

chronicles of a seeker:
drought, water, and the path of my heart

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in gratitude to: god/dess & mamma & all teachers & friends & existences & universes.

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act one

if you believe
in the seed
it has a chance
to grow
watch
the moon & sun
see
how day turns to night
& returns
how days change
& become like & unlike
themselves

if you believe
you will
have water
& light
wet days
dry days

you will take in
what is given

you will
change

*** 1/8/14

chief caleen of the winnemem wintu says—

every person that comes
to our spring
& prays at that spring,
that water has a particular pattern
for that person

the water remembers
who you are
by a pattern that it forms
when it sees you

when it hears you
breathing the same
wind & air

when deer come up
 & drink from a pool,
 that pool has a certain
 pattern of recognizing
 each & every deer

we could get water
 from the spring
 & set it here

& you could dip out water
 from that bucket
 & i could do that
 & everybody could do that
 & the patterning would be different

even from the same bucket
 because it's from the spring

even if we dip out of the same bucket
 the water remembers us
 in a different pattern
 a different energy
 a different way
 —each & every person
 has a relationship to that water

***1/12/14

Mamma says that I had parasites twice as a kid, that she knows of, from bad water. Once in Wyoming, from a hike around Jenny Lake, and we stopped and drank water from a creek. Beautiful Jenny Lake. I remember having what seemed to be a flu. She said all that year I had infections and was on antibiotics.

The next time I got those gut critters, we were at the Blue Angels jet show in Miramar. I had some water with ice and got sick. An incredibly hot day, and I had to lay down in the stifling station wagon.

*

Today at the city lake where I walk—the lake that is still dry this November because last spring we got so little rain—Jeanie and Sonya said, We're supposed to hand into a sherrif's office any expired or unwanted prescribed meds.

Why not just flush them down the toilet? I asked.

Oh no, then it goes into our tap water—they can't filter it out, there's no way to get it out of the water—it gets into our municipal water and gets into the ocean. It can't go to the landfill either because it will get into the ground water.

My God! I had no idea!

And the pharmaceutical companies say they don't want to handle the returns because it would drive up their costs. More billions, Jeanie said with disdain.

*** 11/13/13

let me live
close to wild earth

so i don't forget
how to live

sharing
ground & water
sky & tree

any animal knows
its own way
how to share

& how to live

squirrel's tunnel
a place for many

staying where it's at
the generations giving room for snake

& when cornered, defending young,
being bitten
but immune

bluebelly lizard also carrying on
after disease-giving tick bites

salmon in a circle of going from
but returning to
birth place
to give the next generation
birth
and the life-giving offerings
from their dissolving body

water, ground, tree
 knowing
 how to thrive
 from this kind of return

*** 1/12/14

Just a hundred years ago, the bay in San Diego was very different from what is today. The San Diego River emptied out in a wide, unobstructed area and was dry there seasonally. There were mudflats where today there are freeways, parks, and buildings. Clams and sardines were plentiful and seafishing was good just offshore in the unpolluted ocean.

*** 1/13/14

Slow moving, swirling wind—January but warm; warm dry days & slight winds.

Winds building east, scrambling down through leaves, bringing leaves down to mosaic ground, ground all parched in browns.

We have no predictions left for when rain will arrive.

*** 1/14/14

the night came after the day
 all
 hot & in the commotion
 of a neighbor mowing
 maybe sad maybe happy
 we didn't know
 coyote waited til later
 to sing
 chickens already asleep

*

little lights
 the red sky now gone

and every page
 turned over
 to the same page

& memory will come
 face to face
 with the present
 tomorrow

when i return
to the place
the same place
& not the same
now you can have lines in
your face & hands
and be holding nothing

*** 2/11/14

we can think of
the toddler doing her funny walking
around the low table with her floppy hat
and
the lemon tree blossoms
& granny who just walked out
the door, first pausing, turning to say,
loves, i'll see you tomorrow

before their house was bombed (in palestine)

we can dwell on this

the room filled with peaceful sunlight

instead of this rubble

dwell in what we understand

keep lighting those fires
that give us daily food

no one is a stranger, my child,
sarada devi says,
the world is your own

don't find fault
the world is your very own

what we do have done
is by one day becoming another

day by day

*** 2/8/14

o crow
 you were only innocent
 when you were an infant
 you have had to do what's needed
 chase away meat-eating hawk
 who would eat all the babies
 if it could

*** 2/16/14

you could sit & sit
 in the room's corner
 in the hot spring
 in the sheltering forest

your wisdom sits

and then moves

must move

in time
 in the time of time

artichoke growing leaves from its heart

to be pulled apart

to be a part
 of a human
 body

*** 2/18/14

up there way up there
 at the badri temple in its high place of the himalyas

before morning's light
 sitting in hot spring by the alakananda river
 & meditating with vina gopala's
 before-dawn devotional playing of the sitar

divine music resounding
 glacier to glacier
 of the canyon

swamiji would sit in it all
love in the place of lord badri narayan's worship

there too behind the main temple
sit with shankaracharya
who long ago sat there and told us then
& who tells us still today:
sit down in a quiet place
reduce your necessity for action

he sits down
& is with shankaracharya

who tells him
get up
go
share
this wisdom

he tells us now
you go to the high
mountains

sit
in that beauty
with love

and you still
will go
get provisions

you still
will go
down the mountain
to share

*** 2/19/14

The lake has been ground for so long we hardly think of it as a lake. And the sky is ever fickle with clouds or heavy sediment of grey, many great times of blue.

No such thing as rain. Seasons are recognized by other markers and brave greens that will bloom and fruit, marking their own time, able to skirt the dry years.

*** 2/19/14

If I were not acceptable as imperfect, I would hang up my spurs and walk off this movie set.

Good thing I get to practice as is.

*** 2/22/14

Leaves dashing, unable to land, landing only to move again. Sky bright and grey, and making the day its own. Bird stays put inside bush.

We imagine green. We think of how the mind moves. What is sleeping when the organs keep going? Blood is in motion. The body, all of it, is aging. What is sleeping?

Now the storm is slowing to momentary watery fallings. We don't know if it will gather again today to make more of its clamorous chant.

We don't yet know
how to go past the half-sleepy mind.

*

We didn't see the birds, didn't hear them.

All the shifting cold and warm of the clanging storm keeping us gathered in to corners and covers.

*** 3/1/14

sky has its blue again
speckles of cloud puffs
move all going east

many & then less
a corner of just blue

who will stay

inside wherever
finding

recollection

*** 3/3/14

Three butterflies pass & the sea is still full of fish.

And more butterflies! Very small orange butterflies coming up the canyon bank! Going over the roof, all going north!

Yesterday, nearly every step of the way, caterpillars crossing the trail.

And birds coming in, not according to the past, but making up another way now that the weather stretches itself into more and more heat.

We go towards, looking to & for.

Woodpecker has to get at the bark's bugs.

Hardly able to remember all that heavy rain last week.

The butterflies have to go north on their strong papery wings regardless of wind's motions.

Across the world, the greedy are taking and the people who can are moving away.

Here, everything is possible—small worlds of violence, everywhere the sea of workers, many heartlands of peace.

We don't know what we're looking at until we look closer.

Unpack the bags, travel around these home villages in the cities & burbs & outlands, going with learning to give more & more.

Going this way, I won't get lost.

*** 3/9/14

The other night Swamiji said we have to evolve, we can't do it like them—yet—we have to go slow, bit by bit, learn as we go, to be the mirror. That's how we come to welcome dishes, laundry, cleaning house.

So many warm days, more than usual for winter, changing us all. Late and early nestings, moths arriving in odd hours. Wind getting full of itself and then calming down.

We sit and talk in our small satsang/group. And then they go, Maa to cook, Swamiji to do office work.

*

It won't rain. It will act as if, warming the day with its grey cover, putting the feeling and scent of that water, that reviver, in the midst of this long, heated drought.

Yet there are those plants doing what they always do, flowering, leafing, becoming green

for spring. Able to go on without water.

*

And he said, Bhakti, that's ok, being the lover of God, the devotee, but to go further, learn these ways of practice, go part by part, learn it until you become us.

One is
like the other.

*** 3/22/14

He said, It's not getting there—because once you're there, what are you going to do? It's the going, the journey.

She's going to give you challenges, obstacles. Why go fast, what's the hurry?

Whether you go fast or slow, you're going. You're on your way.

*** 4/5/14

He didn't want to be a priest. He walked around India asking about how to live a spiritual life. A few, he says, out of many, could tell him.

*** 4/16/14

she asked cloud
to take her message of love
and appreciation to kali
up in the mountains

she said
watch as you go
see the wonders of people
& farmed fields
perimeters & vast spaces
of wilds
the ants & tall buildings

go
collect

and then
make the poem

so that's what cloud did

*** 4/18/14

We return to earth—Shiva, Krishna, Vishnu, they all did, they all came and went, into some kind of suffering, going then in to their own path to their free soul.

We don't really know what Swamiji's talking about. We are the characters in this graphic novel. We can see the sweet fruit crumbling.

We make the bell ring, the conch sound, act as if we understand, as if we are already perfect and there, nirvana, heaven.

And when you get there, he says, you look around a bit and then you come on back to earth for another journey—to help others.

*** 4/19/14

The south facing bank doesn't sprout tumbleweeds, cheeseweed, or lamb's quarters. No new greens. Usually it's a quick-growing mini forest of weeds. Now it's just bare brown and sporadic natives.

*** 4/20/14

twin toddlers in their stroller
facing each other
clutching bears
having the faces of an adult—
someone who already
reads the world

*** 4/23/14

At last, night's charcoaled in the space, and then rhythms of rain begin. All winter we've expected this, and here we are nearly into summer

This world of appearances—sometimes we're reminded in shocks of the unexpected—nothing is as it seems.

But for now—window rattlings, rain passages of song percussions.

*** 4/25/14

what do you do
when one friend dies
& another moves to italy
& another moves to the other side

of the country & stops speaking to you
 & your brother & sister-in-law
 leave to travel for a couple years
 having no final destination planned
 selling just
 about everything they own
 & your mother downsizes to
 a senior apartment

all in one year?

do you
 look for new friends
 look for new family
 look within

you don't have to go
 to the cremation grounds in india
 to understand

it's true—
 the body as a body is not infinite
 the nature of nature is change

ash is the purest of substances

*** 4/27/14

We were worrying that there were always the poor, people in need all around us, we were looking for how to help and how to be helped.

When she returned to where we were singing, she said, You want so much. Don't worry. Look here, choose your One Love. See your One Love—in all. You are so poor in your thinking of you. Your talking, these seeds will fall on hard stone.

The poor and the trouble of the world are always here. Are always here.
 We can change ourselves.

I am the businessman, he said, who made a goddess from the river clay, and sat down to sing and pray.

Stayed there.

If i get to be with her, it doesn't matter what else is happening. The more I prayed, the more it became my nature. The more I know me as her.

*

Once when Maa was in samadhi, bees came, rested all over her body. After they had their nectar, they flew off.

*

He says we're saying these prayers because the rishis gave them to us again and again throughout time.

We want to find again how to be water, the one who takes many forms, who flows to the sea, that comes into balance and then moves in and out of the shapes of earth, that is clear, that quenches.

*** 5/1 & 3/14

She said every person's suffering wasn't theirs. She could see it was his, Ramakrishna's. He was doing all the suffering, all of it, for this earth.

*

Birds singing late spring song. The weather fickle.

*

He holds up a mirror to three different people. Asks, What do you see?
Me, my face, they say.

See? he says, You've been trained in this culture—you didn't say you saw the mirror.

Love, he says, is to be freely given.

It's this love or killing and hurting. Really, this love is all. So love and love all. I mean Big Love. No one has to give you a thing. Any thing. Love is so big.

And there is nothing to lose. Didn't they take Jesus's body?

Love in every place, the good and the bad.

*** 5/4/14

the more you love her
the more she does the same
and more
she gives more

you are singing these sanskrit sounds
hardly knowing their meaning
just feeling

there is a cosmic egg
that breaks open again

all the pieces of light scatter collect
never part

*** 5/16/14

In those early days in India, Swamiji did so much praying in Sanskrit, and translating too, that it hummed inside of him and crowded out his thoughts.

*** 5/18/14

Unmistakably, a sky that could build into rain. Cloud blossoms and coolness the latest sky character. Appearing after dry wind-scraping skies, flying branches, and wildfire ashes.

Three girls playing in the toxic ashes 'til told it is forbidden.

*

The greatest fruits, he said, were when i was most distracted—because I kept sitting, didn't get up until I finished. I said to the Goddess, you can make my mind wander, but I'm going to keep sitting and do what I intended to do.

I got the love!

*** 5/20/14

We chanted the first part of the *Chandi Path* tonight for a video recording for the temple's website. According to Swamiji, we were going slow. But it seemed pretty fast to me. We chanted for an hour and twenty minutes.

First thing Maa says when the camera goes off is: Oh God, I was so thirsty! I was so tired and thirsty!

This is *very* funny since she and Swamiji are our examples! We're not supposed to drink or eat anything while we're chanting.

He tried to get the subject changed when she said she was thirsty.

*** 5/21/14

These nights, birds don't let up, sing on through the dark night.

Faith means there is also doubt.

*** 5/23/14

i will
we said each time

believing
it could be

surpassing errors of heart
the afflicted dissembling of body

after all, beyond the realm of the physical
we have always lived

in infinite
possibilities

*** 5/25/14

The meadow green. Able to be green, it has the spring. Drought has not been able to take this green and no houses are here to pull out the groundwater.

Even the lake, though low, has made it to the start of summer with some water.

*

He would sleep a couple hours—his dreams were full of the *Chandi*. After awhile, he didn't have many thoughts.

When he was looking for teachers, it was both extremely joyful and painful longing.

Go inside and feel the mystery, he says.

*

Two birds are in a tree.
One pecks & pecks at fruit.
The other sits & watches.

O bird mind, bird mind,
sit there still,
and sing the name of God.

—What kind of bird do you want to be?

*

After a dry winter & spring, pine & oak not to be stopped. Small galls on the oak, acorn beginning again.

Not to be missed, look: wild rose, a heron, yarrow.

Down in the canyon, the spring still seeping out from the bank. Primrose & monkeyflower in the seep. Honeysuckle on the bank.

*

Not any prayer like a monotonous script. It's the living word, the word living. Sound as its very own essence—prayer in each of us, these bodies. Finding reflected light, finding our one sun.

*** 5/31/14

It didn't seem possible that the meadow would have flowers.

The canyon where I live now not even gold or brown but having an anemic pallor from the dry winter and spring. I should say the grasses. The scrub, knowing well how to live with little or no water, stays green and flowers and fruits in season.

But the mountain meadows are in bloom. Not everything exuberant, but the some hardy wildflowers who can arrive with just the few sporadic rains we've had are here.

*

When Maa and Swamiji were in their Martinez warehouse temple, they weren't thinking of the next comforts given from income. They were doing a three year series of pujas and thinking of what they would do with their next worship.

We want to focus on this kind of distraction, he says.

*** 6/1/14

June has arrived not with usual gloom but with the door to the furnace open.

*** 6/4/14

Instead of using the hose, putting kitchen sink water on the herb & vegetable garden.

They are digging deep in Fresno, but still not reaching water. So trucking it in.

I've taken so much for granted. Nearly all of it. The beautiful pattern of cracks in dried mud—or cement—at my feet.

The birds just then coming into the oak and singing.

What makes water? It is always coming from somewhere. Traces of its beginnings in sky & sea.

Up inside the mountain there is the spring, part of the old road still stretches out to it, and a broken pipe pokes out of dense chaparral, pointing to sky now.

Are we required to drink our recommended ounces while others get by on far less?

*** 6/15/14

Is it in a dream that we are not hungry, we are not aching?

Lizard has lost its tail & the shed skin of a snake is on the ground. It is hot & there are rocks by the side of the road to be gathered.

They say, That which is God has no great feeling of liking & not liking our good & bad deeds.

There will always be the litter somewhere to gather & put away where it doesn't mar the view of our cleared ground, the beauty of these meadows & trees.

It's a true story, those episodes of the past, the near-deaths, the crying. How our parents were crazed in their own remnant hurts.

That was a sky.

Now look at the gorgeous golds in the sumac in late light these June days

& the buckwheat brimming over in multicolored phases of blossoms & ecstatic bees.

How do we explain the imperative, the need to do what we do, these prayers in an old ancient tongue?

This turning outside in

bit by bit
knowing
refracted universe.

*** 6/18/14

We could say, like the *Bhagavad Gita*, that god is indifferent. That the living beings in the past have perished en masse from extremes of cold or heat.

That we live on this ancient earth, and within an epic we only know in part.

How to read the sky? We're still learning.

Just when we've adapted, it changes.

When we were very little, we would put ice on the brick patio floor and watch it become water. Water moving into cracks. We could find our happiness and despair in those melted minute streams.

Or not that.

The moment there as image.

Other moments arriving and going more than we can remember.

I have always been here and you are within me.

We want some water, some pure water.

This wanting: for the kitchen faucet, for the bath, for the garden.

Bring in more water when this ground's aquifer gets low.

Bring it from somewhere else.

Not to borrow, bring it, yes, take it.

And getting the goods of sky for so long. As if it's second skin—lushness of warmth, comforts of cooling.

And the unwanted harsh skies pushed away, if we could, with irritation, even anger.

Where is evidence of sky?

Ground overrun with drought.

Thirsty fallen bees.

Villages moved from vast corrupted lands.

Wasn't I thinking of a love, and not seeing so much of what was freely giving love?

And what about when I was so young, enthralled with glacier and snow-melt lake, extreme clearness, its bright turquoise bottom, that I had to jump in and swim. Water calling. Hardly thinking.

Then older, at other inviting rivers and lakes, considering: where was the water coming from, where was it going? What was it getting from its banks and higher surrounding ground?

To be a part of it, skin our biggest organ, a sponge, or to join it more carefully, just seeing it, sitting beside it.

Ripples of mind, clouds of mind, movements of sky.

A sudden storm, 12,000 feet on a Wyoming peak, sitting by a boulder under a few pines.
Watching icy rain, ephemeral snow, lightning's swift alterations.

Once again, spared—it didn't turn to a snowed-in wilderness, a flickering life.

*

So much unaccounted, free, unregulated.
So much given at a cost of not knowing.

Coming through the pipes.

What do I know of water if I don't look at sky and ground? And this canyon's chaparral?

*** 6/21/14

The authorities are saying use less water.
They are threatening fines.

*** 7/19/14

they say there are thousands of goddesses & gods
presiding over thousands of creations

swamiji says, just tune into your own creativity

*

it's all true

krishna kali

depending on point of view

call him her
her him
just call on god
just call
& watch your life change

*

maa was in samadhi most of the time
she would drink just water

she visited a devotee
 his wife gave her water
 but it was poison
 it was datura water

like shiva, she drank the poison

and she didn't get sick

a friend of the wife arrived & was also
 given the poison
 she got so sick
 she went to the hospital

the husband beat & beat
 the wife
 she called for maa to save her

and maa did

*** 7/19/14

There is a sky hazed with summer barbecues.

I walk with a sore throat. The body in this heat in its own heat, burning and weak. It's how it is and we go on.

Did she burn herself, Sita, as a sacrifice? Does she do it again and again to show us, remind us how to give more?

Is there ever a need for these dramatics? The pull of coming apart?

They say energy can't ever destroy itself.

The cat comes up from its canyon hiding place. Stands under the tree, just stands, watching hummingbirds above.

The body, oh this body.

This tripping, this rising up: Have the hot sky last through the night. Have the body be fiery and even so, the sleep be deep and transcending. And all through the night the many shinings.

Burn in fever, burn in doing. Find even one piece of yourself, this body, taking you into cooling big light.

*** 7/20/14

You could go out into the side coves and swim. Float under a perfect sky of stars in warm embracing water.

You could catch frogs, too, in a full and boisterous creek in the middle of searing summer.

And go down a high desert road, go to the same spring Indians used. And drink from that spring.

And further, on the desert floor, sit in the small, rock-lined pool.

We didn't know all that we had was temporary. Would be overtaken by weather and use.

All of us in forms, coming undone, pieces of the unformed true.

Doing tapasya/acts of sacrifice, the Vedas say, all existence is performing tapasya—every moment.

Doing our actions, in the friction of moving, moving towards, again, being one.

Acting to purify what is really already pure.

They say there is 1/8 each of earth, fire, air, and ether in water.

And 1/8 each of water, fire, air, and ether in earth.

As dry as it gets, earth is still part water.

As wet as it is, water is still part earth.

They remind us the four qualities of water are sound, touch, form, and taste.

And earth has the five qualities of sound, touch, form, taste, and smell.

The five elements give rise to the sutra, the thread, of existence, which is known as Linga Deha, the subtle body.

By way of the body, in all these elements, by way of this wild earth, we find our body, we find our free soul.

*** 7/23/14

Swamiji tells me:

Love God, but tie your camel first.

*** 7/24/14

Becoming sky, the air so full of water morning cackles with thunder, our bodies turning inside out with water. Like heavy clouds. But the sky masks itself in blue, its edges laced with cloud flowers.

I am not who I was—ever.

The scripture says love God, but tie your camel first. But the camel can not be tied as far as I can tell.

In this long, long dream I do the work of bringing her in, making the proper knot I've learned and practiced so well. By morning, she's gone—again.

I go out into the damp, but no-rain day. See what looks like water ahead—is it small pond? The spring? A gathering of rain that passed through that way? That I missed?

I'm hot inside and out being this servant of circumstance. Going on as if.

Anyway, this could be another day I find her, bring her in, tether her. With hope. At least tether again with hope.

*

She said at the beginning of class when Swamiji couldn't get the *Devi Gita* text to come up on his iPad, Without game, there's no love. Without pain, there's no gain.

*** 7/25/14

On the way to the ashram in Napa:
It's the space. All that open land. The gentle land lines moving up & down hills & valleys, stretching out in long lines.

A warm land.
A vast canvas of changing plants.

Desert still generous, though so roughly taken by builders and people seeking places for home and work.

*

Thursday 7/31/14

I'm not going anywhere. I'm not going further—yet. My car broke down near the one-store-town of Pearsonville as the sun was setting.

Going over the Grapevine, my car got hot, and when I reached the desert floor, my radiator leaked then spewed boiling water, and that water after a few refills got mixed up with my engine.

No one stopped when the hood went up. Just when the sky turned dark, sun finally gone behind the southern end of the glorious Sierra peaks, the tow truck arrived. Got towed to Ridgecrest Automotive. I'm headed north for staying a month at the ashram and working part time as a massage therapist in Calistoga.

The tow truck driver says if he can get home fast enough from fishing up in the mountains, he puts the stunned trout he's got on ice into a fish tank, and they come to. He keeps them as pets for awhile and eventually eats them.

*

Friday 8/1/14

Slept in my truck in the parking lot. It is so hot, even in the night, my body does not ever stop pouring out its water.

They say it could be the head shaft is broken. May need a new engine. They wouldn't be able to fix it until next Friday. Advise that I tow it to San Diego. After many calls local and far comparing options, I decide to reserve the U-Haul, but there won't be one available until Monday. This means, as far as I can figure, I'll be camping in my car in this parking lot over the weekend.

Sitting outside the quonset hut lounge of the auto shop all the hot day because I don't want to take a chance on getting sinus congestion or reacting to the swamp cooler. Following the shade around the building—first west, then north, then east. Skin not able to stay dry, water not staying in but coming out of the body. Chair metal hot though in shade. Sun so strong, having its day. It gets up to 108 degrees.

I feel like there's maybe some solutions I haven't yet uncovered, especially regarding my staying in this parking lot all weekend, but I don't yet know what it is. So it's time to just stop any more calling and figuring and just chant.

I do that, it's maybe two and half hours or so, with some minor interruptions of a few people coming and going. When I get to the end, I look up and see the sign two doors down of Economy Inn. Mamma has time share with Hilton properties, and I think maybe Economy Inn is not one of them. It's 4:30 and the shop is closing at 5:00, and I think, what if, by some chance, in this small town there's a Hilton Property? I go into the office and ask if they will search on the computer. And yes, thank God! there are two *brand new* Hilton hotels—just around the corner down a couple miles. I call Hampton Inn, yes!, they have some rooms though very full with the Royal Air Force. I call Mamma, I can't get ahold of her, I call the neighbor and ask him to go get her, she's probably taking a nap. And he finds her, she's out in the backyard, she calls and makes the reservation.

As I'm doing this, it's 4:45 and the service clerk comes out and tells me I'm welcome to stay the weekend there, but I'd be better off going down to Kmart, where there's a little shade. How? I ask. My car won't start. Oh, he says, they got it going enough to move it. No, I say, I don't want to take a chance on having to tow it again. The mechanic comes by and wants my chair, and he's

going to lock the bathroom door. The hotel doesn't have shuttle service, so the next question is how will I get there, and how will I get some of my stuff there, including my allergy safe and gluten-free food? Well, I had chatted with their last customer, Bob, and he is still there, he's standing right there talking with the clerk, and then he offers to take me over to the hotel. And then the service clerk goes to the office and closes up and comes back in his truck, hands over to me a big plastic container with cold—*cold!* wow! —pieces of watermelon.

*

Bob shows me Ridgecrest, the old part of downtown and the new:

A park that is in progress: for now, scraped sand, a few semi-circles of cement curbs.

We go down the main street, and we go over to the next street where the older business district is, and behind that the older neighborhood with run down and shut down houses. Blocks of dirt yards, broken windows. Trailer parks. We don't drive over to see the big houses. He says most people who live here work at the Navy base.

Then back across to the newer part and over to the park and civic center. The civic center is all new buildings. Nearby are the stores, nothing fancy.

He tells me of a girl, one of his basketball kids that he coaches at the rec center. She does rodeo; she was queen in one competition. She likes lassoing or roping goats instead of horses, herding, and jumping barrels. And there's a blind guy who wins a lot in the bucking bull competitions.

We go to Stater Brothers to buy gallons of water—he doesn't recommend I drink the tap water.

At the hotel desk, I tell them Bob is my angel, that he offered to help me. He says he's just doing what he'd want someone to do for him—what goes around comes around.

The Royal Academy is there at the two hotels, in the lobby and halls. Cheers, a guy says in passing. Getting ready to go out and practice, they say, and bring back what they've learned to their other places.

*

Saturday 8/2/14

I take a walk. In the back frontage road to the main road, nothing but that new street and a printer store. And a little spring with an adolescent willow tree in pink blossoms. The spring sending water out east and west in a small stream. Scraps of trash in the surrounding cheesebush and in the water.

I go across the main street over into the neighborhood. Eventually find myself behind the auto shop, there's a young mesquite—with pods—in a big empty lot, and there's an opening in the chain link fence for going into the parking lot of the convenience store, Bill's Market, which is

right next to the auto shop parking lot. Behind the store, someone's growing mint and tomatoes in plastic buckets—probably easier to keep the ground wet in those buckets.

So there's my car, and my stuff, and it is only a half hour walking distance from the hotel. I get a bag from the truck and put a few things in it.

When I get back to the hotel, I go into the computer room. There, I meet Clair Guy. She's a metal artist—as in big metal, a true blacksmith— and glass artist. She tells me she's in town with her mom, they're from Georgia, because her sister-in-law and niece and nephew live there. Her brother died three years ago—it's his birthday.

The heat drops to 99.

Back in my room, wind whistling songs in the screen. Quail talking in the bushes.

*

In Adelanto and Ridgecrest, so much trash to be seen, blown to every corner curb and bush. Gathered evidence of the missing link of how to live with earth with love.

So generous, the springs still coming to the surface in pockets.

Driving over the rise on the 395 Highway passing the desert prison and hearing later about a new one in Adelanto.

How many women who I've know in rural places have gotten cancer? I've always suspected the cause was the well water.

In the small town in our mountains, Julian, where I used to wait tables, the tap water from under that ground, getting so murky and foul of septic leakages, the owner would bring in gallons of bought water and we would serve that.

Space on the eastern side of the Sierras to slow down. Or move through. The car as if winged, flying miles and miles forward.

Welcomed again.

Growing new moon shines over the pointed peaks.

I've returned again.

The wonder is that I can. That this desert is still in vast spaces. That this Sierra is still its wondrous Sierra.

Yes, the body grows old. Land too. But land more slowly.

*

i get to know this town

i slow down

walk

& sit

sit where the windows face the east
and most all of the view
is sand & saltbush & a few military
buildings & props

in the morning at five to eight
the rousing horn's first call reveille
then the loudspeaker's instrumental song

if you lived here
you wouldn't say that war is a bad thing

you would go through one of the gates
& come out knowing you had a paycheck

and national security

i could have been anything
i still could

i have learned to sit longer & longer in prayer

*

Sunday 8/3/14

Not so hot last night. Found one of the windows open so went without AC.

It rained a bit overnight, creosote smelling sweeter—sky turning into night clouds, wind moving in and out, and before long, we were under a blanket of quiet rain.

Today the sky is grey, the weather blessedly cooled to 85.

The sky is keeping its cover, clouds aren't rushing off. Up in the mountains, peaks have moved into black sky.

I walk south to the Maturango Museum.

Walking behind Stater Brothers Market, two young men pull up and park. They walk towards the mesquite on the side of the building. One says, “See, I know this town like the back of my hand.” And then he’s running into the trees. The other guy says, “I guess I’m gonna move the car around.” But then Guy One emerges from the trees, carrying Girlfriend half draped over his shoulder, and lets her slide down, and then they’re walking back to the car, smiling. I say as we pass each other, “I guess you do know how to find what you’re looking for.” He says, “Yeah,” and she looks down, smiling.

Outside the museum is a native garden and a great tufa labyrinth. The first time I walked it, a grandmother was walking it with her three year-old grandson who was going in both directions and stepping over the lines.

The tufa is from a house that had been torn down; its source is a nearby dry lake.

I met Greg Sandoval as I was walking in and he was walking out. He’s a landscaper. He’s Chumash. He makes walking sticks and ceremonial sticks. He doesn’t sell them, he gives them. Same with sage.

He said, All our living is symbols.

I said, It is a poem, and it isn’t real the way it’s said to be real.

He showed me a ceremony stick. He says the first level is water creatures. You learn wisdom in this body until you’ve collected enough in your spirit to move on to the next kind of being.

You are then winged. Then four-legged or crawling, then human.

As a human, you have collected wisdoms, and you eventually pass them on. Pass them on until you’re done.

You rise then into infinity. The owl feathers at the top point in all directions; you return to the all.

*

When I come back from my walk, Clair, who I’d met in the computer room the day before, was at the poolside and her nephew and niece were playing in the water.

She tells me she was going to be a corporate worker but kept coming back to a friend’s welding art shop to practice. And she brought her own love for art, and an eye for organization. They became partners in work and love. They looked for a glass blower to apprentice to for two years. They make glass flowers that go with their metal art. They can’t ship—too heavy.

She said she used to think when she’d meet someone who she felt connected to that they were someone she knew in another life, or that they had some piece to share with her. But now she thinks they’re all her, every person is reflecting back a part of her.

We talk about the strange weather, here we are in the desert in August and the sky is cool and overcast and it's been raining for two days. She says there hadn't been rain in Georgia for three years, and the day her brother died, it started to rain. And it's been going on since then, regular seasonal rain for three years.

The kids are swimming down to the bottom of the pool and bringing up beer bottle caps.

*

Later in the day, I called Bob, who had given me the ride over to the hotel on Thursday and the tour of Ridgecrest, to finalize our pick-up plan for Monday. He said he'd better not do it. Because a new guy was starting tomorrow to be trained by his supervisor—in case Bob retires or something happens to him. They want someone there who can take his place—so he didn't was to be late. He's been doing the supply department job on the base for years and is of retirement age, but he enjoys the job and he wants to keep busy.

So I thought I'd ask Clair if she could take me—first to my truck to put my stuff back in the camper, and then to the U-haul place. But all I had was her website address. I went downstairs, thinking I'd check the pool—nope, not there—then I headed to the desk, but saw she was there in the lobby having birthday cake with her family.

It's her deceased brother's birthday. He had been to Iraq. He was with his wife and kids in Ridgecrest and when he separated from them, he had a band in Hollywood. Always busy. Would light a barbecue with kerosene, put lots of fuel on it, liked to stand right over it, as it flamed up.

Then he'd moved to the small town in Georgia where Clair lived. He drove too fast a curve one night, was in an argument via text with his girlfriend, and went off the road.

She said no problem, she could take me. She and her mom were going back to L.A. tomorrow to fly home to Georgia.

*

From the hotel room window:

Crow walking its cowboy way, beak open to possibilities, walking among the saltbush.

Two roadrunners going up into mesquite like sparrows.

Three crows on one spindly branch.

Small hills in twilight pastel and mountains in luminous pink.

*

maybe goddess is saying

i'm going to give you
unexpected trouble

& i'm going to give you
unforeseen pleasures

and how will you receive each?

*** 8/3/14

Monday 8/4/14

The heat climbs up again, the rain clouds are gone. Clair shuttles me to the U-Haul Place. From inside the house office window, the clerk is tapping on the window beckoning me in. She's got tubes in her nose.

COPD? I ask.

Yeah—and emphysema.

She hasn't ever heard, when I tell her, that the dust from dry China Lake and Owens Lake (—Where's that? she asks. I say—just north of China Lake (which is near here).) that blows through the valley is toxic, causes health problems, especially respiratory.

Her husband walks in carrying a little oxygen tank—he's got it too! Says they lived on down in Riverside, smoking, lived there with the cow and car pollution, all that pollution that gets caught in there, and they didn't have problems.

Their daughter hated running the storage and U-Haul business in Ridecrest. So when they retired, they moved on up to run it. Within a year, they were on oxygen tanks.

To show me the U-Haul truck and autosaver trailer I'll be taking, which is parked about a half a block away, he drives his golf cart, doesn't walk.

*

Now that I have the U-Haul truck and autosaver trailer, I go back to the auto shop. Clair brings me water I'd left in her car. She says, looking across the street from the auto shop's quonset huts, this is the largest naval landholding in the world.

I ask the mechanics if they will load my Toyota truck onto the autosaver trailer. Mechanic Jeff is surprised the car won't start at all. I'm not surprised.

He tries running along side it while the guys push it, jumping into the driver seat, and throwing it into gear, nothing doing, it doesn't work. He does this with the car facing away from the trailer.

Next, he turns it toward the trailer; he runs with it until he gets a bit of speed, gets it rolling up the little tire ramps, but the car won't go all the way.

It takes three guys, eventually, to get it up onto the trailer.

*

I didn't know how to drive a big U-Haul truck like that, got behind the high-up wheel saying, Oh, I don't want to do this, and then acted as if I knew to give myself the courage.

I had over 200 miles to go. There were puddles along the way, spots of wet ground from that strange weekend of summer rain.

I thought of how my grandfather loved to drive. He would get going in college classes, and then the road called and he'd drop out mid-semester. Drive the wavy road from Nachitoches, Louisiana to San Diego, filling the radiator.

In the desert, the road covered here and there in sand, he would let air out of the tires.

By the time he got to San Diego, it wasn't too long before he'd turn around, get out of the seaside town. Back and forth he'd go, a man free to come and go. Until another later time, return to San Diego, the migrant now with wife and daughter.

*

From my high truck seat perch, I could see where the springs were, green spots, in the pale desert.

*

Get to my mechanic's in San Diego at 4:30 pm, and he's not there! A guy who lives across the street volunteers to get the Toyota unloaded—and he recruits his neighbor.

I call my neighbor—who'd said on Sunday when I'd talked to her that she'd bring me home, she doesn't answer, call her partner, and no answer. Call the neighbor again and says she can't do it, she has a migraine. Call Mamma and ask her, but she and Ray have just moved into their senior apartment and she's worn out.

Sorry to bother my neighbor Mike again, he'd coached me when my car was overheating, but I call him and he says if I bring the U-Haul to a drop-off place close to where we live instead of near my mechanic's, which is across town, he'll pick me up. I get home about 6:00.

***8/4/14

Tuesday, 8/5/14

Mamma and Ray are still unpacking today. He wasn't able to remember which day they were moving. She didn't remember where I'd been, the auto shop, when I called her.

*** 8/5/14

Swamiji tells us that Pythagorus' geometry was really drawing yantras/mandalas, drawing depictions of the universe. And then Plato's academy had a sign above the door: Let no one who doesn't know geometry enter here. Meaning: Let people in who want to know the wisdom and harmony of the universe.

*

Vishnu's three steps pervaded the entire universe—he created three civilizations with a common root. There was a time before the Vedic times—before the Indus Valley—the three cultures, Vedic, Greek, and Mesopotamia, were very similar. There was a common, root culture for those three.

And the Romance language of today—it's roots are Indoaryan that turned to Sanskrit, then to Arabic,
then to Greek & Roman, then to
Romance

*** 8/6/14

When I ask about labyrinths in India, Swamiji tells me: The cave Patala Buhvaneshwar in the Himalayas is a complex of grottos that have accommodated worshippers for thousands of years. All the primary Hindu deities appear naturally in stone forms not made by humans.

The *Chandi Path*, the spiritual epic that we chant every day, was divinely transmitted here to the Rishi Markendeya.

Here, also, in its rare case, both Shakti, the female energy and aspects of God, and Shiva, the male aspects of God, are worshipped.

Here, you easily find union.

*

you go out to go in
in the labyrinth
you get close to the center
and then it loops out again
out & in out & in
before you reach the center

and the only way to get back out
is to go back
the path of in & out
until you go out
the same place
you went in

he said last week in class
 the difficulties
 are bringing you closer to the union

he said last night
 the best things about going
 on a pilgrimage

is finding other serious
 sadhus & stopping there to practice with them

and the other thing
 is getting home where you can
 stay seated, not have to travel, and do your sadhana/practice!

*

i had to leave
 i had to return

*

Daedalus designed the labyrinth of halls and rooms for the palace at Knossos. Minos, the king, kept the man-bull Minotaur there.

No one who entered was able to find their way out.

Daedalus had revealed to Minos' daughter, Ariadne, the exit, and by that knowledge her boyfriend Theseus was able to kill the Minotaur to escape.

Because of Theseus' defiant escape, Daedalus and his son Icarus were then imprisoned in the labyrinth. And then Daedalus' fateful invention of handmade wax and feather wings was devised as the means for their escape.

He warned his son: the sea mist will muck up the wings, so don't fly too low, and the sun, of course, will melt them if you go too high.

Daedalus made it to the safety of Sicily. Icarus, as we know, went too high and then went down, down, down into the sea and drowned.

*

The labyrinth I walked is classical, unicursal, some say it dates back to 430 BC in Crete and is seen in coins all the way back to the 3rd century BC. It also appeared in ancient India. And even

today, in Arizona, in TohonoO'odham land, it's considered a living deity, not just stones and a path.

You walk it as a pilgrim, a seeker, you walk it to quiet the mind, to find your own center. You walk it to both disorient your usual sense of direction and to let go into trusting the path that takes you in—and back out.

In our current class studying the *Devi Gita*, we're reminded the path to realization involves us with both action and sitting meditation. You must not focus on just one part.

Yet, even if you did, like Shiva, meditate deeply on a dissociated part, even then, you would find the center. You don't have far to go, you walk the path back and forth, your pilgrimage is right here.

At the Maturango labyrinth where I walked, there are poles marking the horizon spots for viewing the sun's solstices and equinoxes.

You can go on the path of not knowing, not ever having been here before, and arrive. Go in and then come out.

*

Beautiful tufa made from the alchemy of the springs coming up into the lake's big water, mixing with its minerals.

*

Patala Bhuvishwar—The supreme lord of the existence below the earth.

*** 8/7/14

the son of the rishi
told the visiting king
the cleanser
for all his sins
was to go home
and in a prayerful manner
say ram ram ram

when the rishi got home
and the son told him what had
happened that day
the rishi got mad
said he could have told
the king to just say

ram
once

*** 8/8/14

It doesn't seem possible, but my neighbor Mike's fern grows its leaves by tangling its furry-looking roots above ground.

I've been home since Monday and it's Sunday and still no fixed car. The mechanic is waiting for a part to arrive.

If I get frustrated or impatient, what help will that give?

Is it waiting? If my mind is occupied with other things, no.

May as well carry on. Living.
The whole ocean of existence is in my heart.

If they dissected your body, they wouldn't find the spirit, Swamiji says. But it's there, in your subtle body. Every one of us is an avatar, a god or goddess.

Before the Kamakhya temple was built, the cave there already existed. There is a Shiva lingam coming up in a small pool.

Once a year the water turns red. They say it's the Divine Mother's menstruation.

The temple is locked for three days. The brahmins, priests of the temple, put a sari into the water so that it gets stained. In the old days they then gave it to the king, who would put it on his head, wear it as a turban, and walk around town.

They still cut the cloth into small pieces and give them to the villagers and pilgrim visitors.

Swamiji says the Kamakhya site is the primary, most important goddess temple in India.

*** 8/10/14

In 2013, Owens Lake was the largest single source of dust pollution in the United States.

*** 8/10/14

8/10/14, Monday
Still here and the truck still there in the shop.

So this is how it is.
Ramakrishna: Your root is your idea.
Just now, stay put.

Heat slowing me down anyway.

A car—to take flight from heat.

To go to where your two spiritual teachers/gurus live.
And the gurus, I'm told, are not at home this week.

Just as soon as it gets dark, crickets lift the voices of their vibrating wings.

Appearances are deceiving. Who's home?
The neighbor teen's car is in my driveway because I asked her to park it there while I was away.

The mechanic calls and says he's still working on the car, and it's still a mystery what's wrong.

And although in Ridgecrest it took three guys to load the car onto the U-Haul autosaver because the engine was dead, my mechanic here has been able to start the engine twice! He idled the engine for two hours on Wednesday. He towed it to his other yard and his partner also could get it to go. But then it died again.

Renunciate: Some of my essentials are in the still packed car, packed for the trip I've yet to take.

How much more
or less
is needed to be secure?

The houseless woman wore three sweaters, it's true, in the August heat, but she always waited on the sidewalk for the green pedestrian light before crossing the road.

*** 8/10/14

8/12/14, Tuesday
Not going anywhere.
Almost not going anywhere. I take walks around the neighborhood.
It is Tuesday.
Last Monday I had towed the truck from Ridgecrest to my mechanic in San Diego.

He probably didn't start looking into the engine trouble until Friday. It was then he discovered a needed part would have to be ordered. Would be coming from some Midwest place.

I could wait.
I could be gnawing at the bit to get going.

I could want
to be there and not here.

A monk said, when asked what they do: we sit, we eat, we work, we sleep.

But, the seeker said, we all do that.

Yes, the monk said, but we do it with full attention.

I walk every morning.

I go out the front door and walk around the neighborhood. I have found the gentle slopes and avoid the steep ones to spare my aging knees.

It is time to begin being
every time every where
all this time off and still busy.

I almost go nowhere—but the walking, but the neighbor has taken me to the store twice and across town so I could give therapy to a client.

And the moon is full. Days start cool but get very hot and stay hot, unmoving, through the night.

*

Crickets sing and all together stop at their own certain time.

As soon as there is no pushing to make move what won't be moved, there's plenty of room to be. Greg Sandoval had told me at the labyrinth that the Pleiades change their place around Orion, and we are about to go into Fall, when they change position and the harvest begins.

*** 8/12/14

Thursday, 8/14/14

On the road again! Slow traffic in patches, Laguna Beach to Ventura. No car accident, no reason, no holiday, a weekday, 11:30. And really thick and slow in Ventura.

But once out by the sea and the calm ocean, sky and sea blue on blue, who could really complain at the slow way to get to there?

And even in traffic, that great quiet sky, the day not too hot and not windy. Do we always have to have a complaint on hand?

Meanwhile, the extreme generousities embrace me! My car! The miles clicking along; I'm getting to move north in changing scenes of beauty.

The car started lugging in gears 4 and 5 two hours from Salinas, but I made it there to the timeshare Mamma reserved for me. I drove those last two hours at 60 mph or less in fourth gear.

Friday, 8/15/14

Go to the auto shop the hotel manager recommends. Cylinder #1 needs replacing and the spark plug. My mechanic in San Diego says go ahead and replace but don't let them con you into replacing all the spark plugs. But they insist and so I desist and defer.

There's a wide frame photo in the auto shop of the Salinas River flood of 2008, of the town immersed in water.

There's the coming and going to services on these blocks I walk near the auto shop while I wait for my car to get fixed. The recycling center with the homeless doing their jobs as recyclers for America. Mexican songs blaring out of a café. The marine layer fog burning away. Some days you go nowhere; some days you go slowly towards. I will get there, to the ashram, I believe, today.

I have believed I will the other days I had set out also.

Why not believe? It lightens the day.

Saturday 8/16/14

I'm at the ashram, camping in my truck, in a little parking area west of Maa and Swamiji's house. I got up early and did my long puja—til noon.

Monday, 8/18/14

Maa and Swamiji chanted the first half of the *Devi Gita* for our class and a video. Afterwards, Maa said to stop by her house. When I knocked on the door, her attendant handed me a plastic container with foil on top, and then promptly closed the door. It was zucchini, broccoli, carrot, a little cauliflower, with lots of, probably, ghee and oil, salt, and hing. The plastic container was filled to the top, and I ate all of it! And I didn't get sick that night or the next day. And good thing, too, she gave it to me—such a sweet surprise!—because my ice had gone to water and my cooked vegetables were all spoiled.

Tuesday, 8/19/14

Up at the kitchen, I was doing dishes and the water got shut down again—it wasn't working either on Friday when I arrived—after driving all day in the heat I didn't get a shower.

And they said when the water was on again to not use it, because it wasn't being filtered and they were putting the new filter in.

Mercifully, the water was available just before class, so I got to take a shower.

Wednesday, 8/20//14

No one here gets up really early. Pranav came in at 5:00 this morning. I've had the temple all to myself in the early hours.

Saturday, 8/23/14

They had to shut off the water again! When I arrived last Friday, they'd turned it off because the top pipe's filter was clogged. This time it was because a deer had broken a pipe. It took most of the afternoon to repair.

At an outside corner of Swamiji's house, a deer had gotten its head stuck in between the water pipe and the wall. It is a very small space, so no one can quite figure how the deer did it. They tried to give it water or milk, but it could only move its head down; it wasn't able to drink. When they got the deer freed, it stumbled down to the dry creek and fell in, just near the Napeshwar bridge.

That afternoon, I had gone to the Napeshwar outdoor temple to clean up my puja materials, and I heard some rustling in the creek. When I came back out, Adaitya yelled down, Julia, is there an injured deer in the creek? I looked down and yelled back, Yes!

She was lying on her side, and she was breathing heavily. Her rear end was raw. Her torso was in an awkward angle over some small boulders. From up above on the road, I talked to her and chanted the myrtunjaya mantra. She managed to hoist herself up off those rocks and then lie back down on her side partially on the bank. At that point, I didn't hear her breathing, and I couldn't tell if her lungs were moving.

Evening arati and meditation, and then Maa and Swamiji left for their house in Fairfield. Swamiji hurt his back when he and Pranav lifted the deer, trying to get it out from the pipe. The rest of us stayed and sang.

8/24/14 Sunday

Earthquake! at 3:20 AM—alone in the temple—the whole building was rocking! It felt like we could move on down the road like a car. It probably lasted a couple minutes. I was alone, praying. I didn't get up. It seemed like the temple would stay intact.

I was at this verse in the *Cosmic Puja's* "Enkindling of the Sacred [inner] Fire/Agni Prajwalitam":

Oh Golden Womb, You are the One Eternal Existence from which all beings born on the earth have come forth. You always bear the earth and all that rises upon it. You tell us, to which God shall we offer our knowledge and attention?

Through knowledge of this Eternal Cause, all beings born in the universe have come forth. It is in you, Oh Agni, Oh Light of Meditation, in the flame of sacrifice, that this constant movement will find rest. (104)

*

And when Maa was walking to the temple this morning, she fell and hit her head. Swamiji took her to Emergency.

*

A devotee told me Swamiji wants a live-in community that would take over responsibilities of running Devi Mandir. They have a house in Fairfield that they are going to go to once a month for rest. That's where they were last week. They've also been offered homes in India.

They are happy, I said.

She said, I think maybe not. Because they want more disciples who care, who will come and stay. Not come and go.

8/25/14 Monday

A few days ago, the toilet in Swamiji's office house backed up, and they thought they'd fixed it, but then Sunday night Gautam heard water, and it had flooded—on its own it had gone into overflow, causing damage to the floor and downstairs. The workman had unknowingly installed defective parts in the first round of fixing the toilet.

*

I got to ride up the mountain with Adaityananda and Vish in the gator. The deer that died on Saturday had been in the gator, covered with a tarp and some firewood. They thought they'd dig a hole, but we decided the ground would be so hard from this long drought we'd instead find a steep part of the mountain where we could offload her. She was still bleeding—there was blood leaking onto the front cab floor and the truck bed. She was in a plastic bag, but some animal had gotten into a part—Adaityananda said the scavenger must not have liked it because there wasn't much gone in that spot. We drove up, found the spot, and I prayed as they pushed the body over the mountainside.

When we were looking for the spot, we drove up to a mesa. We didn't go to the top, but we could see it and the surrounding mountains. There's patches of bare earth; it's just clay. The ground, I'm guessing, is getting depleted from the forest not getting burned or cultivated.

8/26/14, Tuesday

I was going into town to get some groceries, and I asked Adaityananda what his favorite food is so I could get it. He said cereal, he loves cereal, he really loves cereal. (Still a growing boy at 24!) (Adaitya is being trained to be Swamiji's successor.)

We were talking about rules. Swamiji had laughed in class, saying, We don't have rules here, when we start having rules around here, I'm leaving! Adaitya said Vivekananda made a list of rules for the new Ramakrishna order they were forming. And the swami closest to Ramakrishna said that Ramakrishna didn't advocate for rules. Vivekananda then tore them up.

They don't have many written rules here that I've seen, but there are plenty spoken and implied.

8/27/14, Wednesday

Maa and Swamiji chanted the *Guru Gita* for class tonight. Afterwards, we had questions. They said the disciple has their own path. Maa and Swamiji give us teachings, but each disciple has their own application of it depending on their individual disposition. And the guru doesn't get annoyed with our questions. They only get mad when the devotee asks over and over the same questions and doesn't apply the wisdom, the devotee has the wisdom, but they don't use it in their lives.

8/28/14, Thursday

After puja, went to give Maa a foot massage—per her request—wow!
 She is happy about my long pujas and said encouraging things.

I was so happy we were there together, she was being so kind, we were looking eye to eye then. And I wasn't getting in trouble! I had only come back after three years absence this past December. When I had been there in December of 2010, she and Swamiji had just come back from India and were both sick. A community member had suddenly died of a heart attack two days before I arrived, and just a few days after they had returned home. There was a lot of tension and grief and stress. And Christmas was the next week, so they were making preparations for the celebrations and for the guests who would stay there, or who were already there.

I didn't see Maa until the last day I was there. It had been five days of intense rain, and I had, because of my restricted diet, been slogging through the mud and rain to eat my meals in my car. I didn't want to be in the way because of all the busy community needs in the kitchen.

That last evening of my stay, Swamiji had come to the temple and done a short puja with a few of us. After everyone left to go eat, he'd said to me, I am with you in a corner, in the forest, or in your heart.

Cathy came back to the temple and asked me to come into Maa's temple room to help wrap Christmas gifts. So I made the unknown-to-me mistake of leaving my chair, day pack, and rain jacket there and followed her to our worksite.

When Maa is walking over to a building or room, someone will arrive before her and let you know she's coming. Pratipa did this, and Cathy said, Ok, you can go now. So I was just going out of the room, when Maa came in and saw my stuff and flipped her lid. She was yelling at me, but I didn't know all that she was saying. I knelt down in front of her and told her how happy I was to see her. Nothing doing.

She said, This is a temple and you must treat it with respect! Don't leave your things lying around! Don't leave a mess! You're stupid!

I said, Cathy called me to help wrap presents.

She said, Think, think!

I got up and went to move my stuff and she was still yelling at me. I didn't know what she was saying. I got outside, and I told myself not to get upset, that she does this kind of thing, so I've heard, with everyone at some time or another, that I know I wasn't doing anything on purpose to be disrespectful, that it was a mistake. Yet also I thought I would never yell at someone, period, much less for a mistake. And that also she doesn't feel good. Yet and still, I started crying, and moved into feeling utterly devastated. I'd always felt so happy about Maa and Swamiji, this great, deep happiness and feeling unconditionally loved.

And I had to leave very early in the morning because I had a reserved room over in Bishop. The plan was to stay there a night and then get over to Las Vegas where I was going to stay at Mamma and Ray's timeshare for a week and do some hiking. When I drove out, a devotee had come down (in the rain, of course!), to unlock the gate, and he handed me a present from Maa. I pulled over down the road, opened it, and it was so dark, I saw it was a little statue, and I thought it was one of the goddesses, I couldn't tell for sure which goddess. When I got home, I kept it in its box; it was such a reminder of deep pain that I didn't open it again until six months later. And when I did, I saw that it was not a goddess, it was a sitting, smiling Shiva with his hand up giving blessings.

As I drove to Bishop, the storm was relentlessly bad. I drove through snow all the way from east of Sacramento, over through Tahoe, and all along 395. Very slowly. Crying, crying, listening to a recording of Swamiji chanting the *Chandi*.

And when I got to Las Vegas, I cooked a little sweet potato, something I hadn't eaten in a long time, and got a very bad allergic reaction to it—that went on for days. I kept thinking of that line Swamiji told me, the gift of God always being with me wherever, in a corner, a forest, or in my heart. It comforted me to know there's this divine unconditional love—when I'm deathly ill or when I'm being criticized, just being a human in any set of circumstances.

So here I was now, and for those three years I was away, I prayed that Maa could be happy with me. That she would know I would probably do what she wanted, but that she could just ask me gently. That I am ignorant of some of their ways, but willing to please. A human who makes mistakes. To please not yell at me; I can't handle it. Please.

And I reminded myself I didn't do anything wrong, really. My intentions while there were all good and respectful. That I would not yell at someone if I was helping correct them.

And the biggest part I got from that experience was to not take them so seriously! That I would see the bigger joke of our living, the good and the bad are going to keep changing. That I am fundamentally good, nothing takes that away, and that I am part of the divine love that suffuses all of us and everything. To lighten up in the seeming dark spots. I thought, next time I go there, I'm not going to let myself go down into despair, I'm going to think, Lighten up!—for both them and me! I'm going to laugh at the challenges! And understand that the guru saint is also human, has their human imperfections, their mistakes.

So those three years I carried on as a devotee, participating in our online classes and pujas, and kept email correspondence going with Swamiji. I never told them how upset I was.

The next time I visited the Devi Mandir was December 2013. The first time I went through the darshan line on that visit, Maa gave me a beautiful handmade white skirt. I didn't realize what this meant until later. I noticed that the disciples, the ones intimate with Maa and Swamiji, were given white garments.

And then on this next visit, August 2014, Maa said, Welcome home.

So we never talked about that incident in December 2010, nor my silent prayers. And we hadn't talked much at all in my other visits, but now she was letting me massage her feet and speaking kindly to me.

And Swamiji says I can't be a pujari because I don't sit in asana/seated pose that he recommends, and he doesn't recommend I study Sanskrit. He recommends that I focus on continuing to increase my bhava/love of God. I don't sit the prescribed way because it's too hard on my body at this age and stage of my life. I asked Maa about this, and she said it was ok to sit a way that is comfortable for me.

And yet it doesn't matter, these things he's saying. God is pulsing in my heart. I walk and breathe and pray. Surely giving the breath of God's love in all the places where I am. Maybe meeting a standard, maybe I know or maybe I don't know the measurement. I breathe the love of God.

*** 8/28/14

Friday, 8/29/14

Adaitya and I talked some more about sitting in swastikasana—or not sitting in it. I said what about the kitchen saints who never sat that way? He said Swamiji is saying different things to different people. It's one way of sitting among other possibilities and if you do sit in swastikasana, you have to sit in the way Swamiji prescribes. And just like not all the devotees are chanting the *Chandi* every day, not everyone is sitting this way.

Saturday, 8/30/14

I met with Swamiji. When I first got to his office, I had brought in two aluminum pans of dried peas for Maa to use for massaging her feet, but he told me to put them outside the door. He said to me, You have your own relationship with Maa or me, and you don't need an intermediary, or for each of us to bring you to the other. If you want to communicate with her, just call her.

Swamiji complained about all the emails he answers every day, and he said he wants to just write, translate, and teach classes. He would like to be doing that in three years. Adaityananda will take over the administration. He says the live-in community needs to find ways to fund it without loans. If they can make this support them, then they don't have to work outside. You have to expand your own congregation, be self sufficient first, he says. He would like any one of us to show him an economic proposal and he would work with us. There already are plans made out for more buildings there: a five-car garage, a two-story house, twelve lots for 12x12 cabins. Utilities are already in place for a kitchen and a dining room where the current wood storage is. The current parking lots can accommodate 120 cars.

The younger people are going to school and will be establishing careers. They wouldn't be able to commit to living at Devi Mandir for seven years. For those of us who live away from the ashram, he wants each of us to have our own congregation.

I said, What's going on here? Maa gives me one advice, and you give me another. You're both my gurus but you tell me different things! They are "diametrically opposed," he said. She's all poetry and music, and he's business and practicality. Shiva and Shakti. He said I can listen and find my own way.

*

I talked to some devotees later about Swamiji's sadness and they said he's always unhappy, it's not new. They said they've tried, Maa's tried to make him happy, and it doesn't work. I am so surprised about this since in class he talks so much about being in love and being happy all the time because we're serving the Goddess.

Adaityanda says that Maa wants to live here until she dies, and even though Swamiji says he wants to be away so he can write and not be an administrator, he's also told Adaitya that he wants to stay here too. Adaitya knows Swamiji wants him to take over the administration, and he says he wants to serve the guru.

Tuesday, 9/2/14

Bulls far out in the yellow-dry land. I drive through vineyards on one side, fruit trees on the other, until in all directions fruit and nut trees.

Turn around before going too far and ask the road worker if back at the little town is where the turn off is—yes— others probably have asked—on their way to Yosemite.

The Rim Fire of August 2013 has taken most of the Stanislaus Forest on this western side of 120. The water is very low where the Tuolumne River is, the banks dry, but down in the farmland, the Sacramento River and the sloughs still full.

Where the land has been moved around for crops, plenty of burrs and star thistle when I get out of my car to stretch.

Haven't I come this way before looking for answers?

The big climb up from farms' flat terrain zig zags without rails, going up 3,000 feet into brief green pine, then so much burned. I'm carrying questions and somewhere the answers are all within me.

Mosquito Creek Dam has water and right there are employee houses neatly lined up. The old industrial ways of housing the worker at the worksite still here. Did some people then, or now, want to live away, have a place to live away from where they worked?

I'll be home in a week. I can go on sitting in peace wherever I am. And there's going to be some kind of friction. And there's going to be something to do, something to give.

Maybe there's no such thing as balance—maybe just harmony. Bringing pieces closer together.

So that the spiritual teacher is my own shiny light getting brighter. I'm finding it.

*

Golden Arrow Road, east of Cherry Lake.

400 acres were burned August 2013 in the Stanislaus Forest. So most of the areas along 120 are closed. This road that I'm camping on doesn't have a restriction sign at its entrance. It goes a short way, and then there's parked logging trucks and tractors, scorched open spaces, enormous stacks of burned logs, and then a "No Entrance" sign. It's 4:00 in the afternoon, no one's here, I should be fine for the night.

I took a walk down the "No Entrance" road, and people were driving it, so they must live further down the road.

Wednesday 9/3/14

I was sitting in the front seat doing my puja in the early morning dark when the first logging truck came in at 4:15. There would be one after another, first every hour then about every twenty minutes. A mighty tractor loaded the logs into the truck.

When I was done praying, I drove down the road I'd walked yesterday to find a quieter spot to do my morning preparations. But on the way, I saw a huge vehicle with big pincers and

another ploughing down the black trees. And though they'd dumped water on the ground, there was a lot of dust rising and looking like smoke. Very surreal in the early morning light.

I was down the road from them in a part of the forest that seemed mostly intact, but still, the falling trees made tremendous boomings and shook the ground, and so I did my breakfast and dressing as quickly as possible. I didn't know if they might work so fast that soon they would be ploughing the forest right where I was at, even though there were mostly vibrant unscorched trees there.

*

I go up the steep pass, go out and above in the miraculous land, the unfathomable huge stones left behind by ice reaching far up into sky.

Moon already half full.

I've grown older, and what I've missed along the way wasn't mine to have. And in fact, what I have now is here but I can't possess it. The walls of the temple stayed intact during the earthquake, parts of the forest stay green. Big Love shines on.

I come around a bend in the road and there it is, that great Half Dome, perfectly framed by the steep walls of the canyon. And I know it; it is stunning to see it face to face and it is like my own soul. It is like looking at God.

Later, when I get over to the eastern side of the Sierras, Mono Lake: Those spectacular shadows and late day harmonic hues of water and sky. Paradise still here.

Thursday 9/4/14 Sierras

o little creek from the bigger one
 one who runs from up there to here to further down there
 being lake, small & large,
 being river
 being water for beak
 and unseen fish

good to see you again

*

I see other creeks are not here. The ground is dusty and in places overgrown with monkshood and grasses that will settle into new arrangements once we all receive a season of generous rain.

*

Bridal Veil Falls was doing yesterday what the Indians have said. It goes back up into the wind rather than falling down.

And the Merced, for all its use by excited, and maybe some ignorant upstream campers, is clear and unfoamy. And looking its wild self. I was doing my dishes nearly at the far end of the valley.

I have hope because there is so much beautiful farmland above San Francisco and going east through the South Sacramento delta and heading over to the Sierras—creeks and the rivers and the sloughs and even where the grasses of late summer were golden, yellow dock, though recently turned dry, was plentiful, a sure sign of water.

almond, grape, olive
peach, plum, corn
a truck with two large beds hilled up with tomatoes

in my car, late summer plums

*

When I was at the ashram, there was (is now?) a lot of smoke and in the surrounding hills of Napa. I thought the fire was in Napa. I went into the kitchen and said, It looks like there's a fire coming this way; there's a lot of smoke gathering over those hills. Do we have an evacuation plan?

Run, Adaitya said. Parvati said she'd check on her computer. Later, she said the fire was all the way up in the Mt. Shasta area and in Mendocino forests.

*

Up the shale path, dust ground fine by a dry summer and now it's the start of fall. Most flowers are spent. The creeks and cascades undeterred, still busy running downward.

No snow to be seen but still the water coming from the heights and dropping over precipitous edges.

I feel the grand presence of the ice that once had all this land under its spell. It gets hot during the day, but chills down at night.

Up the trail, a hunter's old cabin, he might have been young, just as young as these summer camp teachers bringing kids up the canyon. In the rock mill, the wheels turned the crusher. Rock delivered round or sharp to here, a made-up story from water and ice.

Mono Lake is still making its own alkaline spring, its special tufa rock.

We come in and go out in the warm months. But water stays, in smaller forms than its long ago long-bodied ice, still takes shape in snow and ice, takes over this land in winter.

Almost nothing left of summer's flowers. Some arnica, one fuschia, the dried heads of pennyroyal, monkshood, a little yarrow, one elderberry turning into purple berries, rose hips at every bush.

My camper is a cave and in the cold, cold morning I am in the cave within the cave, my sleeping bag, chanting. It will be hours before sun turns the east pink, but I know it will.

At dusk tonight, clouds moved in, obscured sun, gathered all black and edged in glowing white, and moved east into the mountain peaks. And went further in, no more to be seen.

The little roadside spring must have its own cave, too, that it bubbles out from to travel to here, it must have its deeper beginning, or I should say, another home.

Friday 9/5/14

sitting still, seeing—
 first a ring
 then later
 what could be a rock
 moves
 moves in & out of the sunlit part of the water
 moves under a log and into the bigger pool

*

Tonight, some wind in sputtering gusts and talking, too.

Energy, he said, has no feeling.

Then why, I still wonder, is God love?

*

The yogis say there is space and you are made of that too. You are not elements and you are. We were talking about what is needed to make this language vibrate.

The mountain is rock, yet its grandeur is in the space it reaches into.

The spring today pouring out even more water.

I walk the dry, wide creek bed cross-hatched with fallen, upthashed, water-moved logs. The banks have moss toppings and are undercut by the water way—when there is water.

Saturday 9/6/14

Lake in a calm day rippling and being glassy and clear. Lake after lake and stream after stream, and cascades hidden in trees coming down with song. There's one big lake far below, that's where these all go. Walking with purpose and time ticking too fast to linger. But I remember when I did, and little frogs jumping onto my shoes, and much more ice on the peaks, and even in the water, there was ice, the water and the air even colder then.

Yes, so much of this water dammed and funneled to L.A. and some stays.

Some farms—green patches in desert scrub and crop sprinklers' water flying into wind. The patches far fewer than back in the heyday when the Owens River ran and the Owens Lake was full, before the water was stolen.

Paiute still here. A dozen cow hides hanging on a fence, that same farmhouse fence next to 395.

Is it wandering or pilgrimage to go to the ashram and the Sierras having been there before?

But time, even the planned, leads to different scenes—anything might happen. And it does: it doesn't rain this time.

Sunday, 9/7/14

Lone Pine—Alabama Hills: A little cool last night, but not cold. Left at 8 and got back home—safe and sound and the car ok!—at 1:15.

There go the mountains receding in my car mirrors. Until I return again. In Riverside County, the few clouds from north coming together and three minutes of rain. Now in San Diego, humid heat, sky glazed in clouds, brushed pink with end of day. This sky unlike any other heated sky of all these days' travels—thick, hard to breathe, and unwilling-to-let-loose rain.

Driving down 395, there was the remnant of Owen Lake, a bit of silver east of my fast moving car. I've heard parts of Owens River have been restored, but didn't see it, or maybe saw it, in a stretch of willows, one brief glimpse between trunks and leaves. To the west, up against the mountainsides meeting the desert floor, clustered cottonwood marking a water spot and a house—sometimes then a farm or cattle.

*

How it could be hotter in San Diego than where I'd just been, I don't know. Lower elevation, more drooping, unyielding clouds? Maybe what's here also moved back to there, to where I was. You never know; you only know here. And we adapt.

Home. Bed and bathroom, a wider indoor space to move in. Forgotten familiars returned. Like shoes, routines back in place. Changed forward motions. The same life not the same.

*** 9/10/14

They say these heat spells will be longer and more frequent, our future unlike our past, nothing to hold onto. Adapt we will, change we must.

*** 9/12/14

So hot and humid. My neighbor says there's a pressure coming from the east, and the storm from the south is going over to Phoenix. Over there, all that concrete and asphalt-paved ground, and even the unpaved ground is unable to accept a lot of sky water, is just now, as it often does, flooding.

*

Swami Rampikalaju comes to visit the Devi Mandir periodically. He says our gurus are far off in the other world, and they are also here, and they are watching from there, and here they are talking, steering with words and all these gestures.

*

You want your teachers to be all perfection, but they have bodies and human leanings of like and dislike, the cover of their manifestations.

*** 9/13/14

A hundred degrees at least in the house and about that outside. I've found the water: it's in my body and pouring out of my skin. The body does not want to move, and the utility company leaves a phone message saying conserve energy today.

At last wind arrives the last two hours of daylight. It looks hazy both east and west, barbecue smoke rambles around the neighborhood and canyon.

*** 9/14/14

A heat wave drives 255,000 to the beaches in L.A. There's 200 surf rescues in each Southern California city. And counting. There's been so far this year 6,000 rescues from the ocean in San Diego, 12,000 in Los Angeles. Big storms from all directions brought in big waves from New Zealand and Hurricane Odile from Baja California.

When there's big waves, the beach sand gets pulled out, which deepens the shoreline drop. This increases rip tide currents. The shoreline water falls into the drop, and then quickly moves away from the beach.

*** 9/18/14

Sky puffing up its mighty wind. Sky a clanging cast iron skillet, crackling, boiling. And still only a few spilling drops.

Are we living within the seas of our sins, we stoked this inferno?

Cat comes through unperturbed until sky is rattling and bellowing, then goes into a crazy run up the tree trunk. Wind jumps into leaves, storms through open windows, all hot air.

All hot air and wind rushing off to the northeast.

And here is this pitiful small fan's great outpouring gift, so there is some circulation, at least that, of this oppressor heat.

*** 9/17/14

The Great Drought was 1853-1865. Far-ranging rancho cattle along with the drought severely depleted native grasses and ushered in more non-native grasslands. Non-natives appear in mission adobe from late 1700s, indicating Spanish introductions of oat, ryegrass, mustard, and others. By the mid-1800s, many Mediterranean invaders had spread throughout California, and then in the twentieth century more annuals from Europe and Asia were introduced via livestock feed.

It was the whisper, the barely audible palpable breeze early in the dark morning, first signaling that the extreme heat might let up its pressure.

By daylight, this world's oven did not fire up to the degree it has been this past week.

The back of my neck and forehead have a strange rash, as if my skin turned to mud and then dried.

And now, tonight, the breeze has vanished, the night hums with crickets. Heat, the bodiless being, has returned.

When you are in the palm of nature's hand, you must settle into it, watch it, be with it. No point in being impatient to get out of its grip. That will just tire you out, constrict more what's perceived as confinement.

And I ask Swamiji, what if I put rice down for the offerings of my heart for my puja, and that strong, sudden wind crashes through the windows and picks up the placed rice, and throws it around the room? Does it nullify the offering?

No, he says, you've given to God the offering and nature can do what it will the minute you've given it.

*** 9/18/14

You circle out and out into a future and in that present are not thinking backwards. But still the story from the past comes in and frames the present when you least expect it. Here are the rings, the circles from that same start-center.

A devotee was telling me her woes of living in community and following the teachers—the highs, yes, but the big difficulties, the dilemma she didn't yet know how to solve.

I won't say what her difficulties are, but listening to her and giving her support, my old story of my days with the Catholic Worker returned. The ideals and the grief of needing to leave. And remembering the title of a book the therapist gave me—*If You See the Buddha in the Road, Kill It*. Didn't I hear years later that the Buddha himself had said it?

It's not about doing an act of violence to your teacher.

And more recently, I heard about a Zen student, who was already imbalanced, had come for a retreat some years ago, and was given this koan. He lost his clarity, what little he'd brought to the retreat, and came in one day and beat his teacher to death.

No, for me I got the poetry of it—I had to start new within myself. As much new as you can when of course you don't ever really shed all your skins until you're fully enlightened. And even as I would put myself into the focus of finding my own way, it didn't mean I had to see the former inspiring people—or the teachers to come—as ones who I would discard completely.

Not nullify. But to see, as Swamiji jokes, niti, niti, not this, not that.

Seeing: I am on the path of self discovery that requires the stripping away of the self, but that declares a self in every passageway and place. While learning to become more humble, you find yourself as an entity, a unique individual who is deeply attached in a rare form of love with a divine manifestation, a being who has shed all and yet takes on attributes, who is both in this world and of the all of all. They have one foot in and one foot out, and often you find you do too.

Strange to be someone, in relationship, in this other kind of love, with these other beings. As you spiritually evolve, you don't kill them—and you don't discard your own self. The maya of being one and many is bouncing back and forth, the vibration from form to form. Coming from its own form. And its own endlessness.

*

She said, I love you, in class this week. And this is the clear water spring.

*** 9/19/14

The King Fire, east of Sacramento, closed California Highway 50, the route north to Lake Tahoe. It may have been started by arson. Smoke and ash in forests, canyons, rivers, reservoirs. It's still moving north.

Fire in Weed takes 150 buildings, in Madera County, 30 houses.

Throughout the state, a world record of fire retardant is dropped.

*** 9/19/14

At the ashram, when they were first drilling for the well, further up the mountain, they could have stopped when they reached the first water, the water was flying up into the air like Old Faithful, but the driller recommended going further down. They have water year round for the ashram community, its visitors, and the gardens.

Statues/murtis stand all about the grounds, with raised hands quietly giving blessings: Ganesh, St. Francis, Jesus, Mary, Lakshman, and Sita.

*

She started saying other names for me towards the end of my stay. Julie, Judy, others I couldn't decipher from her Bengali accented English. They say she does that, and it's no use correcting her.

You don't know what she knows. What she knows in this manifested body when she's not in meditation. What is she playing? When the gurus ask questions, what game are we playing? I answer in the moment the best I can. And later it all refracts in possibilities, the most real and the most illusive.

Here is the land with a million subtle changing weathers. And I am the bird watching, the bee seeking sweet flowers to bring home nectar. I am the beloved still giving even when I am not sure what land this is, not at all sure what will be my next move.

*** 9/20/14

September 21, 2014

400,000 people attend the People's Climate March in New York city. Around the world, in 166 nations, hundreds of thousand march. It's the largest environmental protest in history.

September 25, 2014

Since August 11, the Happy Camp fire, started by lightning, has been burning.

The Orange County Silverado Fire, started in a vegetable garden from hot metal sheeting, burned 1,000 acres.

Ten fires burned in California last week. 66,000 firefighters were called out.

All the vegetables and fruit up 50 cents or a dollar.

And I ask the co-op's produce department worker, Did the prices just go up?

And he says, Yes, the drought.

*** 9/30/14

Tulare dairy farmer shells out \$150,000 to drill a new well to reach water. Lets his fields go fallow. Buys his feed from Nevada and Texas.

Milk up 50 cents in L.A., 89 cents in San Francisco.

Half a million fallow acres in California.

Fresno, one year ago: One acre foot of water = \$140

Now: \$800-\$1,1000

Why? There's no county allocated water this year.

Tulare:

One acre foot of water = \$1,200-\$1,800

Petaluma County:

Organic dairy pasturelands are dry.

If we do get an El Nino this year, we still won't get enough rain.

*** 10/3/14

Western Pond Turtles at Elizabeth Lake, Los Angeles County, are starving and dehydrated. Water had been taken last year for putting out the Powerhouse Fire.

Consultants surveying the lake found the sick and dying turtles. The consultants were there because their clients are suing the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, holding the LADWP responsible for not maintaining the power lines that led to the fire.

*** 10/5/14

At the mercy of more inflamed weather. Something of a miracle: the plants staying green now, especially the ones that can do without water. Buckwheats flowering as usual, as if in daily celebration.

*** 10/6/14

I thought she was one way and he was another. And now it seems some of that impression has flipped. And all in all it seems I have projected and seen the two as fixed, as someone come to life again from ancient scripture.

And I remember Maa saying in her autobiography, You think I'm not acting like I should.

From the biography I've read and dip into for inspiration, I have an idea of Sarada Devi as sweet and kind.

The Dalai Lama is considered in direct lineage from the others. And Maa is like that, she is in a lineage. Swamiji says she's Ramakrishna. Others say she's Sarada Devi. Maa says Ramakrishna talks to her.

And when I chant, sometimes it's a momentum like a river surging forward, and I feel them there, and then it will shift to the absurdity of any one of us being one, two, and three. The costumes of bodies. Of character. Of mind that records these reflective vibrations into the code of these epic poems. Mind conjuring form from the moving form. That it--Big Love--is bigger than any of these forms or reflections.

*

And last night in its early morning hours, that same blank, black night let loose singular drops—I heard them—like an animal in the hedge quietly moving, maybe eating. Footsteps in the dry leaves, some creature in motion. Singular until there were more.

But still, in this night like so many nights this fall, in these inferno nights, the more was not much more.

Not a let loose, let it rain, let it rain, rain, rain kind of rain. It was a withholding rain, a rain of crackling footsteps, not a song of a stream returned to its free running.

*** 10/7/14

In the city it can be easy to forget water isn't just pouring out free and easy. I mean, yes, we're charged money, but still it comes, we get it. The faucet when turned brings water.

Well, not everywhere. No, not everywhere.

In a small town north of here the wells are dry. Eventually, no water official but a woman from the next town hears of their plight, and she brings gallons of water. She was guessing there might be a few people needing it, and found out it was pretty much the whole town.

*** 10/10/14

The world piled on its riches and its poverties. And I, like all others, have searched through the rubble for the meaning.

I have an idea of who I am. All this time, operating on the premises of this being. Does anyone depart from their home body?

The sky showers down treasures of light. So much of a person goes unseen. I find myself in the between. Morning fog lifts, last colors of day bedazzle.

Yet I have a feeling of direction in all these directions.

It could have, it might have, but it didn't: rain.

We had the look of it above our heads. And the delicious feeling of cooler air, air endowed with some moisture.

By late morning, the grey fluff parted, eased off to the margins of the blue.

And the day got hot.

*

The facts of change are really all around all the time. The denials most blatant in anyone's lawn.

A friend in Seattle tells me a storm moved in from the horizon, replete with lightning and thunder, and they got the deliverance of free falling, the absolute real thing, not withholding, rain.

*** 10/15/14

In the webcam class tonight, Swamiji said Shiva fought the Ashuras for 64,000 years and prayed to the Divine Mother for a solution. And she said, Drink the poison.

When Maa drank datura water that a devotee had given her to test her, she didn't get sick. She said, I was always in samadhi at that time. So I could dissolve whatever, I think, at that time. Because I was always inside. Nothing could kill me or defeat me.

*** 10/22/14

We give our prayers to the fire; the fire burns all impurities. The smoke rising, dispersing. In times like these. As if and as always.

Smoke coming this way like it's from a close-by wildfire, but it's far off.

We stoke the body's fire.
We revolve around the sun.

We can tell we're getting hotter.

We pray to Kali who appears dark but is beaming bright inside. She is the night taking away all our darkness in this world. We don't know light without the dark.

The sky this morning mottled, every small dark cloud reflecting in some part rising light.

I'm getting to know through these challenges that the days add up to dissolution. Dry leaves are signs of the times. Ground appears spare, like it's scraped, like it's never known any other way.

*** 10/25/14

The King Fire in El Dorado County burned 97,000 acres. The fire was unpredictable and took three weeks before it was vanquished. The firefighters said they'd never seen anything like it.

*** 10/25/14

These days it's a given: we have intense heat, the water is precious.

They are talking about limiting garden water in San Diego.

If the drought continues more years, we will have to talk about waterless toilets, rationed faucet water.

Ants emerge in crowded lines throughout the house looking for water.

Dairy cows suffer "heat stress;" when the weather gets very hot, they drink more water, eat less, and produce less milk.

*** 10/26/14

2013 driest year for California's past 100 years of weather records.

A swimming pool can lose 1,000 gallons of water a month in evaporation.

*** 10/29/14

Two days of shining blue sky and puff ball clouds. And ta-da, ta-da! Two nights of rain! Real, ground-soaking rain, not the spattering we've had a few times this past spring and summer. Ground is spongy or gooey, being a different, but recalled state, after so long being dusty and hard. Right away, leaves perky.

In Stratford, the water table has dropped one hundred feet. And there are no nuts inside the pistachio shells.

We dream of water like we had it before, yet the sky, in all its colors and changes, is so much bigger than us.

***11/2/14

Swamiji: G-o-d: Generator, organizer, destroyer.

*** 11/5/14

There is the audacity of a man-made lake so big and full that 23,000 homes can circle it, the ones who can afford this luxury in Southern California. And it was built in a time of drought. And endures in another drought. The water is from the Colorado River. The member community, "associates," use it for boating. The children play on the beach.

Millions of gallons disappear into the sky.

*

We had rain on the weekend. Rain! Enough to make the ground stay in its altered state for a few days. But three days later, heat returns in full regalia with its flourishes of Santa Ana winds.

*

Must go on with the weather, the mighty weather. These persistent heats, the proddings of the facts of drought. And yet: the miracles of having, still, water in my house and yard. Having beautiful food that is from somewhere's snowmelt and rainfall. Being with a giving sky.

*

Let nothing disturb you,
 Let nothing frighten you
 All things are passing
 God never changes
 Patience obtains all things
 Who has God lacks nothing
 God alone suffices.

-Teresa of Avila

*** 11/5/14

Karma is a word used flippantly, casually, jokingly—and seriously. If we're talking about what human factors contribute to drought and solutions for living in sustainable ways in long periods of drought, we can seriously apply the term "karma." It means, my teachers say, what you do is what you get.

I'm told that we have, in the world immersed in English language, a transactional culture. But in the ancient yogic days in the Far East, the language of Sanskrit was used within a culture where love was the rule of the land. Love as in unconditional, ever-giving, not looking for a return, non-romantic, devoid of need and greed, devoid of desire. That love.

We still have, thanks to the generosity of nature, water, plenty of water in places.

But we need to be givers to have a harmonious relationship with the water.

Forests and chaparral here need controlled burning and other sustainable, holistic management instead of unharvested, "pristine" growth. Humans and animals are part of the natural garden.

We can recycle water and learn conservation how-tos from those around the world that know how.

Swamiji says, God/dess gives us the fruit of our karma without malice or anger—we're forgiven, but we still get our karma's fruit. Even Shiva, Vishnu, and Brahma took human forms and made mistakes.

*** 11/9/14

August 2014 was the warmest month since weather records began to be recorded here in 1880.

*** 11/11/14

And when rain shall cease for a hundred years and the earth will be devoid of water, praised by those who have wisdom, I shall manifest on earth, but not take birth in a womb.

Then I shall look at the wise people with a hundred eyes, whereupon the descendants of the incarnation of wisdom shall sing my praise as "She with a Hundred Eyes."

Then, Oh Gods, I shall nourish and maintain the entire world and preserve living beings with vegetables from my body until the rain comes.

Then I shall be famed on earth as "She Who Nourishes with Vegetables." Also at that time I shall slay the great thought Impossible.

From *Chandi Pathah* translated by Swami Satyananda Saraswati (Swamiji) 12:46-49

*

In India, many see the Ganges River as a manifestation of the Goddess. There is a saying that reflects devotees' respect of the water, "Without bathing, no praying. Without praying, no eating."

*

Water is generous; when we know it is a living being, we recognize its kindness. How it keeps giving in many places. I see the reeds growing by the side of the road and know even when there are houses and roads everywhere, that in that spot the spring underground is still there.

*

The sky is having its dry spell.

The sea is both warm and cold. Warm currents in these times moving faster and fuller and making gatherings of cold water. The cold water, they say, could make another cold world, another ice age. All strange turns are possible now that we're in extreme, rapidly changing weather.

She Who is All is giving us this passionate relationship.

The shoreline is full of rip tides because of the sea's big waves. When you're in the rip tide, let it take you out to its whirling center. From there, you will be able to swim out from it.

I would go to the rip current's center, and then swim parallel to the yellow cliffs. That ocean, this shoreline is so much not what it was then. Now too much pavement, too many houses on the coastline. Inland waterways unable to drain out to the shore.

When I was a kid, we drove into the coastal hills, just inland from shore. We rolled up and down dirt roads, through evergreen chaparral and occasional eucalyptus groves at farmhouses. Houses mostly abandoned by then. We crossed creeks where water was still running free from east to west.

Now, in what? maybe the short span of forty years? all the ground of those mesas and hills are covered in cement, asphalt, and buildings.

Fortunately, some canyons are protected as reserves.

And here the military's landholdings are left mostly undeveloped, so they are a kind of reserve too. Strange that it is that way.

But there are the dead zones in the desert, off limits for anyone to go into, that were used for military bombing practice and now are depleted and full of ordnance. And half of San Clemente Island, near San Diego, is still being used for Navy bombing practice, and is also riddled with unexploded ordnance.

The simple question is: Why not live in harmony with earth?

What are we hearing in the labyrinth of this fast changing world? And what can we hear inside, within our individual labyrinth?

All of nature is talking the wordless language of love.

*** 11/10/14

Why think of the sea as pure? All this dumping in of our destructions. So much going in, going under. Out of sight, out of mind.

I asked the guy on the beach at the Gulf in Mississippi to watch my pack. I went into the warm water, came out coated in slimy greens and old-oozy browns. He said, No one swims here. The Miss empties everything here that it's gathered.

*

I'm told the Navy base at Ridgecrest used to store napalm.

*

Now the succulents have puffed up their leaves, the full color returns. Last night, just a short, very light rain. And now new verdant shoots of weeds and grasses, as if a dry year was just a day. We're inside the turning of sky's great power.

*** 11/15/14

Shiva, the one with beautiful hair, let Ganga/the water come down to earth, but not too fast, falling through the locks of his hair so that there wouldn't be a flood.

*

The Sanskrit alphabet is made up of vibrations of the universe, I'm told. The combinations of sounds create words that invoke harmony. Unlike English, words can be combined with other words in many ways, rearranged for particular purposes. And each part of a word is a part of all the other parts. You could call Shiva or Kali by thousands of other names.

*** 11/16/14

There are ways back to finding ourselves, our earth. It is not too late. Even in our dissolution. If God is this, then God is that, too. Sustainer, nurturing one, dissolver.

All day long, the sun was moving. We were moving, but it appeared the other way.

Birds winging up and across, settling then, then going.

In rooms without windows, how have we lost knowing where we are?

*** 11/18/14

A 2007 study in *Science* predicted that the Southwest will be in a permanent drought condition by 2050.

A 2011 report by the Stockholm Environment Institute found that drought and reduced precipitation in the U.S. Southwest could cost up to \$1 trillion by 2100.

*** 11/18/14

Crows begin calling just as the sky turns toward its apparition of light. Some greens are growing out new leaves, more leaves, hardly noticing rain or no rain.

And we just don't know all about water and drought and the mind.

I head out the door to find out more about this here. In everywhere.

*** 11/19/14

You are planet imploding and exploding, shaping and reshaping, circling and staying put.

*** 11/19/14

There is the Chinese artist Ai sitting in a replica of the prison cell, the one of the past real, this one art.

And imagining, since he can't go to Alcatraz, to the site of the installation, because the Chinese government bans his travelling, he imagines the dimensions for his installation.

It's in the mind where we travel anyway. A poem has a mind of its own.

*** 11/20/14

I was wrong about Pendleton, and probably Miramar, too, being environmentally clean because they are large military landholdings untainted by industry pollutants.

I have just learned from journalist Thomas Larson that at Pendleton, both groundwater and earth, as well as the Santa Margarita River, are polluted. Their toxins, including radioactive leachate, are spreading under and above ground. On and off base people are drinking the polluted water, and the toxins also make their way to the sea.

In Oceanside, Loma Alta Slough is polluted from "urban stream syndrome," runoff from surrounding neighborhoods. Before houses and businesses cluttered up the land, the natural flow

of both inland freshwater runoffs and seasonal and daily tidal shifts gave the former estuary, now slough, its natural circulation.

Now, unless there's big storm waves, sand bars cause toxins to collect, forming red tides and blue-green algae. Red tide is what caused the entire municipal water of Toledo, Ohio to be undrinkable this past August.

In the Pacific Ocean is an enormous area of garbage, the Garden Patch. Sometimes it has been measured as the size of Texas, other times as large as the entire United States—or more. We know that most garbage that ends up in the sea came from the land.

*** 11/23/14

He says, We make plans. We propose, God disposes.

*

Sarada Devi (Ramakrishna's widow) is sick for six months, her last days before her passing. She's crying for her brother who passed, and two days later all sorrow appears to have vanished.

She is still giving kindnesses in her last months. She won't let the devotee carry on fanning her for worry of tiring her.

She's headed out to the unmanifest, to space, to ether, and beyond. But first, she goes by way of the body.

*

Just enough rain in a night, and then two days later another night, and the arroyo toad revives its singing.

*** 11/24/14

Sitting, chanting, seeing the aviary of thoughts. It's all there, the panorama of a made-up life.

I'm walking out from yoga class, and the student says of this late November heat, I hate it. I'm from the East. I want weather. I want to wear a coat.

A huge flock, one hundred or more, of parakeets fly south at dusk.

*** 11/26/14

The chief of the U.S. Forest Service has said that climate change will likely prolong the annual wildfire season. America's wildfire season lasts two months longer than it did 40 years ago and burns up twice as much land as it did in those earlier days because of the hotter, drier conditions produced by climate

*** 11/26/14

Silver and gold grasses, pond down to its essence. The source spring and ducks all gathered in that intimacy. And the lake, crackled mud, and the west end spring revealed. And the day in another blaze of heat, no wind.

Bikers zipping along the trail, deepening the path into a V, making it more challenging to walk. Today the grinding stone was exposed. It comes and goes with rains.

Black oak is in its last yellow leaves. Lavender asters, enduring heat survivors, in rock shadows.

Having experiences.

Remembering rain.

The lightness of being.

Seeing boulder went with the uprooted tree's roots.

*** 11/27/14

New River moves north like the migrants from Cerro Prieto to the Salton Sea.

The migrants get sick from the very sick water, get here, and don't dare tell a doctor.

The maquiladores/factories near the border let their wastes into the river.

Farmland leaks its toxins. More leaks from riverside dwellers.

The New River was an old river. What it once was nearly disappeared until farmland runoffs revived it.

At the Salton Sea, the endpoint for the New River, epizootics prevail, new massive illnesses for the local and migrating birds.

*** 11/28/14

The L.A. Department of Water and Power had men pose as ranchers to buy up Owens Valley. They got the water ways. And LADWP still owns it to this day.

*

For nearly two decades, the L.A. DWP has flooded most of the 110 square mile Owens Lake bed to prevent dust storms that cause respiratory ailments. Now instead of the flooding they will dig deep furrows into the wet clay. It will save water and improve the environmental problem.

*

Yesterday, wind. Last night, a light rain. Small ground puddles. Early droopy black clouds by midmorning scuttled to the horizon. All's bright and a cold wind runs around showing its prowess.

*** 11/30/14

For five months, once a week as an experiment to test how people react to high heat, a researcher stopped her car at a green light in Phoenix. As the weather got hotter, the driver behind her honked the horn longer. Got vocal, got madder.

Violence, disease, chaos emerge from intense heat.

And solastalgia, pining for your home as you once knew it. In your same home, now changed, because of higher heat, more heat. And if you live where there are not so many trees and plants, you get even more heat.

We make with our collective bodies as much heat as a power plant.

*** 12/1/14

Maa picked up a coconut from an altar and threw it onto the temple's cement ground. Whoosh! Crack! Pieces and coconut water everywhere. She laughed.

A devotee swooped down to pick up the pieces—I wondered, would they be used for prasad? For cooking?

Then Maa dropped a towel into the mess and said, Ok, Julia!

Adaitya said later, Oh, yeah, she does that, and we've had water covering the whole floor.

*

They say today we will get a lot of rain, but for now there's the early morning blanketed in warm storm clouds.

We want to believe there will be more rain.

One year it rained so much here we could hardly keep out the weedy grasses. We cut them and pulled them, and more rain would come. In a day or two the weeds would leap up again.

*

Up north this morning, my friend was driving down Pacific Coast Highway, Ventura to Malibu to Santa Monica, and the hard rain was pulling down the fire scorched ground, blackened earth sliding into the sea just behind her, and cars were getting caught between one collapsed cliffside and another.

*** 12/2/14

In November 1973, the shack homes at Cartolandia in the Tijuana riverbed were razed. The 25,000 residents moved east and set up Tierra y Libertad.

Cartolandia is in Arroya Alamar, a tributary to the Tijuana River. Alamar used to be surrounded by farms and has become a partly cemented channel and a depository of garbage and waste. There is a remnant riparian area that will be destroyed when the canal is completed. Residents have been forced to move, land has been taken for development: the excuse to cement the river is to control flooding, but as history has shown in other parts of the Tijuana River, and the L.A. River for that matter, its real reason is about land development.

The water was safe at one time, before the North American Free Trade Agreement accelerated corporations moving in who don't observe respectful environmental practices. El Bordo, a shanty settlement west of Alamar on the Tijuana River, is at risk for numerous health problems from using the toxic water.

Further downriver is the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant that purifies the water and sends it via a pipe to over three miles offshore.

Performance artist Yoav Admoni made a performance of wrapping his body in the invasive reeds of *Arundo donax*, and walking from up river on the Arroyo Alamar, to joining with the Tijuana River, and going all the way to the sea. He wanted to bring awareness and discussion about the polluted river and the settlements along side it, they being evidence of conflict within Mexico as well as between Mexico and the U.S.

*** 12/3/14

Dangers to consider of the world's increased heat: Here in the Southwest, we will continue to get longer fire seasons and the way it's been going, most likely permanent drought. Nationally, the deer tick that carries Lyme disease will have more dry areas to thrive, and globally, because the sea level keeps rising, there will be more environmental refugees.

*** 12/3/14

12/4/14 interview with Cinnamon McIntosh, Lake Casitas Water District educator:

It's been exciting the last ten years as sources in California of municipal water have become more diversified; it's because the environmental laws are in place. In the 1950s, water was allocated from other places; it was the time of building dams. Now, no one source is depleted, and we are not entirely dependent on one source.

The drought in our region has been good. It's a wake-up call. People are thinking about where water is from, and there are new inventions, new technology to address the need for conserving water. Even toilets are changing. There's of course a lot of concern about the costs of water, so that alone makes people value water more.

Dams are being taken down, and there are more creative solutions for diversifying water sources. There are no new dams in California except for Olivenhaven.

On the downside of the topic of water here is that people have a long-lived expectation to have their yards look like Hawaii. They want ornamentals, grass, the lush tropical look. They don't see that once you use water for these types of landscapes, it's gone. In Phoenix and Las Vegas, they are promoting a localized aesthetic. The agencies there are diligently educating, conditioning the community. Where in San Diego a person would feel they were a good neighbor if you have a lawn, the lawn would be a reflection of who you are and put you in good standing, in Las Vegas, you are a good person if you have native plants that attract hummingbirds and butterflies.

Throughout the state, there is a requirement for all water districts to provide every house with a water meter. This is a big improvement because each household can monitor how much they're using. Before this requirement, Sacramento and Fresno houses didn't have water meters.

Existent dams are being made higher to collect more water. In the past, big dams and private dams were the norm, now no new dams are being planned.

Governor Arnold Swarzenager pushed for the Sites Reservoir, which would have taken up the entire Sacramento Valley, but because of controversy over species concerns, such as migrating fish, and alternative plans, it hasn't been built. Instead, the Shasta Dam was made higher which added 20% to that reservoir's capacity.

Diversification, creative solutions, and environmental laws have helped increase water resources. Lining the All-American Canal with cement has saved 10% of the water from evaporation. From the early part of the 1900s to the 1950s, industry dominated the provisioning of water without concern for environmental or local cultural impacts. The California Water Wars, Los Angeles's private businesses colluding with the City in diverting water from the Owens Valley, is a primary example. Another is the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta; those diversions began in the 1850s. By the 1970s, environmental laws began to appear, fostered by disasters, health problems, and cultural outcries. A banner law that still holds sway is the Clean Water Act.

Irvine and Orange County are using recharging aquifers with treated water.

A good example of managed clean water is Lake Casitas reservoir in Ventura County. The Los Padres National Forest surrounds it and doesn't have runoff pollutants. They made the reservoir to balance out water being used for agriculture. Eight horse ranches near the reservoir have been bought by the Bureau of Land Management as part of the effort to keep the area clean.

I stopped giving children tours of the lake in September 2103. It was so low the kids were sad and scared about running out of water. In my tour, I talk about the land, how it was a hundred years before Spain's missions were here, how it is now, and then raise the question of how it will be a hundred years in the future. Can we imagine what it will look like if we don't get much rain or even no rain? The kids could see how the lake is not its usual self, the dry lines along the banks where the water used to be. The looking escalated into feeling scared. Are we going to have any drinking water? they would ask.

My job is to educate the community. Talking to people, I find that about 10% of them really care and are doing all that they can to use water carefully. 80% don't pay attention, and the other 10% get information, but they don't care.

Many Southern California water districts are offering cash for eliminating lawns. And the Surfrider foundation is promoting an Ocean Friendly Garden program that changes the view of a good neighbor is someone who has a lawn to someone who grows natives.

In Montecito, near Santa Barbara, in June 2014, they thought they would run out of water. They made a tiered cost for water: the more water you used, the more it would cost. We may run out of water! This is big! To admit this is a very big realization. This is one of the reasons why so many homeowners are interested now in sustainable gardening.

Because the Los Angeles aqueduct goes through agricultural lands, it gets the herbicides and pesticides sprayed by planes. When that water is tested, it is tested for certain substances. They might test for 200, and maybe three of the 200 show up in the results. But a lot more might actually be in the water that are not in the range of what the test is covering.

Lake Jennings in San Diego County got closed for three months in 2003 because of the ash fall from the Cedar Fire. That wildfire, due to years of accumulated growth and no controlled burnings in the Cleveland National Forest, burned out 70,000 acres of the forest, most of Cuyamaca Rancho State Park, and half of the county parks.

The value of water can be measured by its use. If it is used once for a lawn, then the water has a low value and high cost. If it used for a home edible garden, it is essentially being used twice, its value is higher and therefore the cost is reduced—you're getting twice the value for the water. You can increase the value even more if you have low-water plants such as native grapes, elderberry, and prickly pear. In fact, prickly pear could be seen as a quadruple value since it has edible pads, a vegetable, the fruit, and both of these as well as the flowers can be used medicinally.

We can see how culture has shaped uses of land and the aesthetic looks. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1945, there were movies romanticizing the Pacific Rim such as Rogers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* and into the 60's Southern California's surf culture, as in the movie *Gidget*. Lush, tropical gardens were cultivated. In San Diego, because of its moderate climate, even earlier than the 40s, this look was being promoted by horticulturalist and landscape designer Kate Sessions in her Mission Hills nursery, and her plantings in Balboa Park and throughout the city. To her credit, she was also interested in local and Baja natives.

San Diego's bay was reformed to make a park; the water is very polluted and perpetuates the paradise problem.

Recycled water can vary widely in its quality depending on how it is processed. University of California, Santa Barbara used Galeta Water District's recycled water only to discover, too late, that the water has ruined the soil. Only grasses that can tolerate high salt levels can grow there now. Native plants that of course are adapted to the area can not grow there. It would be wise to check in a small area the effects of a recycled water. We need to promote the benefits of growing natives, how they are good for us and our land.

At my recent Native Plant Gardening class for the Casitas Water District, 89 people showed up. They were surprised when I told them to forget everything they know about gardening. I said dig a hole, don't add amendment or fertilizer, add some water, put in the plant, add water the next day, and then water only once or twice a month for about six months. After that, typically, you won't need to water at all or maybe once or twice a month, depending on the plant.

In a way, I appreciate what's been happening because of the drought. It's allowed for a media platform for people to talk about the effects of drought and what can be done with water. In my area, the Lake Casitas Water District uses 100% local water from the lake. Because people know where their water comes from, they care more about it. In so many places, people don't know where their water comes from. They aren't integrated with the land they live with. It's difficult to get media to pay attention to the problems of water when there isn't something to see.

*** 12/4/14

When Cinnamon said water is still being used for ornamental gardens, the lush look, the Hawaiian look, I told her about going on a field trip with a propagation class to a big ornamental grower. The grower had huge greenhouses of flowers and other decorative plants. All the workers, it appeared, were Mexican. In one greenhouse, it is sterile, so we had to wear white suits and hair nets, the women workers there were standing in front of two-tiered rows, working the top row by standing on small plastic footstools. It was not possible for them to move their feet, but I saw them put all their weight on one foot and later change to the other foot.

The busy season was almost over, the manager told us. Some of the workers were temporaries, he said.

The plants, too, are temporaries. They get the company's tag, a recognized big name, for the retail nurseries. You'll buy the flowers because of the colors, get them into your front yard or pots, and they'll be wilted in a week or month.

Most of the company's nurseries are in Central America. The plants are sent from there to North America and to Europe.

*

Richard Bugbee says here in San Diego County, the Kumeyaay people don't know about the ocean and shoreline resources of food, medicine, and utilities. When they stayed in the east backcountry to be away from European and American seaside settlers, they lost that knowledge and relationship with the sea.

*** 12/6/14

In the Sierras, Euro-American settlers noted in their diaries, Natives were doing controlled burnings of rotating forest areas to keep the land from being overcrowded, becoming dangerous fodder for big fires, and to make it optimum for hunting. Animals could get better forage from a newly sprouted or recovering area.

Settlers would see Natives carrying wet gunny sacks, walking their familiar trails, to lightning induced wildfire areas.

The trails were travelled from the west side, over the passes, to the east side July to October. It could take five months; the same trail would have areas of its traverse burned two or three times in a twenty year period. Travelling the trails has been going on for 15,000 years.

Home sites along the path benefitted, too, from controlled fires, giving sure passage to the site and ensuring good harvests in the area.

There are 5,000 known historical native sites in the Sierras and most are near meadows. Controlled burns have been set since 2003 at Crane Valley Meadow in the Bass Lake area. Native plants, including pennyroyal, yarrow, deer grass, and acorn have revived, along with the artesian spring.

If we look at the larger picture of the watershed, a revived meadow helps bring snowmelt down to lower elevations.

Settler John O'Neal noted in his diary the problems of the demise of Jackass Meadow in the Sierras:

*

The word "wilderness" comes from "terra nullius." It means "empty lands." This was the foundation for the Doctrine of Discovery. "Wild" and "virgin" meant a place to be taken away from the people who had always lived there. "Virgin" as in taking a woman against her will.

At the same time that Native Americans were being killed or forced into contrived assimilation schools, land was being taken.

One fifth of California's land is National Forest. But land with people who have lived or would like to live in harmony with it has not been a criteria for preservation.

*** 12/7/14

Rain! Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Light, heavy, light. But we need, according to climatologist Bill Patzert, “many storms over many years” to take us out of our drought.

*

Imported, immigrated, lodged in. The foreign, the alien, the invasive. We have to learn this land even if we were born here. Being indoors, we have been sheltered but lost. Our food coming from far away or what we grow, the seeds from some other climate, some other people and place. Once taking down what thrives here, we learn now to bring back what we can. We can harvest our own acorn and grape, even as we are on the edge of no return, yet the land is giving. Is offering us room to know its ways. The choking creek revives just by taking out the non-natives. We too, might get well again.

*

People, or at least our earlier version, lived on Santa Rosa Island, one of the Channel Islands off the Southern California coast, 40,000 years ago.

*

Juana Maria—no one knows her Native name—lived alone on San Nicholas Island (one of the Channel Islands) after the rest of her people in 1835, who were the survivors of massacre by Russian Alaskan hunters, were taken to the mainland by the Santa Barbara Mission. Sailors of the rescue ship said she had disembarked in order to get her baby son who had somehow been left behind. A sudden stormy change in the weather made it imperative that the ship leave without her. When she was found by trapper George Nidever eighteen years later, she was brought to the mission and after only seven weeks, eating the strange food, she perished.

*** 12/8/14

Sun out. Air changing by the minute. Sky going black with swaths of flat clouds and switches in a moment to cleared. It could rain. Already Northern California is floating, sinking, slipping, sliding, moving.

*** 12/10/14

Swamiji tells us, Every system, from the body to an entire society has the same four parts to its structure: intelligence, immune and defense, circulation, nutrition and elimination.

The yogis said there is a body inside another body. Five koshas/sheaths/embodiments: matter, air, thought, light, and ultimately truth/consciousness/bliss/*sat chit ananda*.

You are the universe. We are one.

Ether exists as something. Because it is named in the nine elements, we say in yoga it is one of the elements. We say each element is a part of the other elements. Joined, co-joined.

If fire is to ignite, it needs the space.

And in that space, is the imperceptible but existing oxygen.

Knowing place and my place in it: filling in the space seems real.

*** 12/12/14

Rain and wind brought down trees this week that were already fragile from the drought. 100,000 customers lost power in the San Francisco area.

*

11% of LA's water is groundwater. Just a little is recycled and the rest is from Northern California. The plan to increase local supplies includes purifying San Fernando Valley wells and using more recycled water.

*

We need more rain, lots of it, to get out of this drought. Rain and snow would need to fall every three days from this winter all the way into spring.

*** 12/12/14

When Self-Deprecation, the Afflictor of Gods, approached with pike in hand She Who Tears Apart Thought, Chandika, she swiftly pierced him in the heart with her own pike.

*

Ego fought the gods and goddesses until they were powerless. Ego took over heaven and then went to earth.

God gave Ego a wish and said he must be defeated. Ego said, Let me be conquered, then, by a woman. Because I know any woman will be too weak to win.

The gods and goddesses, then, collected their lights and made one goddess, Chandika. A pillar of fire, a column of light, an illuminated body.

*

Ganga, heaven's water, was called to earth to irrigate, to bring water to all of India.

Then the gods in heaven called her back to protect Kartikeya, the god of war, and to destroy duality.

So she left a river on earth. She was in heaven for awhile, and then she was called to earth again to bring human ashes to the sea. She is eternal and is both in heaven and on earth, purifying all.

We have to work together. She may go away, and so we need to draw her here.

*

Swamiji says, We're attached. She has enough soap to clean all our dirty laundry. Be we don't want to put it all on the line.

Questions for your teacher are fine. Your teachers give instruction, but they want you to have your own path and application of their teachings.

*** 12/13/14

I see Jesus in his small boat rowing away after talking for three days. The seekers have run out of their food, so by the third day, with what the disciples have left, some bread, a little bit of fish, Jesus prays, and the little turns into the many.

After everyone has eaten and left

he gets into his row boat and sets off alone for his private destination.

Time is of the essence. He has some work to do still before it's his time to die.

There he goes, rowing in the late day's light.

*** 12/14/14

Yucca embodying each of the gunas: creation, sustenance, and dissolution. Some in vivid, small spikey beginnings, some in full grown glory with the stalk still reaching toward sky, some papery, leaves already scattered away from its rosette center. And the stalk, too, fallen, making its body turn to earth again.

Going into the dry creek and finding the beginnings of this spring's nettle and watercress.

On the drive out today, the real thing, a partial rainbow, and soon a full rainbow. Just like that, it's in my side window, in my mirrors, and then gone, completely, nowhere to be seen.

Too much wanting becomes all wanting. I leap to what I think might be the answer to my current questions. As if I could bound across this creek's gorge. Small as it is, it is still too big.

They say we are God/dess, all is God's doing, we see and hear and breathe as divine beings, yet we don't recognize ourselves.

Rain clouds stay up in their mountain top clans and just stray drops come with wind. The rocks are glowing in the special light. Some have stories humans told, and that is one of my wishes, to know them. I look for the big grinding stones hidden in scrub, and the patches of prickly pear, the old garden plots. Am I here or back there then? What I know coming through these trails. Feeling at home and it could rain. This body part of this land's body.

The poem from it all.

I walk to pond, to lake.

All this time walking, and I have yet to arrive. And yet I have already arrived.

*

The gods descended to earth. And because Ego ruled, they collected their lights to make Chandi. She can give strength to Ego, or she can take it away. If we pray, they say, we are offering sacrifice to her, and then she removes Ego's power.

*** 12/15/14

Almond crops in the Central Valley are replacing cotton and grapes even though they take more water because their market value is higher. The growers also say that they are a source of protein that doesn't require as much water as cows. Opponents say that in this time of drought, the almond trees are furthering the lowering of the water table and the depletion of existing wells.

*

Maa says in these times, people can't see clearly, don't understand that each of us is an eternal soul living in various bodies time after time. If Swamiji is compared to Jesus, many people don't understand and they argue.

*

Now the first pinks of early morning—as if the day were a baby being born. The end of these days, too, pinks turning to red. While living in our darks, these gifts of light. If we look, we can see the world as it really is. Does it take faith?

I'm looking to see if the green hedge is in fruit, if the fruit is hidden or out. We are being called to wake up to day, to night.

*** 12/16/14

It's in a time like now, when the waves keep breaking overhead, the karmic waves keeping in place the impediments to shore, is where I'm living prayer.

*** 12/18/14

Once, I'd said I was going for all pleasure. Once, I'd said I was asking to live simply. In the center all the parts come in. You, intact, are the missing part, they say. I haven't really had to go looking, but I have followed the looking.

Even St. Joan of Arc got into tributaries: the beautiful tunics, the recant of her mission. Must I go on making inroads I have to leave? They become so clearly the wrong way. And even yet, the fool's garden grows.

*** 12/20/14

Grandmother: They should just pull themselves up by their boot straps.

Aunt: But what if they don't even have bootstraps?

Just when you're thinking—thinking being part of the pit for falling—you are doomed forever, another sky opens.

*** 12/21/14

It was light, it was Jesus, it was the holographic universe. Every ancestor in my present day genes. Every trail I have been compelled to walk. To read the page, yes, the hard copy.

It was love from me pouring out to my family. The years they could not accept it. It was of itself, before this, that.

The where
with
all.

It was aurora borealis.

Months of grey sky and little cracks of another bright sky.

Being with knowing in thought and scheme. The being being. Moving me forward. Self as soul mate leading. Love at first site.

Every soul mate love. And everyone being the one to love. Love the one you're with.

Didn't the day come? Didn't Gabriel say his name when he told Mary she would receive the Son of God in her womb?

And the years of challenges were the hard copy. The bitter bitter epic.

Didn't any scripture of any religion say this? You don't go by way of a straight light. The dream come true.

The dream that envelopes the poisoned life.

The irreconcilable mistaken wanderings.

Do I have to go that way?

Yes, for now, you have to.

The web of life.

Undone, inside me, at the seams.

Nothing is written into the damp ground.

I walk leaving prints. Up canyon, water pooling and moving, present again, moving.

Sky making fast changes. Clouds joining into black, sending off brief rains like flower petals, sky turning inside out into warm blue.

It was Mary later realizing who she is, was.

It was this body, these days, the heart within where she lives.

*** 12/25/14

By way of rain, the mountains became another world: millions of lights, sunlight glittering, reflecting in crystals of snow and ice. Another kind of stopping the mind, walking the trail in snow.

Geese come circling down to the pond, but the pond is fool's ice, dried white from the long months of heat. Frosted over, just one patch, a pit of the spring. So they circle down and cry as they flash, turn up, and point east.

Wind comes through for a brief song: are you paying attention?

Some trees give melting rains. Birds dig about in ground leaves. A blue sky frames the mountain tops, a warm, cloudless sky, as if it is not the one that brought the storm. Slopes turned into white guises.

Alaska, we're told, is warm, is warmer than any recent past, this heat is a return of the early 1900s. Yes, it's another world now.

The last part of my hike, I meet and walk with Ruby from Haiku, Hawaii. Her little boy is with her and the rest of the family is further back on the trail. She slips on the snow, lands on her side, gets right back up. She's used to it, has epilepsy. She is so grateful, she says, to be walking here; it's a beautiful, shiny day.

*** 1/3/15

Thinking the corners are made, the ties knotted, the path having start, middle, and finish, gets me in trouble. The design of living these days is bigger than that.

*** 1/4/15

Am I the apple in your eye, the thorn in your side, the leaf of the tree, a head full of quandary, a lone figure on the sunset horizon? It doesn't matter what I become or don't. Don't mind me; there's an overlap of feeling and thinking. I have the boon of being in your company. Of getting water.

*** 1/5/15

Light rain, the kind where the rain gutters are the loudest voices, air suffused with clouds (not drops). Putting on a regular coat, and being a part of the wet garden, cloud immersed day. I move some seedlings and plant more. Hope in the little acts, the true-to-life act, while also a lament song for some body pain and some lingering troubles.

And God's voice, like a little bell, next to my ear, saying, Patience.

*** 1/11/15

The proposed raising of the Shasta Dam will be devastating to upriver native Winnemem Wintu sacred sites. And downriver this winter, the Klamath River has been already at a record low which has affected the salmon spawning migration.

*

Rain and wind brought down trees that were already fragile from the drought. During the storm, 100,000 customers lost power in the San Francisco area.

*

Almond growers admit that they are lowering the aquifer but assert that meat and dairy farms require more water, and therefore, are less sustainable.

*

The Coachella Valley aquifer has not yet dropped and there has not been a mandate to conserve water. Users pay a low fee because the state does not allow water agencies to charge more than it costs to deliver the water.

*

The earthquake August 24, 2014 in Napa revealed geologic faults that no one had known.

*

The West states' land mass is lifting up because freshwater has been depleted from the drought.

*** 1/11/15

Sister Nivedita, an American devotee of Sarada Devi, said that if the Niagara Falls had been in India, people would be there to worship it, not have picnics, and a temple would be there instead of hotels.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is funding a collaborative effort of U.C. Berkeley, local nonprofits, and Klamath Basin tribes to utilize native local foods.

Sarada Devi did not encourage forcing the body to suffer in breathing, pose, and sitting practices for health or devotion. If taking a more gentle approach, the mind and body settle down naturally.

*

She typically sat with her legs stretched out in front of her because she had rheumatism. But sometimes when devotees visited her, she would sit cross-legged to encourage them in their own practice.

According to the mathematical Littlewood's Law, in the large sample of seconds per day, there are many events being experienced, you're experiencing a million in a month. And at least one miracle, the unexpected, your one-in-a million chance, is happening each month.

NASA reports that 2014 was the warmest year of the earth since 1880 when global temperatures began to be recorded.

Two kings, brothers,
went hunting
in the Nilaparvata Mountain forest.

They got very thirsty
walking.

They went farther
and farther, and did not find
any water.

Suddenly they came upon
an old woman walking with a stick.

She asked if they were thirsty
and pointed the direction to a pond.

It is where the present day Kamakhya temple is.

While they were drinking,
the older brother's ring fell
into the water.

This made them very nervous—
the older brother thought
that old woman must be a ghost!

They decided to cut short
their hunting trip and go home.

In a dream,
the younger brother
was visited by the Divine Mother
and she asked him,
When will you make
a temple for me?
And be sure to add some
gold to every brick.

When the older brother
heard about the dream,
he told the younger brother
it was just a dream.
They didn't really need
to build a temple.

One day, the older brother
was walking to the Vishvanath Temple
in Benares
when he saw the old woman
with the stick again.
She looked at him
and laughed.

When she turned away,
he started toward her
with his sword.
But she ran away,
and each time
his soldiers would get near her,
she would escape.

Then she got to the Annapurna temple.
It was locked,
She turned to the king
and said,
I'm no ghost!
Here's your ring!
I am Mother!
And in a flash she disappeared
before their very eyes.

Even though the older brother
still didn't believe the old woman
was the Divine Mother, his wife did,
and the wife told the younger brother
he could have all her gold jewelery
for the temple's bricks.

The younger brother, then,
set out to build the temple.

Yet the builder was greedy
and was stealing the gold.

No sooner had the temple
been built,
then the earth shook
and the temple crumbled.

Again, the Mother came
to the younger brother
in a dream.

She said,
My temple has fallen
because the gold
has been stolen.
Now build it again,

and be sure to add
some gold
to every brick.

*** 1/18/15