous branches of knowledge, acquire learning and wisdom, delve into Vedanta, and carry out our worldly duties with efficiency and diligence. Yet we are unable to perceive God everywhere. This, indeed, is the real problem.

As my search for Truth continued with earnestness and perseverance, there came a blessed day when I was granted a **direct realisation of the Guru**.

At that moment, my heart overflowed with joy, and my mind was filled with profound bliss.

CHAPTER 20

My First Darshan of My Gurudev

It was June 2012. I had travelled to Sambalpur University in Odisha on official work. At that time, I was serving as a General Manager in an educational research organisation.

For my return journey, I had reserved a ticket on the Delhi–Visakhapatnam Express, scheduled to travel from Titlagarh Junction to Visakhapatnam two days later.

After completing my work, I left Sambalpur early in the morning and reached Titlagarh by a passenger train at about 9:00 a.m. There was no one present at the enquiry counter. A blackboard displayed the information that my train was expected to arrive on time. There were still nearly two hours remaining before its arrival.

I seated myself on a bench at the far end of the platform and began reading **Prasthanatrayam**. About an hour had passed. Meanwhile, a gentleman approached and stood beside me. Noticing his presence, I looked up.

He appeared to be around forty years of age. His demeanour was simple and unassuming. He wore a five-fold robe, had a neatly trimmed beard and a small moustache, a well-built physique, and a serene, attractive countenance.

"**Sab kuch thik hai?**" ("Is everything well?") he greeted me in Hindi.

Momentarily startled, I gathered myself and replied, "**Thik hai**" ("All is well.").

For a moment, I wondered where I might have seen him before. Yet, after reflecting carefully, I was convinced that I had never met him anywhere.

Without delay, he spoke again, this time in Telugu.

"What are you studying?"

Thinking to myself, "Ah, one of our Telugu people," I replied, "**Prasthanatrayam.**"

"What do you understand from it?" he asked.

With a trace of impatience, I answered,

"I am trying to discover the Truth."

"What Truth?" he asked with a gentle smile.

"The real Truth," I replied somewhat sarcastically.

"What is the real Truth?" he asked again, his smile still lingering upon his face.

A slight irritation arose within me, and I fixed my gaze upon him intensely.

He, in turn, looked directly at me with equal intensity.

Unable to withstand the power and depth of that gaze, I lowered my eyes.

“Your train is running one hour and seventeen minutes behind schedule. That means it will take another two hours and ten minutes to arrive. Come with me. Let us walk and talk,” he said.

I was taken aback.

“What are you saying? The display board indicates that the train is running on time. According to that, it should arrive at the platform within the next hour,” I replied.

Smiling gently, he said, “I would be pleased if that were the case. However, what I have told you is the truth.”

“Just a moment,” I said, and hurried towards the enquiry counter.

There was still no one present there. The display board continued to show that my train was running on time. Nevertheless, I decided to verify the information through mobile internet “KNOW YOUR TRAIN STATUS” the railway enquiry system.

To my astonishment, it showed that the train was running exactly one hour and seventeen minutes late.

Slightly surprised, I returned to him and, with a smile, said,

“May I see your mobile phone?”

Laughing softly, he replied,

“I have not yet found any need to use a mobile phone.”

I observed him carefully. He carried no luggage whatsoever. He was clad only in a simple short **pancha** and an upper cloth. I could see no pockets, nor anything concealed within his garments.

“Whatever the explanation may be, this much is certain,” I thought to myself. “What he said has proved to be correct.” With that conviction, I agreed to accompany him on the walk.

“I am pleased that you trusted my word,” he said.

With that, he led me away from the station and onto a narrow earthen path that wound through the surrounding fields. Slinging my bag over my shoulder, I followed him.

As we walked, he asked, “What do you hope to learn by reading these books?”

“As I told earlier, to discover the truth” I replied.

Looking at me thoughtfully, he asked, “Do you believe that the Truth can be known merely by reading books?”

“At present, that is the only means available to me,” I replied.

“That is good,” he said. “But such books must be studied with *empty knowledge*.”

“What do you mean by empty knowledge?” I asked.

“The wisdom of a child,” he replied.

“I do not understand,” I said.

Smiling gently, he continued, “A child sees everything alike. It does not recognise distinctions. It knows nothing of the differences between fire and water, anger and affection, friend and foe, food and dirt, courage and fear, God and demon, light and darkness, and countless other such opposites.”

“Yes, that is true. But what of it?” I asked.

He continued: “As each person grows, he gradually forms his own understanding of God. Drawing upon the intelligence bestowed by the Supreme Spirit, the traditions observed within his family, the teachings he has heard from others, the experiences he has encountered in life, the knowledge gained from books, and his own manner of thinking, he develops a particular conception of the Divine. He then follows that conception, practises it with conviction, and proceeds along that path. As long as everything appears to be progressing favourably, he rejoices in the belief that his path alone is correct and often encourages others to follow the same.”

“However, when circumstances change and difficulties arise, he abandons the path in which he had placed his faith and begins searching for another.

“He learns a new path from others, adopts it, practises it, and continues his journey. This is one of the natural tendencies of human beings.

“Do you agree that this is so?”

He looked at me intently. What he had said seemed entirely reasonable. After reflecting for a moment, I replied that I agreed.

He continued: “Furthermore, among all those who have been endowed with intelligence by the Supreme Lord, only a very few make a sincere effort to understand the Supreme Reality in its fullness”.

“Neglecting the Self that dwells within, man begins searching for the **Paramatma** elsewhere. He arrives at the conclusion that God exists only in certain places, certain objects, or certain forms. Thereafter, he spends his entire life believing in, worshipping, and depending upon those alone, remaining absorbed in a kind of outward spiritual satisfaction. Is that not so?”

“Not so in my case!” I replied, with a trace of irritation in my voice.

“I know,” he said. Turning towards me, he looked deeply into my eyes with a gentle and affectionate smile.

At that very moment, an indescribable joy surged through me. A subtle radiance began to appear behind his head, gradually expanding into a luminous halo. His face shone with an extraordinary brilliance.

My entire body trembled, partly with awe and fear, and partly with overwhelming joy. Then, in a clear and compassionate voice, he spoke: “My dear Athreya! Your earnest longing to know the real Truth has brought me immense joy. By the grace of the Supreme Spirit and in accordance with your own inner spiritual guidance, you have chosen the **Path of Knowledge (Jnana Marga)**, which is most suited to your temperament.

“Any undertaking performed with purity of heart is deeply pleasing to God. If you continue your practice with sincere enquiry, unwavering determination, and the vision of beholding the **Paramatma** everywhere, you shall realise the real Truth. The blessings of that Supreme Spirit are abundantly upon you.”

I listened to his words in reverential silence.

“Your blessings, Gurudev!” I replied in a trembling voice.

Smiling graciously, he said: “Go now. Your train will arrive at the station in twenty-five minutes. **Bhuyat Mangalam!** May auspiciousness be yours. I shall come again.”

With those words, he moved swiftly along the narrow pathway, with a speed that seemed almost beyond ordinary human movement. For a few moments, I could still see the radiant light surrounding him.

Then, gradually, it disappeared from sight.

It took me a few moments to regain my composure. When I looked back, I could see the railway station in the distance. A short distance away, on my right, stood a small temple. Curiously, I had not noticed it while walking in that direction earlier. With slow and unsteady steps, I made my way towards it.

Within the shrine stood a beautiful idol of the Divine Mother, about three and a half feet in height. The moment my eyes fell upon Her sacred form, I felt a fresh surge of spiritual energy flow through me.

With deep reverence, I bowed before the Goddess, applied to my forehead the sacred vermilion from Her lotus feet, and hastened back towards the railway station.

As I reached the platform, an announcement was being made regarding the arrival of my train. Within four minutes, it entered the station and came to a halt.

Immersed in a multitude of thoughts, I boarded the train and settled into my seat. Mine was an upper berth. After a halt of about twenty minutes for an engine change, the train departed from Titlagarh at 2:35 p.m.

Only then did I become aware of my hunger. Despite the long wait at the station, I had not once thought of obtaining anything to eat. Deciding to take some rest and have a meal later at Rayagada, I climbed up to my berth.

As I lay there, one thought repeatedly returned to my mind.

I distinctly remembered him addressing me as “Athreya,” and I remembered myself addressing him as “Gurudev.”

Why had that happened?

Perhaps he had called me Athreya because I belonged to the **Athreya Gotra**. But how could he have known my Gotra? And without any prior acquaintance or conscious thought, why had I instinctively addressed him as “Gurudev”?

These questions continued to recur within my mind, leaving me deeply absorbed in contemplation.

I then remembered my father’s words: “**When the appointed time arrives, the Guru Himself comes to the disciple.”**

Those words echoed repeatedly within my heart.

Yet countless other thoughts and seemingly meaningless questions continued to arise in my mind. For a while, I felt deeply ashamed. My ignorance had been laid bare before me. Even after witnessing such extraordinary wisdom, power, and radiance in him, how strange it was that I continued to entertain trivial doubts and questions! It seemed as though the influence of **Maya** still lingered within me.

As I reflected upon this, I recalled the message imparted by Gurudev:

“The Truth cannot be realised until one transcends ignorance and rises beyond all doubts.” That sacred teaching remained deeply impressed upon my mind.

As the train moved steadily forward, I sat absorbed in contemplation, reflecting upon the mysterious events that had unfolded and upon the profound grace that had unexpectedly entered my life.

CHAPTER 21

The Change in My Name, Annaprasadam, and Gurudev's Name

The manner in which Gurudev had addressed me as **"Athreya"** left a deep and lasting impression upon my heart. Considering it to be a sacred blessing, I made a significant change to the name given to me by my parents. My parents had named me **Srinivasa Sastry**. Thereafter, I added "Athreya" to that name and began calling myself **Sastry Athreya**.

From that day onwards, I started using the name **"Sastry Athreya"** in my writings and in my social media postings. Filled with an indescribable joy, I closed my eyes and began recollecting the conversation that had taken place between Gurudev and myself.

Suddenly, the train came to a halt with a loud jerk, and at the same time, a wave of drowsiness overcame me. I looked at my watch. The time was 7:10 p.m. Curious to know where we had reached, I climbed down from my berth and stepped onto the platform. Looking across, I noticed a signboard bearing the name **"Bobbili."** Realising our location, I calculated that there were still about four and a half hours remaining before I would reach my destination.

I immediately came to my senses and hurried towards a food stall visible at a distance, intending to purchase something to eat. However, before I could reach it, the train sounded a long whistle and began to move. Finding myself unable to do anything further, I quickly boarded the train and stood near the doorway.

At that very moment, I noticed a man running towards me, calling out loudly, "Athreya!" Before the train could gather speed and leave the platform behind, he reached me and handed over a polythene carry bag.

Taking it from him, I asked, "What is this?"

The man merely stood there smiling. Raising his hand in a gesture that seemed both affectionate and blessing-filled, he looked at me silently. He was lean and dark-complexioned, with a closely trimmed beard, dressed in a simple white shirt and pyjamas. As the train moved forward, I too raised my hand in farewell and continued standing at the doorway until he disappeared from view.

Returning to my berth, I opened the bag to see what it contained. To my astonishment, inside were neatly packed portions of rice along with packets of dal,

sambar, curry, and curd. My surprise knew no bounds. At a moment when I had been unable to procure any food for myself, why had this unknown person appeared and handed me a complete meal at the very last instant? Who was he? Could it be that my Gurudev had come in that form? Even the manner in which he had handed me the packet and raised his hand in blessing seemed extraordinary.

With many thoughts passing through my mind, I settled upon my berth, opened the packet of rice, and began eating it with the dal. Everything was still warm, fresh, and delicious. With deep satisfaction, I partook of the entire meal. Thereafter, I took out my water bottle from my bag and drank some water.

Suddenly, it felt as though life had returned to me. With all my heart, I remembered my Gurudev and offered my grateful salutations. Closing my eyes, I sat upon my berth, meditating upon Him. The train reached Visakhapatnam at 9:25 p.m.

As I had slept for a considerable time during the journey, sleep eluded me that night. I remained awake, absorbed in thought. Suddenly, a question arose in my mind:

"What is the name of Gurudev?" Why had I not asked Him? How had I forgotten such an important thing? Had I made a mistake? If someone were to ask me, "What is the name of your Guru?", what answer would I give? Many such thoughts began to crowd my mind.

After some time, however, my mind grew calm, and I reflected:

"Gurudev is Gurudev. What significance does a name really have?" Even if I knew His name, could I ever address Him by that name? The very thought seemed inappropriate. Yet the question of what His name might be continued to linger within me.

I do not know when I eventually fell asleep. When I awoke, it was seven o'clock in the morning.

I had an appointment at Gajuwaka at 10:30 a.m. After completing my bath and morning preparations, I got ready to leave. I wished to narrate everything that had happened to my wife, but owing to the lack of time, I decided to explain it to her in detail that evening. With that thought, I set out on my motorbike.

As I reached the NAD Junction, I was halted by a red traffic signal. About a minute after I had stopped, an elderly gentleman approached me.

Looking at me with a smile, he said: "We all address your Guru as 'Babaji'. I am one of His disciples." Having said this, he quietly moved away and continued on his way. For a moment, I remained motionless, overwhelmed with astonishment at what I had just heard.

Before I could place my motorbike on its stand and turn back, the traffic signal changed to green. The motorists behind me began sounding their horns impatiently. Having no alternative, I moved forward, crossed the junction, travelled nearly a kilometre ahead, made a U-turn, and returned in search of the elderly gentleman.

I parked my bike on the opposite side of the road and searched for him for a considerable time. However, he was nowhere to be seen. On many later occasions, I stopped at NAD Junction hoping to see him again, but I never found him. As I was running short of time that day, I once more made a U-turn and proceeded towards Gajuwaka.

I felt immense joy on learning that my Gurudev was known as **"Babaji."** With deep gratitude, I offered my salutations to Gurudev for sending one of His disciples to dispel my doubt. As the days passed, spiritual contemplation began to deepen within me. The devotion I had inherited from my revered father, the influence of the **Jnana Marga** (Path of Knowledge), the profound philosophy of **Sri Adi Sankara Bhagavatpada**, which had greatly shaped my thinking, and now Gurudev's instruction to understand my own nature and pursue the path of knowledge, all these together laid a firm foundation for spiritual enquiry within me.

I was deeply moved by Gurudev's simple yet profound teaching: **"To recognise the presence of the Supreme Soul everywhere and in all beings, and to perform every action with purity of heart and selflessness, is the Yoga of Knowledge and Wisdom."**

To me, this appeared to be the very essence of all faiths and the underlying message of all spiritual scriptures in the world. No specialised learning or intellectual scholarship is required to understand this truth. The Supreme Soul plants this seed of wisdom within every individual and reveals it through the circumstances of life. The responsibility of man is to realise the **'Real Truth'** through sincere enquiry, unwavering determination, and earnest spiritual seeking. That, indeed, is the true duty of human life.

The **Maya** and **Tamas** that obstruct this realisation must be overcome with the weapon of knowledge. Only then can the Truth be understood. Gurudev teaches that **knowledge gained through direct experience is the true Yoga of Wisdom (Jnana Yoga).**

It is now my duty as a disciple to practise His teachings with purity of **thought, word, and deed**. I have often heard elders say that one can not attain the true **Darshan of the Guru** without first understanding the greatness and uniqueness of the Guru.

At different times throughout history, many Gurus have appeared in this world. They have enlightened the seekers of Truth and guided countless people towards the path of righteousness and spiritual awakening.

Unlike earlier times, in the present age, qualities such as goodness and wickedness, love and hatred, divinity and demonic tendencies, friendship and enmity, gratitude and ingratitude often coexist within the same individual, manifesting according to circumstances.

It is therefore not possible to simply destroy the wicked and preserve the virtuous. Every person possesses certain noble qualities, and every person also harbours some shortcomings.

If the Lord were to incarnate solely for the purpose of destroying the wicked, scarcely any human being would remain untouched. Therefore, the immediate need is not destruction, but guidance, guidance that leads humanity towards the right path.

The one who is capable of performing this sacred and unceasing task is the **Guru**. For this reason, this age may rightly be regarded as the Age of the **Sadgurus**. In this age of **Maya**, the direct realisation of the **Paramatma** is exceedingly difficult. A guide is essential for that journey. That guide is the **Sadguru**.

In an era where countless false teachers and self-proclaimed gurus abound, it is indeed difficult to recognise a true Sadguru. As far as I understand, the lineage of Sadgurus includes divine manifestations such as **Dakshinamurti**, **Hayagriva**, and **Dattatreya**.

It also includes revered preceptors such as **Brihaspati** and **Shukracharya**, who served as spiritual guides to divine and demonic beings respectively.

Divine sages and teachers such as Vasistha, Visvamitra, and Sandipani have illumined the path of seekers through their wisdom and spiritual guidance.

Great exponents of spiritual knowledge such as Sri Madhvacharya, Sri Adi Sankaracharya, Sri Ramanujacharya, and Sri Babaji have inspired countless aspirants towards the pursuit of Truth.

Supreme Gurus such as Sripada Srivallabha, Guru Nanak, and Sri Narasimha Saraswati have left an indelible mark upon the spiritual heritage of humanity. Likewise, many realised souls and spiritual masters including Lahiri Mahasaya, Yukteswar Giri, Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Holy Mother Sharada Devi, Swami Vivekananda, Malayala Swami, Ramananda, Dayananda, Paramahansa Yogananda, Mata Amritanandamayi, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, Swami Chinmayananda, A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Swami

Sivananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Bhagavan Nityananda, Sri Manikya Prabhu, Sri Swami Samarth, Sri Gajanan Maharaj, Gonda Maharaj, Dhuniwala Dada, Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati, Shirdi Sainath Maharaj, Tajuddin Baba, Upasani Baba, Meher Baba, and many others have appeared upon this sacred earth from time to time, imparted timely teachings, and guided devotees and seekers towards the path of Truth.

Thus, the philosophy of the Guru is eternal. It transcends the boundaries of religion, sect, caste, and creed. People describe it in different ways according to their understanding, traditions, and spiritual experience, yet its essence remains one and the same.

With this conviction, I resolved to study, to the best of my ability, the lives and teachings of all these great souls.

I began earnestly practising the message imparted by Gurudev. As my practice deepened, new questions would arise within me, and in one form or another, answers would also reveal themselves. I accepted all such experiences as manifestations of Gurudev's grace and blessings and continued to move forward on the path.

Meanwhile, a deep longing remained firmly rooted in my heart, the desire to once again behold Gurudev in person and converse with Him. With eager anticipation and unwavering hope, I awaited the blessed opportunity for that sacred meeting to occur once more.

CHAPTER 22

Gurudev's Visit to Datta Kshetra

An Indirect Message

In November 2012, I travelled to Gulbarga on official work. Gulbarga, situated on the border of Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, lies approximately 210 kilometres from Hyderabad. It is also known by its present name, **Kalaburagi**. My work at Gulbarga University was completed within a single day. Since the following two days were Saturday and Sunday, I felt an inner urge to once again visit the nearby sacred **Ganagapur Guru Sthana**, the revered **Paduka Kshetra** associated with **Lord Dattatreya's incarnation, Sri Narasimha Saraswati Swami**.

Sri Narasimha Saraswati, reverentially known as **Sri Guru**, is regarded in the Datta tradition as the second incarnation of **Lord Dattatreya** in the Kali Yuga. He was born at Karanja in Maharashtra and, after fulfilling His divine mission, entered **Mahasamadhi** at the sacred shrine of **Srisailam** in Andhra Pradesh, associated with **Sri Mallikarjuna Jyotirlinga** and **Sri Bhramaramba Shakti Pitha**. According to traditional accounts, He disappeared into the waters of the holy River Krishna, leaving behind an enduring spiritual legacy for generations of devotees and seekers. With these thoughts filling my mind, I resolved to utilise the available time to once again seek the blessings of that sacred Datta Kshetra.

The first incarnation was **Sripada Srivallabha**. He incarnated at **Pithapuram** in the present-day state of Andhra Pradesh and concluded His earthly manifestation at **Kuravapur (Kurugadda)**, situated in present-day Karnataka.

The following day, I boarded a bus from Gulbarga at 7:30 in the morning and arrived at Ganagapur at about 9:00 a.m.

From there, I hired an auto-rickshaw and proceeded to the **Sangam**, the sacred confluence of the rivers **Bhima** and **Amaraja**. According to tradition, Sri Guru performed His daily spiritual observances at this holy confluence before proceeding to the nearby fields.

This sacred place is also reverentially known as **"Sri Kshetra"**, after Sri Guru Himself. It was here that Sri Guru performed many divine **lilas**, bestowed worldly welfare upon countless devotees, and guided sincere seekers along the path of Truth. People belonging to various faiths and backgrounds became His disciples and received His grace with gratitude.

The marvellous and inspiring lilas of Sri Guru are beautifully recorded in the revered Marathi scripture **"Sri Guru Charitra"**, composed by **Sri Gangadhar Saraswati**.

An ancient tradition continues to this day at this sacred place. Before proceeding for the darshan of the holy **Nirguna Padukas** of Sri Guru, devotees first bathe at the confluence of the Bhima and Amaraja rivers and then recite passages from the **Sri Guru Charitra** beneath the venerable **Asvattha (Peepal) tree**, which is traditionally believed to have stood there since the time of Sri Guru.

Following this sacred custom, I too bathed in the holy waters of the Sangam and then sat beneath the shade of that revered Asvattha tree in meditation. After some time, my inner being was drawn into a state of spiritual bliss unlike anything I had previously experienced. It seemed as though I had been immersed in an indescribable ocean of **Brahmananda**. Suddenly, I felt as though someone had gently but firmly shaken me. I opened my eyes. Standing before me was an elderly ascetic, apparently more than seventy years of age, clad in the simple robes of a monk.

Seeing that I had opened my eyes, he spoke to me in Hindi:

"Please forgive me for interrupting your meditation. This is Sri Guru's command, and it must be carried out. In a short while, the temple will be closed for about an hour for the midday observances. There are many devotees waiting for darshan. After you have had darshan of Sri Guru's holy feet, the Gurudevs will decide your next course of action." Having said this, he slowly walked away towards the sacred confluence.

For a moment, I felt inclined to stop him and ask a few questions. Yet, for reasons I could not explain, I abandoned the thought. I proceeded to the roadside, hired an auto-rickshaw, and reached the temple. A large number of devotees were already standing in the queue. I too joined them.

After about five minutes, a man dressed in the manner of a temple priest, with a traditional **pancha-kaccham** and a cloth wrapped around his head, approached me. Speaking in Telugu with a distinct Kannada accent, he said: "Please come with me. You shall have darshan of Sri Guru's sacred Padukas."

Somewhat surprised, I followed him silently. He led me inside, enabling me to have a close and blessed darshan of Sri Guru's revered Padukas. Afterwards, he accompanied me outside the temple premises.

Placing a packet of **Khara Bath,** a mildly spiced traditional preparation, in my hands, he said: "I serve here as a priest. You should immediately proceed to

Akkalkot and have darshan at the temple of **Sri Swami Samarth**. Everything will be auspicious." With these words, he sent me on my way and returned into the temple.

By then, it was about one o'clock in the afternoon.

Remembering his words, I made my way to the main road. Just then, I heard a driver of a tempo traveller repeatedly calling out: "Akkalkot! Akkalkot!" Without giving the matter any further thought, I boarded the vehicle and occupied one of the vacant seats. Except for five or six seats, the vehicle was already filled with passengers. After picking up a few more travellers along the way, the journey continued.

The vehicle halted near the Akkalkot temple at about 4:25 p.m., having stopped at several places enroute to pick up additional passengers.

Sri Swami Samarth Sadguru, reverentially known as **Akkalkot Maharaj**, is a revered saint whose life and teachings I had studied earlier. Numerous extraordinary incidents and divine lilas are associated with Him. In the Datta tradition, He is often revered as the fourth manifestation in the Kali Yuga, following **Sri Manikya Prabhu**, while **Sri Shirdi Sai Baba** is regarded as the fifth.

This was my first visit to Akkalkot. After arriving, I decided to take some rest before proceeding for darshan at the temple of Sri Swami Samarth. I learnt that there was an older pilgrims' hostel directly opposite the temple and a much larger, newly constructed hostel situated a short distance away. The temple authorities also informed me that **free annaprasadam** was provided for devotees visiting the shrine. Since it was conveniently located opposite the temple, I took a room in the older hostel.

After bathing and refreshing myself, I entered the temple premises. The arrangements made for devotees to have darshan were exceptionally orderly and comfortable. The sacred idol of **Sri Swami Samarth Gurudev** was beautifully adorned with flowers and decorations. After having a fulfilling and satisfying darshan, I sat quietly within the temple precincts and entered meditation. Having spent nearly an hour in meditation, I left for the newly built hostel to partake of the annaprasadam.

Akkalkot is a small town with a rich historical background. In earlier times, it was ruled by local royalty, and an old fort still stands as a reminder of that heritage. As I walked towards the newly constructed pilgrim's complex. It had been planned and built on a grand scale. A spacious dining hall had been provided exclusively for the daily **annaprasadam** service, with tables and chairs arranged neatly for the convenience of devotees.

From fellow pilgrims, I learnt that no fewer than ten thousand people partook of this free meal every day and that the quality of the food was exceptionally good. Leaving my shoes and socks in a corner, I joined the queue for annaprasadam. Groups of nearly three hundred devotees at a time were being admitted into the dining hall. During the second sitting, I was ushered inside and seated for the meal. Chapatis, curry, rice, dal, and buttermilk were served in generous quantities. These constituted the evening meal. I was informed that in the mornings, a sweet preparation and sambar were additionally served. After partaking of the meal to my full satisfaction, I returned to the place where I had left my footwear. To my surprise, my shoes were nowhere to be found.

A slight sense of anxiety arose within me. Just then, a young man dressed in trousers and a shirt, much like myself, approached with a smile. Holding my shoes in his hands, he spoke in clear Hindi: “Brother, I have been waiting for you for some time.” Handing over the shoes, he continued:

“Gurudev Babaji Mahasaya will meet you at the Mahakumbha Mela to be held at Allahabad next January. Please make the necessary arrangements for that journey. Gurudev has instructed me to convey this message to you. Bhuyat Mangalam! May auspiciousness be yours.”

Having delivered the message, he quickly walked into the building. I stood there in astonishment, watching him until he disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER 23

Pilgrimage Visits, Kumbh Melas, Mahakumbh Melas – Their Significance

His words remained deeply imprinted upon my mind. I fondly remembered my revered Gurudev, Babaji Mahashay, who had graciously fulfilled my longing to meet him and had conveyed his message through this disciple. Offering my salutations to Lord Krishna, I put on my footwear and, with a heart overflowing with joy, walked towards my place of stay.

By the time I reached my room, it was 9:45 p.m. My heart was filled with happiness. The thought that I would have the blessed opportunity of beholding Gurudev in the month of January filled me with immense delight. Spreading a blanket upon the floor, I sat in Padmasana and entered into meditation. I remained absorbed in meditation for half an hour.

Meditation performed at sacred Guru-sthanams such as Ranikhet, Hrishikesh, Varanasi, Prayag, Puri, Pithapuram, Kurugadda, Karanja, Girnar, Mahur, Ganagapur, Humnabad, Shegaon, Garudeshwar, Ganeshpuri, Khandwa, Nagpur, Akkalkot, Shirdi, Sakori, Mehernagar, Dakshineswar, and Arunachalam yields immediate spiritual advantage and inner experience.

The following day was Sunday. Since Solapur, situated about 40 kilometres away, had several train services to Hyderabad, I reserved a Tatkal berth through the IRCTC mobile application for the train departing at 10:00 p.m. on Sunday night.

As there was still ample time before my departure, I decided to visit the holy shrine of Sri Tulja Bhavani Devi at Tuljapur, a town located about 50 kilometres from Solapur and renowned as a predominantly powerful spiritual centre. With that thought in mind, I retired for the night.

I awoke at five o'clock in the morning. After completing my morning routine and checking out of the room, I had one more darshan of Sri Guru Samartha and then proceeded to the bus stand. Buses to Solapur were available every fifteen minutes. I boarded one such bus and reached Solapur. After having breakfast, I took another bus bound for Tuljapur.

I arrived at Tuljapur at 11:15 a.m. I had previously been blessed with the darshan of the Divine Mother on one earlier occasion. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj was an ardent devotee of Sri Tulja Bhavani Devi. According to traditional accounts, the Divine Mother bestowed upon him a sacred sword. Wielding that blessed weapon,

Shivaji Maharaj courageously fought against foreign aggressors, protected the land, and emerged victorious over his adversaries.

The temple is a magnificent stone structure, built with remarkable strength and grandeur. The sacred idol of the Divine Mother is believed to have been fashioned from a single emerald stone. Standing approximately three and a half feet in height upon an elevated pedestal, the Goddess radiates divine splendour and spiritual majesty.

After offering my prayers and paying my humble obeisance to Sri Tulja Bhavani Devi, I departed for Solapur. I reached Solapur Railway Station at about 4:30 p.m.

As my train to Hyderabad was scheduled to depart at 10:00 p.m., I had ample time at my disposal. Solapur is home to the renowned Sri Siddheshwar Temple, a sacred shrine of great significance. Beautifully constructed amidst a lake, the temple stands as an architectural and spiritual landmark. Tradition holds that it was established by the great yogi Sri Siddharameshwar, who came from our sacred Srisailam and propagated the truth that there is no distinction between the divine forms of Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu. This picturesque temple is situated about three kilometres from Solapur Railway Station.

The local people firmly believe that the blessings of Sri Siddheshwar Swami are the reason behind the prosperity of Solapur. The region is well known for its cotton cultivation and handloom industry. Solapur blankets, renowned for their quality, are found in households across the country.

I reached the Siddheshwar Temple by auto-rickshaw. It is a vast temple complex, housing several subsidiary shrines within its premises. After having darshan of Sri Siddheshwar, I visited the shrines of Sri Vinayaka and Sri Vithoba-Rukmini, and also paid my respects at the sacred Samadhi of Sri Siddharameshwar Yogi. I spent some time there in meditation, received the blessed prasadam, and returned to the railway station by 9:00 p.m.

My train arrived on schedule. I began my journey at 10:30 p.m. and reached Hyderabad at 6:30 the following morning. Thereafter, life returned to its usual rhythm, and I resumed my daily responsibilities and professional duties.

Owing to the nature of my profession, which requires me to travel extensively to various universities across the country, I have been blessed with opportunities to visit numerous renowned temples, prayer halls, and sacred Guru-sthanams. I regard this as a divine blessing bestowed upon me by my revered Gurudev. These pilgrimages and spiritual journeys have greatly aided my quest for Truth.

For some time, I had been reading in newspapers and hearing through various media channels that the Government of Uttar Pradesh was making extensive arrangements for the forthcoming Mahakumbh Mela at Prayag (Allahabad).

This sacred Mahakumbh Mela possesses a unique significance.

The Kumbh Mela, which is celebrated once every twelve years at Prayag, is observed twelve times in succession, thereby completing a cycle of twelve Kumbh Melas.

Thus, after a period of 12 × 12 = 144 years, this rare and auspicious occasion arises once again. I came to know that it was being organised on an unprecedented scale as the sacred **Mahakumbh Mela**.

According to the principles of Jyotisha Shastra (Vedic astrology), the Kumbh Melas are determined by the celestial movements of Brihaspati (Jupiter) and Surya (the Sun). Surya remains in each zodiac sign for approximately one month and completes His transit through all twelve zodiac signs in twelve months. Brihaspati remains in each zodiac sign for approximately one year and completes His journey through the twelve zodiac signs in twelve years. This cosmic cycle of time is further sustained by the orderly movements of the other planets, each revolving around the Sun in its ordained orbit.

Once every twelve years, when Brihaspati (Jupiter) transits through Mesha (Aries) and Surya (the Sun) and Chandra (the Moon) are in Makara (Capricorn), or when Brihaspati transits through Vrishabha (Taurus) while Surya is in Makara, the sacred Kumbh Mela is held at Prayag, the holy Triveni Sangam, the confluence of the sacred rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and Saraswati during the auspicious month of Magha.

Similarly, once every twelve years, when Brihaspati is in Kumbha (Aquarius) and Surya is in Mesha (Aries), the Kumbh Mela is celebrated at Haridwar, situated on the banks of the sacred Ganga, during the month of Chaitra.

Likewise, when Brihaspati is in Simha (Leo) and Surya and Chandra are in Kanya (Virgo), or when all three are positioned in Tula (Libra), the Kumbh Mela is observed once every twelve years at Ujjain, on the banks of the sacred Shipra river, during the month of Vaisakha.

In the same manner, when Brihaspati and Surya are both in Simha (Leo), the Kumbh Mela is held once every twelve years during the month of Bhadrapada at Trimbakeshwar (Nashik), the sacred source region of the River Godavari.

These four sacred gatherings are collectively known as the Kumbh Melas. By the boundless grace of the Supreme Lord, I have been blessed with the opportunity to participate in all four Kumbh Melas.

CHAPTER 24

A Pilgrimage to the Mela, Darshan of Great Souls, and the Sweet Call of the Gurudevs

The month of January 2013 arrived. Owing to reports of the immense crowds expected at the Mahakumbh Mela, my wife felt apprehensive and decided not to accompany me. Therefore, I set out alone and reached my elder brother's residence in Delhi on the morning of 15 January. My elder brother had not been keeping well for a few days. Nevertheless, the entire day passed pleasantly in the company of my brother and his children, and I greatly enjoyed their affectionate presence.

At 10:00 p.m., I boarded a train and proceeded towards Allahabad. I arrived there on the morning of 16th January and secured accommodation in a hotel situated near the river.

After completing my bath, I travelled by boat to the sacred Triveni Sangam, the holy confluence of the rivers Ganga, Yamuna, and the mystical Saraswati. There, I offered prayers and oblations to my revered ancestors. Thereafter, I proceeded to the Mahakumbh Mela grounds and reached the sacred venue by eleven o'clock in the morning.

The Government had made extensive arrangements for this Mahakumbh Mela on a truly grand scale. Spread across nearly 85,000 acres and organised with a budget of approximately ₹2,400 crore, the entire Mela area had been meticulously planned and developed. Numerous colonial-style tents had been erected, all interconnected by well-laid roads and pathways.

A vast pavilion had been constructed amid the river to enable pilgrims and visitors to witness the sacred Ganga Aarti, which was performed each morning and evening with great devotion and splendour.

Well-constructed ghats had been provided to facilitate holy bathing in the sacred waters. Electric illumination had been arranged throughout the Mela grounds, ensuring that the entire area remained brilliantly lit at night, almost as though it were daytime. As I reflected upon the thought that I would soon be blessed with the darshan of my revered Gurudev at this sacred Mahakumbh Mela, my heart overflowed with joy and anticipation.

Great souls from diverse spiritual traditions had arrived well in advance of the festivities. Yogis, saints, Sadgurus, Gurus, Naga Sadhus, Digambara ascetics, Himalayan yogis, spiritual teachers from abroad, Paramahamsas, Avadhutas,

Peethadhipatis, Maha Mandaleshwaras, and Mandaleshwaras from various traditions had all gathered there. Spacious camps and tents had been allotted to accommodate them.

In addition to these spiritual luminaries, numerous scientists, scholars, researchers, seekers of Truth, aspirants in search of a Guru, philosophers, thinkers, and even rationalists had come to participate in and observe this extraordinary Mahakumbh Mela. Numerous food stalls had been established to serve the vast number of pilgrims visiting the sacred gathering.

Furthermore, many selfless service organisations, ashrams, spiritual institutions, and temples from across the country were rendering continuous voluntary service. They provided free meals, drinking water, buttermilk, and various other forms of assistance to pilgrims and visitors, embodying the noble spirit of seva throughout the Mahakumbh Mela.

The entire Mela grounds were vibrant with an intensely spiritual atmosphere. I continued my walk, resolving to visit as many camps as possible. Moving from one tent to another, I met numerous people and engaged in meaningful conversations with them.

I had the opportunity to meet many Digambara ascetics and Naga Babas, and I enquired about their customs, traditions, and spiritual practices. I also met several Himalayan yogis, offered my respectful obeisance to them, and received their blessings. I visited the camps of various Peethadhipatis and Mandaleshwaras and was fortunate to converse with some of them.

At about two o'clock in the afternoon, I partook of a satisfying meal at the free annadana camp organised by Sri Sathya Sai Seva Organisation.

No pilgrim had to face any difficulty with regard to food or drinking water, as ample arrangements had been made throughout the Mela grounds. Yet one thought alone occupied my mind: *When and in what manner would I be blessed with the darshan of my revered Gurudev?*

Filled with this longing and anticipation, I continued to wander through the vast expanse of the Mela.

In the evening, the sacred Ganga Aarti was performed with magnificent grandeur and devotion. Innumerable pilgrims gathered to witness the divine ceremony. Saints and ascetics from all the camps participated in the Aarti. Thousands of Naga Babas also took part, displaying remarkable feats of physical discipline and yogic prowess as part of the celebrations.

Whenever the Kumbh Mela is held, the participating Peethadhipatis, Mandaleshwaras, spiritual institutions, and religious establishments jointly undertake the responsibility of serving the Himalayan yogis and Naga Babas. They provide the necessary articles for worship, drinking water, and wholesome meals each day, thereby upholding the sacred tradition of service and hospitality that forms an integral part of the Kumbh Mela.

The reason is that these ascetics do not carry any personal possessions with them. They undertake arduous journeys on foot from various regions of the Himalayas to participate in the Kumbh Mela.

Having renounced worldly attachments and external possessions, they lead lives removed from the conventional social environment, devoted entirely to spiritual pursuit.

Until about 10:30 that night, I visited nearly sixty camps and learned about a wide variety of spiritual traditions and practices. I came to understand many aspects of spiritual life that had previously been unknown to me.

One truth became abundantly clear to me: all these diverse paths, disciplines, and traditions represent sincere efforts to realise the one **Ultimate Truth**.

The Vedas, Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, Shastras, Puranas, Kavyas, and Itihasas describe the Divine Presence in innumerable ways. Yet all of them ultimately arrive at the same conclusion that the highest spiritual attainment lies in directly experiencing the Divine within oneself and perceiving that sacred Presence everywhere, in everything, and always.

For the Divine alone stands apart from all inert matter, shining forth as the eternal consciousness endowed with indescribable power and splendour.

Through the power of their intellect and spiritual insight, human beings have addressed that Supreme Reality by countless names Brahman, Paramatma, Paramjyoti, Parabrahman, Satya, Shiva, Sundara, Adi Purusha, Sarveshwara, Jagatkarana, and the Universal Father of all beings.

Yet, in the final analysis, one must personally experience that Divine Beauty to realise that it transcends all description and expression.

How, then, can one attain the experience of that Supreme Beauty?

What is the simplest and most effective way to attain that experience? This is the question that stands before every sincere sadhaka. The Guru alone is the one who reveals that path.

It was 10:45 p.m. Despite having visited so many camps, I had still not been blessed with the darshan of my revered Gurudev. Yet more than five hundred camps remained to be visited. I consoled myself with the thought that Gurudev would certainly honour his word and grant me darshan. If not that day, then surely the next.

However, I had already reserved a ticket for my return journey on the following night. Such thoughts continued to occupy my mind. At last, I returned to my room.

Just then, I heard a voice behind me calling out, “Have you come?” I turned around. To my utter astonishment and joy, it was none other than my revered Gurudev Himself calling me!

My eyes instantly filled with tears of joy. Without a moment’s hesitation, I prostrated at the sacred lotus feet of the Guru. With great affection, He held me, lifted me up, and said, “Come with me.”

I followed Him effortlessly, completely absorbed in His divine presence.

CHAPTER 25

The Love of Gurudev, Attainment of the State of Savikalpa Samadhi, and the Commencement of Nirvikalpa Samadhi

Gurudev led the way beyond the large camps, away from the bustle and commotion of the Mela grounds. After walking for about ten minutes, He entered a small hut. I followed Him inside. A lantern burned softly within.

Beside it stood a long wooden cot, covered with a clean white linen sheet, spacious enough for two people to sit comfortably. Gurudev seated Himself upon the cot in Padmasana and, with a gentle gesture, indicated that I should sit facing Him. I too occupied my seat.

Looking at me with boundless affection, Gurudev spoke in a loving voice:

“Athreya! It appears that you have not eaten anything since the afternoon. Tell me, what foods you enjoy. Whether vegetarian or non-vegetarian, it makes no difference.”

My eyes filled with tears of love and gratitude. Regaining my composure, I respectfully asked, “Gurudev! Is the consumption of meat not prohibited in spiritual practice?”

Gurudev responded with a gentle smile.

“Spiritual practice has no direct connection with one’s dietary habits. Spiritual progress depends on the purity of the mind, the refinement of the intellect, true understanding, and sincere sadhana. Therefore, tell me what food you would like to have.” As I was already quite hungry, I replied that any vegetarian food would be sufficient.

Gurudev smiled and softly clapped His hands.

Immediately, a tall, lean, bearded man entered the hut carrying a plate in one hand and a tumbler in the other. Looking at me with a faint smile, he placed them before me and quietly withdrew.

On the plate were four idlis, a serving of pongal, and three small bowls containing coconut chutney, thin dal, and curd. The tumbler was filled with fresh drinking water. Everything was warm and freshly prepared. At that moment, I was suddenly

reminded of the occasion at Bobbili Railway Station when a stranger had run alongside a moving train and handed me a parcel of food.

Lifting my head, I gazed lovingly at my Gurudev. Gurudev sat motionless, His eyes closed, absorbed in meditation.

Without speaking a word, I eagerly partook of the meal and ate everything that had been served. As soon as I finished, the same attendant entered the hut once again and indicated that I should wash my hands in a vessel he had brought. I did so. He then collected the plate, bowls, and tumbler and quietly departed.

Gurudev remained absorbed in meditation. A gentle bluish radiance seemed to emanate from His countenance. I too was seated in Padmasana before Him.

Without my being aware of it, my eyes closed. Before long, I was enveloped in a profound trance (samadhi) like state.

Suddenly, I became aware once again. Without opening my eyes, I glanced at my watch. It showed 4:10 a.m. This meant that I had remained in that state for nearly four hours.

What astonished me, however, was something altogether extraordinary. Even while remaining in that condition, I had been witnessing everything taking place around me.

I could perceive everything with remarkable clarity.

I could see Gurudev seated before me in deep meditation. I could see the lantern burning beside us. I could see the attendant who had served me food, seated outside the hut in meditation. I could even perceive the movement of buses and auto-rickshaws on the distant main road and the continuous arrival of pilgrims at the Mela grounds.

I could see Naga Babas singing devotional songs within their camps and performing their traditional Digambara dances. I could see municipal workers engaged in cleaning the Mela grounds. I could observe the movement of police vehicles and volunteers from various service organisations preparing vegetables for the following day's annadana.

I could clearly perceive some Babas seated on the riverbank smoking through a pipe, some saints immersed in meditation, and others taking their sacred bath in the river. In the distance, I could also witness a bhajan programme being conducted in a Shiva temple situated upon a hill.

As I remained absorbed in these extraordinary perceptions and reflections, "Everything is well!" I heard the words of Gurudev. Immediately, I turned my attention towards Him. His entire form was radiating a pure bluish effulgence. That divine light filled the whole hut. I could now behold Gurudev with remarkable clarity.

With my heart overflowing with wonder and joy, I replied to Gurudev's enquiry: "Very well, Gurudev." A gentle smile appeared upon His face. "Good," He said.

"This state is known as **Savikalpa Samadhi**. While abiding in this state of Samadhi, one remains aware of and can perceive all that is taking place around oneself. This is the first stage.

Recognising your sincere yearning to know the Ultimate Truth, and by the command of that Supreme Reality, this initial spiritual experience has been bestowed upon you."

I then respectfully asked,

"Gurudev, is there a state superior even to this?"

"Yes," He replied. "It is known as **Nirvikalpa Samadhi**. In that state, the entire universe becomes revealed to the seeker.

The unseen and inconceivable dimensions of Divine splendour become directly perceptible. One gains insight into the vastness of the celestial realms, the Milky Way and innumerable galaxies, the mysteries of atoms and subatomic structures, the workings of the Pancha Bhutas (the five elements), the origin of living matter, the emergence of life, the development of the foetus within the womb, the sprouting of a seed, the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly, the life-force that animates all living beings, the subtle consciousness underlying existence, the ceaseless exchange of energy, the interrelationship between living and non-living forms, and even the movements of thought within sentient beings. In that exalted state, the seeker gains direct understanding of the countless processes and phenomena that unfold throughout the universe."

"This means that the individual soul abiding within a person becomes united with the Supreme Soul, the very source from which this entire creation has emerged. It signifies a return to one's original abode, the Source from which one has come.

This is what is meant by the realisation of Truth. This is the state of **Brahmaikya** (union with Brahman). This is the truth proclaimed by the Mahavakya, **'Ayam Atma Brahma' — 'This Self is Brahman.'** This is the state expressed by **'Aham Brahmasmi' — 'I am Brahman.'**" With these words, Gurudev concluded His explanation.

Immediately, I asked:

“Gurudev! How may one attain that exalted state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi?” “For that,” Gurudev replied promptly, “you must begin your practice with **empty knowledge**.”

I was unable to comprehend His meaning. “Gurudev, I do not understand. What does ‘empty knowledge’ mean?” I asked respectfully.

Gurudev explained: “It means setting aside all the knowledge that you believe you have accumulated thus far. Without yielding to doubt, cultivate the unwavering conviction that the Supreme Soul is ever present with you, everywhere and always.

Thereafter, perform every action that comes to you in a spirit of selflessness, with purity of mind, free from attachment and personal expectation. Carry out your duties with steadfast dedication and perseverance. Through sincere and continuous sadhana, this state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi will gradually be attained.”

Gurudev spoke these words with a gentle smile.

I then asked: “Gurudev, is it truly possible for an ordinary human being to practise the disciplines You have described and attain the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi?”

“Why should it not be possible?” Gurudev replied.

“Why does a human being remain so restless and anxious, even though he knows that none of the worldly possessions he accumulates throughout life will accompany him when he departs from this world?

Why does he entertain the illusion that all these things belong to him, despite knowing that everything ultimately belongs to the Supreme Soul?

Why does he not strive to discover the Ultimate Truth before death overtakes him?

Why does a person, who worships God in countless ways within temples, overlook the truth that the Supreme Soul pervades everything, exists within every being, and is present everywhere?

Why does he neglect the very parents through whom he obtained this human birth?

Why is he unable to comprehend that the Supreme Soul dwells within him as the Atman, and that the same Atman is present in all living beings, even while he describes and worships the Divine in various forms?

Why does he distort the path of Truth and the principles of Dharma that the great sages and realised souls established through profound experience, sacrifice, and selfless effort?

Is this the result of true knowledge, or is it the consequence of ignorance?"

After a brief pause, Gurudev continued:

"In this entire creation, the Supreme Soul has bestowed upon human beings the greatest capacities and the highest potential. A person who, through sincere sadhana, right understanding, and spiritual knowledge, realises the true nature of the Atman within himself gradually attains the highest states of spiritual fulfilment.

Thereafter, by the grace of the Supreme Reality and through continued spiritual evolution, he progresses towards the exalted state of **Nitya Samadhi**, the state of eternal absorption in the Divine."

Gurudev continued to instruct me, revealing many more profound spiritual truths and mysteries.

CHAPTER 26

Despair, Courage, the Protection of the Guru, Serenity of Mind, and Unity in Diversity

After remaining silent for a few moments, Gurudev spoke again:

“Athreya! There is something more that I wish to tell you.

The state of **Savikalpa Samadhi** that you have now attained in my presence will not arise in the same manner when I am no longer physically before you.”

He spoke these words with a gentle smile.

Upon hearing them, my heart was suddenly filled with disappointment. Perceiving the pain and dejection within me, Gurudev compassionately reassured me:

“O Athreya! There is no reason for discouragement.

The day you realise your true Self-nature through tireless sadhana and unwavering perseverance, both of these states will arise within you naturally and of their own accord.

That attainment shall certainly be yours.” Saying this, He lovingly placed His hand upon my shoulder.

The sacred touch of Gurudev dispelled my disappointment and filled my heart once again with courage, faith, and renewed strength.

After remaining absorbed in meditation for some time, Gurudev slowly opened His eyes.

“My beloved Athreya! By the command of the Supreme Spirit, the time has come for Me to depart from this place. I shall meet you again very soon. Until then, practise with wholehearted dedication all that I have instructed you.

Shubham Bhuyat! May auspiciousness be yours.” Saying this, He placed His hands upon my head and bestowed His blessings.

With eyes moistened by devotion and emotion, I simply gazed at Gurudev. The soft blue radiance that had enveloped Him gradually faded away. When I looked again in the light of the lantern, Gurudev was no longer there.

With profound reverence, I touched with both hands the very spot where He had been seated in Padmasana and closed my eyes in silent gratitude. After a few moments, I slowly rose and opened the door of the hut. A slender ray of the morning sun streamed gently into the room.

When I looked at my watch, it was 5:43 a.m. I extinguished the lantern and stepped outside. The attendant who had served me food was nowhere to be seen. Filled with an indescribable joy and renewed enthusiasm, I began walking once again towards the Mahakumbh Mela. My mind felt remarkably light and free.

I continued my walk along the riverbank. Unlike before, everything around me appeared transformed. The entire atmosphere seemed fresh and radiant with new meaning. Wherever I looked, I could perceive the presence of the Supreme Being. The Divine seemed to permeate everything and shine forth through all creation.

Throughout the Mela grounds, devotees were worshipping the Divine in accordance with their own faith and spiritual inclinations. Some were taking sacred baths in the river, while others were offering Surya Namaskaras. Some were performing rites and prayers for their ancestors, while others sat absorbed in meditation in Padmasana. Naga Babas could be seen unclothed, practising various yogic postures and disciplines. Peethadhipatis and Mandaleshwaras, accompanied by their disciples, moved through the Mela amidst devotional music and spiritual celebrations.

Devotees from foreign lands were seen wandering through the fairgrounds, singing bhajans in the company of their Gurus. Members of voluntary service organisations were engaged in the noble task of distributing food to pilgrims. Many devotees were visiting the temporary temples and shrines established throughout the Mela.

The ringing of temple bells resounded in all directions. Organisers and volunteers guided the continuous flow of pilgrims. Police personnel issued instructions and safety announcements through loudspeakers. Sacred yajnas and ritual offerings were being conducted in several camps. Delicate streams of fragrant smoke arising from offerings of ghee spread gently across the Mela grounds. The chanting of Vedic mantras echoed through the air from various loudspeakers.

From many tents came the sounds of devotional songs and bhajans. Journalists, researchers, and visitors were capturing photographs with their cameras. Television channels were providing live coverage from their mobile broadcasting units.

Amidst all these sights and sounds, I remembered the words of my revered Gurudev.

“This indeed is the true meaning of **unity in diversity**.

Whatever path one may follow, whatever method of spiritual practice one may adopt, the goal remains the same to realise the Truth.

We have come from the Supreme in purity, and it is to that same Supreme Purity that we must ultimately return.

The purpose of life is to experience the eternal nature of the Atman.

Everything that transpires in the interval is but temporary and fleeting.

Nothing is brought into this world, and nothing is taken away from it.

All notions of 'this is mine' and 'this belongs to me alone' are merely passing illusions born of attachment and ignorance."

The true goal before every living being is to dispel the gloom of ignorance, arising from the impurities of the senses, mind, intellect, and ego, through the weapon of knowledge that has been bestowed upon human beings by nature, and thereby to experience that Supreme Light.

If this is not understood and realised, and if one remains attached to notions of what is desirable and undesirable, pleasant and unpleasant, one must inevitably continue to experience the dualities of worldly existence, joy and sorrow, gain and loss, prosperity and poverty, birth and death.

Among the many teachings imparted by Gurudev, He often counselled me to pay attention to two aspects of life. One is the **inner being**, and the other the **outer personality**.

In spiritual practice, far greater importance is accorded to the inner being than to the external personality. The inner self must be nurtured, refined, and preserved in a state of purity. Those who give excessive importance to outward appearances often reveal, perhaps unknowingly, that they do not value inner refinement to the same extent. At times, I felt that I too was not entirely free from this tendency.

We live in an age in which people are frequently judged and valued according to their external appearance. Many individuals choose their spiritual teachers based primarily upon outward conduct, display, or appearance. Recognising this weakness in human nature, some learned and influential persons attempt, in various ways, to attract and impress the masses who are inclined to place undue importance on external factors.

Sadly, such distortions and shortcomings can be observed across many faiths and traditions.

For this reason, the sincere seeker must learn to look beyond external appearances and cultivate purity, discernment, and truthfulness within.

Many such misguided practices are propagated under various names, often spreading falsehood and confusion, and those who promote them are at times regarded as spiritual teachers by the unsuspecting. Some operate in the name of religious beliefs; others in the name of miraculous healing. Some claim to bring transformation through the changing of names, while others promote the influence of fortunate numbers. Some present themselves as Babas, while others claim to bestow spiritual power through Shaktipata. Some utilise sponsored television programmes, while others seek influence through caste-based or religious organisations. Still others justify questionable practices in the name of animal sacrifice, occult rituals, or the exploitation of popular beliefs. Some seek to provoke division in the name of rationalism, human rights, social causes, or political ideologies. Others employ charitable institutions, such as orphanages and homes for the elderly, as means of gaining influence and recognition. There are also those who encourage superstition, who divide the One Supreme Reality into competing factions and thereby foster discord and hatred. Some attempt to attribute caste, religion, colour, or other worldly distinctions to the Supreme Soul. Others distort the teachings of realised souls and great spiritual masters, while some engage in propaganda proclaiming the superiority of one faith over another. Gurudev firmly upheld the principle that, although beliefs, practices, and traditions may differ, **Truth is One**.

He taught that the sincere seeker should look beyond external divisions and recognise the same Divine Reality that shines through all paths leading towards genuine spiritual realisation.

I remembered the words of Gurudev that the aspiration of the good gurus is to bring all human beings, the children of God, on this earth, on the same path, through the paths of karma and knowledge!

I spent the whole day thinking about many things that Gurudev had told me. In the evening I visited the Madhaveshwari Shakti Peeth. At night I left by train and reached Vizag via Bhubaneswar.

Days are passing by. Many channels are broadcasting the highlights of the Kumbh Mela live every day.

BBC and CNN news channels have stated that 120 million people will come from all over the country in the first 30 days, and about 3.2 million foreigners will come.

I start to wonder when I get the chance to see Gurudev.

CHAPTER 27

At the Dargah of Tajuddin Baba
The Grace and Assistance of Gurudev

On 8 March 2013, I received the sorrowful news that my elder brother had passed away in Nagpur. My wife and I immediately set out for Nagpur. My elder brother's three sons performed the prescribed funeral rites and final ceremonies.

The cremation was conducted at Multai, in the Betul district of Madhya Pradesh, situated amidst the Satpura mountain ranges, approximately 128 kilometres from Nagpur. This sacred place is revered as the source of the River Tapti and the sacred asthikas of my brother were united in the river.

The River Tapti (also known as Tapi) is described in our Puranas as the daughter of Surya Bhagavan, the Sun God. Originating in the Satpura hills, the sacred river flows through the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Gujarat before ultimately merging into the Arabian Sea.

Earlier, during one of my official visits to Nagpur, I had intended to visit the sacred dargah of Hazrat Tajuddin Baba, situated about fifteen kilometres from the city. However, circumstances did not permit me to do so at that time.

Now, the opportunity had arisen once again. Yet, owing to the recent bereavement in our family, I hesitated. I felt reluctant to visit such a sacred place while observing the customary period of ritual impurity associated with the death of a close relative. Nevertheless, for reasons I could not explain, the longing within my heart would not subside. "Go! Go! Have darshan! In the presence of a Sadguru, there is no room for doubt." My inner voice continued to urge me repeatedly.

Unable to resist that yearning any longer, on the evening of the seventh day following my elder brother's passing, I travelled with my nephew Sridhar, the second son of my elder brother, to the sacred dargah of Sadguru Tajuddin Baba. As we arrived, Sridhar told me that he would remain outside. Although I too was observing the same period of bereavement, my longing for darshan had become irresistible. Unable to suppress my curiosity and devotion, I entered the dargah premises with a sense of reverent hesitation.

The entire complex was filled with devotees. People belonging to different faiths and backgrounds had gathered there in large numbers. The sacred tomb of Sadguru Tajuddin Baba was adorned with a velvet chaddar, floral garlands, and devotional offerings. Devotees reverently touched the tomb and then touched their eyes as an

expression of faith and devotion. Some sat quietly in a corner near the shrine, absorbed in meditation and prayer.

Standing a short distance away, I bowed respectfully to Sadguru Tajuddin Baba. Closing my eyes, I began to pray silently.

Just then, I felt someone gently tap my shoulder. I opened my eyes. A Muslim brother standing before me smiled warmly and said in Hindi, “Come, come inside and touch the sacred tomb.” Taking my hand with affection, he gently led me forward.

Startled, I opened my eyes. Unsure of what to say, I replied in Hindi:

“No, brother. I do not have a head covering; therefore, I am offering my prayers from here.” Without a moment’s hesitation, he took out a green scarf from his pocket, gently tied it around my head, held my hand, and led me towards the sacred tomb.

Without entertaining any further doubts, and accepting it as the command of the Guru, I reverentially touched the tomb of Sadguru Tajuddin Baba and then touched my eyes with the same hands.

At that very moment, a powerful sensation passed through my entire body, causing it to tremble. A Haji standing nearby gently placed a bouquet of peacock feathers upon my head, blessed me with prayers in Arabic, and offered me three raisins as sacred prasad.

The devotee who had brought me inside then advised me to sit quietly in a corner and meditate. I followed his suggestion and remained in peaceful meditation for about ten minutes. My mind felt extraordinarily light and serene. When I opened my eyes, I looked around for the person who had tied the scarf around my head and brought me to the sacred tomb. He was nowhere to be seen. I approached the Haji and enquired about him, but he replied that he did not know who the man was. I then searched throughout the entire dargah premises, yet I could not find him anywhere. Removing the scarf from my head, I stood for nearly fifteen minutes at the very spot where he had first approached me. Still, he did not return.

I wondered what should be done with the scarf he had given me. If I attempted to return it to someone there, everyone already seemed to have one of their own. Before I could decide where to leave it, I carefully folded it, placed it in my pocket, and departed from the dargah. Reflecting deeply upon these remarkable events, Sridhar and I returned home by cart, our minds absorbed in thoughts of the mysterious grace we had experienced.

When I returned home, my wife was occupied in the kitchen along with our daughters-in-law, preparing the meals. My wife has always been deeply devoted to traditional observances, rituals, and customary practices. By temperament, she follows the path of **Karma** (selfless action and observance of duty), whereas I am more inclined towards the path of **Jnana** (spiritual knowledge). Nevertheless, we have always respected each other's views and spiritual inclinations.

Although I may not place the same degree of emphasis upon certain ritual observances, I nevertheless follow them for my own peace of mind and out of respect for family tradition. From the time of our marriage, she has faithfully adhered to the guidelines concerning worship, rituals, and sacred observances that were taught to her by my parents. Throughout her life, she has diligently fulfilled her responsibilities, upholding the honour, dignity, and traditions of both her parental and marital families. Despite many challenges she has encountered, she has discharged her duties with unwavering courage and dedication. Indeed, my life would feel incomplete without her.

At that time, I did not tell her that I had visited the dargah, nor did I recount the extraordinary events that had taken place there. I quietly placed the green headscarf inside my trunk, beneath my clothes. On the afternoon of the eighth day, all of us departed from Nagpur and reached Rajahmundry in the early hours of the ninth day. The prescribed rites and ceremonies of the ninth, tenth, eleventh, and twelfth days were duly performed on the banks of the sacred Godavari River. Thereafter, each of us returned to our respective homes.

As soon as we arrived in Visakhapatnam, my wife gathered all the clothes from our suitcases and carried them to the bathroom. She soaked them in a bucket of water, completed her bath, and came out. I too bathed separately and then returned.

Soon afterwards, the entire house became filled with the fragrance of sacred **Vibhuti**. Unable to determine the source of the fragrance, my wife and I searched throughout the house. At length, we discovered that the aroma was emanating from the green headscarf that I had worn at the dargah.

When my wife enquired about the cloth, I narrated to her all the events that had taken place during my visit to the Dargah. Both of us were astonished. We removed the scarf and dried it separately. To our surprise, the fragrance became even more intense.

Considering it to be a sacred blessing bestowed through the grace of my revered Gurudev, Sadguru Tajuddin Baba, we preserved it carefully among our cherished

possessions. More remarkable still is the fact that, even to this day, that headscarf continues to emit the same divine fragrance.

"*Akhanda mandalakaram vyaaptam yena characharam!*

Thatpadam darshitham yena thasmai sri gurave namaha!!"

CHAPTER 28

Darshan of Gurudev at the Gajanan Maharaj Temple and the Resolution of Doubts

Although Gurudev had not blessed me with His direct darshan for several months, He continued to guide me indirectly through His teachings, cautioning me and assisting me in my quest for Truth. Among the lessons He conveyed indirectly was the understanding that the noble deeds performed by a person earn him praise and recognition among people. This is a truth that is well known too almost everyone. It is for this reason that human beings tend to value actions more than mere knowledge.

Driven by self-interest, people often engage in numerous actions, disregarding the voice of their conscience and undertaking various endeavours solely for their own advancement. They understand such actions inevitably bring corresponding consequences and suffering. Yet, despite knowing this, they continue to pursue them without fear or hesitation.

Man often takes pride in his intellectual abilities and displays his knowledge, while overlooking the Supreme Truth. In doing so, he fails to recognise that all talents and abilities are but manifestations of the Divine bestowed by God.

At times, he is incapable to express his sincere opinion even before a few individuals. Instead, he seeks to turn every situation and action to his own advantage. Such is the nature of the human mind.

Amid such confusion and inner conflict, how can one realise the Ultimate Truth? A spiritual aspirant must remain ever vigilant in such matters. Through these subtle teachings, Gurudev was indirectly cautioning me to engage in constant self-examination and introspection.

It was during this period that I was unexpectedly blessed with an opportunity to have the darshan of Gurudev at Shegaon.

In the year 2014, I travelled to the Agricultural University at Akola in Maharashtra on official work. Upon completing my duties there, I proceeded to Shegaon, situated about 46 kilometres away, to pay my respects at the sacred Samadhi Mandir of the Mahayogi and Sadguru, Sri Gajanan Maharaj.

Sadgurus such as Sri Shirdi Sai Baba, Sri Gajanan Maharaj, Sri Tajuddin Baba, Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembe Swami), and Sri Dhuniwala Dada were contemporaries. All of them are revered as divine incarnations and Sadgurus embodying the grace of Sri Gurudev Dattatreya.

- Sri Shirdi Sai Baba attained Mahasamadhi at Shirdi in 1918.
- Sri Gajanan Maharaj attained Mahasamadhi at Shegaon in 1910.
- Sri Tajuddin Baba attained Mahasamadhi at Nagpur in 1925.
- Sri Vasudevananda Saraswati (Tembe Swami) attained Mahasamadhi at Garudeshwar (Gujarat) in 1914.
- Sri Dhuniwala Dada entered Mahasamadhi at Khandwa (Madhya Pradesh) in 1930.

Although these great Mahatmas never met one another physically, they often referred to each other while guiding their devotees. The temple complex is beautifully constructed in stone, with Sri Rama Temple situated above and the sacred Samadhi Mandir of Sri Gajanan Maharaj located below. Behind the Samadhi, a majestic idol of Sri Gajanan Maharaj has been installed for the darshan of devotees.

A short distance from the temple premises lies a spacious garden known as *Anand Vihar*, where cottages have been provided for the accommodation of pilgrims and devotees. Shegaon is also well connected by rail, with its own railway station.

After having the darshan of Sadguru Sri Gajanan Maharaj, I was proceeding towards the dining hall when I suddenly heard someone call out, “Athreya!” As I turned around, I was astonished to behold my revered Gurudev seated upon a stool.

Overwhelmed with joy, I hurried towards Him and prostrated at His holy lotus feet. Gurudev graciously lifted me up and made me sit beside Him.

With a gentle smile, He asked, “How is your quest for Truth progressing, O seeker of philosophy?”

I replied, “Gurudev! By Your grace, my spiritual pursuit is progressing well. However, many doubts continue to arise during my sadhana. From time to time, I have been receiving Your guidance inwardly. My long-cherished desire to have Your darshan, which remained unfulfilled for several months, has been blessedly fulfilled today.

I hope that today I shall receive proper clarification for the doubts that trouble my mind.” Hearing this, Gurudev smiled softly and said, “I understand your situation. That is precisely why I thought of spending some time with you.”

“O Athreya! To realise the Ultimate Truth, you must first undertake a thorough examination of yourself. Constantly observe and analyse your thoughts, your true nature, your inner being, the transformations that continuously arise within you, and the way you respond to the events and circumstances of life.

If one engages solely in analysing the external world without practising self-examination, mental weakness gradually develops and true discrimination fails to mature. As a result, a person loses touch with his own Self, becomes dependent upon others, and drifts farther away from the Supreme Truth.

Meditation greatly assists this process of self-enquiry. However, meditation does not merely consist of concentrating upon an object, observing the breath, or mechanically repeating a mantra. True meditation involves earnestly seeking the underlying cause and truth behind all things through the wisdom and discernment bestowed by God. Through such contemplation, you will gradually realise the Truth and experience supreme spiritual bliss.

Thereafter, you will attain the state of *Brahmananda* (Divine Bliss), and in due course progress towards the state of perpetual *Samadhi*, eventually reaching the exalted state of *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. Through this, you will directly experience the Self and realise the Ultimate Truth. You will become one with the Paramatma, the Supreme Self.

At that stage, your spiritual sadhana will have reached its fulfilment. Beyond this, there remains nothing further to be attained.

Athreya! Spirituality is, in essence, the study and realisation of one’s own Self. All other methods are but practical aids that support this supreme objective. My blessings shall always remain with you in this sacred pursuit of Self-realisation. You shall certainly be blessed with the darshan of the Supreme Self.” With these gracious words, Gurudev brought His discourse to a close.

Saying that it was time for Him to depart, Gurudev gently placed His hand upon my head, blessed me, and instructed me to proceed to the dining hall. Thereafter, He slowly walked towards the temple. I remained standing there, gazing at Him with reverence until He disappeared.

After some time, I regained my composure and continued towards the dining hall. The teachings imparted by Gurudev filled my heart with renewed courage and inspiration. I firmly resolved to set aside all unnecessary thoughts, analyses, and arguments that could give rise to doubts and confusion. With determination, I resolved to put Gurudev’s teachings into sincere practice.

This entire creation is filled with countless diversities, contrasts, and apparent contradictions. Every individual perceives and experiences life in his own way. It is neither possible nor necessary for one person to provide answers that satisfy everyone.

No matter how many great souls proclaim that there is but One Truth and strive to remove these apparent differences, the diversity that forms an integral part of creation continues to manifest in countless ways.

Yet, the true Gurus and realised Masters, having directly experienced the Ultimate Truth, constantly move among humanity, guiding sincere seekers along the righteous path. Through their compassion and wisdom, they bring about transformation in individuals and, thereby, in society itself.

By following the paths of *Karma* and *Jnana* taught by such Enlightened Masters, everyone must gradually free himself from the bonds of *Maya* and delusion. Through earnest enquiry and the pursuit of Truth, one must learn to perceive the underlying unity amidst diversity and ultimately attain Self-realisation.

CHAPTER 29

A Journey Towards Self-Realisation

For the realisation of truth, a spiritual seeker must maintain a harmonious balance between *Karma* (righteous action) and *Jnana* (spiritual knowledge). He must progress on the path by understanding and practising the principle of inaction within action and action within inaction. To the fullest extent possible, he should wisely utilise the knowledge and discernment bestowed upon him by the Supreme Self.

The principles of *Karma* and *Jnana*, handed down to us by the sages and noble predecessors, reflect the essential foundations of human existence. They encompass human welfare, wisdom, peace, prosperity, spiritual contemplation, personal growth, inner potential, and self-discipline.

These two great doctrines were expounded with the welfare of all humanity in view, rooted in the pursuit of Truth and directed towards the establishment of *Manava Dharma* the universal principle of righteous living. They were analysed with profound insight and presented in a systematic and rational manner for the benefit of all. Within these teachings, there is no distinction based on caste, creed, or religion. They are universal truths intended for the upliftment and spiritual evolution of all humanity.

Every realised sage, as a fundamental part of spiritual instruction, briefly explains to disciples the distinction and relationship between these two paths, *Karma* and *Jnana*. He encourages them to examine both from an integrated perspective, understand the underlying Truth that unites them, and realise that Truth through personal practice and direct experience.

At the same time, seekers are cautioned that the greatest obstacle encountered during spiritual practice is the ego, the sense of “I” and “mine.” Unknowingly drawn into its influence, many aspirants abandon their spiritual discipline midway and ultimately find themselves returning to the very state from which they began. The paths of *Karma Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga* serve as powerful means for gradually dissolving and ultimately transcending this ego-consciousness.

Owing to the disturbances of the mind, intellect, and ego, human beings become subject to countless thoughts, conflicts, and inner unrest. One must wholeheartedly accept that the primary cause of this condition lies within oneself and not in God.

When a person adopts a particular tradition, practises it, and comes to believe that it alone represents the Ultimate Truth while criticising other paths and beliefs, he

unknowingly falls into ignorance. Without realising the Truth for himself, he may, in the very name of the tradition he follows, create confusion and doubt in the minds of others.

It is indeed true that worldly intelligence and worldly learning, by themselves, have no direct connection with the Ultimate Truth. This is what the great sages have succinctly described as *Maya*. This *Maya* exerts a tremendous influence upon the human mind and intellect. It can subject even highly learned and knowledgeable individuals to ignorance, pride, and delusion. To become completely free from its influence, one must sincerely embark upon the quest for Truth.

The Supreme Self, who abides within all living beings in the form of the *Atman*, bestows consciousness and vitality upon every creature. Yet, while remaining ever-present within, He functions solely as the Divine Witness, without assuming responsibility for the various actions performed by the individual being.

Failing to understand this profound truth, man imagines that all his actions are accomplished solely through his own abilities and talents. In doing so, he overlooks and disregards the presence of the Supreme Self dwelling within him.

When favourable events occur, he offers abundant praise to God.

When adversity arises, he is quick to criticise and blame the Supreme Lord. And when everything proceeds according to his wishes, he proudly proclaims that it is all the result of his own skill and intelligence.

How, then, can a human being who remains immersed in such delusion come to recognise the Supreme Self residing within? How can he directly experience that Divine Presence?

For this, intense spiritual discipline is essential. One must thoroughly understand and realise one's own true Self.

To attain such realisation, the complete grace and blessings of the Guru are indispensable.

In this quest for Truth, I began striving to understand the nature of the Self through the study of the Vedas and Upanishads; through various sacred scriptures; through devotional and spiritual literature; through contemplation of the Divine Presence permeating the entire creation; through the life histories of great saints and realised Masters; through the company of noble souls; through careful observation of the thoughts that continually arise within the mind; through inner meditation; and through the direct teachings imparted by Gurudev.

Whenever I was blessed with His direct darshan, Gurudev would, often, instruct me about the Self and the path to Self-realisation.

For the *Atman* is neither born nor does it die. Likewise, it is beyond the limitations of past, present, and future. It is eternal, timeless, and ever-existent.

It pervades all existence and is present within every living being. Weapons can not harm it; fire can not burn it; water can not wet it; and wind can not dry it. In other words, even the five great elements that govern the material world have no power over the *Atman*. To realise this truth is the essence of genuine spiritual practice. Yogis strive tirelessly for this realisation. Many people attempt to describe the nature of the *Atman* in various ways. Yet rather than merely describing it, it is far more beneficial to realise it through sincere effort, direct experience, and the disciplined practice of spiritual wisdom.

Gurudev repeatedly emphasised that true spiritual practice consists in fully knowing oneself and thereby attaining *Atma-bodha,* Self-awareness and Self-realisation.

To overcome the countless difficulties encountered in human life; to attain a higher spiritual state and experience supreme bliss; to recognise oneself as a manifestation of the Supreme Self; to become completely free from the cycle of birth and death; and to return to one's original Divine Abode, one must attain *Atma-jnana* (Self-knowledge).

When you become free from the bondage of *karma*, *Atma-jnana* will dawn within you. Therefore, remain constantly established in contemplation of the Self. If you persevere in this manner, you will surely realise the Truth before long.

"Shubham Bhuyat!" – "May auspiciousness be yours! May blessedness be yours!"

With these words of assurance and benediction, the revered Gurudev bestowed His blessings.

CHAPTER 30

Paravidya and Aparavidya

Although Gurudev did not bless me with His direct darshan for an entire year, He continued to dispel my doubts indirectly from time to time. Perhaps it was His divine intention that I should spend that year wholly engaged in enquiry, contemplation, and introspection.

While discharging my responsibilities towards family and profession as a matter of duty, I devoted much of my time during my travels to deep self-reflection. This brought considerable clarity regarding many spiritual subjects, while at the same time giving rise to several new questions within my mind. I carefully recorded these thoughts and doubts in a small notebook.

Among the insights that arose through introspection was the following:

The knowers of *Brahmavidya* have declared that, to gain a complete understanding of this world and existence, one must first comprehend two forms of knowledge *Paravidya* and *Aparavidya*.

In *Aparavidya* are included the four Vedas, together with the six *Vedangas—Siksa* (phonetics), *Kalpa* (ritual procedures), *Vyakarana* (grammar), *Nirukta* (etymology), *Chandas* (prosody), and *Jyotisa* (astronomy and astrology), which serve as the auxiliary disciplines of Vedic learning.

Numerous rituals and sacred observances are performed in accordance with the teachings of these four Vedas. The *Rg Veda* contains hymns in praise of the various deities; the *Yajur Veda* expounds the procedures and principles of sacrificial rites; the *Sama Veda* teaches the melodic chanting of the Vedic hymns; and the *Atharva Veda* deals with sacrificial practices, health, healing sciences, and subjects relating to astrology and other branches of sacred knowledge. Collectively, these scriptures also impart an understanding of realities that lie beyond ordinary perception.

Paravidya, on the other hand, is the higher knowledge that reveals the eternal and immortal Truth. It teaches the nature of the everlasting *Atman*. The Upanishads, which constitute the *Vedanta,* the concluding and highest wisdom of the Vedas are devoted to the exposition of *Paravidya*. For this reason, it is also known as *Upanishad Vidya*.

The enlightened sages perceive this *Aksara Parabrahman,* the Imperishable Supreme Reality as the source of the entire universe. It is beyond the grasp of the

physical senses, beyond the organs of action, without form, colour, or material attributes, unborn and undying, eternal, all-pervading, and supremely subtle.

Such a Supreme Reality can be realised through the purified mind. The mind is the chief instrument for Self-realisation. The Supreme Self dwells in the heart of every living being in a subtle and invisible form. Though the outward forms of beings may differ, the *Atman* within them is one and the same.

Just as rivers may bear different names and follow different courses, yet the water within them is essentially the same, so too are all beings united by the one Supreme Self. When the many rivers finally merge into the ocean, they lose their separate identities and become one with it. In the same manner, the individual self ultimately merges into the Supreme Reality.

Every living being is, in essence, an embodiment of *Sat-Chit-Ananda* Existence, Consciousness, and Divine Bliss. To realise this supreme truth, one must engage in sincere spiritual practice founded upon Self-awareness and inner enquiry.

Those who behold all beings in the Self and the Self in all beings harbour no hatred towards anyone. How can one who has realised that the Self alone pervades all existence experience attachment, aversion, or sorrow?

A person who has attained Self-realisation perceives the entire universe as the manifestation of the Self. He sees nothing apart from the Self in all creation. Distraction arises only when there appears to be a second object distinct from oneself. When everything is experienced as One, the mind has nowhere else to wander. It remains established in that Oneness. Consequently, there is neither sorrow nor attachment, neither hatred nor fear.

Self-awareness, Self-realisation, and similar spiritual attainments are inward experiences. The external world remains unchanged. The nature in which the world is perceived varies according to the condition and maturity of the observer's mind.

A young person may look upon the world with confidence, believing that anything can be achieved. An elderly person may view the same world with the feeling that everything has already passed.

The world itself has not changed; the change lies in the observer. It is for this reason that the mind of one who has attained Self-realisation expands beyond all limitations and becomes one with the entire universe. Such a realised soul understands the inner significance of all things. He perceives the wisdom hidden within creation and comprehends the Truth that underlies existence. Such a person alone can truly be called a complete human being.

A true *Maneeshi* is one who has mastered the mind. He does not act according to the whims of the mind; rather, the mind functions at his command. One who has realised the Self has nothing further to know and remains eternally content. Such a realised soul places his faith solely in the *Atman* and the *Paramatman*. Having understood the true nature of existence, he does not become dependent upon or attached to anything external.

The *Atman* is unmoving, yet swifter than the mind. The senses are incapable of overtaking or comprehending it. Indeed, how can that which pervades the entire universe be said to move from one place to another?

The mind and the body themselves exist within the all-pervading reality of the *Atman*. Before the mind reaches any object of perception, the *Atman* is already present there. Thus, while ever remaining motionless, the *Atman* is said to be swifter than the mind.

The senses are unable to perceive the *Atman*, for the organs of perception such as the ears, skin, tongue, eyes, and nose—were created to apprehend the external world alone. To function, these organs require an unchanging and stable basis.

Just as a vehicle requires a fixed road upon which to travel, and a motion picture requires a stationary screen upon which to be projected, so too do the senses require a stable foundation for their operation. That immutable foundation is the *Atman*, the life-principle and inner consciousness that enables all the senses and faculties to function.

Since the *Atman* dwells within every living being, it is, in truth, nearer to us than anything else. Yet so long as it is not realised through direct spiritual experience, it appears to be distant and unattainable.

The scriptures clearly declare that the same Reality exists within as the *Atman* and without as the *Paramatman*. The Supreme Truth is none other than the *Paramatman*. Equally true is the teaching that the essential nature of the individual being is itself none other than that Supreme Reality. *Atma-jnana* (Self-knowledge) is the direct realisation, through sincere spiritual practice, of the eternal Truth expressed in the awareness, "I am." It is the experiential recognition of one's true essence and ultimate nature. The fruit of such spiritual attainment is *Atma-sakshatkara* the direct realisation of the Self. This is the highest state of spiritual fulfilment, the supreme condition of liberation and enlightenment. It is the exalted state of *Brahma-bhava*, wherein one abides in the awareness of oneness with Brahman, the Absolute Reality.

This physical body will one day be reduced to ashes, while the life-force shall merge into the immortal and deathless *Atman*. Therefore, O mind! Engage in earnest enquiry, persevere in spiritual practice, attain the supreme goal, and realise the Truth of "I am." In this manner, the spiritual aspirant must constantly inspire and awaken himself through inner contemplation.

"O Supreme Lord! You are the Knower of all the actions I have performed. May I experience and exhaust the results of the deeds accumulated thus far. Grant that the actions I perform hereafter may be carried out without personal desire, attachment, or expectation, and may I remain unaffected by their fruits." Such should be the sincere prayer of a spiritual seeker.

During *sadhana*, one must deeply enquire into profound questions such as these: By whose power is the mind drawn towards the objects of the material world? By whose inspiration does the mind function? By whose command does the life-force (*prana*) operate? By whose will do speech find expression? What is the source of the knowledge that empowers the eyes to see and the ears to hear? The earnest pursuit of answers to such questions gradually leads the seeker towards the realisation of the Supreme Truth.

CHAPTER 31

Empathy and Self-Compassion

The *Atman* / Brahman is eternal, conscious, all-pervading, and present within all beings. Therefore, it can be realised through true spiritual knowledge. This Self-awareness ever remains as the foundation of all cognition and as the witnessing consciousness behind every experience of the individual being. This alone is the Truth.

One who perceives this Reality through subtle wisdom and refined spiritual insight attains immortality. It is through the presence of the *Atman* that a living being derives strength, vitality, and the power to live. It is through *Jnana* (spiritual knowledge) that a living being attains immortality.

If a person realises this Truth in the very course of this birth, the purpose of life is fulfilled and the Truth is understood. If, however, he fails to realise it, he remains bound by worldly existence. Consequently, he must continue within the cycle of birth and death and take birth again in this world. Therefore, the wise perceive the one and indivisible *Atman* dwelling equally in all beings. Through this vision of unity, they become free from bondage, transcend worldly limitations, attain complete liberation (*Moksha*), and are released from the cycle of birth and death.

To attain Self-realisation through *Atma-jnana* (Self-knowledge), a seeker must possess at least a basic understanding of the constitution and functioning of the body. This truth is beautifully illustrated in the *Prashna Upanishad* through an instructive narrative.

Once, the five elements and the various sense faculties within the body of a living being gathered together and began to proclaim among themselves: “It is because of us that this body remains active, radiant, and vibrant. Therefore, we alone are worthy of being regarded as divine powers.”

At that moment, *Prana* (the vital life-force), perceiving their pride, said to them, “Don’t be deluded. It is because of me that this body remains alive and conscious. I alone sustain it through the power of life. Observe for yourselves.” Saying this, *Prana* prepared to withdraw from the body. The moment it began to depart, the five elements and the sense faculties immediately lost their strength and vitality, and they too were compelled to follow in its wake.

Realising their helplessness, they at once understood that their existence and functioning depended entirely upon *Prana*. Humbled and awakened to the truth, they began to offer prayers of praise to the life-force:

"O Prana! You are the vital power of life. Within this body, you shine as fire; You radiate as the sun; You move as the wind. You are both the gross and the subtle aspects of existence. You are immortality itself. You are the Vedas; You are knowledge; You are virtue and righteousness.

You enter the womb and manifest as life. You are the Lord of the universe. You sustain and uphold us all. Through You, offerings reach the Devas; through You, sacred rites are performed for the ancestors. You are the noble conduct and spiritual strength of the sages.

O Prana! You are Indra; You are Rudra. You are the protector of all beings. You are the Light from which all other lights derive their radiance. You are the source of the faculties of knowledge in all living creatures. You are the mind itself. Remain within us in Your gracious form. Don't abandon us. Bestow upon us prosperity, wisdom, and discernment. To You we offer our reverent praises."

Yet certain questions naturally arise: How does this *Prana* come into being? How does it enter the body? How does it sustain the senses and the mind? How does it depart from the body at the time of death? The answers to these profound questions are found in the Upanishads.

The Upanishads teach that *Prana* arises from the *Atman* itself and enters the body of the living being through the medium of the mind. Just as a shadow remains inseparably associated with the body, *Prana* remains closely connected with the *Atman*. A king who governs a kingdom appoints various officials to administer different regions, while he himself remains the supreme ruler overall. In the same manner, *Prana* establishes various functional divisions within the body, while remaining the governing principle that presides over them all.

This vital force functions throughout the body in five principal forms. As *Apana Vayu*, it operates in the organs of excretion and elimination. As *Prana Vayu*, it functions through the organs of perception and respiration. Between *Prana* and *Apana*, *Samana Vayu* maintains balance and harmony.

Samana Vayu distributes nourishment and vital energy derived from food throughout the body. Through this life-sustaining essence, the various organs acquire vitality, consciousness, and the ability to perform their respective functions.

The *Atman* is said to abide in the heart of the living being. According to the sacred teachings, there are one hundred and one principal *nadis* (subtle channels) connected with the heart. Each of these branches into one hundred subsidiary channels, and each subsidiary channel further divides into seventy-two thousand finer channels. The vital force that circulates through this vast network of subtle channels is known as *Vyana Vayu*. Through its all-pervading movement, it sustains and coordinates the functions of the entire body.

Among all these *nadis*, the most important is the *Sushumna Nadi*. Within it operates *Udana Vayu*, the vital force that functions in accordance with the karma of the individual being. It is this *Udana Vayu* that guides the soul towards higher realms, lower realms, or human birth, according to the merits and demerits accumulated through past actions.

During sleep, all the senses of a living being withdraw and merge into the mind. Upon awakening, they once again emerge and resume their respective functions. Although the senses remain temporarily inactive during the state of sleep, the vital fires of *Prana* within the body continue to remain active and alert. In this condition, the mind experiences its accumulated *samskaras* (impressions and latent tendencies). This is known as the dream state (*Svapna Avastha*). Drawing upon the experiences gathered during the waking state, the mind creates a world of its own and experiences it as though it were real.

Thereafter, when the mind is enveloped by a higher radiance, it transcends the dream state and experiences an indescribable bliss. This is known as the state of deep sleep (*Sushupti*). In this condition, the mind shines in its own nature, free from distractions and external engagements. The senses and the mind rest in unity with the *Atman*.

In the Upanishadic vision, the entire process of life is compared to a sacred *Yajna* (sacrifice). The mind is likened to the *Yajamana,* the sacrificer or presiding performer of the sacrifice. It is explained that this daily sacrifice of life leads the *Yajamana* into the state of *Sushupti*, where he comes into intimate contact with the Supreme Reality.

In this exalted state, only pure consciousness remains. Nothing else is perceived or experienced. In that condition, the individual self-rests in the Supreme Self, and the *Atman* abides in the presence of the *Paramatman*.

This is the state of *Advaita,* the realisation of non-duality. It is the state proclaimed by the Mahavakyas, *"Ayam Atma Brahma"* ("This Self is Brahman") and *"Sarvam Khalvidam Brahma"* ("Verily, all this is Brahman"). To attain this supreme state of

realisation, the sages have prescribed meditation upon the sacred *Omkara* (Om), the primordial sound and symbol of the Absolute.

In relation to the cosmic order, *Prana* is compared to the sun, *Apana* to the earth, and the space between them to *Samana*. The all-pervading principle that permeates and sustains these is described as *Vyana*. Through these manifestations, the vital force sustains both the individual body and the universe.

The inner fire (*Jatharagni*) is the foundation of bodily life. When this vital fire is extinguished, the senses withdraw from their functions and merge with the mind, while the mind, together with its impressions and tendencies, becomes absorbed in the subtle principle associated with the individual self. Thereafter, in accordance with the final thoughts, intentions, and impressions retained within the mind, the living being proceeds towards a future birth.

Just as a shadow remains inseparably connected with the body, *Prana* remains associated with the *Atman*.

CHAPTER 32

Gurudev in the Himalayas – A Pilgrimage to the Sacred Cave

In October 2015, a strong desire arose within me to visit the sacred cave in the Himalayas where the revered Gurudev is believed to spend much of His time in meditation. This holy place is widely known as the *Mahavatar Babaji Cave*.

I had heard that numerous devotees of Sri Babaji Maharaj undertake pilgrimages to this cave. It is said that Sri Babaji Mahasaya remains eternally absorbed in deep meditation there and, on unusual occasions, graciously grants His darshan to fortunate devotees.

Whenever I heard accounts of disciples who had been blessed with the darshan of Gurudev, my heart would overflow with joy. The reason for this was simple, I had been blessed to experience that indescribable sweetness on many occasions.

When the longing for truth awakens within a seeker, accompanied by the spirit of self-enquiry, every such divine experience assumes profound significance. I stand as a direct witness to the truth that the revered Gurudev, by His own grace, grants opportunities for darshan, personal contact, and even conversation whenever and wherever he so wills. Whenever this truth revealed itself to me, my entire being would be filled with marvel and ecstasy. I would treasure those sacred moments deeply within my heart and cherish them as priceless blessings of Gurudev's grace.

It had been quite some time since I had been blessed with the direct darshan of Gurudev. Consequently, a deep desire arose within me to visit those sacred caves at least once.

I had already learnt that this holy place, popularly known as *Babaji's Cave*, is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas, approximately sixty kilometres from Ranikhet in the state of Uttarakhand.

However, undertaking such a pilgrimage required considerable time and expense. Travelling from Visakhapatnam to Delhi by air and then proceeding further into the Himalayan region involved a tedious journey. Moreover, the cost of air travel at that time was quite abnormal.

Above all, I had not yet received any message from Gurudev. No consent had come, nor had I received His command to undertake this pilgrimage. I often wondered, "Should I proceed to this sacred place without Gurudev's permission? Will I truly be

blessed with His darshan merely by visiting the tirtha?" with such thoughts occupying my mind, I decided to postpone the journey.

About a week passed in this manner. Then, one day, my company unexpectedly contacted me. Other assignments were set aside, and I was urgently deputed to visit the office of the Registrar of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in New Delhi on official work. The company transferred advance funds to cover all my travel expenses, including air tickets, accommodation, and local conveyance.

I was already in regular contact with the Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, and several other senior officials of the University. On two previous occasions, I had personally travelled to Delhi and met them regarding official matters. At that time, a major programme proposal submitted by our company had come up for consideration and discussion, which gave me great satisfaction and hope.

IGNOU is one of India's premier institutions for open and distance learning. Naturally, administrative processes there do not move very quickly, as numerous formal procedures must be completed. I contacted the Registrar's office and was informed that an appointment had been scheduled for four o'clock the following evening.

Considering this development as Gurudev's divine indication, I completed all the arrangements for my journey. Since I was uncertain about the date of my return, I booked only a one-way ticket to Delhi.

The following morning, I boarded the flight and, after a journey of about eight hours, arrived in Delhi at approximately 10:30 a.m. After reaching the city, I checked into a hotel and made the necessary preparations.

To reach the region of Sri Babaji Mahasaya's sacred cave, one may travel by train from Delhi to Kathgodam. From there, taxis are available to proceed through Ranikhet and Dwarahat to Kukuchina. From Kukuchina, devotees must undertake a walk of approximately four kilometres to reach the cave.

Kathgodam is the final railway station on this route. Since the region attracts a large number of pilgrims and tourists throughout the year, accommodation and transport facilities are readily available.

From Kathgodam, travellers may also take a diversion of about nine kilometres to visit Nainital, situated along the route leading towards Ranikhet.

Nainital is a beautiful hill station renowned for its picturesque freshwater lake and the sacred shrine of Sri Naina Devi. Another revered shrine dedicated to Sri Naina Devi is situated in the Bilaspur district of Himachal Pradesh.

There are three train services operating between Delhi and Kathgodam. Since I wished to complete my official responsibilities before embarking upon the next phase of my journey, I carefully planned my schedule.

After lunch, I proceeded to the University. The remainder of that day and the following morning were occupied with official work. By noon on the next day, all the matters for which I had been deputed were successfully concluded.

That evening, I secured a berth in the Third AC compartment through the Tatkal quota on the train scheduled to depart at 8:30 p.m. Returning to my hotel room, I discussed with the staff at our head office the further transactions and formalities that needed to be pursued with the University. Having completed these arrangements, I found myself free for the next five days.

I travelled overnight by train and arrived at Kathgodam at about five o'clock the following morning. Kathgodam is a beautiful railway station nestled amidst scenic hills. The station is remarkably clean and well maintained. After arrival, I went to the paid air-conditioned waiting hall. The facilities, including the bathrooms, were exceptionally neat. After refreshing myself and making the necessary preparations, I came out of the station around noon.

My plan was to hire a taxi from Kathgodam and travel towards the sacred caves of Sri Babaji Mahasaya, a journey of approximately 260 kilometres. Along the way, I wished to visit several significant places of spiritual and scenic elegance, spend the night either at Ranikhet or Dwarahat, and on the following day devote ample time to visiting the sacred cave and, by Gurudev's grace, seek the blessed darshan of both Sri Babaji Mahasaya and the revered Gurudev. Thereafter, I hoped to return to Kathgodam by nightfall.

Numerous taxis were available outside the station. Travellers proceeding to Nainital, Ranikhet, and neighbouring destinations generally preferred to travel by taxi. Shared taxi services were also available. Although government buses operated on these routes, their frequency was limited, and the journey through the mountainous ghat roads could be somewhat arduous. For this reason, most visitors either hire a private taxi or make use of shared taxi services. Taxi operators are required to register their journeys at the local police outpost and provide receipts to passengers. Owing to this system and their generally reliable service, the taxi drivers in the region have earned a reputation for trustworthiness among pilgrims and travellers alike.

As soon as I stepped out of the station, four taxi drivers approached me. I explained my plan, to travel to Sri Babaji Mahasaya's cave, stay overnight enroute, and return the following day. After discussing the details at length, I personally negotiated and

hired a taxi for the entire journey at a cost of five thousand rupees. After having a moderate breakfast, we commenced our journey at 6:30 a.m. Along the way, I visited a few Hanuman temples established by the revered Neem Karoli Baba.

Sri Neem Karoli Baba, also known as Sri Neeb Karori Maharaj, is believed to have established one hundred and eight Hanuman temples across many parts of the region. The local people revere Him as an incarnation of Lord Hanuman. Although His exact date of birth is not known, He attained Mahasamadhi in 1973 at Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh.

Nainital is a place of exquisitely exceptional natural elegance. Admiring the scenic surroundings as we travelled, we arrived at the sacred Sri Naina Devi Temple at approximately 9:00 a.m. The temple is situated beside the famous lake that adorns the town. Many devotees had gathered for darshan. I obtained a special darshan ticket and, after about an hour, was blessed with the darshan of the Divine Mother. Here, the Goddess is worshipped in a unique form.

At 10:30 a.m., we resumed our journey and reached *Kainchi Dham* around noon. This is the sacred place where Sri Neem Karoli Baba resided for a considerable period and established an ashram. Devotees lovingly refer to it as *Kainchi Dham*. The ashram houses several shrines dedicated to various deities, among which the temples of Sri Rama and Sri Hanuman are especially prominent and revered.

After offering prayers and visiting all the shrines within the ashram, we came out and continued our journey. Departing from Kainchi Dham at about 1:00 p.m., we stopped at a roadside hotel and enjoyed a wholesome meal consisting of wheat rotis, lentils, and vegetable curry. Thereafter, we continued onwards and reached Ranikhet at approximately 3:30 p.m.

CHAPTER 33

The Enchanting Cave and the Darshan of Gurudev

Ranikhet is a picturesque hill station nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas. The region is home to many awesome and ancient temples that attract pilgrims and visitors alike. From here, one can behold spectacular scenes of the Himalayan ranges in all their splendour and grandeur. Situated at an elevation of approximately 1,830 metres above sea level, Ranikhet is renowned for its natural charm and serene ambience. It is also popularly known as the “Queen’s Meadow”.

This region serves as the headquarters of two distinguished regiments of the Indian Army, the Kumaon Regiment and the Naga Regiment. A large military hospital equipped with modern facilities is also located here.

During the winter months, from December to February, temperatures generally range between 0°C and 3°C, and the region often receives snowfall. As my visit took place during October, the climate was far more moderate, with temperatures ranging between 10°C and 21°C. The weather was pleasantly cool and conducive to travel and pilgrimage.

We spent nearly two hours exploring the various places of interest in and around Ranikhet, with the driver patiently showing me the prominent locations.

Afterwards, the driver asked, “Sir, shall we stay here for the night, or proceed to Dwarahat?” “Which place would be better?” I enquired.

“There is a Yogoda Satsanga Ashram at Dwarahat,” he replied. “However, I cannot say whether accommodation will be available there today. There are also several good hotels here in Ranikhet. The decision is entirely yours.”

I then asked, “How far are Sri Babaji Mahasaya’s Caves from here?”

“Sir, from here to Kukuchina, via Dwarahat, it is approximately fifty-five kilometres and takes about two hours by road,” the driver explained.

As both of us were somewhat exhausted after the long journey through the winding mountain roads, I decided that it would be better to halt at Ranikhet for the night. I requested the driver to take me to a suitable hotel.

He brought me to Hotel Nanda Devi, situated in the centre of the town. The premises were neat and well maintained. After inspecting the room and finding it comfortable,

I agreed to stay there. The room tariff was two thousand rupees. After settling the driver's charges, I requested him to have his dinner and return the following morning. He informed me that he would be ready by six o'clock the next morning. I agreed, and after bidding him good night, entered my room.

I took a refreshing bath and ordered dinner. Within a short while, the hotel attendant brought a simple yet satisfying meal consisting of two hot potato parathas, pickle, and curd. After finishing my meal, I lay down upon the bed, preparing to rest before the next day's sacred journey.

I had already received Gurudev's grace in making this journey possible. If, in addition, I was to be blessed with His darshan, my joy would know no bounds. With deep devotion and heartfelt yearning, I prayed to Gurudev to grant me His darshan and then retired for the night. I awoke at four o'clock in the morning. Sitting upon the bed, I spent about an hour in meditation and introspective contemplation.

Thereafter, I completed my morning preparations, packed my belongings, and came downstairs at 5:45 a.m. After settling the hotel bill at the reception, I proceeded to the taxi stand. The driver was already waiting. The vehicle had been thoroughly cleaned and was neatly prepared for the day's journey. We decided to have breakfast after travelling for some distance and set out on our way.

Our journey continued amidst pleasant weather, with the majestic beauty of the Himalayas accompanying us at every turn. After breakfast at Dwarahat, we resumed our journey towards Kukuchina. As we ascended further into the mountains, new vistas of Himalayan splendour unfolded before our eyes. Within another two months, the entire region would be covered with a blanket of snow.

We stopped at the Dwarahat market area at about 7:15 a.m. for breakfast. Accommodation facilities were available there for pilgrims and travellers. A short distance away stood the Yogoda Satsanga Branch Ashram (YSS Ashram), where devotees could also find lodging, subject to availability. Some pilgrims preferred to stay at the Joshi Guest House in Kukuchina, where rooms were allotted whenever vacancies existed. After breakfast, we continued our journey and reached the trekking point at Kukuchina at approximately 8:20 a.m.

Several shared taxi jeeps were parked there. Around ten pilgrims had just alighted from two other vehicles. They proceeded ahead on foot along the dirt pathway leading towards the sacred destination.

"Sir, if you wish to reach Babaji's Cave, follow the pilgrims who are proceeding along this path. It will take about an hour's walk. The route is quite good. Please take care, and I shall wait here for your return," said the driver.

“Very well,” I replied, and began walking.

The pathway was a reasonably rapturous mountain trail, with a few ascents and descents. As I walked along with the other pilgrims, I absorbed the serene charm of nature that unfolded on every side.

After about forty minutes of uphill walking, I reached the sacred cave of Sri Babaji Mahasaya at approximately 9:00 a.m.

The entrance to the cave had been carefully enclosed with a stone structure resembling a protective wall, fitted with an iron gate. Above the entrance was a signboard bearing the inscription:

Yogoda Satsanga Society of India Cave of Mahavatar Babaji

The notice was displayed in both English and Hindi. After removing my footwear, I entered the cave. It was neither very small nor excessively large. A narrow inner section of the original cave had been closed off with a brick wall. The interior was kept neat and clean, with mats spread on the floor for the convenience of devotees and meditators.

A few Kriya Yogis were already seated in meditation. I quietly chose a corner, sat down, and began meditating upon the revered Gurudev.

To my great astonishment, within a mere five minutes, my mind became completely tranquil and deeply absorbed in a profound spiritual state.

It seems that the entire universe was present within my own being. Countless tiny luminous spheres seemed to revolve within themselves and move throughout my inner consciousness. Beneath my heart, I perceived a radiant blue light, shimmering and pulsating with extraordinary brilliance, spreading a marvellous and indescribable effulgence.

In that divine light, I can clearly see the circulation of air in my body, the waves of knowledge radiating like thin golden threads through countless nerves, and the essence of food flowing like beads through my blood vessels.

My whole body seems to be floating in the air like cotton. Without my knowing it, both my eyes open. The nature around me is glowing with many colors! Even in the daylight, I can see everything happening in the universe, from the Milky Way in the sky, the constellations, the five elements, the life force radiating in the trees, the life force in living beings, and the consciousness embedded in inert matter.

A large building opposite is shining with gold! I try to go into that building! Some force is trying to stop me. Meanwhile

Athreya! I am sitting on a rock two hundred feet above this cave, waiting to meet you! Reach there quickly! I heard the words of Gurudev and came to my senses!

I am sitting on a mat in the lotus position! My body was filled with a miraculous power at that moment.

CHAPTER 34

Blessed with the Sweetness of the Narayana Upanishad in the State of Turiya Samadhi

Beholding the serene and radiant countenance of Gurudev, I immediately knelt before Him in reverence. Touching His sacred knees, I offered my heartfelt prostrations and said: "Gurudev! My humble and heartfelt obeisances unto You for arranging and supporting this pilgrimage the very moment the desire arose within me to visit Your sacred cave. My countless prostrations unto You for fulfilling my wish and graciously blessing me with the opportunity of Your divine darshan."

"May auspiciousness be yours! Yours has indeed been a blessed journey." With these gracious words, Gurudev placed His right hand upon my head and bestowed His blessings. Clad in His simple robe, He then seated Himself before me, and I sat opposite Him with profound reverence.

With a gentle smile illuminating His face, He asked: "Athreya! How was your experience within the cave? Were you able to perceive everything clearly?"

"Gurudev! I perceived with great clarity that the very processes constantly taking place throughout this creation are also occurring within my own body. By Your grace, I experienced a wondrous spiritual bliss unlike anything I had ever known before." with folded hands, I expressed my heartfelt gratitude.

"Athreya! Your *Atman* has merged with the *Paramatman*, the source and foundation of this entire creation. This is *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. This is *Brahmaikya,* oneness with Brahman. This is the realisation proclaimed by the Mahavakyas: *'Ayam Atma Brahma'* and *'Aham Brahmasmi'*." Looking at me with affection and satisfaction, Gurudev continued: "I have now fulfilled my promise that I would soon bestow this state upon you." he spoke these words with a gentle smile.

"Yes, Gurudev," I replied. "You graciously grant everything. Yet You also say, 'Athreya! You will experience this only in my presence.'" I looked at Him with a slightly wistful expression.

Gurudev burst into a hearty laugh and asked: "What then occurred in the cave? Was I not present before you there as well?"

Then, with compassion and assurance, He said: "O Athreya! Even when I am not physically present before you, these states of *Samadhi* shall arise within you whenever they are required. Such is my blessing upon you."

Overwhelmed with joy and unable to contain my emotions, I bowed at the holy feet of my Gurudev, my eyes filled with tears of devotion.

“May auspiciousness be yours! I bestow this gift upon you in recognition of your tireless spiritual practice, your unwavering faith in the Guru, your patience, and your complete surrender.”

“Athreya! The next two years will be a period of testing, a time during which your courage, faith, and patience will be thoroughly put to an ordeal. Joy and sorrow will come in turn. You will be called upon to experience both comfort and hardship as part of life’s ordained course.

Armed with the striking spiritual power and profound knowledge that I have now bestowed upon you, you shall emerge victorious, facing every circumstance with the steadfastness and wisdom of a true seeker, accepting all experiences as part of your human duty.

To prepare you for that state, I have chosen to spend more time with you today. During this period of testing, I shall continue to guide you inwardly and indirectly. However, you will not be blessed with my direct physical darshan.”

“As declared in the *Narayana Upanishad*, the *Narayana Suktam*, and the *Mantra Pushpam*, I must explain to you certain truths concerning that Supreme Power which resides within every living being. Listen carefully.

Yacha kinchat Jagatsarvam drishyathe shruyathe pi va,

Antharbahischa tatsarvam vyaapya Narayana sthithaha!

Since nothing exists apart from the Supreme Reality, whatever we see, hear, perceive, or experience in this world is none other than the manifestation of that Divine Power.

This means that the Supreme Power we seek to know exists both within us and outside us. Even the very thought that inspires us to seek that Reality, and the source from which that thought arises, are themselves expressions of that same Divine Power.

Therefore, understand this well: the Reality that we strive to realise is not distant from us. The very Power we seek is already hidden within our own being.”

“But now another question naturally arises: By what power do we live? By what power is life sustained within us? Where exactly does that Divine Power reside within the human body?

The sacred texts declare:

Anantam avyayam kavim samudrante visvasambhuvam

Padmakosa-pratikasam hrdayam capy adhomukham.

That infinite, inexhaustible, all-knowing Supreme Power, the source of the universe and the cause of all creation, existing beyond the ocean of worldly existence, abides within the human body. It is in the region above the navel and below the throat, within the heart-lotus, which is described as resembling a lotus bud, with its stalk directed upwards and its blossom facing downwards.

This is known as the *Hridaya Kamala*, the Lotus of the Heart.

Adho nisthya vitastyante nabhyam upari tisthati

Jvalamala-kulam bhati visvasyayatanam mahat.

Within this heart-lotus, interwoven with countless subtle channels (*nadis*), lies a minute and sacred space. Therein blazes a great spiritual fire, radiant with innumerable flames. This divine fire shines as the inner support and sustaining power of all existence.

This is the very *Vaishvanara Agni* referred to by Lord Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

"Aham Vaisvanaro bhutva

Praninam deham asritah

Pranapana-samayuktah
Pacamy annam caturvidham."

"Having become the Vaishvanara Fire, abiding in the bodies of living beings, and united with *Prana* and *Apana*, I digest the four kinds of food."

It is through the operation of this divine inner fire that the food consumed by living beings is digested and transformed into nourishment. The radiance of this great fire extends throughout the body, illuminating and energising it from head to foot, sustaining life and all bodily functions.

The sacred texts declare:

"Santhapayati swam dehamaapaada thalamasthakaha

Tasyah sikhaya madhye Paramatma vyavasthitah.

Neelatho – yada madhyastha – vidyullekheva bhaaswaraa

Neevarashukavathanvee peetha bhaaswathyanupamaa"

What is the reason for that enormous fire erupt continuously?

Within that great inner fire, which possesses the power to digest and assimilate all nourishment in the body, there exists another subtle and extraordinary flame that rises upward. Shining like a streak of lightning amidst dark-blue rain clouds, this radiant flame glows with a golden effulgence and is as minute as the tip of a grain of rice.

Further, it is proclaimed:

"Sa Brahma, Sa Sivah, Sa Harih, Sa Indrah, So'ksarah Paramah Svarat."

"He is Brahma; He is Shiva; He is Hari; He is Indra. He alone is the Imperishable, the Supreme, the Self-effulgent Sovereign."

At the summit of that subtle flame resides the *Paramatman*, the Supreme Reality that is to be realised through inner awareness and direct spiritual experience. All forms of the Divine, whether worshipped as Brahma, Shiva, Hari, Indra, or by any other sacred name, are but manifestations of that One Supreme Being.

Therefore, there is no need to search elsewhere to realise God. That Divine Presence abides within the lotus of the heart as pure consciousness. He may be experienced here and now through sincere spiritual practice, devotion, and Self-realisation.

Ultimately, what becomes clear is that human life is brief, while its highest purpose is the realisation of Brahman. Yet many fail to discover the path that leads to that supreme goal. By the grace of a realised Sadguru one who has attained direct knowledge of the Self, the seeker can readily understand the Truth, realise the Supreme Reality, and attain the goal of life with far greater ease.

Thereafter, one attains oneness with the *Paramatman*, the Supreme Self. As declared by the *Brahma Rishis*, for such a realised soul there is no further cycle of birth and death. He attains complete and everlasting peace.

Thereafter, if required for the welfare of the world, such a liberated being may assume a form and manifest again by Divine Will.

Just as a spider projects its web from within itself and subsequently withdraws it back into itself; just as tender shoots naturally emerge from the earth; and just as hair grows effortlessly upon the head and body of a human being, so too does this entire universe arise spontaneously from the *Akshara Parabrahman*, the Imperishable Supreme Reality.

Thus, the scriptures teach that Brahman is both the origin and the ultimate dissolution of the universe; that Brahman is the eternal support and refuge of all

existence; that the essential nature of Brahman is pure Consciousness; and that the entire cosmos manifests from that Consciousness effortlessly, naturally, and in accordance with its inherent Divine Power.

In this manner, the revered Gurudev subtly unveiled the profound mystery of creation.

CHAPTER 35

The Four Mahavakyas and Self-Advancement through Meditation

“O Athreya! The great sages have bestowed upon humanity unparalleled wisdom in the form of the Vedas and Vedanta.

Our Vedas and Vedanta embody a treasure of profound and eternal truths. Through tireless dedication, rigorous austerities, divine insight, deep contemplation, extensive enquiry, and extraordinary foresight, countless great Rishis discerned these truths from the infinite expanse of the universe and preserved them for the upliftment and advancement of all humanity.

The Vedas constitute the earliest body of sacred knowledge that imparted civilisation, culture, and a righteous way of life to mankind. They have comprehensively taught humanity its duties and the principles of *Manava Dharma*—the universal code of righteous living. Furthermore, the Vedas have expounded, in a systematic and profound manner, the path by which a seeker may attain liberation. By living in accordance with *Dharma*, by making proper use of the knowledge bestowed by the *Paramatman*, by realising the Ultimate Truth, and by attaining direct spiritual experience, one becomes eligible for *Moksha*, liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

The Vedas teach humanity the path of *Karma Yoga*, through which one may gradually exhaust and atone for the effects of actions accumulated over many births. Through *Jnana Yoga*, the Vedas have bestowed upon mankind the wisdom of Self-knowledge.

The Vedas impart the understanding that *Parabrahman* is the Pure Consciousness from which the entire universe has emerged. The Vedantas further reveal that this Pure Consciousness is eternal, everlasting, changeless, and beyond the limitations of time.

Each of the Vedas ultimately presents the highest essence of its wisdom through the *Upanishads*, which constitute the Vedanta, the culminating knowledge of the Vedas. These Upanishads expound the science of the Self and reveal the nature of the Supreme Reality. For the benefit of *Jijnasus* (earnest seekers of Truth) and *Mumukshus* (aspirants longing for liberation), the essence of the Upanishadic teachings has been distilled into four profound *Mahavakyas* (Great Sayings), enabling the highest truths to be understood with clarity and directness.

These four Mahavakyas are:

Prajnanam Brahma (*Consciousness is Brahman*)

Aham Brahmasmi (*I am Brahman*)

Tat Tvam Asi (*Thou Art That*)

Ayam Atma Brahma (*This Atman is Brahman*)

The *Rig Veda* proclaims through the Mahavakya *Prajnanam Brahma* that Consciousness itself is Brahman.

While elucidating the origin of creation, the ancient Vedic wisdom declares that the entire universe has emerged from *Parabrahman*. The pure consciousness that pervades and animates all existence is Brahman. Brahman alone is the all-knowing Reality, the source of all wisdom and the foundation of all creation.

Brahman is the Pure Consciousness that sustains and guides the eighty-four lakh forms of living beings. It is this very Consciousness that empowers the Sun, the visible manifestation of Divine Splendour to hold and govern the planets revolving within its sphere.

The Vedic sages further explain that the same Pure Consciousness of Brahman is the power that sustains and governs the countless solar systems moving throughout the vast expanse of the universe, which is without discernible beginning or end.

Thus, the scriptures reveal that the *Atman* alone existed before creation, remains during creation, and continues to exist even after its dissolution.

Aham Brahmasmi

The great Mahavakya of the *Yajur Veda* is: **Aham Brahmasmi**
(*I am Brahman*)

The individual being wanders through innumerable births and experiences. Yet, throughout all these births, the Supreme Reality continues to shine within as the *Atman*.

This great declaration of the Yajur Veda teaches that, through enquiry, discrimination, and the proper application of acquired wisdom, one can realise the Truth that one's essential nature is none other than the Supreme Reality itself. By transcending identification with the physical body and recognising one's true nature, the seeker comes to the direct realisation: "I am Brahman."

The Veda emphatically teaches that every human being is capable of attaining this exalted state through sincere self-enquiry, righteous conduct, and spiritual

discipline. It further declares that, by living in accordance with Dharma and cultivating noble aspirations, one should first gain mastery over oneself and thereby attain harmony with the entire order of nature.

Tatvamasi:

The great Mahavakya of the *Sama Veda* is: **Tat Tvam Asi** (*Thou Art That*)

This profound declaration of the Sama Veda teaches that the Pure Consciousness which pervades all beings is not something distant or separate from oneself; rather, it is one's own essential nature. The statement "Tatwamasi" reveals the fundamental unity between the individual self and the Supreme Reality. It declares that the very truth which sustains the universe is present within the seeker himself. The celebrated philosophy of *Advaita Vedanta*, later expounded with unparalleled clarity by Sri Adi Shankaracharya, finds one of its principal foundations in this great Mahavakya.

"Ekam Eva Advitiyam" — "The One alone exists, without a second." This profound declaration reveals that there is only one ultimate Reality, namely *Parabrahman*. The philosophy of *Advaita* expounds the sublime truth that this Supreme Reality not only dwells within you but also pervades the entirety of creation. Therefore, the individual being, who is an inseparable part of this cosmic manifestation, is in essence none other than the *Atman*.

Ayam Atma Brahma

The great Mahavakya of the *Atharva Veda* is: **Ayam Atma Brahma**
(*This Atman is Brahman*)

This sacred declaration teaches that the individual *Atman* and Brahman are one and the same. Through enquiry into the nature of the Self, the seeker realises that the *Paramatman* is One, indivisible, and all-pervading.

It is within the Atharva Vedic tradition that humanity was gifted with *Pranava,* the sacred syllable *Om*, the eternal symbol of the Supreme Reality.

Just as countless names are used to identify the objects of the material world, the infinite universe itself is represented by the primordial sound-symbol *Omkara*. The sages recognised *Om* as the fundamental vibration underlying all creation. Modern scientific observations have likewise sought to identify cosmic vibrations that symbolically echo this eternal principle proclaimed by the Vedas.

"O Athreya! The Supreme Lord created human beings as the most discerning and intelligent among all living creatures, endowing them with exceptional capacity for knowledge and understanding.

The Divine intended that humanity, through the proper use of wisdom and discrimination, should participate in preserving the harmony of creation, safeguarding nature, and protecting all forms of life.

Indeed, through the remarkable powers of intellect bestowed upon him, man has acquired mastery over many aspects of the material world. By harnessing knowledge and skill, he has established a position of prominence among living beings and has exercised influence over the forces of nature.

Among all living beings, it is the human being alone who possesses the capacity to attain *Atma-jnana* (Self-knowledge). Yet, due to the influence of *Maya* (illusion), man fails to recognise his true nature. The senses and the mind, which are integral to embodied existence, contribute significantly to this delusion. Subject to their influence, human beings live according to differing temperaments and dispositions.

Regarding the pursuit of Self-knowledge, human nature may broadly be classified into three categories. Some are predominantly devotional, some are action-oriented, and others are inclined towards enquiry and wisdom. These correspond respectively to the paths of *Bhakti Yoga*, *Karma Yoga*, and *Jnana Yoga*.

The proportions of these qualities vary from person to person. Yet, all three are interconnected and mutually supportive. Each of them is essential for the attainment of Self-realisation. One who understands the unique significance of these three paths and practises them in a balanced manner becomes qualified to attain Self-knowledge.

In simple terms, to attain Self-realisation, one should possess devotion comparable to that of Sri Madhvacharya, selfless dedication comparable to that of Sri Ramanujacharya, and wisdom comparable to that of Sri Adi Shankaracharya.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Sri Krishna declares:

“O Partha! Those who perform actions pleasing to Me without attachment to their fruits (*Karma Yoga*), those who constantly meditate upon Me (*Dhyana Yoga*), those who worship Me with single-pointed devotion (*Bhakti Yoga*), and those who remain unattached to the objects perceived by the senses through the light of wisdom (*Jnana Yoga*), such seekers shall surely attain Me.”

Furthermore, those who outwardly restrain their senses while inwardly dwelling upon sense objects are merely deluding themselves. Such persons neither benefit themselves nor become useful to others. Remaining bound by hypocrisy and attachment, they are unable to attain the Supreme Goal. Lord Krishna repeatedly emphasises this truth, teaching that genuine spiritual progress is possible only through sincerity, self-discipline, purity of intention, and steadfast practice.

Here, the essential point is not merely whether one performs actions or refrains from them. What is truly important is the removal of impurities and latent tendencies from the mind.

There is little benefit in withdrawing from society and undertaking austere penance in solitude if these impurities have not been eliminated through purity of thought, speech, and action.

The scriptures further teach that one who has become free from such inner blemishes can attain liberation even while living amidst the activities and responsibilities of the world.

However, this transformation is not easily achieved. As an initial step, a person must progress from *dushkarma* (unrighteous actions) to *satkarma* (righteous actions). Thereafter, from *satkarma*, one must advance towards *nishkama karma*, the performance of righteous actions without expectation of reward or personal gain.

When pursued with sincerity and steadfastness, this path soon gives rise to true knowledge. From knowledge arises *vairagya* (detachment), and from detachment comes inner freedom.

For mastery over the mind, practice (*abhyasa*) must be accompanied by detachment (*vairagya*). Detachment without practice is ineffective, and practice without detachment is equally incomplete. In either case, the mind will not readily come under control.

The mind, by its very nature, constantly runs after the fleeting pleasures of the senses and the transient attractions of the world. Through meditation, however, it must gradually be directed towards the eternal, changeless, and all-pervading *Paramatman*.

In the present age, many methods of meditation are practised. Whatever the method employed, the essential objective remains the same, to concentrate the mind and establish it in contemplation of the Divine.

In the beginning, the mind may wander in many directions and become distracted by countless thoughts. Yet, through patient and persistent effort, it should be gently brought back and gradually established in the *Atman*. In due course, the mind becomes steady, inwardly absorbed, and fit for the realisation of the Supreme Truth.

Simply stated, there is no need to learn meditation as though it were something entirely new. Every living being is engaged in meditation continually. However, for countless years, the mind has been absorbed only in worldly objects, desires, and

pleasures. What is required now is merely to redirect that same power of concentration towards the Supreme Reality.

If one practises meditation daily at a fixed time and gradually increases the duration and depth of one's practice, the mind will undoubtedly come under control.

When the mind and the intellect become united and harmonised, Truth reveals itself. The *Atman* blossoms in its full splendour. The state of *Advaita* is attained. *Brahmaikya* oneness with Brahman is realised. This is the highest culmination of meditation.

The true purpose of meditation is to discover within oneself that very "I" which has been wandering externally through the world for countless years. Once one truly knows who that "I" is, nothing further remains to be known.

If the mind is forcibly restrained during meditation, self-realisation can not be attained. The reason is that mere suppression does not bring true understanding. Yoga is not the coercion of the mind; Yoga is the merging of the mind with the *Atman*.

The real purpose of spiritual practice is to become free from the cycle of birth and death. Through meditation, one should realise that which prevents re-entry into this cycle; that which bestows spiritual bliss; that which enables one to view the material world with equanimity; and that which reveals the Ultimate Truth. All these attainments should arise through genuine meditation.

There is little value in meditating upon Narayana while harbouring contempt towards fellow human beings. There is no true spiritual progress in worshipping Madhava while neglecting one's human duties and responsibilities. There is no benefit in remembering Sadashiva while forgetting the Truth that He embodies. Meditation is the sacred discipline through which this profound philosophy is realised, experienced, and lived.

CHAPTER 36

Trials, Hardships, and Joys

For almost two hours, the revered Gurudev spoke to me on many intrinsic aspects of *Atma-jnana* (Self-knowledge). The extraordinary spiritual experiences and the immense wisdom bestowed upon me by Gurudev filled my heart with enormous enthusiasm, strength, and inspiration. Above all, the affection, compassion, and grace that Gurudev showered upon me during those sacred moments of instruction touched me deeply and left an indelible impression on my heart.

"Athreya! The time has now come for me to depart from the world. During the next two years, which shall be a period of tough tests and transformation, you will learn many new lessons and gain valuable experiences.

Your wisdom shines like a finely polished diamond. In the years to come, this wisdom will become a source of *Atma-jnana* for many sincere seekers and aspirants who yearn to know the Truth.

Therefore, do not be anxious about anything. I have complete faith that you will emerge successful in every trial that lies ahead of you.

Throughout this period of severe testing, pure *Vairagya* (dispassion) will gradually arise within you. Through those experiences, your spiritual maturity will deepen, your understanding will expand, and your journey towards the Supreme Truth will advance steadily under Divine Grace."

"Go, Athreya! May auspiciousness and blessedness be yours!" With these words, Gurudev placed both His hands on my head for a few moments, bestowing His complete blessings on me.

"Gurudev! I am prepared for whatever may come," I replied, my voice trembling with emotion and devotion.

Gurudev looked deeply into my eyes with a compassionate smile. Then, gradually, His divine form disappeared from my sight.

With tear-filled eyes, I slowly rose to my feet, gazing silently at the very spot where Gurudev had been seated only moments before.

The entire surroundings were immersed in profound peace and stillness. After a few moments, I began walking and eventually reached the rock near which Gurudev had earlier granted me His darshan.

Pilgrims were moving along the pathway, some ascending towards the higher peaks and others descending. If one were to enquire of the local pilgrims, they would explain that the *Pandavas* are believed to have spent a period of their *Ajnatavasa* (incognito exile) in the hills above. The place is known as *Pandavkholi*, and a temple dedicated to the Pandavas is also situated there.

I glanced at my watch. It was 12:15 p.m. Instead of proceeding further uphill, I began my descent towards Kukuchina at a leisurely pace. Absorbed in thoughts of Gurudev and the holy experiences of the day, I continued walking down the mountain path.

At exactly 1:00 p.m., I reached the taxi that was parked at Kukuchina. The driver was asleep inside the vehicle. I gently awakened him.

"Sir! You have returned! Shall we leave now?" he asked. "Let us first have a cup of tea and then continue our journey," I replied.

"Yes, Sir," he replied, and ordered two cups of tea from the shop opposite. After washing our faces, we enjoyed the tea together. At about 1:15 p.m., we resumed our journey towards Ranikhet.

"We shall have lunch at Dwarahat and then continue," the driver said. "If all goes well, we should reach Kathgodam by about 7:00 p.m."

He further added, "If you arrive by then, there is a train bound for Delhi at 8:25 p.m. You can reach Delhi by about 6:00 a.m. the next morning. There is also a flight from Delhi to Visakhapatnam at 11:30 a.m. If you board that flight, you should reach Visakhapatnam by around 2:00 p.m."

By the time we reached Ranikhet, I was able to access the internet. I checked the travel schedules online. Tatkal tickets were available on the train to Delhi, and seats were also available on the following day's flight, though at a slightly higher fare. I immediately booked both tickets. My mind felt completely at ease.

Just as the driver had anticipated, we arrived at Kathgodam Railway Station at approximately 7:15 p.m. I paid him the remaining balance and thanked him for his assistance throughout the journey. After having a fairly moderate evening meal, I boarded the train and settled into my berth. The next morning, I reached Delhi as scheduled. Thereafter, I boarded the flight for Visakhapatnam and arrived home according to plan.

Although the revered Gurudev continued to guide and assist me inwardly in my spiritual practice, just as He had foretold, I was no longer granted the opportunity to see Him, touch His sacred feet, or converse with Him directly.

During this prolonged period without His physical darshan, Gurudev nevertheless showered His grace upon our family in countless ways. Through His blessings, many auspicious events were conducted in our home, and we were enabled to undertake several sacred pilgrimages. At the same time, He subjected us to numerous severe tests and trials. I encountered many difficulties in my financial affairs, within my family life, and in my professional responsibilities. There were occasions when the weight of these challenges caused me considerable distress, and I found myself deeply troubled by many circumstances.

Throughout every circumstance of my life, the revered Gurudev bestowed upon me immense courage, unwavering patience, and profound spiritual wisdom. Following His instructions with steadfast faith and performing my duties with renewed enthusiasm and determination, I gradually overcame all the difficulties that confronted me.

Whenever I found myself struggling amidst challenges and uncertainties, I would mentally prostrate at the holy feet of Gurudev and seek His grace.

Everything is accomplished solely through the blessings of the Guru.

From the beginning of 2018, favourable times gradually began to return. As I slowly emerged from the various hardships that had troubled me, a deep and unshakable courage arose within me, both physically and mentally.

An unwavering conviction took root in my heart that, by the grace of the Guru, no achievement is beyond reach. Through these experiences, I came to realise a profound truth: for a spiritual aspirant to attain complete Self-awareness and progress steadily on the path of realisation, three virtues are indispensable **courage, faith, and patience**. These qualities form the foundation of spiritual growth and enable the seeker to advance safely through every trial towards the ultimate goal of Self-realisation.

CHAPTER 37

Guru Dattatreya Is My Gurudev

By the grace of the revered Gurudev, my long wait finally came to an end. It was during the month of May 2018. I had travelled to the city of Nanded in Maharashtra on official work. Nanded is situated on the sacred banks of the River Godavari and lies close to the regions bordering the districts of Nizamabad and Adilabad.

It was here that Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth and final Guru of the Sikhs, cast off His mortal body. In His sacred memory, a magnificent shrine known as *Hazur Sahib* was established at the site. The shrine is grand in scale and remarkable in its architectural beauty and spiritual ambience.

The city of Nanded is regarded as one of the five most sacred pilgrimage centres of the Sikh faith. Foremost among these sacred sites is the *Harmandir Sahib* at Amritsar in the state of Punjab.

This revered shrine is associated with the spiritual legacy of Sri Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Guru of Sikhism. Popularly known throughout the world as the *Golden Temple*, it stands amidst a sacred tank and is renowned for its extraordinary beauty. The sanctum and much of the structure are adorned with gold plating, lending the temple its celebrated appearance and spiritual splendour.

I had the blessed opportunity to visit this sacred shrine recently.

Nanded Railway Station is officially known as *Hazur Sahib Nanded*. Even the façade of the railway station has been designed in the architectural style of a Sikh Gurdwara, reflecting the spiritual significance of the city.

My official work at *Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University* and the *Shri Guru Gobind Singhji Institute of Engineering and Technology* was completed over the course of two days.

On the evening of the second day, I visited the sacred *Hazur Sahib* shrine and proceeded to partake of the *Langar,* the community meal offered to all devotees without distinction.

As at the renowned *Harmandir Sahib* in Amritsar, the *Langar* service at Hazur Sahib continues throughout the day and night, serving devotees round the clock.

The volunteers lovingly serve freshly prepared rotis, dal, vegetable curry, kheer or halwa, and buttermilk, offering as much food as one desires. Everything is served

hot, wholesome, and delicious. The dining hall is maintained with exemplary cleanliness and discipline.

While I was partaking of the meal, a young Sikh volunteer approached and poured water into the empty tumbler before me.

Looking at me, he asked in Hindi, “Your name is Sastry Athreya, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” I replied in Hindi.

“Very well. Gurudev has gone to the *Mahur* Ekaveerika Shakti Peetha, which is about one hundred and twenty-five kilometres from here. You may meet Gurudev there tomorrow. He asked me to convey that He will be awaiting your arrival.”

Having delivered this unexpected message, the young man accompanied me outside towards the washing area.

I entered the washing area along with the other devotees, cleansed my hands, and when I came out, the young Sikh volunteer was nowhere to be seen. The significance of the encounter was immediately clear to me. Without discussing the matter with anyone, I quietly hired an autorickshaw and returned to my hotel room.

Mahur is a small but sacred town nestled amidst the Sahyadri mountain ranges.

Approximately three years earlier, I had undertaken a pilgrimage to the *Mahur Ekaveerika Shakti Peetha* (Sri Renuka Devi Temple), the shrine of Sri Anasuya Mata, and the temple of Sri Gurudev Datta. These sacred temples are situated upon the hills, about seven kilometres from the town of Mahur.

Mahur, also known as *Mahur Gad*, is revered throughout India as the birthplace of Sri Guru Dattatreya. According to several Puranic accounts, it was here that the divine couple, Maharshi Atri and Sri Anasuya Mata, were blessed by the Trimurtis—Brahma, Vishnu, and Maheshwara. The three deities manifested themselves as their son, Sri Dattatreya, who is traditionally depicted with three heads, symbolising the unified presence of the Divine Trinity.

The sacred *Dattatreya Charitra* also records that Bhagavan Parashurama resided in this holy region along with His mother, Sri Renuka Devi. Having received the grace and guidance of Sri Dattatreya, Parashurama became His devoted disciple and spiritual seeker.

Sri Renuka Devi herself is worshipped here as the Divine Mother in the form of *Ekaveerika Devi*, one of the revered *Shakti Peethas*. In the Telangana region, this same Divine Mother is widely worshipped and adored as *Sri Renuka Yellamma*. This sacred kshetra becomes especially vibrant during the festivals of *Vijayadashami*

(Dussehra) and *Sri Datta Jayanti*, when thousands of devotees gather to participate in the celebrations with great devotion, splendour, and spiritual fervour.

There are three hills at this sacred place. Upon one hill stands the temple of Sri Ekaveerika Mata, a revered Shakti Peeth; upon another are the shrines of Sage Atri and Mother Anasuya; and on the third hill is situated the Datta Mandir. Among these, Datta Shikhar (Datta Peak) rises higher than the other hills. The sacred Penuganga River flows at a short distance from this holy region. Mahurgad is renowned as an eminent Datta Kshetra and is also revered as a Shakti Peeth.

It is believed that Lord Dattatreya moves about these surrounding regions, bestowing His divine darshan in various forms upon devotees and seekers of Self-realisation. Through His grace, they are blessed with spiritual upliftment and granted an inner experience of the Self.

A deep sense of fulfilment arose within me at the thought that, although I had made no special effort on my own, Gurudev, upon my arrival in Nanded, might have conveyed an invisible summons, granting me the blessed opportunity of beholding him in this sacred kshetra.

It would be difficult to explore this region thoroughly by bus, even though the Ghat Road extends only a few kilometres. Moreover, since one never knows where the revered Gurudev may choose to grant his darshan, I decided to leave the hotel, arrange a taxi for the onward and return journey, and set out early the following morning, prepared to stay overnight at Mahur if necessary.

When I enquired at the hotel reception about hiring a taxi, they informed me that the hotel vehicle could be arranged for the journey at a total cost of ₹4,000. I agreed and requested that a good vehicle be provided. After paying an advance, I returned to my room. I spent some time in meditation and then retired for the night.

I awoke early in the morning, completed my ablutions, and set out for Mahur by taxi at 7.30 a.m. Along the way, the driver and I stopped for breakfast and delighted in the serene beauty of the natural surroundings. By eleven o'clock, we reached the foothill area of the sacred Sri Ekaveerika Matha's Shakti Peeth.

To have a darshan of the Divine Mother, one must ascend approximately 150 steps. The driver informed me that he would park the taxi while I proceeded to the temple. I climbed the steps and arrived at the sanctum of the Goddess.

The deity is highly impressive, distinguished by a large and majestic head. Her broad, radiant face shines resplendently, adorned with stunningly sculpted eyes, nose, and mouth. A golden crown graces her head, enhancing her divine splendour.

Apart from the sacred head, the Goddess has no visible torso. According to the Puranas, Bhagavan Parashurama, the son of Sri Renuka Devi, also worshipped as Sri Ekaveerika Devi, obeyed the command of his father, the sage Jamadagni, and severed his mother's head. Later, upon Parashurama's earnest prayers, the sage was pleased and, through his spiritual power, restored her to life.

Devotees revere this sacred stone as a manifestation of the Divine Mother's head as Sri Ekaveerika Mata, enshrined in the form of a Shakti Peeth.

At the temple counter nearby, I purchased a sari, blouse piece, bangles, flowers, turmeric, and kumkum for offering to the Goddess. After presenting these sacred offerings, I had the blessed darshan of the Divine Mother, received Her prasadam, and then came outside and sat quietly for a while.

However, Gurudev was nowhere to be seen. Thinking that he might grant darshan at one of the other two temples, I descended the steps and returned to the taxi.

By then, it was quarter to two in the afternoon. Since two more temples situated on separate hills remained to be visited, I handed the driver two hundred rupees and decided to have lunch at the Punjabi hotel opposite. Preferring something light and easy on the stomach, I had a few milk biscuits and two bananas as my meal.

After the driver returned from lunch, we resumed our journey at about 2.30 p.m. towards the temple of Sage Atri and Mother Anasuya, situated on another hill. The driver parked the vehicle within a short distance from the temple. There were only a few devotees present. I joined the queue and had the blessed darshan of the sacred idols of the venerable sage couple. Thereafter, I remained seated in the temple for some time in quiet contemplation. However, I did not receive Gurudev's darshan there either.

We then proceeded towards the third hill, known as Datta Shikhara. At about four o'clock, the vehicle came to a halt a short distance from the Datta Mandir. I alighted from the car and looked around. The hill rose majestically to a considerable height.

The atmosphere was exceptionally serene and pleasant. Apart from four or five devotees, I could not see anyone else. They had already completed their darshan and were making their way down the hill.

Meanwhile, those devotees approached the driver and requested, "We need to go to the Mahur bus stand. Will you take us there?" The driver looked towards me for my consent.

Confident that Gurudev would surely grant me darshan at this sacred place, I immediately replied, “Please go ahead. I shall remain in the temple and meditate for an hour.”

The driver, however, said, “I shall drop them at the bus stand, have some tea, and return by about 5.30.”

With that understanding, I entered the temple.

A four-foot idol of Sri Dattatreya was enthroned upon an elevated seat. In front of the deity sat a priest, facing the sacred image. Bowing reverentially before Sri Datta, I recited a few Datta shlokas known to me and requested the priest to bless me with Datta Tirtham. The priest turned towards me, holding the sacred Tirtham in his hand.

To my utter astonishment, it was none other than my revered Gurudev, Sri Babaji Mahashaya!

An indescribable joy surged within me, and tears welled up in my eyes. Overcome with devotion, I immediately prostrated at the lotus feet of Gurudev. Placing both His hands upon my head, He blessed me, saying, “Aatmanubhuthi Sidhirastu.”

At that very moment, an unknown spiritual force spread throughout my entire being. A transcendental bliss, beyond worldly description, engulfed me. Gurudev then held my shoulders with both hands and gently raised me up.

As I looked towards Him, a wondrous vision unfolded before my eyes. Gurudev appeared in the radiant form of Sri Dattatreya, His countenance shining with divine effulgence, adorned with three smiling faces resplendent with celestial splendour.

The words, “Gurudev Sri Babaji Datta!” flowed effortlessly from my lips. My entire being was drawn towards Him in profound devotion and spiritual ecstasy.

“Athreya!” I opened my eyes upon hearing Gurudev’s call. “Awaken!” His hands still rested upon my shoulders.

Addressing me, who was immersed in an ocean of divine bliss, Gurudev spoke with boundless compassion:

“O Athreya! At this sacred moment, in this holy kshetra, I shall bestow upon you, through the grace and form of your beloved Sri Datta, the eternal state of bliss, a state beyond anything you have ever experienced before.”

“From this day forward, you need not undertake any special spiritual practices. Experience inaction within action and action within inaction, and abide in eternal

bliss. May you be blessed! May your journey be auspicious!" So saying, Gurudev placed His right hand upon my head in blessing.

After some time, when my body returned to its normal state, I looked towards the face of Gurudev. He gazed at me with a serene and compassionate smile. I felt as though an indescribable and everlasting joy had become firmly established within my heart and mind.

With a gentle smile, Gurudev said: "My child! Although I know no one here, the temple priest entrusted me with his duties, saying that he would return immediately after completing his bath. There he comes now. Let us sit outside and continue our conversation."

Hearing this, I suddenly burst into laughter. Gurudev gently tapped my hand, signalling me to restrain myself, and then stood beside the idol of Sri Datta, holding the vessel containing the sacred Tirtham.

A few moments later, the priest entered the temple and addressed Gurudev in Hindi: "Oh! I have inconvenienced you. Thank you very much for your help."

Gurudev smiled and replied,

"Oh, no problem."

He then handed over the Tirtha vessel that He was holding.

The priest turned towards me and asked, "Have you received the sacred Tirtham?"

I replied in Hindi, "No."

I then approached him and reverentially received the holy Tirtham.

Thereafter, I took one hundred rupees from my shirt pocket and offered it as dakshina upon the plate placed below, amidst the flowers offered to the Lord. Having done so, I came out of the temple and walked alongside Gurudev.

CHAPTER 38

Dispelling Doubts – Questions and Answers: Guru's Teachings

Gurudev led me towards a quiet spot near the edge of the hill, where a few flowering plants were growing. The scenery was captivating. Amidst clusters of small green shrubs and flowering plants, the descending slopes of the hill presented a delightful sight. In the distance, the town of Mahur could be seen.

Gurudev sat upon a smooth rock. I approached and sat respectfully beside Him in Padmasana. Looking towards me with a gentle smile, Gurudev said:

"Athreya! Do you still harbour any doubts? Very soon, circumstances will arise that will require you to compose certain writings on Self-Knowledge. A number of seekers will come into your life. It shall be your responsibility to guide them on the path of Self-realisation and help them attain the state of Eternal Bliss. For this purpose, My support shall always stay with you. That alone will be the Guru Dakshina that you offer Me."

Hearing these words, I bowed my head in reverence and replied: "Certainly, Gurudev! I accept Your command as sacred. With Your grace, I shall strive to guide all sincere seekers towards the path of Self-Knowledge and help them attain the state of Eternal Bliss."

Gurudev raised His hand in blessing and said: "Shubham Bhuyat" – "May auspiciousness prevails."

He then continued: "Whether through your writings or through the spiritual discourses you may deliver, let no word contrary to Truth ever emerge from your lips. Therefore, clear all your doubts. Ask your questions."

I opened my small notebook and began.

Question:

"Gurudev, who is the Paramatma?"

Gurudev:

"Paramatma is the Eternal Reality that pervades all things, exists in all places, and shines through all times."

I am presenting my questions and Gurudev's answers during the discussion below:

Question:

“Are the individual soul (Jiva) and the Paramatma one?”

Gurudev:

“Though there appear to be differences in their limiting adjuncts, the essence of Consciousness in both is one and the same.”

Question:

“Does Paramatma truly dwell within the body of the individual being?”

Gurudev:

“Indeed. Within the temple of the body, Paramatma abides as the very nature of the Atma.”

Question:

“How may one realise the Atma?”

Gurudev:

“That awareness within you which declares, ‘I exist’, is itself the Atma.”

Question:

“Is the Atma God?”

Gurudev:

“Yes. The Atma itself is Divine. That which is separate from the Atma cannot be called Paramatma.”

Question:

“Does God possess a form?”

Gurudev:

“The Supreme Reality is formless. Yet, just as a flower possesses fragrance, the Formless manifests itself through forms. The individual being is one such manifestation.”

Question:

“Can God be known without Self-Knowledge?”

Gurudev:

“If a person does not know his own true nature, how can he know God? To know the Divine, one must first know oneself.”

Question:

“Who is the Jiva?”

Gurudev:

“By nature, one is Pure Consciousness. When that Consciousness identifies itself with a body and becomes bound by bodily awareness, it is called the Jiva.”

Question:

“What is the nature of the Jiva?”

Gurudev:

“The Jiva is neither pure Consciousness alone nor merely the inert body. It is an apparent combination of both. Having no separate form of its own, it mistakenly regards the body it inhabits as its true identity.”

Question:

“What are the characteristics of the Jiva?”

Gurudev:

“Attached to the body, enslaved by the senses, overcome by desires and delusions, deprived of discrimination between Truth and untruth, and living under the notion of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, such is the condition of the ordinary Jiva.”

Question:

“What is Brahman?”

Gurudev:

“That from which the entire universe arises, by which it is sustained, and into which it ultimately dissolves that is Brahman.”

Question:

“What is illusion (Bhrama)?”

Gurudev:

“That which is perceived by the eyes, heard by the ears, and captivates the mind, causing one to forget Reality, is called illusion.”

Question:

“Then what is Brahman, and what is illusion?”

Gurudev:

“The same Atma that dwells within all beings dwells within you. Though forms are many, the essence of the Atma is one. Perceiving unity amidst diversity is Brahman. Mistaking that unity as multiplicity is illusion.”

Question:

“What is the difference between the Jiva and the Divine?”

Gurudev:

“The Jiva is under the influence of Maya, whereas God is the Lord of Maya. Imagining and identifying are the characteristics of the Jiva; creating and governing belong to the Divine. Waking, dream, and deep sleep are the states of the Jiva. Creation, sustenance, and dissolution are the functions of the Divine.”

Question:

“Can the Jiva become Divine?”

Gurudev:

“Certainly. Apart from the limitations imposed by ignorance, there is no real difference between the Jiva and God. When the delusion of bodily identification is transcended, the Jiva realises its Divine nature.”

Question:

“What is the true meaning of ‘I’ and ‘mine’?”

Gurudev:

“In relation to the Jiva, ‘I’ signifies ego and ‘mine’ signifies possessiveness. In relation to the Divine, ‘I’ signifies the Atma and ‘mine’ signifies Pure Consciousness.”

Question:

“What is ‘Aham’ and what is ‘Ahamkara’ (ego)?”

Gurudev:

“‘Aham’ is Pure Consciousness. It has no form of its own. When it identifies itself with a particular body or personality, it assumes the form of Ahamkara, or ego.

The pure awareness expressed as ‘I am’ is Aham. The notions ‘I am this’ or ‘I am that’ constitute Ahamkara.

Aham is ever-present and unchanging. Ahamkara arises along with bodily identification and disappears with it.

Aham can exist without Ahamkara, but Ahamkara cannot exist without Aham.

Ego is accompanied by thoughts, imaginations, and modifications of the mind. Pure Aham is free from all such modifications.

Ahamkara belongs to the realm of appearance, whereas Aham belongs to Truth."

Question:

"Can Self-realisation be attained while remaining identified with ego?"

Gurudev:

"Ego, arising from ignorance, keeps one bound within the domain of ignorance. Through an ego-centred outlook, the direct realisation of the Self, which is Truth itself, cannot be attained."

Question:

"How may one become free from ego?"

Gurudev:

"When ego recognises its own true source, it is transformed into pure 'Aham'. Then the ego-bound sense of individuality dissolves, and pure Being shines forth.

The experience of the Self as pure 'I Am' arises naturally. That is Atma-anubhuti, the direct experience of the Self."

Question:

"What is Sat-Chit-Ananda?"

Gurudev:

"The essential nature of Pure Knowledge is Sat-Chit-Ananda, Existence, Consciousness, and Bliss.

'Sat' signifies that which never perishes and remains unchanged through the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep.

'Chit' signifies Pure Consciousness, which illumines and knows all experiences in these three states.

'Ananda' signifies bliss free from dependence upon external objects, a bliss that remains present in all states of experience."

Question:

"Is the individual being truly of the nature of Sat-Chit-Ananda?"

Gurudev:

"Indeed. Without the slightest doubt, the essential nature of every being is Sat-Chit-Ananda."

Question:

"If that is so, why does the individual fail to recognise this truth?"

Gurudev:

"Because of ignorance. Identifying itself with the body, the individual forgets its true nature as Sat-Chit-Ananda."

Question:

"How can one become free from this ignorance?"

Gurudev:

"So long as delusion remains, Brahman cannot be realised.

Through ignorance, one assumes personal doership and burdens oneself with the notion that 'I am the performer of all actions.'

When the truth is realised that 'I am not merely this body,' that delusion gradually disappears."

Question:

"What is the Veda?"

Gurudev:

"The Veda is Knowledge. It reveals numerous principles and truths through which human beings may understand the profound Reality governing the universe and recognise the Divine order underlying creation."

Question:

"What is the central purpose of the Vedas?"

Gurudev:

"The Supreme Reality, though appearing through countless names and forms, is One alone. There is no second.

The purpose of the Vedas is to reveal the unity concealed within apparent diversity."

Question:

"What is Vedanta?"

Gurudev:

"Vedanta is the concluding portion of the Vedas. It expounds the highest wisdom.

While the earlier portions of the Vedas deal with various rituals and disciplines, Vedanta reveals the truth of non-duality and unity.

The ritualistic sections ultimately culminate in Knowledge. Their purpose is to guide humanity beyond divisions and towards the unique experience of Oneness.

The supreme objective of the Vedas is to establish One Reality that shines through the countless manifestations of the Divine."

Question:

"What should a seeker ultimately learn and practise from these teachings?"

Gurudev:

"To place unwavering faith in that which is Eternal, that is Bhakti.

To know and realise that which is True, that is Jnana.

To relinquish attachment to that which is transient and ever-changing, that is Vairagya.

Understanding these truths and living accordingly, one should directly experience the Paramatma dwelling within oneself."

Question:

"What is Jnana (Spiritual Knowledge)?"

Gurudev:

"Jnana is the vision of non-duality—the direct perception of the One Reality present in all existence."

Question:

"How is Jnana attained?"

Gurudev:

“Knowledge is not something acquired from outside. Through Atma-vichara (Self-enquiry), ignorance is removed, and Knowledge reveals itself naturally.”

Question:

“What is the benefit of Jnana?”

Gurudev:

“Knowledge alone leads human beings to a state free from sorrow.

Through Knowledge, one comes to know one’s true nature. Truth becomes self-evident, and Brahmananda, the Bliss of the Absolute, is attained.”

Question:

“How does Knowledge manifest itself?”

Gurudev:

“The very nature of the Atma is Knowledge. When the understanding ‘I am the Atma’ becomes firmly established, true wisdom shines forth in the individual.”

Question:

“What is the difference between the mind and the Atma?”

Gurudev:

“The mind is a collection of thoughts and mental modifications. The Atma is the true Master, the real ‘I’.”

Question:

“Does the mind assist in attaining Self-Knowledge?”

Gurudev:

“Without the cooperation of the mind, Self-Knowledge can not be realised. Therefore, the mind must first be purified. Pure thoughts form the foundation for the attainment of Self-Knowledge.”

Question:

“What is the proper definition of the Atma?”

Gurudev:

“The visible world is constantly undergoing change. Yet behind this ever-changing universe there exists an unchanging, eternal Reality that serves as its very foundation. That Eternal Reality is the Atma.”

Question:

"What is Atma-Saksatkara (Self-realisation)?"

Gurudev:

"To directly experience within oneself the Atma, which shines as Pure Consciousness and Bliss, is called Atma-Saksatkara."

Question:

"What are the obstacles to Self-realisation?"

Gurudev:

"A restless mind and spiritual practices undertaken without proper understanding are the principal obstacles."

Question:

"Is it not the mind itself that experiences Self-realisation?"

Gurudev:

"Yes. When the mind becomes free from restlessness and agitation, it becomes capable of experiencing the Self."

Question:

"What are practices undertaken without proper understanding?"

Gurudev:

"Practices performed merely to fulfil desires that arise in the restless mind, without understanding their true purpose, are practices lacking proper discernment."

Question:

"How is Self-realisation attained?"

Gurudev:

"Through complete surrender to the Paramatma, the Supreme Self."

Question:

"What is surrender?"

Gurudev:

“Surrender is the state in which, with the firm conviction that the Supreme Lord alone is the doer of all actions, one unconditionally offers and relinquishes all ego-driven desires unto Him.”

Question:

“Does spirituality consist merely of worship, chanting, and meditation?”

Gurudev:

“Certainly not. Spirituality is the study of the Atma. It is the recognition of the truth that every living being is, in essence, the Atma, and the practical application of that truth in one’s life.”

CHAPTER 39

Revered Gurudev with Me and within Me

After listening to every one of my questions with predominant patience, Gurudev answered them with consummate compassion and clarity. One by one, all my spiritual doubts were dispelled. I felt as though a heavy burden had been taken away from my heart.

My entire body seemed to be suffused with a radiant blue effulgence. Immersed in that blissful spiritual state, tears of divine joy flowed incessantly from my eyes as I gazed at Gurudev.

Gurudev remained seated in deep **Dhyana**, absorbed in meditation. His entire form shone resplendently, enveloped in a brilliant blue radiance that illuminated everything around Him.

After a few moments, Gurudev slowly opened His eyes and looked at me with immeasurable love and compassion.

"My child Athreya," He said gently, "within another year you shall be absolutely relieved of your professional responsibilities. Thereafter, you will undertake pilgrimages to many sacred places. Wherever you travel, bestow your attention on perceiving the underlying unity amidst the countless expressions of diversity.

Never forget that **Sadhana** is a sacred discipline to be practised throughout one's entire life. End your ego entirely. Examine everything with the light of true knowledge. Through such discrimination and wisdom, you too shall attain the exalted state of **Atmananda,** the bliss of the Self.

Athreya! I shall always remain with you and within you. Whenever doubts arise in your heart, I shall continue to resolve them from within. Therefore, do not yearn for my physical presence alone. Realise through your own experience the eternal truth that I am ever by your side."

Smiling affectionately, He continued,

"Look, your taxi has arrived. May auspiciousness ever be yours." With these words, the revered Master concluded His divine discourse.

Gradually, the beautiful blue radiance surrounding Gurudev began to diminish until it completely disappeared. Gurudev Himself was no longer visible before me.

With deep reverence, I touched the sacred spot where He had been seated with both my hands and then gently placed them upon my eyes, as though receiving His divine blessing.

Just then, my mobile phone rang and I answered the call.

“Sir, I have arrived. I am waiting near the parking area,” said the driver.

“I’ll be there immediately,” I replied.

Filled with complete inner fulfilment and boundless bliss, I slowly walked towards the parking area.

As I approached the vehicle, the driver asked in Hindi, “Sir, it will take nearly six hours to reach. Shall we halt here for the night, or shall we proceed directly to Nanded?”

Reflecting within myself, I thought:

“The purpose for which I came has been fulfilled. By the boundless grace of Gurudev, I have also been blessed with the Darshan of the presiding deities of this sacred place. Therefore, let us continue our journey to Nanded.”

“Nanded,” I replied simply.

“Okay, Sir,” said the driver, and the taxi began moving forward.

As the vehicle travelled on, countless thoughts arose within my mind.

Are all incarnate Mahatmas and Sadgurus truly so utterly selfless?

Do they bestow their grace even before their devotees express their needs?

Do they dedicate their entire lives solely for the spiritual welfare of humanity?

Perhaps that is why Gurudev, who is verily the embodiment of Lord Dattatreya, continues to remain eternally present upon this earth through His subtle spiritual form.

How many seekers like myself must have received His boundless grace!

Who are they? How may I come to know them? Is it possible that one day I shall meet such blessed souls?

Thus, innumerable questions continued to arise within me.

Yet, at the appropriate time, the Gurudev who eternally dwells both within me and beside me would undoubtedly provide the answers.

For the present, I felt that it was enough if I sincerely fulfilled the sacred duty that He had entrusted to me.

The very moment this thought arose, my mind became completely calm.

Breaking my silence, the driver asked,

“Sir, what are you thinking about? Would you like to have some tea? There is a village ahead where they serve excellent tea.”

“Very well,” I replied. “Let us stop there.”

We halted at a small roadside tea stall. Along with tea, I had two *Vada Pavs*. Thereafter, we returned to the car.

The driver said courteously, “Sir, if you wish, you may rest for a while on the back seat. I shall drive carefully. Please do not worry. I have eighteen years of driving experience.”

He smiled reassuringly as he spoke. “Very well. Please drive safely,” I replied.

Settling comfortably into the rear seat, I watched as the taxi resumed its journey towards Nanded. Soft old Hindi songs were playing gently on the music system.

Once again, my thoughts turned inward.

Throughout the ages, whenever humanity has become entangled in conflicting ideologies, beliefs, and divisions, enlightened sages have incarnated upon this earth. Out of supreme compassion and complete selflessness, they have dedicated their lives to guiding mankind along the path of truth.

They proclaimed the Eternal Truth fearlessly. They revealed the principles of **Sanatana Dharma** in ways that ordinary people could grasp and practise. Their noble efforts awakened spiritual consciousness in countless seekers and inspired humanity to walk the righteous path.

As my thoughts continued to flow, I reflected upon the great Acharyas who had illumined the world through the ages.

Though there were differences in philosophical interpretations, they all sought to establish the same Eternal Truth. Through the profound doctrines of **Dvaita**, **Advaita**, and **Visistadvaita**, the great teachers—**Madhvacharya**, **Adi Sankaracharya**, and **Sri Ramanujacharya** revealed, each in his own distinctive manner, the unity underlying all existence.

With extraordinary wisdom and scriptural mastery, they lucidly expounded the profound truths enshrined in the **Vedas** and the **Vedanta**. Their teachings have

served as invaluable guides for earnest seekers aspiring to comprehend the Supreme Reality.

Those illustrious Mahatmas explained with remarkable clarity the eternal relationship between the **Atman** and the **Paramatman**. They understood the diverse temperaments, beliefs, and levels of spiritual maturity among people and accordingly presented practical paths of **Sadhana** suited to each seeker. In this manner, they brought about harmony among differing viewpoints and established methods of spiritual practice that could be followed with confidence and understanding.

They firmly rejected blind superstition, irrational beliefs, and meaningless ritualism born of ignorance. Instead, they awakened discrimination, wisdom, and spiritual awareness among the people, inspiring them to pursue Truth with sincerity and discernment.

Likewise, throughout the world and across different ages, a large number of Realised Yogis and Enlightened Masters have incarnated in various lands. Understanding the social conditions, cultural traditions, and mental dispositions of the people among whom they lived, they taught those eternal principles of Dharma that were most appropriate to their circumstances and conducive to their spiritual evolution.

Indeed, every authentic spiritual path ultimately exists to awaken mankind to the Eternal Truth and to establish humanity in righteousness. The external forms may differ, but the essential purpose remains one and the same.

Therefore, it is the sacred responsibility of every seeker to perceive the inner essence that unites these diverse paths, to understand the supreme spiritual principle they proclaim, and to engage earnestly in **Sadhana** leading to the realisation of the Supreme.

One should never distort these noble teachings for selfish interests, nor manipulate them for personal gain or sectarian superiority. Such misuse only obscures their true purpose and creates confusion among people. Every sincere aspirant must recognise this profound truth with humility and reverence.

CHAPTER 40

Instead of "Papoham Papatma" – "Chidananda Rupah Shivoham"

Within this entire creation, there exists nothing apart from the Supreme Reality. He alone is the primordial cause of everything. Therefore, there is no room for the doubt that He is present in one place and absent in another. Wherever one seeks Him, there indeed He is. The true Jnani is one who perceives the entire universe as the glorious manifestation (*Vibhuti*) of the Supreme Being and worships Him accordingly. Worship performed without such sacred awareness remains incomplete.

In the worship of the Lord, **quality** is far more important than **quantity**. Even a person burdened with sinful tendencies, if he serves the Lord with one-pointed devotion and unwavering concentration, gradually sheds his impure nature and is transformed into a noble and virtuous soul.

In truth, there is no individual in God's creation who is inherently sinful. Within every living being shines the ever pure Atman. Deluded by Maya, man performs sinful actions. Therefore, one should never condemn or despise anyone as a sinner.

Likewise, no one should ever regard himself as sinful. Instead of constantly repeating:

"Papoham Papakarmaham Papatma Papasambhavah," one should ceaselessly contemplate: **"Chidananda Rupah Shivoham, Shivoham, Shivoham."** One should live in accordance with this sublime truth.

This is what is known as **positive contemplation** (*Anukula Chintana*). Such noble thinking greatly aids the seeker on the path of Self-realisation. Gradually, the human being evolves towards the Divine.

In the beginning, one may believe that God resides only in temples and places of worship. However, before the end of one's earthly journey, one must attain the state wherein the Supreme is perceived everywhere, in every place, in every object, and in every atom of creation.

Just as a flower naturally matures into some fruit, so too should the aspirant strive to evolve spiritually. For this purpose, the Supreme Lord Himself bestows the wisdom necessary for the journey.

Until Self-realisation dawns, the Sadguru graciously imparts the enquiry into Truth (*Jnana Vichara*) to every sincere seeker. This is His sacred assurance. There is not the slightest doubt about it.

While my spiritual enquiry, I observed an interesting truth. Broadly speaking, human beings are divided into two schools of thought:

One is **"Asti"** (It Exists), and the other is **"Nasti"** (It Does Not Exist).

Everyone understands these two expressions. *Asti* affirms existence, whereas *Nasti* denies it. But what exactly is it that one accepts or rejects?

Both these approaches, in their own way, assist the seeker in the pursuit of Truth. Throughout history, many great realised souls have attained the Truth by sincerely following one or the other of these paths.

The believer (*Astika*) seeks to discover what truly exists through complete faith, while the non-believer (*Nastika*) earnestly enquires into what does not exist. Yet, beyond these apparent differences lies a profound truth that deserves careful reflection.

The essence revealed through these two approaches is this:

The **Astika** establishes the existence of the Supreme Reality.

The **Nastika** establishes the reality of the Self through enquiry.

Ultimately, the realised sages declare that these two are not separate. The Atman abiding within us is none other than the Paramatman.

Hence the great Mahavakyas proclaim:

"Aham Brahmasmi! Ayam Atma Brahma."

Even within the expression *Nasti* ("It does not exist"), the word *Asti* ("It exists") is hidden. Such is the subtle nature of Truth.

Merely proclaiming oneself to be an Astika out of fear of God is of little value. One must experience that Divine Existence through unwavering faith, profound devotion, and sincere spiritual practice.

One should realise the Supreme Reality, which alone is Eternal Truth; attain direct experience of the Atman; and rejoice in the bliss of Brahman. Everything else is transient and perishable. The ultimate purpose of human birth is to realise this Eternal Truth.

A human being enters this world in the state of duality, perceiving multiplicity everywhere. The true fulfilment of life is to depart from this world established in the state of **Advaita**, the supreme awareness wherein all existence is experienced as One.

Therefore, every devotee should constantly pray:

"Asato Ma Sadgamaya" (Lead me from the unreal to the Real.)

"Tamaso Ma Jyotirgamaya" (Lead me from darkness to Light.)

"Mrityor Ma Amrtam Gamaya" (Lead me from mortality to Immortality.)

These timeless prayers are relevant under all circumstances and in every age.

So long as one remains under the influence of untruth, ignorance, and the fear of death, one cannot attain lasting peace. The ordinary individual is unable to free himself from these limitations because he has become deeply bound by worldly existence.

He is easily attracted by the enchanting power of Maya(illusion).

He makes little effort to transcend it.

He mistakes worldly life itself to be the supreme goal in life.

He evaluates everything solely from a material standpoint.

He imagines himself to be equal to God in wisdom and authority.

He worships the Supreme more out of fear than out of love and surrender.

He mistakes Maya for Reality itself.

Thus, he continues to wander farther away from the Eternal Truth instead of moving towards it.

A person performs every action with a desire for its fruits.

He allows external actions to overpower inner purity.

He mistakes the unreal for the Real.

He follows practices that are contrary to Truth.

His love remains confined only to his own family.

He imagines himself to be the sole architect of time, destiny, and his accomplishments.

He ignores the eternal principles ordained by Dharma.

He interprets the Sastras and the Puranas merely according to the limitations of his own intellect.

He fails to understand the inseparable relationship between the individual soul (*Jivatman*) and the Supreme Soul (*Paramatman*).

Ignoring the Divine that dwells within, he searches for God only in the external world.

Therefore, every spiritual aspirant should faithfully practise the following principles:

1. Every human being is obliged to perform action (*Karma*).
2. No one can remain without performing action even for a single moment.
3. Every action should be performed selflessly, without expectation of its fruits (*Nishkama Karma*). This alone is **Karma Yoga**.
4. Whether one follows the path of Karma Yoga or Jnana Yoga, selfless action is indispensable.
5. Through Karma Yoga, the mind becomes purified (*Chitta-shuddhi*), and from such purity arises true wisdom (*Jnana*).
6. Having attained wisdom, one should cultivate steadfast detachment (*Vairagya*) and remain firmly established in spiritual discipline.
7. One should develop equal vision (*Sama Dristi*) towards all living beings.
8. Through meditation (*Dhyana*), the mind should gradually be withdrawn from worldly distractions.
9. Through Self-enquiry (*Atma-vichara*), one should realise the Supreme Reality.
10. One should behold the Divine Atman that eternally shines within oneself.
11. Upon attaining direct Self-realisation, nothing further remains to be known.
12. Through this supreme experience, the seeker becomes liberated from every form of bondage and attains true freedom.
13. The individual soul (*Jivatman*) finally realises its eternal oneness with the Supreme Soul (*Paramatman*).

Thereafter, having become free from the endless cycle of birth and death, such realised beings may, according to the Divine Will and for the welfare of the world,

assume birth once again. These exalted souls are known as **Satpurusas** and **Sadgurus**.

In other words, they have realised their own true Self.

Those who fail to attain this Self-realisation continue to perform actions driven by worldly desires. Becoming increasingly attached to transient objects, remaining under the sway of the senses, and experiencing alternating pleasure and sorrow, they continue to accumulate the results of their actions (*Karma*). Consequently, they are compelled to undergo repeated births and deaths to exhaust those accumulated karmic impressions. Forgetting the Reality of the Atman and failing to realise the Supreme Truth, they drift farther away from the Divine, never reaching the sacred destination from which they originally came.

CHAPTER 41

Life – A Game of Chess, Every Move – A Choice and Every Choice – A Test

By the boundless grace of my revered Gurudev, and exactly as He had instructed, the entire year of 2016 passed amidst numerous auspicious family events and responsibilities. Yet, in accordance with His teachings, I never allowed my spiritual discipline (*Sadhana*) to diminish.

Whenever time permitted, I devoted myself to **Atma-vichara** (Self-enquiry) and deep contemplation. On a few occasions, I happened to meet certain learned scholars. Following the instructions of my Gurudev, however, I never entered debates or arguments with anyone on matters of spirituality.

I would simply listen in silence and with reverence to whatever they expounded. Among the words of a few, I perceived genuine wisdom and Truth. Yet, in the discourses of many others, I found ignorance and intellectual arrogance more apparent than true knowledge. They appeared eager to impose the doctrines they themselves believed upon others.

Whenever I encountered such situations, I would inwardly remember the smiling countenance of my revered Gurudev, who would answer even the most intricate questions with striking simplicity and clarity. Mentally, I would offer my humble prostrations at His sacred feet.

When examined with discernment, one realises that **Sanatana Dharma leaves no room for ignorance.**

Countless great Rishis and realised sages, through intense austerity, profound enquiry, direct experience, and deep contemplation, investigated this universe and the Supreme Consciousness that pervades it. Having realised the Truth through their own spiritual experience, they compassionately codified that wisdom for the benefit of humanity in the form of the **Vedas, Vedangas, Darshanas, Sastras, Puranas**, and other sacred scriptures, thereby firmly establishing the eternal principles of Dharma.

Every person born into this world is destined to perform action (*Karma*). Along with prescribing the actions necessary for worldly life, these sacred scriptures also enjoined righteous duties performed with wisdom and spiritual understanding.

When these ordained duties are observed alongside one's worldly responsibilities, they bring health, longevity, prosperity, and, above all, inner peace. Gradually, the mind becomes purified (*Chitta-shuddhi*), enabling the seeker to experience the Divine manifestations of the Supreme within the heart. Before the end of life, one thereby attains Self-realisation and fulfils the true purpose of human birth.

This exalted tradition of Sanatana Dharma has continued uninterrupted through the ages. Yet there have also been those who, failing to understand its true spirit, criticised and misrepresented its teachings.

As generations passed, human attitudes gradually changed. Ignorance steadily increased, while true spiritual wisdom slowly receded into the background.

As ignorance spread, the **Arisadvargas,** the six inner enemies of man, namely **Kama** (lust), **Krodha** (anger), **Lobha** (greed), **Moha** (delusion), **Mada** (pride), and **Matsarya** (jealousy) became increasingly dominant. Likewise, the three powerful worldly cravings (**Esana-traya**), the craving for spouse (*Bharyesana*), the craving for progeny (*Putresana*), and the craving for wealth (*Dhanesana*)—together with envy, hatred, and selfishness, grew stronger in human society.

At such critical periods in history, numerous great Mahatmas incarnated in different regions as Gurus, indefatigably striving to preserve and restore the eternal values of Sanatana Dharma. They continue to do so even today.

Some fortunate souls recognised the Truth and walked the path shown by these Enlightened Masters. Many others, however, remained immersed in ignorance, unwilling to awaken to Reality.

The eternal wisdom contained in the **Vedas** and **Vedanta** has repeatedly been reinterpreted and explained in forms suited to the changing needs and circumstances of different ages.

In recent times, many distinguished Western scholars have undertaken careful and impartial research into these ancient scriptures. Having subjected them to rigorous study and analysis, they have acknowledged that these teachings embody eternal truths, are founded upon sound reasoning, and possess remarkable scientific validity. They continue to disseminate this profound wisdom throughout the world, helping countless people cultivate a more enlightened understanding of life. This is a truth that we ourselves have often failed to recognise.

Although this priceless spiritual treasure rightfully belongs to us, instead of studying it sincerely, examining it deeply, and applying it in our lives, we have too often criticised it, neglected it, and distanced ourselves from it through ignorance.

Some intellectuals, motivated by personal recognition and worldly gain, have distorted the profound wisdom of the sages, covering it with superficial interpretations and portraying it as nothing more than blind ritualism and superstition. In doing so, they have unfortunately contributed to the spread of further misunderstanding and ignorance in society. Indeed, this is one of our greatest misfortunes.

Upon deeper reflection, one clearly perceives the distinction between **Dharma** and **religion**.

Dharma is eternal; religion is institutional.

Dharma is founded upon **Truth (Satya)**.

Religion is founded upon systems of belief, doctrines, and human interpretations.

From **Truth** arises **Dharma**; and from **Dharma** naturally flow **Peace (Shanti)**, **Love (Prema)**, and **Non-violence (Ahimsa).**

Therefore, our ancient seers declared that the pillars of true human life are:

Satya, Dharma, Santi, Prema, and Ahimsa.

Without Truth, Dharma cannot dwell.

Without Dharma, peace inevitably gives way to unrest.

Without Dharma, love degenerates into attachment and selfish affection.

Without Dharma, non-violence loses its true meaning and ultimately gives rise to violence.

Therefore, **Truth alone is eternal.** It alone is **Sanatana**. It alone is the Supreme Reality. It alone is **Paramatman**.

Hence the Upanishads proclaim:

“Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahma.”

That is to say, the Supreme Brahman, who pervades the entire universe, is of the very nature of **Truth, Knowledge, and Infinity**.

When That is realised, nothing further remains to be known.

All the Dharmic paths established by the great sages ultimately exist for one purpose alone to lead humanity to the realisation of this Supreme Truth.

This profound truth is consistently proclaimed throughout all spiritual scriptures.

Indeed, every faith and every genuine spiritual tradition ultimately seeks to lead humanity towards the realisation of that Supreme Reality. Is this not their common purpose?

The Infinite, All-pervading Divine Power, which cannot be perceived by the physical eyes, is worshipped with reverence and devotion under different names and forms. It is man who has assigned diverse names to that One Supreme Reality.

According to differences of country, culture, historical circumstances, and social conditions, various religious traditions and customs have evolved. Some of these have remained unchanged through the ages, while others have naturally adapted themselves to the changing needs of time.

However, those principles that are founded upon **Truth** never undergo change.

Only those practices and conventions created by human beings are subject to change.

Life is like a game of chess played with God.

We make one move, and God responds with another.

In every move that we make, there exists an **"option"**.

In every move that God places before us, there exists a **"challenge."**

Whether our choices arise from selflessness or selfishness, the challenges bestowed by the Lord are always perfectly suited to those choices.

Those very challenges are meant for the refinement and elevation of the individual soul.

Meeting those challenges with courage, discrimination, and steadfast faith is itself **Sadhana**.

When Sadhana is practised in a spirit of selflessness, Truth gradually reveals itself.

When Sadhana is pursued with selfish motives, one becomes increasingly enveloped by the veil of Maya.

CHAPTER 42

The Glorious Kamakhya Temple – The Unexpected Darshan of Gurudev

Having instructed me thus, Gurudev had indicated that I should resign from my employment during my fifty-sixth year. Accordingly, in March 2019, I resigned. During my professional career, I had the opportunity of travelling extensively to many places.

Just as Gurudev had directed, wherever I travelled, I endeavoured to perceive the underlying unity amidst the apparent diversity. I made every effort to examine everything with the eye of spiritual wisdom. Throughout this inward journey, I continually experienced the presence of the Self abiding within me.

As part of my official responsibilities, my final assignment in March 2019 took me to **Guwahati**, in the State of Assam, which is also affectionately known as **Gauhati**. It is a large and prominent city. The locality known as **Dispur**, situated within Guwahati, serves as the capital of the State of Assam.

My work was at the **Assam Science and Technology University**, located in Guwahati. Nearly all the engineering colleges in Assam are affiliated with this University. My official work was completed within two days.

That evening, I hired an autorickshaw with the intention of having the sacred Darshan of the renowned **Sri Kamakhya Devi Temple**. Vehicles are permitted to travel almost up to the hilltop. The driver dropped me within a short distance from the temple, after which I continued the remaining path on foot. I had previously visited this holy shrine along with my wife.

The sacred **Kamakhya Temple** is situated upon the **Nilacala Hill**, in the western part of Guwahati. The hill overlooks the majestic **Brahmaputra River**. This ancient shrine is one of the most revered and historically significant temples in Bharatavarsa. It is counted among the Eighteen Maha Sakti Pithas. Here, the Divine Mother is worshipped by devotees as **Kamarupini** or **Sri Kamakhya Devi**.

Within the temple complex are ten subsidiary shrines dedicated to the **Dasa Mahavidyas**, **Kali, Tara, Sodasi, Bhuvanesvari, Bhairavi, Chinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagalamukhi, Matangi,** and **Kamala**. These sacred manifestations of the Divine Mother together represent the complete spectrum of Supreme Sakti.

According to the Puranas, this sacred region marks the place where **Sati Devi** had once manifested Her profound spiritual glory before Lord **Paramashiva**. Following the destruction of **Daksa's Yajna**, Lord Shiva, overwhelmed with grief, wandered through the worlds bearing the body of Sati upon His shoulders. To restore cosmic order and bring Shiva back to His natural state of transcendental awareness, Lord **Vishnu** released His **Sudarshana Chakra**, which divided Sati's body into many sacred parts. The place where Her **Yoni** fell became this holy site, now revered as the **Kamakhya Sakti Pitha**.

Historical records suggest that worship at this sacred site has continued since at least the sixth century. The present temple structure is believed to have been reconstructed during the sixteenth century. This magnificent temple comprises three principal sections, each reflecting the unique architectural and spiritual heritage of the shrine. The central pavilion of the temple leads into the sacred **Garbha Grha**, which resembles a natural cave.

Within this sanctum there is **no sculpted idol or anthropomorphic image of the Goddess**. Instead, deep within the earth lies a naturally formed cleft in the rock, perpetually bathed by an underground spring. This sacred rock formation, revered as being in the form of the **Yoni**, is the object of worship at Kamakhya. The ever-flowing water that emerges through the fissure is regarded as supremely holy and is worshipped with profound devotion.

Each year, during the monsoon season, it is traditionally believed that the Divine Mother enters Her annual period of **Rajaswala** (the sacred menstrual cycle). To commemorate this divine phenomenon, the temple celebrates the renowned **Ambubachi Mahotsava**, a grand festival observed over four days. During this sacred period, the water flowing through the Garbha Grha acquires a reddish hue, symbolizing the Divine Mother's creative and life-sustaining power.

Devotees from every corner of the country gather in great numbers to participate in these celebrations, which are conducted with exceptional splendour and deep spiritual fervour. It is also a long-held belief that childless couples who receive the blessings and Darshan of Sri Kamakhya Devi during this auspicious period are blessed with progeny through Her divine grace.

Certain ancient ritual traditions, including animal sacrifice, continue to be observed at this temple in accordance with its long-established customs. Every morning, devoted worshippers bring goats as offerings to the Divine Mother. The ancient **Kalika Purana** extols **Sri Kamakhya Devi** as the fulfiller of devotees' righteous aspirations, as the beloved Consort of Lord Shiva, and as the **Adi Sakti** who bestows

Mukti upon sincere seekers. It is this Supreme Divine Mother who is worshipped here under the sacred names **Kamarupini** and **Kamakhya**.

An immense number of devotees had assembled at the temple. After obtaining a **Special Darshan** ticket, I entered the sacred cave-like sanctum and was blessed with the Darshan of the Divine Mother in Her naturally manifested **Yoni** form. The temple priest reverentially sprinkled upon my head the sacred water that continually flowed over the holy rock.

After completing my worship, I came out of the temple and walked towards the edge of the hill. Standing there, I gazed with deep serenity upon the majestic **Brahmaputra River**, whose waters flowed gracefully below, filling my heart with quiet joy and spiritual fulfilment.

As I stood absorbed in the serene beauty of the surroundings, I suddenly heard a familiar voice calling, "Athreya!" Instinctively, I turned around. Standing before me was Gurudev. For a few moments, I was overwhelmed with ineffable joy. Words failed me completely. Never had I imagined that I would be blessed with the unexpected Darshan of Gurudev at that sacred place. With profound reverence, I immediately prostrated at His holy feet and offered my humble obeisance.

With great affection, Gurudev gently held my shoulders, raised me up, and said, "Shubham Bhuyat! May all auspiciousness be yours. There is no time to linger now, Athreya. We must proceed quickly." As He walked ahead, I followed closely beside Him. After a few moments, He began to speak.

"Athreya! Listen carefully."

Then, with immeasurable compassion, Gurudev bestowed upon me these divine words: "I shall ever remain with you and within you. Whenever doubts arise in your mind, I shall continue to dispel them from within. During that inner clarification, certain Mahavakyas will spontaneously arise in your consciousness. Carefully preserve them in writing."

"With the wisdom that has been bestowed upon you, you shall, in due course, compose profound commentaries on the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram and other sacred scriptures. You will also write the account of your own spiritual journey, enriched by your many divine experiences."

Seekers of Truth will publish those works. Through innumerable Satsangas, you shall impart Self-knowledge and inspire seekers towards direct spiritual experience. Together with your companions in Satsanga, you will undertake many selfless acts of service in various places.

After a brief pause, Gurudev continued: *"There is no need for you to long for My physical Darshan. According to the needs of time and circumstance, I shall continue to meet you whenever necessary."* Saying this, He turned towards me, lovingly placed His right hand upon my head, and blessed me.

"Athreya! Everything shall unfold for your highest good. Shubham Bhuyat! I shall now take My leave."

With those words, Gurudev began descending the hillside. I remained standing there, my eyes fixed upon Him until He disappeared. Drawing a deep breath, I slowly walked towards the auto-rickshaw stand, my heart overflowing with gratitude and divine bliss.

That sacred Darshan became one of the most precious blessings of my life.

As I reflected upon the encounter, Gurudev's very first instruction echoed repeatedly within my mind:

"Certain Mahavakyas will arise within your consciousness. Carefully preserve them in writing." I began contemplating the deeper significance of those words. Gurudev had also foretold that I would one day compose spiritually illuminating works. I realised that the Mahavakyas arising within me would become the very foundation of those writings. Perhaps this was the true purpose behind His divine instruction. Immersed in these thoughts, I reached the autorickshaw stand and returned to my hotel, arriving at about 8.30 p.m.

My flight to Kolkata was scheduled for the following afternoon from Guwahati. From there, I had already booked a connecting evening flight to Visakhapatnam.

After dinner at the hotel restaurant, I returned to my room. I opened my laptop, created a new document in Google Docs, and titled it: **"Mahavakyas of Gurudev."**

Thus began the sacred task that Gurudev Himself had entrusted to me.

CHAPTER 43

The Commencement of My Writings – The Mahavakyas of Gurudev

As I reflected deeply upon what I should write, I made a sincere effort to recollect the many spiritual truths that Gurudev had imparted to me on various occasions. One after another, His divine utterances began to arise vividly in my memory. I immediately commenced recording them. They are as follows:

1. Athreya! If you aspire to attain Atma-anubhuti (Self-realisation), Vairagya (dispassion) is indispensable. To cultivate true Vairagya, Jnana (spiritual wisdom) is essential. To attain Jnana, purity of mind (Chitta-shuddhi) is indispensable. Chitta-shuddhi arises through Bhakti (devotion), and genuine Bhakti blossoms through Nishkama Karma—selfless action performed without attachment to its fruits.

2. "Athreya! To place one's faith in that which is eternal is Bhakti. To discern that eternal Reality is Jnana. To renounce that which is transient and ever-changing is Vairagya."

3. "Athreya! A person perceives the external world through his eyes. When the eyes are closed, it is perceived through the mind. But who is it that perceives the mind itself? It is the Atman. Therefore, enquire into the Truth, realise the Atman, and attain Atma-anubhuti."

4. Athreya! Every individual possesses the Sthula Sarira (Entire Body), the Suksma Sarira (Subtle Body), and the Karana Sarira (Causal Body). Within the causal body lie the accumulated impressions (Vasanas) of countless births, together with the merits and demerits of past actions. These latent impressions continue to influence one's present life. If they are to be eradicated, transformation must first take place in the subtle body. Hence, spiritual discipline must be practised at the level of the subtle body.

5. Athreya! Just as butter is hidden within milk, oil within the sesame seed, and fire within wood, so too Divine Consciousness pervades every object throughout creation.

That All-Pervading Consciousness is Paramatman. It can not be adequately described in words; it can only be directly realised through personal spiritual experience.

6. Athreya! To realise the Truth is to discover one's own true nature. This is called Self-Realisation. To abide firmly in that state is known as Self-Abidance. To become completely free from every form of bondage is Liberation or Salvation (Mukti).

7. Athreya! If, despite performing acts of devotion and spiritual disciplines for a long time, Self-knowledge has not yet dawned, understand that the appropriate time to seek refuge at the feet of a Sadguru has arrived. When, with complete humility, one yearns sincerely for the Guru, the Guru Himself graciously bestows His Darshan and reveals the path that leads to the Goal.

8. Athreya! In this Kali Yuga, both virtue and vice coexist within every human being. Therefore, the Lord does not incarnate merely to destroy the wicked. Instead, He manifests as the Sadguru, living among humanity, patiently guiding sincere seekers and leading them along the righteous path.

9. "Athreya! I have come solely for your sake. My treasure is inexhaustible. Whoever approaches Me may freely receive whatever is truly needed. Yet, whatever is thus received must ultimately be offered back to Paramatman. If this is done, that treasure shall forever remain full and unfailing."

10. "Athreya! The grace of the Guru is beyond measure. The Guru alone knows what ought to be bestowed upon each disciple. It is the disciple's sacred duty to serve the Guru with unwavering faith and complete surrender. Through Guru-seva, the attainment of Self-knowledge becomes effortless. The Sadguru often imparts, through a worthy disciple, the wisdom that is destined to benefit many others."

11. "Athreya! Wealth may enable a person to acquire the objects of the material world, but it can never purchase Atma-jnana (Self-knowledge). That supreme wisdom is attained only through sincere spiritual discipline and Divine Grace."

12. "Athreya! During times of adversity, man naturally seeks refuge in spirituality. Yet, when prosperity arrives, he often falls prey to ego and forgetfulness. Such is the play of Maya. It is through Atma-vichara (Self-enquiry) that one transcends this delusion."

13. "Athreya! As detachment from worldly attractions steadily increases, the Atman draws ever closer to you. True Vairagya is itself the royal path to spiritual fulfilment. By relinquishing the fleeting and impermanent, one becomes worthy of attaining that which is eternal."

14. "Athreya! True meditation is Ekagrata—one-pointedness of mind. Today, countless methods of meditation are practised. In reality, every individual is continually meditating upon something. If the mind is absorbed in worldly objects,

redirect that very power of concentration towards the Atman. That alone is true meditation."

15. "Athreya! To attain Atma-anubhuti, neither mastery of many languages, nor distinctions of caste or creed, nor scholastic learning, nor external display, nor even extensive scriptural knowledge is essential. What is truly required is the natural wisdom bestowed by Paramatman, together with steadfast faith and sincere spiritual practice."

16. "Athreya! The essential nature of Paramatman is Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram, Truth, Auspiciousness, and Divine Beauty. Therefore, Bhakti enables one to realise the Truth; Jnana enables one to comprehend the Auspicious Reality; and Vairagya enables one to experience the Divine Beauty of the Supreme."

17. "Athreya! Do not choose a Guru merely on the strength of public reputation or popular acclaim. Seek and approach the Guru through the inner yearning of the soul. Only then does the consciousness of the Guru and the disciple become united, enabling the disciple to realise the true nature of the Self. This alone is the sacred bond between Guru and disciple."

18. "Athreya! If you desire Atma-anubhuti (Self-realisation), cultivate the spirit of devotion exemplified by Madhvacarya, the spirit of selfless service embodied by Ramanujacarya, and the wisdom of Adi Sankaracarya. Through sincere spiritual practice, every seeker is capable of integrating these noble qualities within himself."

19. "Athreya! During the states of dream (Svapna) and deep sleep (Susupti), that which silently remains with you, and which once again awakens you into the waking state (Jagrat), is none other than the Atman. Every day, without even being aware of it, every living being experiences the bliss of the Self during deep sleep."

20. "Athreya! Just as water assumes the form of the vessel into which it is poured, and just as sunlight illumines every object upon which it falls, so too does the Atman, upon entering a particular body, assume its apparent individuality while simultaneously enlivening it with Divine Consciousness."

21. "Athreya! All religions seek to reveal the same Eternal Truth. Every faith endeavour to lead humanity towards the knowledge of Paramatman. It is man who has assigned different names, customs, and disciplines to them. Those founded upon Truth endure through the ages; those established merely upon dogma or human opinion eventually fade away."

22. "Athreya! That which is worshipped as the Supreme Deity, that which shines forth as Prana Sakti, and that which abides within all beings as their innermost

essence, is one and the same Paramatman. He who directly realises this all-pervading Oneness is truly a Jnani; he indeed is the true Yogi."

23. "Athreya! That which remains inseparably united with the universe throughout the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep is Paramatman. Within every living being, the same Supreme Reality shines forth as the individual Jivatman. The one who experiences this unity of the individual self with the Supreme becomes established in the Truth."

24. "Athreya! Circumstances may change; beliefs may vary; customs and traditions may differ. Yet Truth itself never changes. Truth is eternal and endless. Therefore, it is we who must journey towards Truth; Truth does not alter itself to accommodate us."

25. "Athreya! The Sadguru can impart spiritual wisdom and reveal the path of Truth. However, under no circumstances can He directly bestow Atma-anubhuti (Self-realisation) upon a disciple. The attainment of that supreme experience must be accomplished through the disciple's own sincere Sadhana. This alone is the immutable law of the spiritual path."

26. "Athreya! That which is the ear behind the ear, the speech behind speech, the eye behind the eye, the mind behind the mind, and the life-force behind the very breath of life, that alone is the Supreme Reality. One who realises That becomes free from all bondage and attains the immortal state beyond all limitations."

27. "Athreya! Since the human intellect naturally functions through names and forms, it finds it difficult to comprehend the Formless Absolute. This is the challenge encountered when one attempts to worship the Divine solely in Its formless aspect. Unless this limitation is transcended, the essential Truth of Paramatman can not be fully realised."

28. "Athreya! Human life is like a game of chess played with the Divine. When man makes one move, the Lord responds with another. In every move made by man there exists an element of choice; in every move made by the Lord there lies a challenge. To face those Divine challenges with courage and steadfastness is Sadhana. Through selfless spiritual discipline, Truth is gradually realised; through selfish pursuits, one becomes increasingly entangled in Maya."

29. "Athreya! Rivers may bear different names, yet the water flowing through them is one. Likewise, though bodies and forms appear diverse, the Atman dwelling within them is One. The same Divine Consciousness manifests through countless forms. He who directly experiences this unity is the true Jnani; he indeed is the genuine Yogi."

30. “Athreya! Worship performed through selfless action yields one kind of spiritual fruit, while worship performed through Jnana yields another. But the seeker who harmoniously integrates Karma and Jnana, and thereby realises the true nature of the Divine, alone becomes worthy of attaining Mukti.”

31. “Athreya! The abandonment of ego is the final milestone on the path of Karma Yoga, and the very first milestone on the path of Jnana Yoga. Every action performed under the influence of ego becomes an obstacle to spiritual progress.”

32. “Athreya! Some attain Atmananda through selfless action, others through spiritual wisdom, others through meditation, and still others through Vairagya. Whatever the path, Chitta-shuddhi—purity of mind—is indispensable.”

33. “Athreya! Let Karma be the bow, Jnana the arrow, and with unwavering concentration draw the bowstring firmly. Then release the arrow towards the supreme target—the Atman. Such should be the seeker’s spiritual endeavour.”

34. “Athreya! Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa attained Brahman through unsurpassed devotion; Swami Vivekananda through profound spiritual wisdom; Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi through Atma-vichara (Self-enquiry); Vedanta Prabhupada through the constant repetition of the Divine Name; Paramahamsa Yogananda through Kriya Yoga; and Swami Dayananda Saraswati through dedicated service to Sanatana Dharma. Though their paths differed, the supreme Goal they attained was One.”

35. “Athreya! Karma and Jnana are the two great steps in the spiritual ascent of human life. Karma purifies and ennobles the present, while Jnana illumines both the present and the future. To harmoniously integrate the two is true Sadhana. This indeed is the sacred duty of every seeker.”

36. “Athreya! Paramatman is beyond illusion, beyond speech, beyond mantra, and beyond even death. Only Truth can reveal Him.”

37. “Athreya! There are four stages in the journey of Atma-sadhana:

1. ‘I am separate from Paramatman.’
2. ‘Everything is Paramatman.’
3. ‘Paramatman exists within me.’
4. ‘I Myself am Paramatman.’

These represent the progressive unfoldment of spiritual realisation.”

38. “Athreya! Man is born with purity; therefore, he must strive to preserve that purity throughout life. To enable this, Paramatman bestows upon every individual the capacity to acquire spiritual wisdom.”

39. “Athreya! Devotion is not the exclusive privilege of human beings. Was not Prahlada, though born among the demons, a great devotee? Were not Bali and Vibhisana also devotees of the Lord? Among animals, were not Gajendra, Jambavan, and Hanuman supreme devotees? Among birds, were not Sampati and Jatayu exalted in devotion? In the Divine creation, every being has its own sacred role to play.”

40. “Athreya! Knowledge without righteous conduct is fruitless, and conduct devoid of true knowledge is equally incomplete. The similar principle applies even to the life of Sannyasa. Wisdom and conduct must always go hand in hand.”

41. “Athreya! The patterns of human thought are manifold. Every individual follows a different line of thinking. Though thoughts may vary, Truth remains One and the same. That Truth is Paramatman. No matter from how many perspectives it is examined or analysed, Truth itself never changes.”

42. “Athreya! The supreme objective of all Sadhana must be the realisation of Truth. That which is devoid of Truth can never attain Paramatman. All other pursuits belong merely to the realm of external appearances. They become the very source of attachment and bondage. When attachment to the external is renounced, awareness naturally turns inward. Therein abides the Truth.”

43. “Athreya! Every human being performs actions in accordance with his own individual tendencies and latent impressions (Vasanas). Consequently, he continues to strengthen those very tendencies and becomes increasingly identified with the limited personality that arises from them. Failing to discern the Truth that liberates him from the bondage of action, he remains caught in the unending cycle of birth and death.”

44. “Athreya! It is impossible for human beings to foresee the full consequences of every action they perform. In the Divine order, there exists a supreme and infallible intelligence—far surpassing all human technology. It is as though the entire universe is governed by a perfect Divine system, beyond the comprehension of the human mind. Nothing can escape its flawless law, nor can anyone evade its operation.”

45. “Athreya! You have the right to perform your actions, but never over their results.

He who truly understands this is a Jnani. He who lives in accordance with this wisdom is a Yogi. Such a seeker alone becomes worthy of experiencing the bliss of Yoga."

46. "Athreya! Only the one who, with absolute purity of the Antahkarana (the inner instrument comprising the mind, intellect, memory, and ego), places complete faith in Me—the Me who dwells within you—truly belongs to Me. No matter in what manner you seek to perceive Me externally, you will never behold My real nature there. To imagine otherwise is but the product of ignorance."

47. "Athreya! The Lord first grants primacy to Bhakti (devotion), and thereafter to Jnana (spiritual wisdom). Through this Divine order, He bestows upon every seeker the opportunity to realise Him. Before the Lord, all beings are equal. It is only we who create distinctions and differences among ourselves."

48. "Athreya! There can be no living being without the Atman. There can be no inert matter devoid of Consciousness. There is no life without inert matter; no Atman without Paramatman; and no universe apart from Paramatman. All existence is pervaded and sustained by that One Supreme Reality."

49. "Athreya! This entire creation is constituted of two principles: Kshetra (the Field) and Kshetrajna (the Knower of the Field). The Kshetra is the inert body, while the Kshetrajna is the conscious being who illumines it. Even the physical body itself is but another field. The Atman, which dwells within it as the witnessing Consciousness, alone is the true Kshetrajna."

50. "Athreya! Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa attained Brahman through unsurpassed devotion; Swami Vivekananda through profound spiritual wisdom; Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi through Atma-vichara (Self-enquiry); Vedanta Prabhupada through constant Nama-japa (repetition of the Divine Name); Paramahamsa Yogananda through Kriya Yoga; and Swami Dayananda Saraswati through dedicated service to Sanatana Dharma. Though their paths were diverse, the Supreme Goal they attained was One."

51. "Athreya! That which melts the heart is Love. That which is performed with love is Seva (selfless service). That which arises through Seva is Ananda (Divine Bliss). To share that bliss with others is Peace. To refrain from causing harm to any living being is Ahimsa. To seek the welfare of all is Dharma. That which reveals Paramatman is Truth."

52. "Athreya! God is Faith. With unflinching faith alone can one truly experience Him."

53. “Athreya! Man has discovered countless paths in his quest to realise the Truth, which is the very cause and foundation of this creation. Yet, becoming engrossed in the complexity of those very paths, he often loses sight of the Truth itself.”

54. “Athreya! The mother is real; the father is worthy of reverence. The Atman alone is the Eternal Reality; the body is but a temporary abode. It is the Atman that dwells within the body, and it is the Atman that illumines and recognises the Atman. That alone is the Eternal Truth.”

55. “Athreya! There is little benefit in meditating upon Narayana while harbouring hatred towards one’s fellow human beings. There is no merit in worshipping Madhava whilst disregarding the welfare and dignity of humanity. Likewise, merely speaking of Truth whilst neglecting righteous conduct serves no purpose. Such is not true spirituality.”

56. “Athreya! Who constructed temples and places of worship? Was it not man himself? But who created the mountains, the forests, the rivers, the lakes, and the vast oceans? These are My true sanctuaries.”

57. “Athreya! However deeply one may be immersed in Maya, if one radiates Jnana, everything becomes filled with sweetness. Creation becomes sweet; humanity becomes sweet; action becomes sweet; wisdom becomes sweet; meditation becomes sweet; Yoga becomes sweet; and spiritual experience becomes sweet. That sweetness is Brahmananda—the Bliss of Brahman. It is Atmananda—the Bliss of the Self.”

58. “Athreya! In his quest to realise the Truth, which is the very cause of this creation, man has discovered innumerable paths of Karma, Jnana, and spiritual disciplines. Yet, alas, instead of recognising that the Truth abides within his own being, he continues to search for it in the external world.”

59. “Athreya! If a farmer tills his field for a single season, he may harvest vegetables.

If he cultivates it year after year, he may reap abundant grain. If he nurtures it over many years, he may grow mighty trees. Likewise, if a human being diligently cultivates the field of life throughout his lifetime, he will harvest Jnana, spiritual wisdom.”

60. “Athreya! By nature, the Guru is the very embodiment of serenity and compassion. Yet, at times, He may seem stern towards His disciples. Such sternness arises not from displeasure, but from His earnest desire for their spiritual enlightenment. Therefore, it is often said that while the scriptures may enable one to gain some understanding of Paramatman, it is exceedingly unusual to truly comprehend the magnitude of the Guru.”

61. “Athreya! For the attainment of Atma-jnana (Self-knowledge), Chitta-shuddhi (purity of mind) is of paramount significance. Without purity of mind, even a life spent in solitude within the forest yields little benefit. But one who possesses purity of mind encounters no obstacle to spiritual progress, even while living amidst society.”

62. “Athreya! Everyone must earn their livelihood through Karma, the path of righteous action. Yet, while engaged in action, one must strive to realise the Truth, this is the path of Jnana. The harmonious union of Karma and Jnana alone leads man towards the supreme fulfilment of life.”

63. “Athreya! If you place your trust solely in Karma, you will inevitably experience both pleasure and pain. If you place your trust in Jnana, you will transcend both pleasure and pain and attain abiding peace.”

64. “Athreya! Examine Karma through the light of Jnana, and test Jnana against the touchstone of Truth. Then, the Truth shall reveal itself to you without delay.”

65. “Athreya! Meditation is, in essence, profound earnest. This alone is true Tapas (spiritual penance). Today, people seek comfort and convenience, even air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned facilities for the practice of meditation. Yet, without inner contemplation, there can be no true meditation. The sole fruit to be attained through meditation is Atma-anubhuti, the direct realisation of the Self.”

66. “Athreya! The moment a seeker completely renounces the notions of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ through thought, word, and deed, Atma-jnana (Self-knowledge) dawns within him. Until then, doubt, confusion, and inner conflict will continue to persist.”

67. “Athreya! The patterns of human thought are manifold. Every individual follows a different line of thinking. Though thoughts may vary, Truth remains One and the same. That Truth is Paramatman. No matter from how many perspectives it is examined or analysed, Truth itself never changes.”

After writing continuously for several hours, I paused for a moment, poured myself a glass of water from the bottle on the table, and drank it slowly. My thoughts settled into stillness. When I looked at the clock, it was 5:20 a.m. I realised that I had been writing uninterrupted for nearly seven and a half hours.

I carefully read through everything that I had written. At that moment, a remarkable realisation arose within me. During those seven and a half hours, it had not been I who had composed those sixty-seven Mahavakyas. Gurudev Himself had entered the depths of my heart and caused my hands to write them. This truth became

unmistakably clear to me. I saved the document and, within the sanctum of my heart, offered my humble Sastanga Pranamas at the holy feet of Gurudev.

Desiring a cup of hot tea, I locked my room and stepped outside the hotel. A small tea stall stood directly opposite. After enjoying two cups of steaming tea, I took a short morning walk and then returned to my room.

Thereafter, I created another Google Docs file entitled “Pariprasna – Gurubodha”, in which I began recording the answers Gurudev had bestowed upon my spiritual questions at Mahur.

Thus, “Pariprasna – Gurubodha” became my first spiritual work, while “Gurudevula Mahavakyalu” became my second spiritual work.

On that sacred day, Gurudev graciously inaugurated my literary journey. My heart overflowed with gratitude and joy. Sleep no longer came to me. After taking my bath, I proceeded to the nearby temple and had the blessed Darshan of Sri Gurudev Datta, Sri Swami Samarth, Sri Sai Natha, and Sri Kalika Mata. Returning to the hotel, I fulfilled the check-out formalities, hired a taxi, and departed for Guwahati Airport. Continuing my journey, I arrived safely at Visakhapatnam at approximately 8:30 p.m.

CHAPTER 44

Geyam – Gita Nama Sahasram

In accordance with the gracious instructions of my revered **Gurudev**, I took voluntary retirement from my professional responsibilities on **31 March 2019**. Thereafter, I resolved to dedicate the remainder of my life entirely to spiritual pursuit and **sadhana**.

This marked a profoundly significant turning point in my life. Although I had written a few articles and essays during 2018, the greater part of my literary work was completed during the years **2019** and **2020**.

On the auspicious occasion of **Sri Rama Navami** in 2018, I founded the *Sanatana Seva Satsang*. Thereafter, daily spiritual gatherings commenced through **Google Meet**, where seekers and devotees assembled to engage in discussions on spirituality. Friends who had become acquainted with me through **Facebook** also began participating regularly in these satsangs(spiritual confluences).

In the month of **May**, my wife and I travelled to **Dubai**, where we joyfully spent two months with our grandson and our daughter's family. Subsequently, during **September**, our son-in-law and daughter relocated to the United States of America.

During the month of **July**, I attended the visa interview at the **United States Consulate in Hyderabad**. By the grace of the Divine, I was granted a visa valid for ten years, until **2029**. Accordingly, on **25 September 2019**, we arrived in **California**. Throughout the following month, we were blessed with the opportunity of visiting places of scenic elegance.

On **3 December**, our granddaughter was born. As travelling naturally reduced during this period, I found ample time to devote myself to writing. At that juncture, I fondly recalled the words of my revered **Gurudev**, who had once encouraged me, saying, *"You will yet write many works."* By his boundless bounteousness and the wisdom, he bestowed upon me, several literary works took shape.

Among the principal works completed during this period are:

- **"Shastriya Ramayanamu"** – *The Ramayana from the Scientific Perspective.*
- **"Vishnu Sahasranama Stotra Vislesana"** – *A contemplative exposition on the Supreme Reality through the Vishnu Sahasranama.*

- **"Oka Satya Sodhakuni Atma Katha"** – *The Spiritual Journey of a Seeker in Pursuit of Truth.*

In **March 2020**, we had planned our return journey to India. However, owing to the outbreak of the **COVID-19 pandemic**, all flights were cancelled, and there was complete uncertainty as to when normal services would resume. The entire world was engulfed by this unprecedented calamity. Millions suffered immeasurable hardship, and countless lives were lost.

Social distancing physically separated people from one another. Yet, amidst this crisis, many noble-hearted individuals rendered selfless service to society, risking their own lives for the welfare of others. Conversely, some selfish persons exploited the pandemic for personal gain, deceiving innocent people in various ways. Time itself eventually delivers appropriate lessons to such individuals.

During those challenging days, my revered **Gurudev** repeatedly bestowed upon me the blessing of his divine **darshan**, strengthening me inwardly and inspiring me to continue my spiritual endeavours. Many incidents that unfolded in our country deeply moved my heart. By the grace of the Lord, I was blessed with the opportunity of rendering **Narayana Seva** to several deserving devotees, which brought profound peace and solace to my mind.

During this same period, my revered **Gurudev** inspired me to undertake the composition of two further works:

- **"Jnana Gita"** – presenting the wisdom of the **Upanishads** for daily life.
- **"Jivana Gita"** – presenting the timeless teachings of the **Bhagavad Gita** as a practical guide for righteous living.

These two works, together with the **Brahma Sutras**, constitute what is traditionally known as the **Prasthana Trayam**. The joy I experienced while composing these works is beyond the power of words to describe. Alongside intellectual understanding, my revered **Gurudev, Sri Babaji Maharaj**, graciously blessed me with a measure of inner spiritual experience.

May all humanity live in peace, harmony, and enduring bliss. Since ancient times, the **Upanishads**, the **Brahma Sutras**, and the **Bhagavad Gita** have illumined the path towards that noble ideal. They continue to guide sincere seekers towards the highest spiritual realisation.

The Prominence of Upanishads: The Upanishads, Brahma Sutras, and the Bhagavad Gita have, from time immemorial, served as the principal guiding lights for those who aspire to lead lives filled with peace, righteousness, and spiritual

fulfilment. Far from being merely ancient scriptures, they remain eternal sources of wisdom, illuminating the path towards the realisation of the Supreme Truth.

These sacred works are not confined to any community, sect, or creed. Their sublime teachings transcend all barriers and are intended for the spiritual upliftment of humanity as a whole. Indeed, the **Prasthana Trayam** stands as a universal treasure, offering timeless guidance to every sincere seeker.

With the blessings of my revered parents and the boundless grace and command of my **Gurudev**, I undertook the task of presenting the profound wisdom contained in the **Prasthana Trayam** in lucid and simple Telugu, making these exalted truths accessible to ordinary readers. My sole intention has been to communicate these sublime teachings in a manner that is both comprehensible and spiritually elevating.

While residing in the United States, I first shared these writings through **Facebook**. The overwhelming affection, encouragement, and appreciation shown by readers greatly strengthened my resolve and inspired me to continue this sacred literary endeavour.

Within the vast body of **Sanatana Dharma**, the **Upanishads** occupy an unparalleled position of eminence. Since they constitute the concluding portions of the **Vedas**, they are also reverentially known as **Vedanta**, meaning "the culmination of Vedic wisdom."

Each of the four **Vedas** is traditionally divided into four distinct sections:

1. **Samhita** – comprising the sacred hymns, mantras, and invocations.
2. **Brahmana**– explaining the procedures, significance, and ritualistic applications of the Vedic sacrifices.
3. **Aranyaka** – expounding the deeper philosophical and symbolic meanings underlying the sacrificial rites.
4. **Upanishad** – revealing the highest spiritual wisdom concerning the individual Self (*Atman*), the Supreme Reality (*Paramatman*), true knowledge (*Jnana*), liberation (*Moksha*), and the essential nature of **Parabrahman**.

Although tradition speaks of well over a thousand **Upanishads**, **108** are regarded as the principal Upanishads. Among these, **ten** occupy a uniquely pre-eminent position and are collectively known as the **Dasopanisads**.

Recognising their supreme authority, **Adi Sankaracarya** composed his celebrated commentaries upon these ten Upanishads, thereby establishing their foundational place in the philosophical tradition of **Advaita Vedanta**.

The word **Upanishad** itself conveys profound significance. It is traditionally interpreted as **Upa** – "to draw near", **Ni** – "with humility and steadfastness", **Sad** – "to sit."

Thus, an **Upanishad** symbolises the sacred process whereby a devoted disciple sits reverentially at the feet of the Guru to receive the highest spiritual wisdom. These scriptures therefore represent intimate dialogues concerning the deepest truths of existence.

The Upanishads explore, with remarkable depth, the eternal mysteries relating to the **Atman**, **Paramatman**, creation, consciousness, and the ultimate purpose of human life. They transformed the course of Vedic philosophical thought by placing supreme emphasis upon direct spiritual knowledge and Self-realisation rather than mere ritual observance.

Many of the Upanishads derive their names from the illustrious sages associated with them. Thus, names such as **Yajnavalkya**, **Uddalaka**, **Aruni**, **Svetaketu**, **Sandilya**, **Aitareya**, **Pippalada**, **Gargi**, and **Maitreyi** continue to be immortalised through these sacred scriptures, bearing testimony to the invaluable contributions of these great seers to the spiritual heritage of humanity.

The **Upanishads** are also reverentially known as **Brahma Vidya**, for they impart the supreme knowledge of **Brahman**, the Absolute Reality. They distinguish between **Para Vidya** (the higher spiritual knowledge that leads to Self-realisation) and **Apara Vidya** (worldly and scriptural knowledge). For this reason, the Upanishads are regarded as the very essence of the Vedas and the repositories of their innermost wisdom.

As the passage of time unfolded, ten Upanishads came to be universally recognised as the foremost among them. It was upon these ten that **Jagadguru Adi Shankaracarya** composed his authoritative commentaries. They are: Isavasya Upanishad, Kena Upanishad, Katha Upanishad, Prasna Upanishad, Mundaka Upanishad, Mandukya Upanishad, Taittiriya Upanishad, Aitareya Upanishad, Chandogya Upanishad, Brhadaranyaka Upanishad

Over the centuries, various spiritual traditions have also recognised certain Upanishads that particularly expound their respective philosophical perspectives. The **Saiva** tradition reveres fifteen Upanishads, including: Aksamalika Upanishad, Atharvasiras Upanishad, Atharvasikha Upanishad, Kalagnirudra Upanishad, Kaivalya Upanishad, Ganapati Upanishad, Jabala Upanishad, Daksinamurti Upanishad, Pancabrahma Upanishad, Brhajjabala Upanishad, Bhasmajabala

Upanishad, Rudrahrdaya Upanishad, Rudraksa Jabala Upanishad, Sarabha Upanishad, Svetasvatara Upanishad

Likewise, the **Vaishnava** tradition accords special significance to fourteen Upanishads, among them: Avyakta Upanishad, Kali-santarana Upanishad, Krishna Upanishad, Garuda Upanishad, Gopala Tapani Upanishad, Tarasara Upanishad, Tripad-vibhuti Mahanarayana Upanishad, Dattatreya Upanishad, Narayana Upanishad, Nrsimha Tapani Upanishad, Rama Tapani Upanishad, Rama Rahasya Upanishad, Vasudeva Upanishad, Hayagriva Upanishad

Similarly, there are **seventeen Sannyasa Upanishads**, which describe the ideals, disciplines, qualifications, and way of life of the renunciate. These include: Arunika Upanishad, Avadhuta Upanishad Katharudra Upanishad Kundika Upanishad Jabala Upanishad, Turiyatita Avadhuta Upanishad, Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad, Nirvana Upanishad, Paramabrahma Upanishad, Paramahamsa Parivrajaka Upanishad, Paramahamsa Upanishad, Brahma Upanishad, Bhiksuka Upanishad, Maitreyi Upanishad, Yajnavalkya Upanishad, Satyayani Upanishad, Sannyasa Upanishad

When these Upanishads are classified according to the four Vedas, the traditional enumeration is as follows: **Rig Veda** – 10 Upanishads, **Krishna Yajur Veda** – 32 Upanishads, **Sukla Yajur Veda** – 19 Upanishads, **Sama Veda** – 16 Upanishads, **Atharva Veda** – 31 Upanishads

Thus, the recognised total comes to **108 Upanishads**.

The Upanishads constitute an inexhaustible treasure of spiritual wisdom. They reveal the path by which the finite human being, through disciplined spiritual practice (*sadhana*), may transcend the limitations of the individual mind and realise the infinite consciousness of **Brahman**. This is the eternal truth enshrined within these sacred scriptures.

In my work **"Jnana Gita"**, I have presented the teachings of six of the most significant Upanishads in a manner intended to be both accessible and spiritually beneficial to earnest seekers.

The greatness of the **Bhagavad Gita** is beautifully expressed in the well-known verse:

Sarvopanisado gavo Dogdha Gopalanandanah |

Partho vatsah sudhir bhokta Dugdham Gitamrtam mahat ||

Among the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita is revered as their very essence. In a celebrated analogy, Lord Sri Krishna, the Divine Cowherd, is said to have milked the nectar of the Gita from the sacred cows of the Upanishads, with Arjuna serving as the

calf. The wise and discerning partake of this immortal nectar and are spiritually nourished by its sublime wisdom.

Great philosophers and spiritual masters have long regarded the Bhagavad Gita as the quintessence of the Upanishads. They affirm that the regular study, recitation, contemplation, and practice of its teachings enable one to fulfil one's duties in the highest spirit.

Its eighteen chapters unfold the timeless paths of Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and Jnana Yoga, illuminating the ideal way of righteous living. Within its sacred verses, the nature of Bhagavan, the true essence of the Atman, and the profound relationship between the individual soul and the Supreme are explained with remarkable clarity and depth.

Many devotees worship the Bhagavad Gita itself as a sacred scripture, reverentially enshrining it in their homes and temples. Others embrace it as an unfailing guide to righteous conduct, drawing inspiration and strength from its eternal wisdom.

Composed for the welfare of the entire world and the upliftment of humanity, this divine scripture deserves to be studied, understood, contemplated, and, above all, lived by every individual.

The Bhagavad Gita embodies the eternal Truth expounded by the Supreme Sadguru, Lord Sri Krishna Himself. Those who comprehend its inner meaning and faithfully practise its teachings are truly blessed. Throughout the ages, countless Yogis, saints, philosophers, and realised masters have drawn inspiration and guidance from its immortal message.

Swami Vivekananda expounded the teachings of the Gita in the light of Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga, and Raja Yoga. Swami Sivananda lovingly advised even those who did not aspire to become yogis to cultivate the habit of reading a chapter of the Gita every day. Paramahansa Yogananda extolled the Bhagavad Gita as one of the greatest spiritual scriptures ever bestowed upon humanity.

What, then, is the profound truth contained within the Bhagavad Gita that possesses the power to transform the very destiny of humankind?

As a *Sadhaka*, Arjuna wages the battle and fulfils his *Swadharma*. As the Divine Guru, Lord Sri Krishna assumes the humble role of a charioteer, without wielding a weapon. Yet, it is through His divine guidance that Partha emerges victorious on the battlefield.

Upon deeper reflection, one may observe that the wisdom belongs to Lord Krishna, while the performance of duty belongs to Arjuna. Yet the reality transcends this

apparent distinction. Lord Krishna first imparts His divine wisdom to Partha, transforms him into His own instrument, and leads him to victory, while Himself remaining the detached Witness.

Thus, He reveals the profound truth of **Oneness,** that there is ultimately no separation between the Divine and the sincere spiritual aspirant. This state of oneness is *Yoga*, and Lord Sri Krishna is the eternal Lord of Yoga (*Yogesvara*).

The **Bhagavad Gita** commences with the word **"Dharma"**, the very first word of its opening verse, and concludes with **"Mama"**, the final word of its concluding verse.

Together they convey the sublime message: **"Mama Dharma",** *"My Dharma"*.

The Bhagavad Gita teaches every individual to recognise and faithfully perform his or her own *Swadharma*.

Beginning with **"Mamakara",** the sense of possessiveness expressed in Dhritarastra's opening words, *"Mamakah"* ("my people") the Bhagavad Gita gradually unfolds the profound truths concerning grief, the Atman, Karma, Jnana, divine wisdom, Dhyana, the Cosmic Vision, Bhakti, the Imperishable Reality, the Supreme Goal, and Liberation. Ultimately, it culminates in the glorious triumph of **Victory** (*Vijaya*) the victory of Dharma, Self-realisation, and the Divine Will.

All this is a sacred dialogue between a *Sadhaka* and the Divine Friend. Here, the human being is the *Sadhaka*, and Bhagavan is the eternal Friend. As the compassionate Friend, the Supreme Lord answers every question that arises in the heart and mind of the spiritual seeker.

He alone provides the answers.

Special Features of the Scientific Ramayana

"Vedah Pracetasa asan Saksad Ramayanatmana."

(If the Vedas are the eternal source of knowledge, the Ramayana is the Veda expressed in narrative form.)

It is indeed true that the great Rishis, through the power of their profound tapas, realised that the entire universe functions according to immutable scientific principles. For the welfare of humanity, they imparted this wisdom through the Vedas, Puranas, Itihasas, and other sacred literature.

The *Scientific Ramayana* authored by me is a humble endeavour to present, in the form of a narrative, the scientific truths embedded within the ancient epic, the Valmiki Ramayana.

The entire creation both animate and inanimate has always functioned, and will continue to function, according to eternal and ordained principles. It is these timeless truths that every human being, who is veiled by Maya, must strive to realise during life.

Whenever Dharma declines and requires re-establishment, Lord Narayana Himself incarnates upon the earth in human form to restore righteousness. Whenever He descends as an Avatara, He assumes a human form while keeping Maya completely under His divine control.

In the Krita Yuga, Dharma stood firmly upon its four pillars. In the Tretha Yuga, when one of those pillars declined, Lord Sri Rama incarnated to uphold and re-establish Dharma. Likewise, during the transition from the Dwapara Yuga to the Kali Yuga, when Dharma, already standing upon two pillars, lost yet another and remained supported by only one, Lord Sri Krisna descended as the Divine Avatara.

While Lord Sri Rama is revered as the embodiment of **Maryada,** the ideal of righteous conduct within the realm of Maya, Lord Sri Krisna is the embodiment of **Lila**, the Supreme Lord who accomplishes His divine purpose through His transcendental play.

While the Ramayana presents the principles of **Dharma** in a direct and accessible manner, its profound spiritual philosophy is conveyed in a subtle and implicit form. To unveil these deeper truths, Maharshi Valmiki himself expounded them through the *Adhyatma Ramayana* and the *Bhava Ramayana*.

In my *Scientific Ramayana*, Sri Sita-Rama, Laksmi, Narayana, and Hanuman are all manifestations of the Supreme Lord. The entire divine narrative unfolds according to the sacred design conceived by them.

The declaration, **"Ramo Vigrahavan Dharmah"** ("Rama is the very embodiment of Dharma"), uttered by the rakshasa Marica, is an eternal truth.

Lord Sri Rama incarnated upon the earth through the *Putrakamesti Yajna*. He accompanied Sage Visvamitra and Lakshmana into the forests to protect the sacred yajnas. Indeed, every step of His life was governed by the injunctions of the Vedas and dedicated to the establishment and protection of Dharma.

In the *Bala Kanda*, He exemplified the ideal duties of a disciple; in the *Ayodhya Kanda*, those of an obedient son; in the *Aranya Kanda*, the valour and responsibility of a Kshatriya; in the *Kishkindha Kanda*, the virtues of a true friend; in the *Sundara Kanda*, the qualities of the Supreme Lord guiding His devotees; and in the *Yuddha*

Kanda, the heroism of the righteous warrior. Thus, in the Ramayana, both the journey and the ultimate destination are none other than Lord Sri Rama Himself.

The spiritual journey of every human being follows a similar course. In one's essential nature, one is none other than the very embodiment of Parabrahman. Yet, owing to identification with the physical body and the veiling influence of Maya, one's innate divinity remains concealed.

Every individual, therefore, undertakes two *ayanas*—one outward and the other inward. The true pilgrimage is the inward journey into one's own Self. By attaining purity of mind, receiving the wisdom imparted by a true Guru, turning one's awareness inward, realising one's own essential nature, exhausting the experiences ordained by *Prarabdha Karma*, and burning away the accumulated *Sancita* and future *Agami Karmas* through Self-knowledge, one finally abides as a treasure-house of divine wisdom and realises one's identity with Narayana.

Lord Sri Rama is the embodiment of the knowledge of Parabrahman. He is the Supreme Truth, the Eternal Reality, and the very personification of Truth.

Special Features of the *Sri Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram (The Form of the Supreme Self):*

Jagadguru Adi Sankaracarya, in his *Bhaja Govindam*, exhorts seekers with the words, **"Geyam Gita Nama Sahasram"**, indicating that the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Vishnu Sahasranama* should be regularly recited and contemplated for the attainment of Self-knowledge.

One who truly understands the inner significance of the seven hundred verses of the *Bhagavad Gita* and the thousand divine names contained in the *Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram*, and moulds one's life in accordance with their teachings, has nothing further to seek in the realm of spiritual wisdom.

Such a seeker soon attains the grace of the Guru, realises the Self, and reaches the highest spiritual fulfilment. Of this, there can be no doubt.

The *Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram* occurs in the *Mahabharata*. After the Kurukshetra War, Bhisma, reclining upon the bed of arrows (*Ampasayya*) and awaiting his chosen moment to relinquish his mortal body, expounds this sacred hymn to Yudhisthira, the righteous King Dharmaraja, while yearning for union with the Supreme Being.

This sacred hymn, comprising 108 verses and one thousand divine names, commences with the name **"Vishvam"** and concludes with the thousandth name,

"Sarva-Praharanayudhah." Through these thousand names, Bhisma most profoundly reveals the infinite glory and divine nature of the Supreme Lord.

To experience the full greatness of this sacred hymn, one must understand the inner meaning of each divine name. Whether recited individually or collectively, it should be chanted with understanding and devotion. Its recitation should bring spiritual benefit to all who hear it. The chanting of the *Vishnu Sahasranama* is not restricted by caste, creed, or religious affiliation. What is essential is unwavering faith, sincere devotion, and patient perseverance.

Those who listen to or recite this sacred *Vishnu Sahasranama* with devotion shall be freed from fear and protected from all inauspiciousness. Those who seek its blessings shall surely attain the four *Purusarthas*—Dharma (righteousness), Artha (prosperity), Kama (righteous fulfilment of desires), and Moksha (liberation).

My humble prayer is that this sacred hymn should be recited with devotion, understanding, and awareness of its inner meaning, not merely as a ritual or display of scholarship, but as a means to attain Self-realisation.

Many eminent scholars and realised souls have written profound commentaries on the *Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram*. With the blessings of my revered father and first Guru, **Sri Akundi Suryanarayana Sastry**, and by the boundless grace of my worshipful Gurudev, **Sri Sri Sri Babaji Mahasaya**, I have been blessed to complete this humble work. In it, I have endeavoured, to the best of my understanding, to explain the meanings of the thousand divine names contained within the 108 verses and to present an analysis of the Supreme Truth embodied by the Paramatman.

If this humble exposition proves beneficial to even a few sincere seekers in their spiritual practice and pursuit of Self-knowledge, I shall consider my effort to have been truly fulfilled.

CHAPTER 45

The Conclusion of the Autobiography – The Commencement of the Divine Mission

Under the Government of India's **Vande Bharat Mission**, certain Air India flights resumed operations in August 2020. Towards the end of that month, we returned to Visakhapatnam. At that time, several parts of the city continued to remain in the COVID-19 Red Zone, although the severity of the pandemic was gradually diminishing.

In 2021, however, the second wave of COVID-19 swept across the country. This devastating wave claimed the lives of countless people and remains an unforgettable chapter in our nation's history. Through collective human effort, medical advancement, and determined perseverance, the world gradually overcame this second wave. Vaccination programmes were undertaken across the globe on a war footing.

During this prolonged period of self-quarantine, my spiritual *Sadhana* reached its highest intensity. I was blessed with the rare privilege of beholding my revered Gurudev on numerous occasions, touching His sacred feet, and engaging in direct conversations with Him. During these divine interactions, we discussed many profound spiritual matters.

To share this profound spiritual wisdom with others, Gurudev established **Sanmathi**, **Gnana Vedika**, **TruGnan**, and WhatsApp groups such as **Open Mind** and **Shivoham**, and commenced **Gnana Satsangs** every morning and evening with groups of spiritual aspirants.

By the boundless grace of Sri Gurudev, these satsangs continue uninterrupted to this day. Numerous seekers and sadhakas have expressed that, through regular participation in these satsangs, they are constantly experiencing the awakening and direct recognition of their own True Self. This is indeed a matter of immense joy and divine fulfilment.

For the very first time, two spiritual congregations were organised during February 2022.

The first was conducted at Vijayawada under the gracious hospitality of **Sri Bolisetty Sivakumar Garu** and **Smt. Sridevi Garu** at their residence. The devout couple organised the gathering with exemplary devotion, grandeur, and

meticulous care. I extend my heartfelt congratulations and abundant blessings to them.

The second gathering was held at Hyderabad under the auspices of **Sri Vijilapuram Venugopal Garu** and **Smt. Seema Garu** at a beautiful farmhouse. The pious couple organised the event with great enthusiasm, devotion, and joy. I offer them my heartfelt congratulations and blessings.

These two spiritual gatherings provided a blessed opportunity to meet many dear friends and fellow seekers. On these auspicious occasions, I was also privileged to honour several revered elders.

In the year 2022, by the infinite grace of the venerable Gurudev, I was blessed with the rare privilege of receiving His direct **darshan** on two occasions.

At the divine call of Gurudev: In the course of 2022, I travelled on two occasions to receive the sacred **darshan** of the venerable Gurudev and to seek His divine guidance concerning future spiritual endeavours.

On one occasion, I journeyed to the sacred temple of **Bambaleshwari Ammavari**, situated atop a hill at Dongargarh in the State of Chhattisgarh. On another occasion, I travelled to the revered temple of **Jhuladevi Ammavari** at Ranikhet, nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas. During these blessed visits, I was fortunate to receive numerous instructions and divine directions from Gurudev regarding plans and spiritual activities.

In the year 2022, with the generous financial support of the members of **Sanmathi Seva Satsang** and the wholehearted encouragement of our children, all the books authored by me were published in an elegant and attractive format.

The publications include:

- **Scientific Ramayana**
- **Gnana Gita** *(Upanishads in Everyday Life)*
- **Life Song** *(Upanishads in Everyday Life)*
- **Sai Katha Makarandam** *(The Divine Story of Sadguru Sainath)*
- **An Analysis of the Vishnu Sahasranama Stotram** *(The Form of the Supreme Self)*
- **Autobiography of a Seeker of Truth*

Each of these works was brought out in a beautifully designed and dignified book format.

Likewise, many profound spiritual teachings compiled by our Satsang members from numerous satsangs were carefully edited and published in six compact, pocket-sized volumes under the titles **Athreya Geeta** and **Guru Geeta**.

In addition, digital platforms under the name **TruGnan** were established on Facebook, WhatsApp, Telegram, and YouTube, through which our Satsang members continue to share spiritual teachings, reflections, and messages for the benefit of seekers.

The **TruGnan** website (**trugnan.org**) was established to make spiritual knowledge readily accessible to seekers. Through the website, publications are made available for download, and PDF editions of books, together with audio and video recordings of spiritual discourses and satsangs, are uploaded regularly for the benefit of all.

During the years 2023 and 2024, numerous spiritual programmes, **Narayana Seva** activities, auspicious observances, and satsang gatherings were conducted under the auspices of our ever-expanding family of Satsang members.

My **Shashtipurthi Mahotsavam** was celebrated with immense joy at the sacred **Annavaram Kshetra** in the gracious presence of Satsang members. On that auspicious occasion, a collective **Sri Satyanarayana Swamy Vratham** was also performed with great devotion under the guidance and participation of the Satsang family.

I offer my heartfelt congratulations and blessings to **Sri Balaji Rao Garu** and the members of the Visakhapatnam team, who shoulder the responsibility of organising every Satsang programme with exemplary dedication. They meticulously plan each event, ensuring that every detail is attended to, that no inconvenience is caused to anyone, and that every programme is conducted flawlessly in a spirit of selfless service and unwavering devotion.

My heartfelt blessings and affectionate appreciation are also extended to all the Satsang members who, directly and indirectly, render selfless service in every programme with devotion and sincerity.

The grand spiritual gathering organised by **Sri Kollimarla Venkata Ranga Rao Garu** and **Smt. Ranga Rao Garu** at **Hanuman Junction** provided a blessed opportunity to meet many new seekers and devotees. That memorable gathering was truly extraordinary. The devout couple extended such gracious hospitality that it shall remain cherished in our hearts for a lifetime.

Many other joyous and spiritually uplifting occasions also greatly enriched the inner journey of our Satsang members. These included the spiritual gathering organised by

our Nellore Satsang friends; the two auspicious wedding ceremonies conducted at the residence of **Sri Vittapu Srikanth Garu** and **Smt. Lakshmi Garu**; the sacred **Kshetra Darshans** thoughtfully arranged by **Smt. Lakshmi Garu**; the **Griha Pravesham** ceremony in Visakhapatnam; and the magnificent **Guru Puja Mahotsavam**. Each of these blessed events made a significant contribution to the unique spiritual growth and collective progress of our Satsang family.

Up to the End of December 2024, through this autobiography, **"Nandakam"**, I have shared with you my quest for Truth, my direct and indirect experiences with my first Guru, the venerable Gurudev, my spiritual disciplines, the states of **Samadhi** that I was blessed to experience, and the journey that culminated in the realisation of my own Self.

With this section, I bring my writing to a close. The remaining experiences shall be shared with my beloved friends as and when the need arises, in accordance with their spiritual growth and readiness.

Throughout this sacred quest for Truth, I have drawn inspiration and guidance from the **Vedas**, the **Upanishads**, some sacred scriptures, devotional poetry, the Divine presence of the **Paramatma** permeating the entire creation, the lives of many Noble Masters, the company of the virtuous, the ceaseless reflections arising within the mind, the practice of inner meditation, and, above all, the direct teachings offered by the venerable Gurudev.

The ultimate culmination of all these paths is but one, to attain **Atma Sakshatkara** (Self-realisation).

Whenever I was blessed with the sacred **darshan** of Gurudev, His teachings invariably centred upon the **Essence of the Self (Atma Tattva)**. The Self is neither born nor does It ever die. It transcends the divisions of past, present, and future. It is eternal, immutable, and all-pervading. It resides equally in every living being. To know That is the true spiritual discipline; it is the supreme quest pursued by all yogis.

Many describe the nature of the Self in countless ways. Yet rather than merely attempting to define or explain It, it is far more meaningful to realise It through earnest endeavour, steadfast spiritual practice, and the pursuit of true knowledge. The highest **sadhana** is to know oneself completely and thereby attain **Atma Karuna,** abiding in one's own True Self with complete Self-realisation.

To overcome the countless challenges encountered in human life, to attain a higher state of consciousness and experience supreme bliss, to realise oneself as the very embodiment of the **Paramatma**, to become completely free from the endless cycle

of birth and death, and to return to one's eternal abode, one must attain **Atma Karuna**, abidance in one's own True Self.

With the infinite grace of our revered Gurudev, I have unwavering faith that throughout the year 2025 many more spiritual programmes, satsang gatherings, and **Narayana Seva** activities, filled with Truth, Knowledge, and Bliss, will continue to be conducted under the auspices of our Satsang family.

Even now, all my beloved friends are immersed in bliss, though many may not yet be consciously aware of it.

Very soon, each one of you will unfailingly always experience the unique awareness of your own True Self, under all circumstances, and in every walk of life. This is my solemn assurance.

All that is required is your unwavering **Shraddha** (steadfast faith) and **Saburi** (patient perseverance)

Chidananda Rupah Shivoham! Shivoham!!

May auspiciousness, happiness, and divine welfare be bestowed upon one and all.

May all beings everywhere be blessed with happiness.

Om Shantih Shantih Shantih

Glossary

Sanskrit and Telugu terms that recur in this book, with the sense in which they are used here.

Agami Karma — Karma being newly created by present actions, whose results will be experienced in the future.

Ahamkara — The ego; the sense of "I am the doer" that identifies the Self with a particular body and personality.

Ahimsa — Non-violence; refraining from causing harm to any living being in thought, word or deed.

Annadana — The sacred offering of food to pilgrims and those in need.

Annaprasadam — Food received as a sacred blessing (prasadam), especially food offered by the Guru.

Antahkarana — The "inner instrument" made up of mind (manas), intellect (buddhi), memory (chitta) and ego (ahamkara).

Aparavidya — The "lower" knowledge: the Vedas, their auxiliary sciences and all worldly learning. See Paravidya.

Atma-anubhuti — The direct experience of the Self.

Atma-jnana — Knowledge of the Self; Self-realisation.

Atma-vichara — Self-enquiry; the inner investigation "Who am I?" that leads to Self-knowledge.

Atman *(Atma)* — The true Self; the pure, eternal consciousness dwelling in every being.

Bhakti — Devotion; loving faith and surrender to the Divine.

Brahman — The Absolute, all-pervading Supreme Reality.

Brahmananda — The bliss of Brahman; the supreme bliss of union with the Absolute.

Buddhi — The intellect; the faculty of discernment and decision.

Chidananda — Consciousness-Bliss; the nature of the Self.

Chitta-shuddhi — Purity of mind, the inner condition needed for spiritual wisdom to dawn.

Dargah — The shrine built over the tomb of a Sufi saint.

Darshan — A sacred sight; beholding a deity, a holy place or a realised soul and receiving its blessing.

Dharma — Righteousness; the moral and spiritual law that upholds life; one's rightful duty.

Garu — A Telugu honorific added after a name to show respect.

Gotra — One's ancestral lineage, traced to an ancient sage (for example, the Athreya Gotra, descended from Sage Atri).

Guru Sthana — A place sanctified by the life or presence of a Guru.

Gurudev — "Divine Teacher"; a reverent way of addressing or referring to one's Guru. In this book it refers to Sri Sri Sri Babaji Mahasaya.

Jagrat, Svapna, Susupti — The three ordinary states of consciousness: waking, dreaming and deep sleep.

Jivatman — The individual soul; the Self as it appears in an individual being.

Jnana — Spiritual wisdom; knowledge of the Supreme Truth.

Jnani — One who has attained spiritual wisdom; a knower of the Truth.

Kali Yuga — The present age of the world in Hindu tradition, marked by the decline of virtue.

Karma — Action; also the law by which actions bear fruit as their results.

Karta, Kriya, Phala — The doer, the action and the fruit (result) of the action.

Kshetra, Kshetrajna — The Field (the body and the world of matter) and the Knower of the Field (the conscious Self). Kshetra also means a holy place of pilgrimage.

Kumbh Mela *(Mahakumbh Mela)* — The great pilgrimage gathering held at sacred river confluences; the Mahakumbh is the largest of these, held once in twelve years at Prayag (Allahabad).

Mahasamadhi — The conscious final departure of a realised soul from the body.

Mahavakya — "Great saying"; one of the four key statements of the Upanishads on the oneness of the Self and Brahman, such as "Aham Brahmasmi" (I am Brahman). In Chapter 43 the word is also used for the sayings of Gurudev.

Mandaleshwar — A senior title given to the head of a monastic order or akhada.

Manas — The mind; the faculty of thought, feeling and desire.

Maya — The cosmic illusion that veils the Truth and makes the transient appear real.

Moksha *(Mukti)* — Liberation from the cycle of birth and death.

Naga Baba — A member of an order of ascetics who renounce clothing, often seen at the Kumbh Mela.

Narayana Seva — Service to people in need, seen as service to God (Narayana) dwelling in them.

Nirvikalpa Samadhi — The highest state of absorption, in which all distinction between the seeker and the Supreme dissolves.

Nishkama Karma — Selfless action performed without attachment to its fruits.

Nitya Samadhi — The state of permanent, unbroken absorption in the Divine.

Padmasana — The lotus posture used for meditation.

Pancha — The traditional dhoti, a length of cloth worn around the waist.

Paramatman *(Paramatma)* — The Supreme Self; God as the one Self of all beings.

Paravidya — The "higher" knowledge that reveals the eternal Truth of the Self, taught in the Upanishads. See Aparavidya.

Peethadhipati — The head of a peetham, a traditional seat of spiritual authority.

Prarabdha Karma — The part of one's accumulated karma that has begun to bear fruit in the present life.

Prasad *(Prasadam)* — Food or another offering that has been blessed and is received as grace.

Prasthanatrayam *(Prasthanatraya)* — The three foundational texts of Vedanta: the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita.

Sadguru — A true Guru; a realised master who leads the disciple to the Truth.

Sadhaka — A spiritual aspirant engaged in sadhana.

Sadhana — Spiritual practice and discipline.

Samadhi — A state of deep meditative absorption in the Divine.

Sanatana Dharma — "The eternal way"; the traditional name for the Hindu spiritual tradition.

Sanchita Karma — The total karma accumulated over countless births.

Sannyasa — Renunciation; the monastic stage of life.

Sat-Chit-Ananda — Existence, Consciousness and Bliss: the essential nature of Brahman.

Satsang — "Company of the Truth"; a gathering for spiritual discussion, chanting and meditation.

Savikalpa Samadhi — A state of absorption in which awareness of the surroundings and of the distinction between seer and seen remains.

Seva — Selfless service.

Shakti Peeth — One of the sacred shrines of the Divine Mother, where parts of the body of Sati are said to have fallen.

Shaktipata — The transmission of spiritual energy from a Guru to a disciple.

Shashtipurthi — The celebration of one's sixtieth birthday.

Shivoham — "I am Shiva"; the affirmation of one's identity with the auspicious Supreme Self.

Shubham Bhuyat — "May it be auspicious"; a blessing.

Sthula, Sukshma and Karana Sarira — The gross, subtle and causal bodies.

Tapas — Austerity; intense spiritual discipline.

Turiya — "The fourth"; the state of pure consciousness beyond waking, dreaming and deep sleep.

Upanishads — The philosophical portions of the Vedas, which reveal the knowledge of the Self and Brahman.

Vairagya — Dispassion; detachment from what is transient.

Vasanas — Latent tendencies and impressions carried over from past actions and births.

Vedanta — "The end of the Vedas"; the philosophy of the Upanishads.

Vibhuti — Sacred ash, applied to the forehead and received as a blessing.

Yajna — A sacred fire-offering; also any act of selfless worship.

