



Ananda Sangha of Palo Alto

Monthly Newsletter
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Dear Friends:

“Animals evolve more rapidly if they mix closely with human beings,” Swamiji writes on page 136 of *The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*. “This is the benefit to them of being pets.”

Based on this passage, our most recent Gita class included a long discussion of the right relationship between animals and human beings. (July 10, if you want to download it from our website.).

Mutual Service

The first point in the *Way of Ananda Sanghis*, after the universal prayer for enlightenment (“May the Divine Light awaken and purify my heart, and bring enlightenment to all beings”), is this lovely statement of our interdependency: “We believe in a single, blissful, eternal consciousness, Satchidanandam, which pervades the entire universe, unifying it and all creatures in a bond of mutual service.”

I have often read that phrase “mutual service,” but it wasn’t until I was preparing for this class on the Gita that the importance became clear to me.

In the Gita, Swamiji explains, that as we progress toward Self-realization, there will always be beings whose consciousness is less evolved than our own, and beings who have a higher state of realization than we have attained.

Spiritual progress comes when we expand our sympathies and reach out to help those coming up behind us, and when we develop the humility to open our hearts in respect and receptivity to those who are more advanced than we.

In the Gita, and in the *Way of Ananda Sanghis*, this help is not limited only to other human beings, but extends back to animals, plants, nature spirits and other such entities, and forward not only to saints and masters, but also to *devas* and other angelic beings.

For some people, animals are an important way to enter into this “bond of mutual service.”

I am not saying that if you don’t already have a pet you should go out and get one! I am only reflecting on how many different ways there are to serve God.

Master’s Pet Deer

It is interesting to note that Master included in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, a touching story about his own relationship with an animal. In this case, a fawn he cared for when he was running his school for boys in India, which was only one of many pets they kept at the school.

In the Gita commentary, Swamiji emphasizes the importance, when we serve others, of being *impersonal* in our love. This does not mean to with-

hold affection or to be cold in our relationships. It is not right attitude to be impersonal *toward others*. It is to be impersonal towards *oneself* and one's self-interest.

Above all, this means to serve in harmony with divine law. To recognize, as Master put it, the *inescapability* of divine law, rather than allowing sentiment, or personal likes and dislikes to cloud our perception of "What is trying to happen" in a divine sense.

Pet Euthanasia

In terms of pets, perhaps the most difficult situation that pet owners face is when to prolong the life of a pet through (sometimes quite expensive) medical intervention, and when to allow nature to take its course. Perhaps even more challenging is when to take a hand in ending a pet's suffering through euthanasia.

This is where the story in *Autobiography of a Yogi* should be kept clearly in mind.

In that story, the pet fawn is dying from accidental overfeeding. Master, in his love for the deer, prays that its life be spared. His prayers are so powerful that the fawn begins to recover. That night, however, the soul of the deer comes to Master in a dream and asks to be released from that form.

Immediately, Master withdraws his divine demand. Moments later, the fawn dies. Master ends the story with a beautiful discussion of life and death. (Rather than paraphrase, after this letter you'll find the whole story of the deer excerpted from *Autobiography*.)

After class was over, a devoted pet owner spoke to me about her concern that some day soon she will face the necessity of putting her 19-year old cat "to sleep," meaning, of course, to end its suffering by putting it to death.

"How can it be right to take a life in that way?" she asked.

A Mosquito is Saved from Death

Again, *Autobiography of a Yogi* provides a guideline. In this case, it is the discussion of *ahimsa* (nonviolence or harmlessness), in the chapter *Years in My Master's Hermitage*. The creature at issue there was not a beloved pet, but an annoying mosquito.

A mosquito in the act of biting Master's thigh was saved from execution by Master's timely remembrance of Patnajali's principle of *ahimsa*. Instead of receiving praise from his guru for his restraint, however, Sri Yukteswar's surprising response to Master was, "Why not go ahead and finish the job?" Since, he explains, "The deathblow has already been struck in your mind."

Ahimsa means the removal of the *desire to kill*, Sri Yukteswar says, since this world is "inconveniently arranged," for the "literal practice of *ahimsa*."

Naturally, we should make our outer life conform as much as possible to the principle of harmlessness, but it is our *inner* attitudes above all to which we must attend. Master said, "God reads the heart." (The full excerpt of the mosquito story is also included following this letter.)

Pets Must Go On

Coming back to my friend and her cat, we readily agreed that her inner attitude toward this beloved creature was entirely loving. She would only end its life to spare it suffering, not to inflict harm upon it.

"You have already taken responsibility for its life," I pointed out, "and by extension, therefore, for the time of its death. Without your care and medical intervention it would certainly have died years ago.

"Up to a point," I said, "it is right to extend the life of a pet, to give it more time to associate with humans and thus, as Swamiji explains in the Gita commentary, hasten its evolution by contact with beings more advanced than itself. It is good karma for an animal to be a pet. In the wild, it would only be able to associate with creatures on its own level of consciousness.

“However, even the life of the most well cared for pet is one of very limited potential in terms of consciousness. The nervous system of an animal can only encompass a limited level of awareness, compared to Self-realization which is the destiny of all creatures.”

In the story of the mosquito, Sri Yukteswar explains, only the human body has the ‘unique brain and spinal centers’ needed to “fully grasp and express the loftiest aspects of divinity. No lower form is so equipped.’

So at some point, like Master’s pet deer, the soul of the creature will have exhausted the potential of that particular form. In order to evolve it has to go on to its next stage. That is why the deer pleaded with Master to be allowed to die.

Highly Evolved Pets

A complicating factor for some pet owners when it is time to allow or even facilitate the death of a pet, is that many owners are convinced that his or her animal has already achieved a high state of evolution, perhaps higher even than the pet owner himself. Most pet owners have many experiences to back up this assertion.

Because animals don’t have individual egos, and are therefore spared the “thwarting cross-currents of ego” — a major impediment to spiritual understanding — they often do manifest remarkable attunement to subtle realities.

In this way, and many others, animals can be our teachers. This is a beautiful example of how all creatures are unified in a “bond of mutual service.”

And for purposes of this discussion, it really doesn’t matter whether the perception of high consciousness in a pet is a true or not. The point is, especially for those who are most concerned about letting a high consciousness pet die, is that one characteristic of a high state of awareness is *nonattachment* to one’s body.

Devoted pet owners, may mourn the loss of a familiar and much loved animal form, but the soul inhabiting that animal form may be eager to go on to its next stage of evolution.

Various “pet psychics” have confirmed that pets feel no anxiety about their own death. Insofar as they do suffer, it is for their distraught owners who are plunged into grief and loneliness at the thought of a pet’s impending demise.

All of Creation

The same discussion can also be applied to trees and other plants. For the “bond of mutual service,” extends to everything in the natural world.

In *The Path*, Swamiji tells the story of Master reprimanding careless gardeners for their rough treatment of a tree they were planting. “Be careful!” Master exclaimed. “Can’t you feel that it’s alive?”

On the other hand, when Swamiji was building Crystal Hermitage, he didn’t hesitate to remove quite a few large, long-standing trees in order to clear the view from the garden to the hills beyond.

Some people in the community were dismayed by what they considered to be his callous indifference to those trees.

“Trees enjoy giving pleasure to people by opening up the view,” Swamiji said in reply. He hadn’t yet coined the phrase, “the bond of mutual service,” but clearly Swamiji was referring to it.

In the soon to be published book, *In Divine Friendship: Letters of Counsel and Reflection*, Swamiji addresses the same subject.

Referring first to both plants and animals, Swamiji writes, “Lower forms of life don’t work from ego, and are not deeply concerned about themselves individually. Their karma, as Master said, is group karma.”

Then about trees, he writes, “Trees do have feeling, as Master indicated, but their feelings — much more than most people’s — is for the general rightness of things, and not for themselves particularly, or for personal likes and dislikes. Life and death are, for them, more or less meaningless, and death is not a cause of suffering.

“The vibrations of a place,” Swamiji went on to say, “can be spectacularly uplifted when

the place is developed not with a view to destroying trees, but to making it beautiful and cared-for. The very *devas* (angelic beings) are attracted to places where there is pure, devotional energy.... Wildness alone, especially 'unkempt' wildness, attracts *rakshasas* (demonic beings) and lower entities. Angels are attracted to places that reflect the higher regions where they live....

"Man's sensitivity has been given him by God to refine and develop material reality," Swamiji writes. "God needs channels of His blessings on earth. It is not His way to want us to say, 'You do it all, Lord. It's your business, not mine.'"

God In Nature

Years ago, there was a movie about St. Francis called *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. Many people were enthusiastic about the movie, but Swamiji was not impressed.

"They completely missed the point," Swamiji declared. "They made it seem as if Francis worshipped *Nature*, as a thing in itself. Francis was devoted to God. And because of the purity and intensity of his devotion, he saw God *everywhere*. It wasn't the sunflowers or the doves *in themselves* that inspired Francis. It was the presence of God he saw within them. God at the heart of everything."

When Francis declared this, it was a spiritual *revelation*. Until then, in order to commune with God, people separated themselves completely from all aspects of creation. It hadn't occurred to them to see God *in Nature*.

In his *Canticle of the Creatures*, Francis refers to aspects of Nature as his "brother" and "sister." It is a declaration that there is *no* reality apart from God. To portray Francis as worshipping those separate aspects of God's creation is a complete contradiction of what he intended.

All creatures are united, to refer again to the first point in *The Way of Ananda Sanghis*, "in a single, blissful, eternal consciousness, Satchidanandam, which pervades the entire universe." Man's "highest duty," Swamiji goes on to say, is "to realize himself as an expression of all-pervading Satchidanandam."

Creation's One Goal

Even though plants and animals lack the ego development needed to consciously be aware of this divine goal, still, they participate in the gradual expansion of consciousness.

In the *Festival of Light* we say,
"From the hearts of mankind,
And of creatures everywhere,
Goes up in wordless yearning a prayer for redemption."

In this context, *redemption* means to be freed from all limitation and to know ourselves as we truly are: One with the Infinite Light. Creation has no other purpose.

"The forming of stars and moons and planets,
Of galaxies revolving on the tides of space,
Of drifting continents, upheaving mountains,
Snowy wastes and dark, silent ocean deeps
Had but this for its design: the birth of life,
And with life's birth, the dawn of self-awareness:
Passage through dim corridors of waking consciousness
To emerge at last into infinite light —
Into perfect joy!
O Children of Light, forsake the darkness.
Know that, forever, you and He are one!"

Joy to you,
Asha





Autobiography of a Yogi, Chapter 27:

Founding a Yoga School at Ranchi (p. 244-245)

With a large fruit orchard and twenty-five fertile acres at our disposal, the students, teachers, and myself enjoyed many happy hours of outdoor labor in these ideal surroundings. We had many pets, including a young deer who was fairly idolized by the children. I too loved the fawn so much that I allowed it to sleep in my room. At the light of dawn, the little creature would toddle over to my bed for a morning caress.

One day I fed the pet earlier than usual, as I had to attend to some business in the town of Ranchi. Although I cautioned the boys not to feed the fawn until my return, one of them was disobedient, and gave the baby deer a large quantity of milk. When I came back in the evening, sad news greeted me: "The little fawn is nearly dead, through over feeding."

In tears, I placed the apparently lifeless pet on my lap. I prayed piteously to God to spare its life. Hours later, the small creature opened its eyes, stood up, and walked feebly. The whole school shouted for joy.

But a deep lesson came to me that night, one I can never forget. I stayed up with the fawn until two o'clock, when I fell asleep. The deer appeared in a dream, and spoke to me:

"You are holding me back. Please let me go; let me go!"

"All right," I answered in the dream.

I awoke immediately, and cried out, "Boys, the deer is dying!" The children rushed to my side.

I ran to the corner of the room where I had placed the pet. It made a last effort to rise, stumbled toward me, then dropped at my feet, dead.

According to the mass karma which guides and regulates the destinies of animals, the deer's life was over, and it was ready to progress to a higher form. But by my deep attachment, which I later realized was selfish, and by my fervent prayers, I had been able to hold it in the limitations of the animal form from which the soul was struggling for release. The soul of the deer made its plea in a dream because, without my loving permission, it either would not or could not go. As soon as I agreed, it departed.

All sorrow left me; I realized anew that God wants His children to love everything as a part of Him, and not to feel delusively that death ends all. The ignorant man sees only the unsurmountable wall of death, hiding, seemingly forever, his cherished friends. But the man of unattachment, he who loves others as expressions of the Lord, understands that at death the dear ones have only returned for a breathing-space of joy in Him.



Autobiography of a Yogi, Chapter 12:

Years in My Master's Hermitage (p.111-112)

The instructive mosquitoes served for another early lesson at the ashram. It was the gentle hour of dusk. My guru was matchlessly interpreting the ancient texts. At his feet, I was in perfect peace. A rude mosquito entered the idyl and competed for my attention. As it dug a poisonous hypodermic needle into my thigh, I automatically raised an avenging hand. Reprieve from impending execution! An opportune memory came to me of one of Patanjali's yoga aphorisms—that on *ahimsa* (harmlessness).

"Why didn't you finish the job?"

"Master! Do you advocate taking life?"



“No; but the deathblow already had been struck in your mind.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Patanjali’s meaning was the removal of *desire* to kill.” Sri Yukteswar had found my mental processes an open book. “This world is inconveniently arranged for a literal practice of *ahimsa*. Man may be compelled to exterminate harmful creatures. He is not under similar compulsion to feel anger or animosity. All forms of life have equal right to the air of *maya*. The saint who uncovers the secret of creation will be in harmony with its countless bewildering expressions. All men may approach that understanding who curb the inner passion for destruction.”

“Guruji, should one offer himself a sacrifice rather than kill a wild beast?”

“No; man’s body is precious. It has the highest evolutionary value because of unique brain and spinal centers. These enable the advanced devotee to fully grasp and express the loftiest aspects of divinity. No lower form is so equipped. It is true that one incurs the debt of a minor sin if he is forced to kill an animal or any living thing. But the *Vedas* teach that wanton loss of a human body is a serious transgression against the karmic law.”

I sighed in relief; scriptural reinforcement of one’s natural instincts is not always forthcoming.



Events and happenings ...



Prayer works! The adoption we asked you to pray for — a baby boy from Guatemala — usually takes months to complete. Instead, it happened in a matter of weeks. By mid-June, the family was united in America.



(Left) Eli David Ecsery. Awake and ready!. (Above) Tired, but happy, new parents, Ginny and David and baby Eli arrive on American soil.



In the Great Balloon Toss, Lauri (shown here) and her sister Julie were the winners in the Sibling Partnership round.

JULY 4th

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Immortal words that set in motion a world changing series of events. The founding of America was, in a sense, the first step in bringing the message of Self-realization to the world. Only in a free country like America could a work like this begin. Self-realization is based on respect for every individual, and the personal freedom needed to pursue one's spiritual destiny to the limits of one's ability.

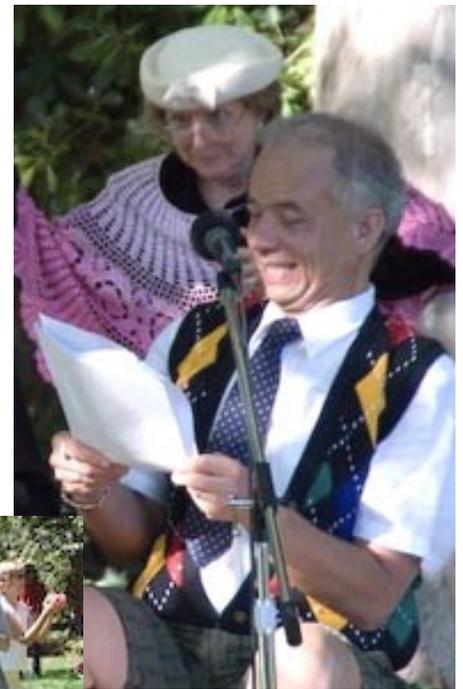
Master often spoke about the greatness of America and its destiny to lead the world, not through wealth or military might (in this we have strayed from our founding purpose) but through spiritual attunement, nobility of character, and generosity of spirit. Master spoke against "selfish patriotism," which is used to justify the domination by one country over others, but favored unselfish patriotism, which is loyalty to a worthwhile cause, and the willingness to sacrifice for the welfare of others.

July 4th at Ananda, like everywhere else in America, is now simply a happy day of family fun.



(Left) The children rode their bikes in a parade around the green. Sophia concentrates on keeping her two-wheeler (without training wheels!) on the road. Jackson makes a patriotic display.

Below: Marilyn and David deeply concentrated in the balloon toss.



(Above) In the after-picnic entertainment, Old Woman Brandishing an Umbrella (Asha) hovers over a "small" boy called "Stinker" (Jeffrey Phillips) in the P.G. Wodehouse tale, "The Passing of Ambrose."

Blessing the Almost-Completed School Building

We are "only" \$350,000 away from finishing the Expanding the Light Building Project. This may seem like a large sum, but considering where we started — needing to raise \$1.3 million — we have a lot to cheer about!



(Left) After Sunday service, chanting and scattering rose petals, we carried pictures of the Masters all through the not-quite-finished building to bring divine blessings and speedy completion of the project. Linda spreads blessings.
(Right) Rewa passes out *prasad* (sweets that have been placed on the altar and offered first to God).

Raising Money to Complete the School Building

Hundreds of items ranging from beauty treatments to vacation sites to spiritual relics were auctioned with great energy, humor, and enthusiasm, for a total benefit of \$16,000. A solid step toward completion.



(Left) Auctioneers Joe and David make humorous small talk... (Above) which charms at least their spouses, Asha and Marilyn.



(Left) Shanti, Linda, and Patricia keep track of dozens of bidders and hundreds of items. (Right) ...amid a lot of laughter...who knew an auction could be so funny?



(Left) Intense competitive bidding for the giant stuffed bear Joe is holding was dubbed "The War of the Grandmothers."

Living Wisdom School Graduation and Celebration

At the end of year Celebration, each child in the school is presented with a certificate listing the quality that exemplifies what he or she has accomplished that year or is aspiring to accomplish. The children are informed a few weeks ahead of time so they can prepare acceptance speeches, which they deliver before parents and guests at the final assembly.

(Below left) Middle-school teacher Gary has given his student Zachary the quality of "Curiosity." Zachary is giving his understanding of this quality and why it was presented to him.



(Below) Elementary teacher Barbara has given Max the quality of "Kindness." Max replied, "I think my teacher Barbara gave me this quality



because I try to use kindness wherever I go. I think my classmate George has this quality because whenever anyone is crying he goes and tries to help them. I like having this quality because I think kindness is a great quality for a person to have."

Vanamali Devi Visits Ananda

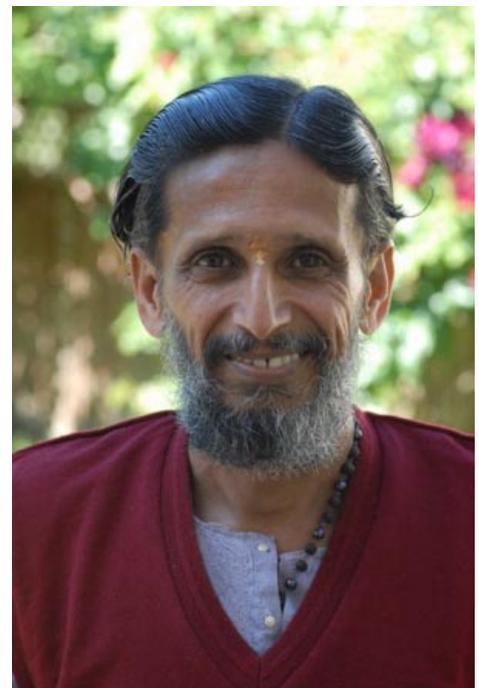
In 1995, Swamiji returned from a visit to Rishikesh, India, with the happy news of meeting a woman named Vanamali Devi whom, he said, “Writes beautifully about Krishna.” Since then her book, “The Play of God,” has become one of Ananda’s favorites. She has since gone on to write about Rama, Shiva, and Divine Mother, and also to become a dear and much loved friend of Ananda. In May, she came with her cousin-brother (as they say in India) Mohan to spend several weeks at Ananda Village, and for a five day visit to Ananda Palo Alto.



In addition to meditation, every day “Mataji,” as she is called, does an elaborate *puja* (worship ceremony) to Krishna, or, on special holidays to one or another of the deities. Although sometimes she has no choice except to use flowers she purchases from a shop, her preference is to go outside wherever she is and pick flowers that are growing to use in her ceremony.



Suman embraces Mataji after a puja to Divine Mother at Chela Bhavan.



Mataji’s brother, Mohan.

Swamiji's Visit

The month of June was defined, and uplifted, by Swamiji's presence in America. You all received letters after the special weekends and programs with Swamiji, so here is simply a remembrance of the many special moments with him.

After his birthday party at Crystal Hermitage, Swamiji greeted and blessed every one of the several hundred people there, including many devotees from Ananda Palo Alto.



Blessing Edwin.



Blessing Linda, with Devi in the background.



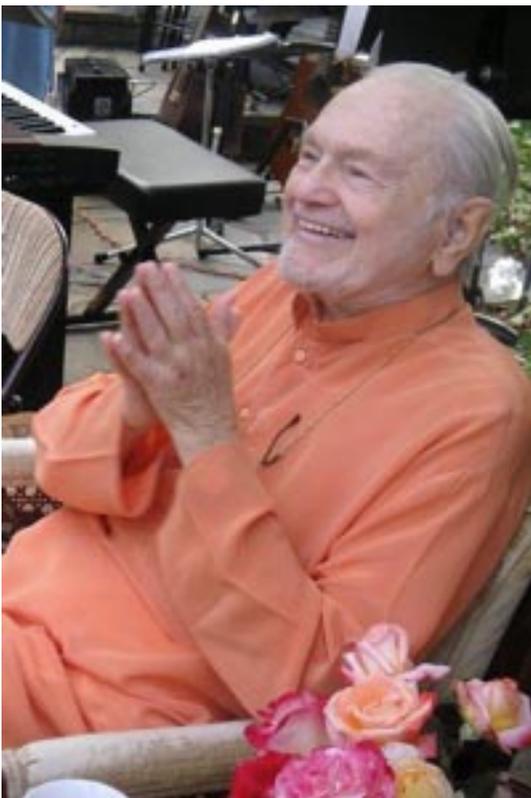
Blessing Helen.



Blessing John.

Nancy Mair worked for days to make this exquisite and delicious cake for Swamiji and the 500 guests at the party. Her husband Kerry presents the cake to Swamiji for him to blow out the candles. After eating a piece of the cake, Swamiji told Nancy, "That cake was out of this world, but I am so glad it was also *in* this world so I could enjoy it!"





(Top left) At the Festival of the Joyful Arts, Swamiji's play, *The Peace Treaty* was performed. All members of "Clan Emerald", as it happen, reside in our community. Here Raghu, Clare, and Steve take a final bow.

(Left middle) Clare and Marguerite perform an original dance to Master's chant, *I Will Be a Gypsy*.

(Right middle) When Swamiji first arrived in America, he spent a few days in our community recovering from the long journey. As he was leaving for the Village, a few dozen people gathered in the driveway to wave goodbye. Before leaving, from his seat in the the car, he greeted and shook hands individually with each one there.

(Top right) Swamiji shaking hands with John.

(Left) Swamiji *pranam*s in appreciation for all the kindness and affection showered upon him. The meaning of "pranam" is: The divine in me bows to the divine soul in you."