

Mamma has another misery day.

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After Ramakrishna's passing, Sarada was living in her hometown, Jayrambati. There were times when she felt she could not go on with being in a body in the earthly world, she was so sad. But she had a vision one day of a girl dressed in red, playing and moving about. Then Ramakrishna appeared and told her, Take the girl as a support and live your life. There will be many spiritual seekers who will come to you.

When Sarada's brother was dying, he asked her to take care of his mentally ill wife, Surabala. One day Surabala was walking across the courtyard, holding some quilts and her baby, Radharani, who was called for short, Radhu, was crawling on the ground behind her. The child was eating old puffed rice that was on the ground, and she was crying.

Ramakrishna appeared then to Sarada and told her, This is the girl you saw before. Take her as a support. She is your Maya.

So Sarada essentially adopted Radhu. Disciples didn't understand why she was taking care of her niece. She explained that she could "sever the attachment" at any time if she wanted to. She was keeping Radhu with her in order to keep her body on the earthly plane so that she could do the work Ramakrishna intended for her to do.

Ramakrishna used to tell his disciples that he was asking for a sweet, a smoke, or some conversation in order to bring his mind to earth, where he was called to do his life's work.

\*\*\* 3/6/17

The U.S. Drought Report is saying that last year 99% of the state was in drought. Currently, only 1% is in severe drought and 7% is in the moderate condition. 15% of the state, about 10.2 million people, continue to be in some level of drought.

\*\*\* 3/11/18

Lake Oroville is still releasing water down its main spillway. The damage at its base has been filled in with concrete.

\*\*\* 3/18/17

The Owens Valley Indian Water Commission is claiming first rights to the water in the valley, the water that was diverted by the Los Angeles's Department of Water and Power, masterminded by William Mullholland. When Harry Williams was a boy, he had found an old irrigation headgate, which started a lifelong search for information about his people's (Paiute) irrigation system in the valley. Eventually, he discovered that an army officer, Captain Davidson, in the early 1800s had written about the system, and a surveyor for the Army Corp of Engineer, Von Schmidt, in 1856 had mapped out sixty miles of the system. As a guest in a U.C. Berkeley class,

Harry talked about the Paiute's ongoing struggle to regain their water rights, and he said he hadn't been able to find the Von Schmidt maps. Jenna Cavelle, a student listening to the talk, set out to see if she could find the maps in the Bancroft Library archive, and she did. Cavelle went on to make a film, *Paya*, while in graduate school in USC's film school. An engineer, Chris Morrow, relying on the Von Schmidt maps, has been making new maps and quantifying the cubic feet of water, and this is aiding the Water Commission in their water claim.

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Knowledge of the history of the Native people of Owens Valley has been compromised from many years of traumas. In 1863, one thousand Shoshone and Paiute were rounded up by the United States army and made to walk to the relocation of their designated Sebastian Indian Reservation near Fort Tejon. The Owens Valley (called Payahuunadu) Natives had been losing their land and its resources, such as plants they would cultivate, tend, and harvest, and waterways to settlers, ranchers and farmers, and mining and logging business ventures. But many Natives returned and worked with the land in both their accustomed ways and also as employees of the ones who now claimed rights to their millenniums-old homeland. Natives throughout the region today are recovering whatever they can of their nearly-lost heritage.

\*\*\* 3/24/17

little bird saying  
it may be a mistake  
that i am

being because  
where i alight

crow comes  
to devour  
all of me

but god says  
no you stay

there's a child  
little like you

who sees you  
& laughs

there's seeds  
you're giving  
to earth

you bring song to the canyon

and yes, your feathers & bones  
will one day soon  
return to earth

& be earth

\*\*\* 3/20/17

The Big Sur coastline was hit hard by last summer's Sobranes Fire. Then the rains came and flooded because so much vegetation was lost in the fire. Due to landslides and damage, two long stretches of Highway 1 are closed to through traffic, and the Pfeiffer Canyon Bridge is being reinforced after nearly collapsing. Just the north and south ends of Big Sur's Highway 1 is open, as well as a small middle section that can only be reached by going west over the mountains via the Nacimiento-Ferguson Road from Highway 101. At least 1,000 people are out of work, and in general, the Big Sur area, which relies on tourism for its income, is in a state of emergency.

On March 22, Caltrans started demolishing the damaged bridge. The new bridge won't be done until the fall.

\*\*\* 3/27/17

Boulder is inside me and lizard. Blue sky & ocotillo. The miles to here & back. Creosote & pupfish. The plan realized, the part come undone. To begin with. To end. To continue. Becoming. Realization of a self that will ever be undone. Starting here & now.

The spring turned into creek, this creek I may never see again. Downstream is the dry creekbed.

Where I have put myself in search of. Going in moments. Wind is blowing, a cold desert spring night. Going into becoming, into that starry night. The space of it. Having been here before, this canyon.

Am I knowing some of the secret life of desert wind? Wind comes from the east, rattles ocotillo flowers, the old dried agave. The people here used to have poem-songs for all these experiences. Now, only some of the poem-songs remain.

O creek, you give us our body. You run through our days.

\*\*\* 3/31/17

Because the snowpack in the Sierras is at 164% of its average level, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power is reinforcing the aqueduct system that takes water from the Owens Valley to Los Angeles in preparation for possible flooding. Locals are unhappy that some areas are getting attention while others aren't, and the DWP's rights are interfering with tourism. Bishop's Trout Derby was cancelled because the DWP would not issue fishing rights to the Owens River,

and the system next to Manzanar National Historic Site, the WWII internment camp for Japanese-Americans, has not been reinforced.

The Owens Lake and a section of the Owens River have been getting some more water due to a legal settlement to mitigate the pollution and associated health problems that resulted from the DWP causing the lake to go dry nearly 100 years ago. The anti-dust system is expected to get damaged in the upcoming floodings. Other local and State agencies that are already involved in the system will be a part of the restoration—or redesign.

In anticipation of flooding, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti has declared an emergency for L.A. and the areas surrounding the DWP aqueduct.

\*\*\* 3/31/17

Doesn't the light appear here and here? And still I go in and out of thinking I am looking through the fence slats. Creek going strong, big oaks shading the way: if there was nothing more to write than this.

Buddhist teacher Dipa Ma, when she first started meditating, would not give up. She was in pain, crawling up the stairs, sitting. But she kept going back to the temple to learn how to go deeper into meditation.

Is it done this way or that? Follow a way in, and when you're in, you're in.

Then I was driving down to the desert. Prayed. Saw the sky change into its wonderland of stars and trace of moon.

Slept a little bit. Prayed more through the cold glittery dark and into the return of daylight. You can go past the irritation of cold and hot, they say. And I only sort of know it. You can go into the prayers, the love is all you and you are it. All these years going to desert and mountain, the corner of my room, the city's wild canyons, hills, and beaches. Going, sometimes, a little deeper into that big love. But Dipa Ma could go all night and day. And I don't know that way yet.

They had to stop Shiva from dancing. He would have kept going until all the universe had come undone.

He was holding Sati's body. She had left it to return to a state of pure disembodied union. Vishnu used his arrows to cut her body into 51 pieces.

Shiva stopped dancing. He went and sat in meditation with each piece on earth, praying for each part to reunite, to be her body, enlivened, and to give him his own embodied energy. Then they could go on giving, being with the existence of this universe, to us, to all of us.

Pema Chodron says, Pray, even nearby children going off to school and bugs get blessed by your prayers.

\*\*\* 4/2/17

A full page commentary in the *Los Angeles Times*' Editorial section by the Editorial Board regarding President Trump. They say they will be adding more commentaries in future issues regarding three main points: Trump not respecting the government and true facts, and his extreme rightwing views.

\*\*\* 4/2/17

First light and alone with the flowery trail, bird home. And snake home—their fresh marks all along the dusty way.

A little rain.

Oak catkins gathered in an eddy.

Now the sky brightens. The sprinkles are gone. Just because there's so much snow in the mountains does not mean it's time to go on as if in the old days of draining, of taking, of us forgetting.

After the rain, flowers we had not seen in years appeared along the trail.

\*\*\* 4/8/17

Nut and dairy farms raised their retail prices so that even though we were in drought, in 2012-2014 they made record profits.

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Governor Brown lifted the statewide drought emergency with the exception of Fresno, Kings, and Tulare counties in the San Joaquin Valley, and Tuolumne county. Many water conservation measures will remain in place as well as long-term plans.

\*\*\* 4/8/17

Ral Christman (Kumeyaay) sings bird songs, teaches history. He teaches that the Kumeyaay were born right here, and that their history is taught through story and song. The bird songs take a lifetime to learn. What you understand of them when you sing them as a child is different than what you understand as you get older. When he teaches history, he explains that Kumeyaay history is conveyed as cyclical events and meanings derived from experiences. It's not a chronology of names, dates, and places. And the kind of history that is taught in school is not really factual. History, he says, is really philosophical.

\*\*\* 4/2017

Sati and Shiva were living in bliss on Mount Kailash. Shiva saw Rama and Lakshman in the lowland, looking for Sita, who had been kidnapped.

Shiva told Sati, Look, look! There's Vishnu! There's Infinite Bliss of Consciousness! The living manifestation of Sat-chit-ananda/Truth-consciousness-bliss!

Sati looked, but all she could see were their friends Rama and Lakshman, two human men. She said, What are you talking about?! Those are our mortal friends.

Yes, yes, Shiva said. But remember, we can have many forms and no form. Look, why don't you go to earth and try some trick on Rama in order to reveal his divinity?

Ok, Sati said, that will be fun!

So she went to the forest where they were and she came out from behind some trees, appearing as Sita. Rama immediately recognized her true being, saying, Sati! Greetings! What brings you to these parts? Have you heard what has happened to my beloved? Is that why you're disguised as Sita?

Sati said, Oh, umm, yes, um, yes! I just wanted to give you a little comfort by appearing as Sita.

Oh! Oh, well, thank you! Where's Shiva? Rama asked.

Oh, he's back home. And really, I must go back right away. We know you're playing in this drama here, and we will keep sending you our love and blessings!

So she went back home. And she told Shiva she'd seen Vishnu, and: I never doubted you; I just wanted to play that trick.

But Shiva smiled and said, Hmm, well, you got off track from truth, but when I contemplate divinity/Vishnu/Rama, it makes me happy.

Sati's doubt weighed on her heavily, but later, in her next life as Parvati, she was able to give Shiva and earth many blessings.

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When Jesus appeared to his disciples after his body had died, they saw him, though others could not. He was appearing in his subtle, divine body.

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Swamiji says, Look at these stories! These people were like us, and they came through.

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Maa says the entire universe is her family. She can appear to a devotee even though her body is in another place. She comes also in people's dreams and through their feelings. She says when you love God, anything is possible, you can do anything. You are God, there is no difference. Her actions are God's actions.

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I am you.

When the house is built, the scaffolding is used. Later, we do not see the scaffolding.

Flowers appear that we haven't seen in years. They can live in seed or twig through the years of dry heat. And then become flower again when there's enough rain.

\*\*\* 4/15/17

The Sierras have now reached a record for this being its wettest year in 100 years.

\*\*\* 4/15/17

Water is life.

People from all over have gone to the Standing Rock Reservation to protest the plan for the Dakota Access Pipeline to be built under the Missouri River, disrupting the area's entire ecology.

\*\*\*4/16/17

The Central Valley [irrigation] project was first designed in 1904 by the Bureau of Reclamation. It went into California law in 1933, after the droughts of the 20s and early 30s. Crops of lettuce, strawberries, corn, onion, and tomatoes were planted in the San Joaquin Valley, but because of the high cost of the diverted irrigated water, much of the water was from local wells. Immigrant labor was used to keep costs down, and row crops were soon replaced with long-term, water-guzzling crops of tree nuts and citrus as well as grapes. Over the years, the water table has dropped dramatically. Also contributing to the aquifer's decline is the drilling for oil. Many old oaks stand dead on the hillsides because their roots tapped into the oil polluted aquifer.

\*\*\* 4/2017

Life begins here.

Ramakrishna says if you have a day, a few days, a week, a month, a year—go somewhere, it could be in your home, and be alone to pray. Get the nectar of love, real love. That will eventually allow you to be in the world free of the strings and knots.

Life begins here. And here. And here...

And the water falls.  
And the water moves through the grooves in earth.

For a little while like ant, here and there, I am moving, pushing seeds larger than me. What is this day's work?

In the *Chandi*, our ancient Sanskrit prayer, it says s/he will come again when there is perplexity. And drought.

Are we going in circles?

The earth will get spoiled, the water fouled, the air congested, and fire will tear around. And s/he will come again.

We get ash from the fire of our offerings—the offerings of what we've held onto, thinking it was needed. There's the ashes, the pure left from the burns. A little ash is placed on our foreheads. There where we might see from our spirit body.

God is moving through our veins and hearts. Directs and dissolves. And this world is coming undone. And being remade.

Every day I'm walking. Sitting. Simple, simple, praying.

New grasses and weeds going to brown. Heat and beetle still taking.

There are the moments of pauses. We learn to be the ones receding, to take turns being the downstage players.

We celebrate creating and re-creating. Plant the seeds. Give them water.

\*\*\* 4/22/17

Throughout Southern California urban forests, massive amounts of trees are dying due to insect invaders, including the polyphagous shot hole borer beetle, who are taking extra advantage of trees affected by the drought.

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Showers at California State Beaches have been put back into operation, after two years of being shut off in order to conserve water.

\*\*\* 4/22/2017

*Conversation with Adaityananda 12/30/16: Shree Maa was saying last night that she likes to do puja with the things. And when she said that, I thought, Maa and Swamiji are coming from*



*different places. Because Swamiji seems to prefer chanting without the things. Last summer, you and Swamiji focused on long sittings of chanting—without placing various offerings on the altar.*

Swamiji says that puja requires that you do some work in the world. There are things, materials. You have to clean it, you have to set it up, you have to get things. You have to do some work in the world. If we just do path/chanting, then we can just keep going. We don't have to contact the outside world. We don't have to do anything. When we were in Uttarkashi, we didn't set foot outside the house until we ran out of food.

But you can see why Shree Maa wants to do puja. She wants to give everyone a chance to help. People come and say, "Maa, we got these flowers for your puja, we set up this altar for you." They *love* that! And when Shree Maa sets up an altar in their house, it transforms the home.

It's easy for people to respect puja. They can see it. They can look at it and say, "We gave these things, and gave this prasad. And She gives that prasad to everyone." Puja is better for when you're dealing with the public. Everyone can contribute to the puja. For the public, they feel more empowered, even if they're not going to do the puja. They can participate by bringing prasad.

Whereas, if we're just two sadhus sitting in a house and not dealing with anyone, we don't need to have prasad. We don't need to have people to contribute to because we're just chanting along.

And Maa also said last night that God loves manas puja/mental puja, when you don't give physical offerings. Sometimes when we're driving and for some reason Maa can't do puja, you'll see Maa sitting in the back of the car, and later she'll say, "I did the whole puja today." She was just sitting in the car and doing the puja in her mind. She was visualizing making the offerings, giving the flowers.

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#### Standing Rock Indian Reservation

From April 2016 to February 2017, people from everywhere gathered to express resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline that was proposed to go through the land and under the Missouri River, to protect the drinking water for those on the reservation as well as 20 million people who live along the watershed that reaches all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. The gathering's leadership was Native and they established a non-violent stance. Although the law enforcement had at times used chemicals, rubber bullets, water cannons, and overhead surveillance, the encampment stayed in place and remained peaceful.

\*\*\* April 2017

The world splits open every moment. The moon and sun trade off, the sky I knew another sky.

Dipa Maa said all that got left in her mind was concentration, love, and peace. Sarada said she did more than she had to in her actions in order to show us a way.

\*\*\* 5/5/17

The Sierras' snowpack is now at 200% of its average. Water agencies are coordinating how to handle the expected huge amount of meltwater. The subsidence (ground sinking because the water table has dropped) in many places in the Central Valley has caused levees to become much less reliable if there is flooding. Also, gopher and squirrel holes that have proliferated during the drought have weakened many levees. After the levee devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, federal standards were changed which makes it possible for funding to renovate the 100 year-old levee system in California. But the funds have not yet been released. Farmers and local water districts are doing what they can independent of the needed federal funding, sacrificing crop fields to move more dirt into the levees. And lower revenue crop areas are not eligible for any of the new federal funding. Warm rains or heat waves could set off a flooding that is predicted to take out many crops.

\*\*\* 5/4/17

At the beginning of our kirtan/group singing last night, Maa said Swamiji was now doing eight hours of sadhana/praying and "dissolving" at their other home in nearby Fairfield, and he didn't want to come to the ashram any more. He wants to "dissolve" it (she used that word again).

For many years now he's been asking disciples to propose a plan for taking over his administrative responsibilities and for creating ways to generate the operating revenue. But he has not been satisfied with any proposal that has been offered. He grew up in a family business and went to law school, so he knows a thing or two about what is needed to run an ashram. He has kept the Devi Mandir afloat beyond donations by tradings in the stock market.

Maa said they would sell the ashram property and give away the altar statues, or if nobody wants them, "dissolve" them (the third time she used that word). She and Swamiji had made the murtis/statues with mud from the Napa River.

She said she is sad, but this is what Swamiji wants now. They also have to move out of the Fairfield house that someone had donated to them because it is going to be sold. She's been praying for maybe getting the house next door, but it is not available.

She said they will still travel, and we can travel with them. We don't know what is next for us as a "family." She said, Don't worry. God will show us what's next.

\*\*\* 5/7/17

Oroville Dam's main spillway had been evaluated by a panel of engineering experts to identify why it was damaged in the heavy rains of this past winter. They found 24 problems and say that the 1960s design is outmoded for current standards and needs.

\*\*\* 5/11/17

Marta Becket was camping with her manager/husband in Death Valley in 1967 when they discovered their trailer had a flat tire. They went up to Death Valley Junction to get the tire fixed. When Marta walked around the little town, she discovered an abandoned old theatre. She ran back to tell her husband. They imagined leaving their New York City home to live in Death Valley Junction, and they would renovate the theatre where Marta could present her unique ballets. And their dream came true. She gave her first public performance in their Amargosa Opera House in 1968 at the age of 43.

Over time, she painted the walls and ceilings with characters so that whether she had a live audience or not, she would have someone to perform for. She created every part of her performance—choreography, music, and costumes. Eventually, her husband lost interest and began having affairs. A handyman, Thomas Willett, came one day in 1983 to make repairs, and her husband left never to return. Thomas became her friend, and she decided to have him be a kind of vaudeville silent comedy man in some of the dances of each night's performance.

She also renovated a part of the hotel, offered some of her acreage for the non-profit Wild Burro Rescue Organization, and developed relationships with the local wandering wild horses.

She stopped performing in 2012, but continued to be involved in the operations of on-going guest performances and to be in attendance in the audience. She turned the theatre and hotel into a non-profit organization so that it could continue beyond her life, and in January 2017 she passed at the age of 92.

Her story is such an inspiration. Sometimes we just have to do what we're called to do, even if it is different from others, be the little rivulet, off from the main stream.

\*\*\* 5/13/17

What should frighten you, Sarada Devi said, as long as I, your Mother, exist?

When a disciple of Sarada could not complete a fast, she would do her own fasting and let that merit be applied to the disciple.

The sky goes on changing today hour to hour. It looks like it might have rained in the night.

While we were sleeping.

\*\*\* 5/14/17

A little girl tells me, I will be in first grade next year. It's the first time in my whole life I'll be in first grade.

Summer heat, the searing of the the last wild green grasses in the canyon. Impossible for us to go unscathed.

\*\*\* 5/21/17

Mud Creek ravine had been rattling with underground water draining from the mountain, and on May 20, the mountainside let loose a one and half million ton landslide that covered Highway 1 for a third of a mile and extended out 250 feet into the ocean.

This spring's Big Sur storms have caused the closure of Andrew Molera and Julia Pfeiffer State Parks.

The 40 mile stretch of the highway from Ragged Point to the former Pfeiffer Canyon Bridge will now be further delayed in reopening.

The coastline was primed for rain erosion by last summer's Soberanes Fire. Because the area was so dry from the drought, it was a tinderbox, and the land is so rugged it was difficult to contain. The fire burned from July to October, taking over 132,000 acres, including reaching up into Carmel Highlands.

\*\*\* 5/27/17

6/2/17:

President Trump announced on Thursday, June 1 that the U.S. would not continue its agreement to be a partner in the Paris international accord to slow global warming.

President Obama said: Even as this [Trump] administration joins a small handful of nations that reject the future, I'm confident that our states, cities, and businesses will step up and do even more to lead the way, and help protect for future generations the one planet we've got.

Syria and Nicaragua had not signed the agreement. Nicaragua wanted stronger measures, binding caps on emissions and penalties if a country did not meet them.

As part of the agreement, the U.S. and other wealthier nations would be aiding developing countries adhere to the regulations. Trump argues that those funds would be better spent in the U.S.

Jean-Claude Junker, European Commission President: The Americans can't just get out of the agreement. We tried to explain this in clear, simple sentences to Mr. Trump. It looks like that attempt failed. Not everything written in international agreements is fake news.

Florida Representative Carlos Curbelo, who has been dealing with his constituents' problems of flooding associated with rising tides and increased storms: A strategic mistake and something that really sets us back. Down here in South Florida, we understand that the environment and the economy are one and the same.

California Governor Jerry Brown: California will resist this misguided and insane course of action.

California, Washington, and New York governors form a United States Climate Alliance to help states achieve the Paris agreement measures.

50 U.S. mayors announce they will continue to move forward with the goals of the agreement.

General Electric chief executive Jeff Immelt: Disappointed with today's decision on the Paris Agreement. Climate change is real. Industry must now lead and not depend on government.

Head CEO of Tesla, Elon Musk, and Chief of Walt Disney Co., Robert Iger in protest withdraw from the White House advisory council on manufacturing.

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6/3/17:

Michael Bloomberg, former New York City Mayor, special envoy for cities and climate change to United Nations: The American government may have pulled out of the agreement, but the American people remain committed to it—and we will meet our targets.

Bloomberg is a billionaire. He is donating the \$15 million the U.S. is pulling out of the agreement.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti: Cities and states are already where most of the action on climate is. Our message is clear to the world: Americans are with you, even if the White House isn't. Trump's move is going to have unintended consequences of us all doing the opposite of what the president wants. It will in many ways backfire.

Pittsburgh mayor Bill Peduto: Trump's misguided decision to withdraw from the Paris climate agreement does not reflect the values of our city.

New York mayor Bill deBlasio, on June 1, visiting an area of Brooklyn destroyed by the recent Superstorm Sandy, and hearing of the agreement withdrawal: All that occurred in that superstorm was because of climate change. We've already borne the brunt here in New York City. It's only going to get worse if something is not done quickly to reverse the course the earth is on.

\*\*\* 6/3/17

Swamiji:

The past exists as a present recollection.

The future exists as a present projection.

The present is the here and now reality.

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Some of Ramakrishna's monks, after he passed, would only visit Sarada occasionally. They led quiet lives and felt her blessings deepening within themselves without having to go see her.

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She would accept all seekers who came to her.

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This radical disassembling of our ashram has, in a way, happened before. Shree Maa and Swamiji moved out of the Martinez ashram because too many people were coming there who wanted Maa and Swamiji's blessing but didn't want to do any of their practices. Maa and Swamiji purposely moved up into the hills of Napa, out of town, and gated the entrance to make it more challenging to get to the temple.

But now, hearing that Swamiji wants to dissolve the property and that Maa is sad, it seems to me that it may be that this is also like how it was with Ramakrishna and Sarada in terms of how they viewed seekers. Ramakrishna had only a small circle of disciples with him, and Sarada, after Ramakrishna's passing and as she became recognized by more and more people, was visited by many and welcomed all. Now Swamiji is rarely going to the temple grounds, preferring to stay at their Fairfield home. When I visited in January, people were dropping by unexpectedly, and Maa was finding time to talk to them. I talked to a man who had driven up from L.A. He is interested in making a documentary about Ramakrishna. And although Maa was very busy, she let him come to see her in her little house, and she talked with him a short while.

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Sarada told a story of people going to a little lake to bathe. And when they would get out of the water, they would rub their feet on a particular stone, to rub the dry skin off. A jeweler came one day and saw the stone, realizing it was a large diamond. Though many people may have heard of or seen her, she said not many recognized her as a saint.

\*\*\* 6/3/17

Summer, then. How will it be—the aftermath of the winter's rains?

Dragonfruit climbs up and now has reached over the fence. Wild cucumber lacings on canyon sumac.

Sticking in my mind, Pema's advice: Little irritations, lightweight gossip, a bit of slander—catch it, nip it in the bud. Being a seeker, do others feel like I do, seeing the trippings, you feel something like Pinocchio, growing warts despite our best intentions. Catch hostility, she says, and petty mindedness.

I sit and pray and all's well. And then in the world, tricklings everywhere of our meanderings. The respite of well-being in seeing us as is, beings of water. It will not stick, the so-called bad. Roshi Joan Halifax found compassionate ones living on death row.

Once again, circled on to another grey sky.

We can't help but live with this earth, it's how it is. Packaged deal.

Going to where I am ever going. There to another there, and clearly, beyond it is endless. So why worry? Here is the way.

While she was working and in graduate school, Dipa Ma's niece meditated at night, walking her dog for an hour, sitting for an hour, and in the morning for an hour and a half. After three weeks, Munindra, Dipa Ma's teacher, asked her to come for a retreat. But she could only go for Thursday through Sunday, so he said that's fine. Feeling the press of her limited time, she started meditating Thursday night and kept going all the way into Friday night. At one a.m., she felt "something went wrong," felt different. When she told her mom and Dipa Ma the next morning, they told her she had gone to the first stage of enlightenment.

When you respect your actions, Maa and Swamiji say, it's your spiritual practice and your meditation.

Grey and nearly noon. A little wind. Crows gathering in the silk oak, down to ground, back up into tree, then sky-clattering calls, who knows if it's happy or not.

And the next moment, they are gone.

\*\*\* 6/4/17

A disciple has had cancer off and on for six years. It goes away then shows up in other difficult forms. I asked Swamiji how we could view this. He says:

It is my belief that our love for God does not alter our past karma. It changes our present, so that we have an even more brilliant future to which to look forward. It changes the way we respond to our present, accepting the past karma with equanimity, and by not creating greater negativity for the future.

In prolonged illness or other adversities, we see those who are devoted to God are able to maintain an attitude of peace, even though they face overpowering obstacles. They surrender to the inevitable with the faith that to grieve over what must come to pass is as foolish as to idly accept that which is not necessary, and they conquer the attachments of the ego by giving their all to those they love.

We are free from attachment, no longer bound, focusing on the Goddess as the source of strength and inspiration. If there is outstanding karma, I will experience that karma, but I will not forget the divine in all, my love for God.

\*\*\* 6/4/17

Hawaii Governor David Ige signed a law June 6, 2017 that will help reduce greenhouse gas, and protect wetlands and forests, as well as announced its commitment to the U.S. Climate Alliance. He also signed another bill that creates a Carbon Farming Task that will promote sustainable agriculture. In Hawaii, he says they are seeing firsthand the dramatic on-going effects

of climate change: tides rising, tidelines eroding, roads flooding, coral bleaching, and harsher weather.

\*

The Environmental Protection Agency announced June 6<sup>th</sup> that they are extending for a year the the deadlines to reach emissions standards that would improve air quality. The California Air Resources Board says they will keep on track with their efforts to reduce pollutants.

\*\*\* 6/7/17

Former FBI Director James Comey who had been fired by President Trump, gave his testimony at the Senate Intelligence Committee, June 8, 2017.

Trump had fired him on the grounds that the staff and organization were not being handled well. “Those were lies, plain and simple. I am so sorry the FBI workforce had to hear them. And I am so sorry the American public was told them.”

Trump had tried to influence Comey in private meetings to stop investigating possible Russian interference with the 2016 U.S. elections. Comey was writing memos in order to keep a record of the conversations. He told the Committee, “I was honestly concerned that he might lie about the nature of our meetings.”

\*\*\* 6/8/17

California Governor Jerry Brown has been in China promoting green energy agreements as part of his Under2 Coalition, an international environmental agreement to make efforts to keep the global temperature below 2 Celsius. “President Trump’s announced withdrawal [from the Paris Accord] has heightend the focus on this fundamental existential threat called global warming, called habitat destruction, called species extinction. We have to wake up our countrymen, in fact, the world.”

\*\*\* 6/8/17

A developmentally delayed woman came to Dipa Ma’s apartment and asked to learn how to meditate. Ma said, Notice your breath, rising and falling.

Ma lived up four flights of stairs. The woman went down two flights and couldn’t remember the teaching. So she went back and asked again.

She headed down the stairs once more—she lived in an apartment across the alley—but lost the teaching again.

All tolled, she returned four times to get the instruction. She applied her attention to her breath, for a year having difficulty understanding how to do the practice. But she kept at it, eventually



finding not only the focus and peace she'd heard practitioners talk about, but also that she could stand up straight again after years of being bent over from arthritis and intestinal trouble.

\*

Little leaf does not speak. Moves with wind and scrapes the ground, making that kind of song.

One day, all the homeless camps in the park were cleared by volunteers. Later that day, a man looked through the pile for something he'd lost in the sweep.

Small birds, some with blue feathers, some with yellow, move from tree to tree.

Moon all bright and briefly appearing in the parting coverlet of clouds.

\*\*\* 6/10/17

A friend was going to go to the New Camoldi Hermitage in Big Sur for her annual retreat, but she had to cancel. Just north of the monastery the downed Pfeiffer Bridge is being replaced and just south is where the big landslide is. A bulldozed road is open over the landslide for an hour in the morning and at 4:00-5:00 in the afternoon, allowing only residents to drive in and out. They hope to be able to allow visitors in mid-July.

\*\*\* 6/13/17

The California Division of Safety of Dams has sent out letters ordering 100 water flood control districts to do comprehensive safety assessments of their dams.

\*\*\* 6/15/17

Wind runs in from the canyon, drying lettuce and laundry. More good composted earth must be added to ground to make zucchini.

Sarada said for those of us who are monks, while we are on the slippery road of this world, we should walk on tiptoe.

\*\*\* 6/17/17

I don't get closer or maybe I do without noticing. Years in the making, in the refinery. Or, as Ramakrishna says, In the lunatic asylum, says, God, you are the epitome of lunacy!

Maybe not ever closer except in how I see—sometimes. Outside the fence, so many thistle weeds.

Now elder blossoms and green berries. The bird that sings through the night not always here. Prakriti/nature is without feeling, but is love, Swamiji says.

How do I comprehend that?!

She has passed at last, our dear disciple sister who braved the travails of cancer through her body for years.

Let the sky speak in colors and clouds. Here's all the poems.

A river is. A clearing by the oak is.

Prayer come to life.

In her '46-'47 *Prayer Journal*, Flannery—what a name—asked to be a mystic. Asked if she could be a good writer, and that the story of God's love could come through.

She was to be so bold as to ask. I've figured better to put the pen to paper and be grateful for whatever comes in.

Now sun going past its noon high, and now the heat phasing out the sea gauze that had come inland.

I sit longer in meditation and still mind travels. In truth, Swamiji says, it goes on moving even when we find the stillness of union.

In these real stories: Squirrel is down in the canyon, cheeping a defense of its territory. The neighbors splitting up feels like a rent in the fabric, but that weave is not mine to keep, I have never owned. I am clearing stuff out of my rooms, and more will come in if I don't look out.

I don't have the meditation practice down as prescribed. This love leads. I keep going outside. Everywhere, a free world.

\*\*\* 7/1/17

In Tulare County, The Kern River is full of fast-moving cold Sierran snowmelt. Eight people have drowned. Because of the dangers, the Kings and Tule rivers are closed for access.

\*\*\* 7/5/17

Sky crinkled with clouds. Next day a frosted pane of haze.

Up before bird song. And somewhere along the night's ticking, one bird gets going with the tunes, calling out to the hidden and rising sun.

\*\*\* 7/7/17

Governor Jerry Brown at the Group of 20 [world leaders] in Hamburg, Germany announced a plan for working together to protect the global environment.

\*\*\* 7/7/17

James Baldwin: People can't bear their reality.

Wanting pleasure, wanting painless moments inside and outside.

Butterfly comes in, alights briefly, and goes on.

June bug on my arm.

Clouds getting jagged and anything could happen. Wind now crisp hot, now humid, moving in and out from any direction.

\*\*\* 7/8/17

Because of the years of drought, the fish in Southern California lakes and reservoirs are much smaller than their usual size, disappointing anglers. Throughout California, snowmelt is making rivers too deep and the currents too fast for safe fishing. Many higher elevation lakes are still frozen or just thawing.

\*

Record heat this weekend. And large wildfires forcing evacuations: Alamo Fire in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties and Garza Fire in Kings County.

\*\*\* 7/8/17

Clouds pulled together enough to let down a little light rain.

The miracle of this summer is here. Lake and pond brimming, lily pads. On the surface, the dance of water rings from the underwater thrivers.

dragonflies finches jays

milkweed bladderpod pine cones

Little dog growls, it's a puppy, the hikers tell me; I'm just the start of more people that she'll see.

Cows in the lush meadow and this time, the lake no longer scoured dry, they stand in the water.

The blessed water.

Why not see the good now?

And say thank you.

\*\*\* 7/9/17

Although the snow and rain brought the blessings of breaking the long drought, they also increased the fast-growing and fast-drying grasses and shrubs that are susceptible to igniting quickly given any fire source. The U.S. Forest Service could be putting money and labor into prescribed burns and other effective ways of thinning and managing the overgrowths, but instead the resources go primarily towards fighting massive fires caused by the many years of unchecked, overgrown zones.

\*\*\* 7/9/17

Inyo County is using an eminent domain claim in order to regain land and water ways that were bought by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, by agents posing as farmers and ranchers, in the early 1900s. The county will pay fair market value for holdings. The DWP has a long history of keeping their sovereignty throughout the Owens Valley. Recently: When the Lower Owens River was partially restored with released water, reeds flourished and in their flourishing began blocking the flow of water. But the DWP did not agree to manage the problem when requested by locals. In another hostile instance, the DWP told ranchers—during the drought—in 2015 that they had to reduce their use of water by more than 50%--and they gave them a 48-hour notice. The DWP backed down when Inyo County said they would file an injunction citing that their water agreements were being violated and the reduction would wipe out the local economy.

\*\*\* 7/13/17

The Tioga Pass Lodge, built in 1914, built on the eastern edge of Yosemite National Park, has been severely damaged by the heavy snowpack. It won't be able to be restored for this year's tourists. Campgrounds throughout the Inyo National Forest have been impacted with damage to water lines, bridges, roads, etc. Campers going to open land areas, because of the closed damaged campgrounds, are creating other problems with unpermitted fires and rescue emergencies.

Fearing that the snowmelt would overcome the Rush Creek Hydroelectric Project and its three reservoir lakes, Southern California Edison had built this past spring twelve water pumps near the plant. They are working well, providing the necessary control of the release of water.

And some really sweet news: Mono Lake is up 2 ½ feet.

\*\*\* 7/16/17

Cooler in town. Heat impressed into the mountains. But cloud clans and whitewashes, and now blessed breeze roam about.

\*\*\* 7/16/17

Dipa Ma says: Too much luxury gets in the way of your practice. What do you need so many shoes for? Why have ten boxes of tea? Living a simple life is good for everything.

\*\*\* 8/6/17

From my ashram's website: The Devi Mandir is closed as we prepare to move from Napa.

\*\*\* 8/10/17

The water comes through and goes. Live and live long as ant and snail, as turtle. To go on, slowly, slowly, changing.

Dipa Ma said she didn't know anything about meditation when she started. And she used to want things. But once she progressed in her meditation practice, she could simply be in the present, living. And it felt like enough.

\*

A roof and rooms.

The water comes from the mountains into these pipes.

Comes from cloud.

The cloud covers the moon, then moves. Returns again.

The rubble of the world  
collects moves crumbles

is swept away by wind.

\*\*\* 8/12/17

Sarada says: Think of God or Ramakrishna.  
Sometimes, she admitted, Think of me. Think of any saint or any form of God.

\*

Days of the body in its sojourn of healing from eye surgery. One-eyed and dancing. Nothing that must be done. Cloistered in the least hot of the hot rooms, lying on the floor, paused in yoga angles. Now the slow, very quiet breath, the inner rhythm of mantra. Nothing that must be done.

But the tap tap pull to go on praying in all the doing and resting.

Do I do enough? No! I have to think of Valmiki, the thief and murderer, who could only say Mar when a guru told him he could repeat Ram in order to make amends. He did this in earnest and

ended up coming through his bad legacy to write the Ramayana. If the thief and murderer came through, maybe maybe I'm being refined too.

\*\*\* 8/13/17

Summer dust coming in the room with hot wind and baby lizard who is in the kitchen.

\*

They had to catch the water—when they created land here, Tu-chai-pai, The Maker, and Yo-komat-is, his brother, they had to make mountains and hills so water would be brought down and make valleys and gullies where it could collect. For the first people who were coming.

\*

Leaves so green in these simmering days.

\*\*\* 8/18/17

Ramakrishna: It's sweet to be in devotion.

Once you've touched this, all else pales. I guess surprising my friend when she said, But what do you like to do that's fun?

And I said, This *is* fun.

\*

The land here was being planted with native plants and harvested, and purposefully burned to clear and cultivate. Rocks and trees were placed to bring rainfall to gathering spots. Springs rose up and were nurtured. They in turn gave water to the people through the seasons, and through the circulatory droughts.

Most of those springs dry now.

\*

Dipa Ma:

I'm moving

with meditation

What I have to do

I do

They aren't problems

Unnecessary gossip or visiting

I don't do

Do laundry Do dishes  
Help your family and neighbors

Make it all  
meditation,  
your path

Follow  
your path

with your heart

\*\*\* 8/19/17

All the women and men dressed from the waist down and went topless in the old days of India. You see how it was in the sculptured walls of temples.

When the Moguls came into India from Afghanistan, they brought their rule that any woman who wasn't covered was open for attack. The Indian women had to comply in order to be safe.

\*

Rishis were from the beginning of humankind seers of the divine. They would be with us forever. Now, Swamiji says, most are not out and known; as the days have darkened, as the Kali Yuga time period has progressed, most rishis, though they move about us, turn inward.

\*

He had become a teen preacher. He didn't want to go the route of most kids: junkie, pimp, or thief. But James Baldwin was still conflicted. His church said white people were all devils. But a white teacher would take him to movies and plays and share books with him. And a best friend, Emile, was a white Jew.

Emile knew how much James was suffering. James had eventually realized he didn't believe his church and its ways, but he was afraid to walk away from it. Emile wanted to help him, so Emile told James to meet him at the library on Sunday. Emile would have two tickets for a play, and if he didn't come, they would not be friends any more. And Baldwin knew, but he couldn't say it aloud to his friend, could hardly admit to himself, that he would have to do what he did best, be a writer. Which would also be difficult.

In that time, it would be nearly miraculous if he found his way of earning his income from writing.

He went to the play with his friend. And he went on to writer searing sentences to get underneath the lulling lies about race, and class, and sexuality that Americans have been spellbound by.

\*

Yellow butterfly  
The rare passing by

See out

It points  
to in

Let's see  
where we'll go

with this time

\*\*\* 8/20/17

1542 Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, coming from Spain, arrives in what is now called the San Diego bay looking for fresh water. Claims the area for Spain and then leaves.

1602 Sebastian Vizcano finds "sweet and good water" near the San Diego river. And then he leaves.

1769 Gaspar de Portola's expedition party, coming by foot from Baja California, and exploring the interior, has difficulty finding water. The Kumeyaay guide the party to their pools and springs and storage pots.

Junipero Serra arrives by ship and the crew is starving and dehydrated. The Kumeyaay bring them fish and drinking water.

\*\*\* 8/25/17

Yes, I get irritated, Dipa Ma says, but my mind stays cool.

And you could be mad, Swamiji says. You could say, Why is this happening to me?! You could be mad at karma. Or you could look at what is happening as a chance to dance with divine love.

\*\*\* 8/26//17



Dr. Masuro Emoto tested how vibrations affect the frozen shapes of water crystals, using written words, images, music, and spoken prayer. All the good and peaceful vibrations make intricate snowflake shapes. All the negative vibrations make dark, asymmetrical blobs.

City tap water and bodies of water near cities have deformed crystals. Water in the wilds and distilled water make beautiful crystals.

\*\*\* 8/27/17

Record heat throughout California. Also high heat, high pressure throughout Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona. It has made Hurricane Harvey stay in the Houston area, pulling up water from the Gulf and pouring it down.

\*\*\* 9/1/17

She came in, ferocious monster, flooding the Texas coast. Moved on up to Houston, tore levees. Swirled garbage and the hidden all into one. And chemical plant exploded, adding its poisons. Little boats row in to bring drinking water, to bring people out.

\*

Sky cleared to a hot stamp, pressed in and down here. Water poured out of my body.

I found my body would not sit on and on. It would take heat. It would take no wind. And body ache. But illumination must be approached bit by bit.

Dipa Ma said yes, she got sleepy, she would even sleep standing; there would be the mind stories; there might be visitations.

She said, Keep going.

Swamiji: I'm not going to transcendent heaven. It's immanent. I look for it in my mind. Here.

Then I would stay as long as I could. Then be kind to my body and get up for a short while. Give up the bigger way. Go, as St. Teresa said, the little way. Go, then, all the way to heaven is heaven.

\*

And once the two days of sacrifice had been given, when the early morning was still the middle of the night, in a new round of prayer, furnace wind came in the wide open windows, made river-like music in the leaves.

And then morning light showed sky gone fickle with grey blotches. Wind become staccato, rushing in and going invisible.

First the smell of rain. Then the rain. Enough to turn the ground, all of it, other colors. And the canyon—the returned wind as carrier!—going sweet.

\*

The wall is not finished.

You could walk back and forth across the border from Jacumba and Jacumbe, but not now. Now the patrol stops you.

Half of U.S. farmworkers are undocumented. While you are working, you may wait many years to become legal.

The angels take gallons of water to the desert trails, pull out the mean-hearted slashed bottles.

You're dying one way or another. You may leave home where everyone is being killed. Take a chance at making it through the line of one country and another. To get even near. And all the other ways you could still not make it.

\*

James Baldwin, when he was a young man, worked at a Black-owned restaurant. He would go to the Italian restaurant down the block to have a bite to eat, but they would not let him in. Because he was Black. This was New York City, Greenwich village, 1945.

Then one day they let him in. The only black person eating there, he would sit near the front window.

One day, some out-of-town whites came by and saw him, and they started yelling, making threats. The restaurant manager locked the doors, turned off the lights, and everyone went to the very farthest back rooms. They waited a couple of hours before they came back out.

\*\*\* 9/3/17

In the Verdugo Mountains just north of Los Angeles, the La Tuna fire has ravaged over 5,800 acres, one of the largest wildfires in L.A.'s recorded history.

\*\*\* 9/3/17

8.1 earthquake hits Mexico, leveling towns throughout Oaxaca.

\*\*\* 9/7/17

Hurricane Irma, the largest storm every recorded for the Atlantic Ocean, is devastating the Caribbean. 90% of Barbuda has been destroyed.

In North Dakota and Montana they have had a “flash drought.” The high heat in one month destroyed the crops.

\*\*\* 9/7/17

U.C. San Diego sues the Trump administration for ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. U.C. President Janet Napolitano, who had formerly been the secretary for U.S. Homeland Security, says the rescinding of the DACA harms students who are contributing to society and the economy.

\*\*\* 9/9/17

It rains, it's hot. The sky pulls across from the East's hurricane to let down rain here.

The earth shuddered and rattled, destroying villages in Mexico.

You go step by step, Swamiji says, to samadhi. And when you step into that eternity, you come back. You walk on. There's so much to do and pray for.

Sometime we have to step aside our day-to-day distraction, we filter the unseen dragons. Go part way by our own secret mission.

And island villages are immersed in hurricane flood.

Be catalyst from this temporary comfort zone. To touch others' pain might be going to Mars. I circle back to: It's the same sky. It's one body. Wind is air we are all breathing. What is there to give if it is not really mine? What is there to keep?

Acorns stored in the tree trunk will not all make it into jay's belly in winter. Squirrel and beetle will get some.

Two butterflies circling.

So often, I wasn't able to make change go my way, the way I wanted. But here I am, having journeyed on some goodness within me to get to here. Never mind my faults. The sky did not keep a record. We are loved by God: we the least likely and last, the ones far behind, hidden, lagging, who go on loving in the midst of turmoil and delights.

Today water falls from the sky. Makes a terrible mess there, music and the green here.

\*\*\* 9/10/17

The Eagle Creek Fire in the scenic Columbia River Gorge area of Oregon and Washington has so far burned 33,000 acres. It started on September 2 when some teenagers set off some firecrackers.

\*\*\* 9/10/17

Eastern Sierras

Puffs and tails of storm clouds, later sky scraped to all blue.

Now up in my favorite canyon, the creek dry three years ago now running. I use an aspen stick to help me balance crossing on logs. And more creeks—they swirl and bubble, rush and meander. Where there had been thin cascades, thundering falls. Islands of sludge in the lakes, beaver homes.

Wind returns, styling the cleared day.

Water ouzel dips, monkshood flowers. Nearly all the wildflowers gone to wind and water currents.

Timeless here

Fluttering aspen, last night's colder night, they only now begin to yellow.

Clouds collect and depart up in the peaks.

Careful hiking up the rocky parts of the trail. Yesterday two handfuls of hikers. Today, just two trekkers. I return to this place years and years. Stories drain off. Spirit life is here. What will the poem be? Riches in the dark clouds wreathed in silver and gold. Spirit life is not so much puja or walking mantra meditation. Not reading vedic translations. Or what the teachers say. When you go under all these surfaces, you see wherever you are is the moment's experience. Sometimes in the "real" world, sometimes up high and down under.

And so I have been going somewhere all this time. And it is all the same place I am visiting. I have been here before. To go is to return.

Sun goes past my past and future. Rising, setting, circling.

\*\*\* 9/15/17

Maybe it's not so much that I've changed as how I see, perspective, perception.

Aspens lying on their sides brought down by winter's snow. Glinting creek and lakes. Clouds form and reform, billows of light and possibilities of pools of water.

Every day I'm stronger going up the steep parts of trail.

It's not too late for some wildflowers.

Not someone here. Happy to be anonymous.

Rabbit bush beams in the dusk.

I'm hearing, Nothing that you have is yours; your family, your house, anything you are doing.

It's all going. It is earth and sky.

Last light ringing black bottomed clouds.

\*\*\* 9/16/17

Still great gatherings of snow on the peaks; they will not melt before next winter. I can't begin to fathom the great amount of water passing down these mountains and into the desert plains.

Why crave to be closer to God? I climb up the trail, go in and out of layers of this self, these mountains. Cascade, juniper, cicada.

Little ant out on a pebble on the edge of the creek, slowly looking for its way to shore. Antanae touching water, other pebbles. Makes wrong turns, reaches the dead ends, keeps looking for a way. And makes it.

Watercress in bloom. None in the speeding meltwater but on the sandbar.

Light haze and the smell of smoke drifting in from the south, from another place.

Spirituality, Maa says, is being gentle, loving, kind, and honest.

In camp, creek, my kitchen sink, easy to get to. Windbreak of aspens.

I hike to a certain creek, sit next to it as I have so many times before. Bright little mirrors dancing. Clear deeps in motion.

Saraswati, Ganga, here.

Two years ago, no water, but I knew how it had been and would be again.

There's a cadence of place. You stay long enough, you sit with it, you can't help but hear it. Some disturbances of then, not now, surface, but paying it no mind, it goes. Sage like any sage and pennyroyal. But being with them, find treasure. This year, no juniper berries. Yes, rosehips. Aspen, laughing leaves, where there had hundered years ago been pine.

\*\*\* 9/17/17

In 2009, when archaeologists were surveying the Owens Lake for the L.A. Department of Water and Power's dust mitigation project, they discovered evidence of a massacre of Paiutes that

happened in 1863. A recent rain had exposed cavalry uniform buttons, muskat balls, and bullets as well as Paiute bones, a grinding stone, volcanic chert and glass fragments from tool-making, and other artifacts. Paiutes have told the story through the years, but they lost the evidence when the ranchers and LADWP took their land.

\*\*\* 9/17/17

Falls, cascades, an old little dam, rocks that traveled to here. None of the dwellers out of place though moved by wind and water. What I can't foresee, what goes awry, I go with. You learn to go like creek over the rocks. And remember the ones who are suffering.

When I kvetch out loud, the angst of those sounds reverberate. Better to practice patience, which is peace, which is, I'm told, also faith. Better to be water dipping and rising with the changing surfaces. Inside this body, what is there? What is there to keep?

It's cold at night? Do what I can. So many days I was imagining being here again. Light here so mystical. Mountains, lakes, creeks, cascades transcendent. A painter at the edge of a meadow says to me, It's all bliss!

Linda Gregg had flown out from New York city to read some poems at the L.A. Festival of Books. She said when she stepped outside of the airport that she felt the light and air lift her, she said it is not anything like New York.

The water of Mono Lake was medicine for the Mono people—to bathe in it and to drink it. Do they now use it?

Clouds make such a show, coming and going quickly, shape shifting.

\*\*\* 9/18/17

Smoke comes in from the west and in an instant is cleared.

I heard that mid-summer, the smoke coming over the mountains from the fire in the Mariposa area was so thick you couldn't see Mono Lake.

An aspen leaf stands stem up in this fast-moving creek, is pressed against a rock.

The delight of nippy, running snowmelt. Peaks adorned with thick, vast ice.

Last night, wind roaring down from the mountains' canyon, hurtling into my truck, shaking it. All night, moving in, moving on, in waves. Like a vole, I stayed burrowed in my sleeping bag.

\*\*\* 9/19/17

Up in the mountains, heavy clouds. I dared only a short hike. Now in sun setting, they gather, stronger, settle in. Some break off and come over to this desert, collect again over the lake. I want to see and remember God all the time.

Dipa Ma taught women who had children to bring their awareness to whatever they were doing, breastfeeding, cleaning house. And many moved to the other states of consciousness doing this.

Wind gets to roam around all day. I pray it keeps the clouds back, their rain for higher places. Sky looks about to burst open with rain.

Saw a big lump on the trail, red, some white berries in it and lots of seeds—bear scat!

\*\*\* 9/20/17

Thursday 9/21/17

It rained through the night Wednesday and intense wind. Blessedly, the camper shell hardly leaked. Very, very cold night. I had planned to leave Friday, but the weather moved that up a day: I looked out in the morning light and even the hills near my campsite were covered in snow!

Drove up 395. Snow on sagebrush, the mountains covered, really covered, not dusted.

I drove west on 50. The clouds had dropped onto it, even at the beginning it was snowing, and very soon the left lane of the two lanes going west was not navigable. No one was out yet renting chains. I followed a dump truck, it was making tracks I could go in, we were going 30 mph. When we dropped into South Lake Tahoe, some light rain. Going past the town, I went first into falling snow and then heavy rain. It finally lifted when I got to the foothills of Sacramento. It was sunny, warm, blue sky with little white cloud patches. You wouldn't believe I had been in such a different world.

I had thought when I first got on the road in the morning how grateful I am to Mamma and Daddy for giving us the experiences of camping, our sense of adventure and can-do in the challenges, to give whatever was happening a try.

And I thought how experience is just itself and later we give it meaning.

\*

Having driven through storms all day and stopping at the store, I got to the ashram just shortly before, but in time for the evening prayers. They are still getting the place remodeled. They don't yet have showers. In the dharmshala/dorm house, the guys are sleeping on the floor in what used to be office cubicles. The women are in rooms and have beds. As usual, I am camping in my truck.

\*\*\* 9/21/17

Friday 9/22/17

I had come into the temple early in the morning and did various pujas/prayers at the Durga altar. Four hours later, Swamiji came in with Adaityananda and started doing the Cosmic puja. I was watching him from where I was sitting—he's always said once you sit down to pray, if you don't absolutely have to, don't get up until you've finished praying. Maa came in and her altar was right next to mine. She said, What are you doing? I said, I'm watching Swamiji. She said, Move! Go sit there!

Then as she walked away, she said loudly, Stupid! You're stupid!

My first day and she was already at it again. I was torn then because I was doing what Swamiji's taught. But Ramya, Maa's assistant, came over to me and said, kindly, You can go sit with Swamiji and them.

I went and sat next to Adaitya and just behind Swamiji. It was such a treat to watch him doing the *Cosmic Puja*, and then the *Chandi*. He was chanting four verses per breath, and I was enjoying it so much, and so happy to be sitting there with them. I had been sitting for many hours, and I unfolded my legs and straightend them in front of me. I kept chanting and rubbed my legs gently to help the circulation.

We were nearly done with the *Chandi*, and my head went flying forward. I didn't know what had happened at first, I was shocked, realizing I was leaning forward and my head hurt. And then I saw that my music stand had fallen forward and my loose *Chandi* puja papers were sprawled on the floor. I realized something must have fallen from the roof. After all, they had just recently moved here and renovated the warehouse to make the temple.

I said softly to Adaitya, who had kept in sync with Swamiji's rhythmic chanting throughout this event, Something just fell...

And I started looking up to the ceiling, and there was Maa standing just behind me—looking sternly at me. I was further shocked!

She said, Don't sit with your feet pointing to the altar! If you need to do that, sit in a chair!

I wasn't even aware of my legs at that point, and I looked at my feet, kind of stunned, just in this shock. Then when I realized that she had hit me hard on the back of my head, I started shaking. This was 11:30 AM and I'd been praying since very early morning, so weak by then, needing to eat, I knew without thinking, a line had been crossed, I could not stay. I gathered up my seat blanket and music stand and books. And I saw that Maa was not there in the temple.

I put my things into the truck, got an apple to get some energy into me, went into the Dharmshala/dorm house to go to the bathroom, and to tell whoever was there that I was leaving.

I told a disciple, Mary, what happened. She said Maa has been "very caustic" because of the stress of moving. She's been very hard on everyone, cranky. She said Maa has slapped her a number of different times until she just stopped reacting. Maa would slap her on the face for a mistake or for nothing. When it was for nothing, she realized she didn't need to react. She thinks Maa is helping to "download"—she must have meant draining—out karma. Maa acts "weird," especially lately, very unpredictable; you don't know what to expect.



I said, Yes, I could tell she's stressed out when I first got here.

Meanwhile, Carol came in, the current housekeeper manager, and she was frantically looking through her boxes—she'd just moved there the past week—for a rolling pin. Maa was yelling at her to find a rolling pin. Unexpected devotees were arriving, and Maa wanted to prepare particular foods for them.

Mary was talking about the guru: We just don't know all that they're doing for us. She said she'd been hit as a child and now this was different, she could see it differently.

I said I've read plenty of accounts of people moving on from those gurus who crossed certain lines, and the devotee continued to grow spiritually.

We kept talking, but started going through the boxes looking for a rolling pin.

Maa came in, yelling, Carol! Give me the rolling pin! She said to me, I'm sorry I hit you, we'll talk later.

I said, No, Maa, I'm going.

She said, We'll talk. And she left, going back to the kitchen.

We were not finding that rolling pin, but kept looking. Maa sent someone over, I later learned it was Anna, to tell me that in India, mothers hit their children and gurus hit their devotees, it's not bad, it's not a big deal.

I said, I understand. But it's not ok for me.

Then Maa came again, still wanting that rolling pin! She said to me, You can not self-realize if you are not hit by the guru.

Well, then I have to go, I said. At this point, I wasn't feeling tearful or angry, it was just a matter-of-fact truth coming out from deep within me. I was surprised to hear that certainty. And I thought, Well, I have wanted and prayed for more devotion, and I got already what I've wanted. I love God. I haven't pined for "self-realization"/samadhi because Swamiji and others have told us that you can get tripped up on desiring that state, and you can't sustain being in that state anyway.

She said, I used to hit Mary, and look how sweet she is now.

She said, People in the West are naughty.

I said, That's not me.

I said, I'm human and I make mistakes.

She said, You don't want to learn? How can you learn?

I said, I love you. I can learn by you kindly telling me what you want. I can probably do what you want, if you say it kindly.

She said, Ok, I won't hit you any more. And I will talk to you kindly.

For a second, I was kind of stunned. I think the other disciples standing there all were, too. And then without thinking, again, I opened my arms wide and said, I love you! Thank you! And I gave her a big hug and kissed her on the cheek.

She was probably kind of shocked herself at this point since devotees don't just up and hug her, they reverentially bow to her. She smiled and then turned and went off to cook!

Mary said excitedly, Did you hear that?! She said I was sweet!

We could not find that darn rolling pin, and dear Carol, feeling even more pressure with time slipping away, went off to the store to get the gadget.

I had to go to the store, too. Mary was worried I wouldn't come back. She said, Come back, and I'm going to doll you up into a sari.

I said, No, no, no. No sari! It's too fancy for me. And I won't wear it right. Don't worry, I'll come back.

She said, You'll see. It will be fine. I have one for you; it will be perfect!

No, I said. Thank you. No, sari!

Carol said she had been a psychiatric nurse, and she had worked with a lot of abused people, so she also had told Maa she would not accept being hit.

I said, Yeah, as a body therapist and creative writing teacher, I've also worked with a lot of people who've been abused.

\*

Thinking later about it all:

What Mary said, well, I know we get those lessons in our daily lives anyway, the practice of letting go and not reacting.

And being hit that way, from behind, unexpectedly, was like a bad cowboy, shooting someone in the back, an act not full of honor. They would say a coward did it. Which I am sure Shree Maa does not want to be seen as.

\*

Later, in that night's program, when I was getting my water bottle that someone had put in the back near Maa's chair, she said, How are you?

I said, I'm fine; how are you?

She said, Fine. You can give me another kiss here!

And she pointed to her cheek.

Wow! This was such a blessing and sweet surprise! I kissed her and put my hand lovingly on her shoulder.

Swamiji's presentation that night started with the Shankar Acharya's five verses that outline a yogic spiritual practice. Some years ago, I combined some of these teachings with some things Maa has said into a little booklet:

Sit down and contemplate the supreme divinity.  
 Reduce your necessity for action in the world.  
 Take the cure for uncontrolled desire.  
 Remain contented with whatever you receive  
 in a divine union.

Remain the same while undergoing all opposites.



Contemplate the great words of wisdom.

I am one with the divine. Maintain this attitude.

~~~~~

With the strength of wisdom, be free of:  
 -Debating philosophy with intellectuals.  
 -Looking for grace from others.  
 -Receiving something from others.

~~~~~

Experience the fruits of your past actions  
 and  
 renounce the fruits of your present actions.

~~~~~

Maintain the association of true knowledgeable people  
 serve them  
 ask from them  
 listen to their great words of wisdom.

Listen to your own soul for true knowledge.

I am one with the divine—  
remain here.



Shree Maa:

That you are a spiritual seeker  
is not something you need to show outside.

It will manifest in your behavior  
without you having to try.



When the time for action comes  
we will not think  
I am helping this person  
or  
I am doing a good deed.

What happens  
is the natural order of things.



We  
and our actions  
are part of the flow  
of life.



If we are  
gentle  
loving  
kind  
and honest  
in our actions,  
that is spiritual.



Your spirituality  
can not be hidden

it is simple

it is easy.

[Art: Maria Sibylla Merian]

\*

Then he told us about the woman who lived with devotion for decades waiting for Rama. The minute he started to tell this story, even though intellectually I didn't know what he was going to say, I was crying.:

When Rama was in search of Sita, who had been kidnapped, he came to the house of Shabari. She was a disciple of Matanga Muni. When she was a little girl, Matanga Muni said to her, I'm going to heaven now. You stay here, take care of the ashram, and prepare for the coming of a great visitor.

She said, Can't I go to heaven with you? It would be more fun to go to heaven than to take care of an ashram and wait for someone to come.

He said, No, don't miss this opportunity. Rama will come. And when you get to have the darshan/blessing of Rama, you ask him, How do you get devotion?

And for many decades, Shabari prepared for Rama to arrive. Every day she did her puja religiously. She swept the path and put flowers on it so that he wouldn't step on a thorn. She picked the berries from the tree, prepared prasad, and tasted each one to see that it was sweet enough for him. And in every way she became the embodiment of devotion.

And one day Rama came.

She didn't recognize him at first. And she said, Please don't step on my flowers. They're for Rama.

And he said, I'm Rama.

She started to cry, and her tears fell on his feet. She said, Please come into my humble house. I have a little mud house in the forest, and I would like you to have a seat and I will wash your feet.

And he said, No need to wash my feet. You just purified me with your tears.

She said, Rama, I picked these berries for you. Please eat this fruit.

And Rama relished each fruit like a great delicacy, even though it was already eaten by her. He felt it was offered with the greatest devotion.

And when she had completed the prayers to Rama, Rama said, Thank you very much. I must go now.

Shambari said, Not until you tell me what is the secret of devotion.

And he said, All these years you've been preparing my puja so I could come. You are the epitome of devotion. You are the embodiment of love for God. What can I say? I'm wandering around the forest looking for my wife. And I was told that you can tell me how to find her.

And she said, I can't tell you how to find her. But I can tell you how to find someone who can help you find her. On the highest mountain over there is a king named Sugriva, his minister's name is Hanuman. And Hanuman will help you find Sita. Now, I told you what you want to know, now you have to tell me what I want to know. How do I get devotion? What do I do to cultivate devotion?

And Rama sang this song to Shabari:

The first step is to associate with saintly people.

(Hey, we're all doing something good tonight!)

And the second is: Enjoy stories of divinity and divinely inspired beings.

(That's what we're doing! Good work!)

The third step is: Feel the privilege to perform selfless service as an expression of love.

(Your seva is just the privilege for you to demonstrate the sincerity of your love. It's not a job that you have to do. It's a privilege. It's an opportunity. And if you remember that when you're doing what you're doing, that's the third step of devotion.)

The fourth step is: Sing about divinity without any selfish motivation.

(We're trying. We did seven hours this morning and we're going for eight tomorrow.)

The fifth step is: Recite mantras/prayers with full faith.

The sixth step is: Perform all actions with tranquility. And see every circumstance as an opportunity to manifest perfection.

(We've got a little work to do there. But we're trying. Trying to maintain that center from where you perform all activity. And never let anger take you from that center. Just maintain that center because every circumstance is the opportunity to demonstrate our dharma.)

The seventh form is: See the world as equal to God. (Because she lives in it. It's her world. She's got the whole world in her hands.) And regard the company of saintly beings as a greater opportunity than the perception of God.

(Because when you get the company of saintly beings, you get an opportunity to improve ourselves. Whereas, if you see God, you'll be so dumbfounded you won't know what to ask for. That happened to me in Bakreswar about 40 years ago. I took a look at Shree Maa and my jaw dropped, and my mouth hung wide open, and tears came to my eyes. And she put a sweet in my mouth. And a flower on my head. And turned around and walked out! So it's even more auspicious to keep company with saintly beings. It's a greater opportunity than to be with God. God will give you a sweet. But saintly beings will teach you something new so you can change yourselves, so we can make ourselves better than we were yesterday. )

The eighth step is: Be satisfied with whatever we receive as the fruits of our actions. And do not contemplate the faults of others.

(So whatever we get in harmony, the fruit of our karma, that's what we'll take. As much as you can, maintain that santosh/satisfaction. You just did Santoshi Maa puja! You should be full of santosh!)

The ninth step of devotion is: Remain with simplicity all the time. Renounce conniving for selfish ends. Take delight in faith in God with neither exultation nor unhappiness.

(Just keep an even keel. Just maintain the bhava, just keep the santosh, keep it simple. You don't have to win every time, you all don't have to look for an advantage in every event. Just be simple and shanti.)

For whomever even one of these forms of devotion is practiced, be it woman or man or a movable or unmovable object, that being is most beloved to God. All of these forms of devotion are present in great measure within you.

(And that's why we congregate around you [looking at Shree Maa]. You are our example of pure devotion. Because you always maintain equilibrium and you always maintain tranquility. And you never exhibit any anger or passion. You always maintain the greatest center of complete santosh. [She and Ramya and others laugh. She says, I hit someone today!—We all laugh.] You hit somebody! Mother! Wait a minute, this scripture was about you! You must have hit them with the greatest devotion. [She says, That's true.] Only, never for anger, only so you can show them the path of righteousness. You can maintain your dharma and they can maintain their own. [That's true, she says.]

Ladies and gentlemen, join in practicing any form of devotion or all the forms of devotion. Hang out with the saints. Have satsang. Be with people who are knowledgeable and talk about things that are important. Stop idle gossip. Close your attachments to the worldliness. Make yourselves improve yourselves. Try to listen to the stories about gods and saints and godly beings. And how they improved themselves and make themselves better.

In every way that you possibly can, practice the mantra and the japa. And listen to the story. And watch your own transformation as it occurs. This is the path of devotion.

\*

I know Swamiji's first loyalty is to Maa. He has told us that. He has done everything under the sun to demonstrate devotion to her—for his own spiritual evolution and to give us a supreme example. This is why, although many devotees will complain to him about something Maa has done, I will not do that.

As I was going to my car to go to bed, I saw Swamiji on his way from the temple to the dining room. I told him, It was such a delight to pray with you this morning!!!

He said, Really? After all these years?

I said, Oh yes, it's a thrill every time!

\*\*\* 9/22/17

Saturday 9/23/17

When I came out of my morning prayers and was in the lobby, Maa was there with a few disciples sorting flowers and fabrics for the night special program. I thought she was busy, but she looked over at me and blew me a kiss! I sent one back. Well, things have certainly changed! I've always been so cautious, worried about doing things wrong, she's called me names and yelled at me in the past, and now there is all this tenderness going on.

Before our Saturday night program, Ramya and Mary dressed me in a sari! It's complicated to do, lots of folds of fabrics. White and red trim, not fancy, like Sarada wore. Mary insisted on earrings, a necklace and a rhinestone tilak on my third eye. I said, The jewelry seems too ornate for a peasant girl like me. Ramya said, Do what everyone else is doing. Swamiji just wanted to pursue enlightenment when he was first in India, but he learned that all the customs were a part of it.

Just before I got in the darshan/blessing line, Mary hurried over to me and readjusted the sari. Part of it had come out of the waistline and was falling out and about—I hadn't noticed! My mind was on the Kumari puja Swamiji had just performed. It's a ceremony for blessing a little girl, in this case a 3 ½ year old.



When it came to my turn in the line and I bowed to Maa, she laughed. And then when I bowed to Swamiji, I said, I'm still the peasant girl. Mary wanted me to wear all this!

He said, You've moved up in the world!

\*\*\* 9/23/17

Sunday 9/24/17

After I did my solo set of worship, I went out of the temple and helped Carol. She said the moving of the ashram had been very stressful, and the Napa ashram was still there. A few disciples are living there because they work in the area. The property had just been assessed and there is a lot of work that must be done before it is put on the market.

After the Sunday group chanting, I was telling a disciple about being hit, and she said, Once, Maa was about to hit me, but I blocked her hand, I took hold of her hand and wrist, and said, Were you going to hit me? Don't ever hit me.

She said Maa gives her a hard time, but lately it's been getting better. She says Maa and Swamiji have enlightenment but they are also just humans.

Another disciple said, God is everywhere. Where would you not point your feet?

A disciple who had seen Maa hit me said she thought it was about clearing abuse in my history and not reacting.

Someone else said she used to be a devotee of Ammachi—and Ammachi hit devotees also. I'd never heard this before about Ammachi.

I don't see it as being about clearing past abuse, but everyone has their own interpretation depending on their own story. What I see is that it's about me having a voice, feeling inner certainty, harmony, and empowerment. And to be able to dialogue with the teacher using my voice. So I didn't even hesitate within myself to know my own wisdom and to say no. When I was younger, I would have hesitated first.

We are encouraged not to waste this brief life with unnecessary chatter. But it ended up being good to talk with disciples, individually, to hear their perspectives and stories. And after all, during a public program and with the webcam on, Maa had admitted hitting me and losing her temper. It is vital that we stay open about the dynamics that are happening. A number of people said maybe Maa would be less cranky because of what happened. And it did seem to be that she relaxed, and she would say in our group blessings, tenderly, I love you. Lovey dovey. Peace and joy and love for you all!

Monday 9/25/17

I do my first four hours with the Durga altar sitting on the floor, and then when I move to join Swamiji and the few disciples, I sit in a chair as Maa has suggested for another four or five hours. This morning when I was chanting with Swamiji, when Maa was done with her Shiva puja, she had to walk by me to go give water and put flowers on the lingam at the other end of the big altar. She has a large one at her personal altar, and she had already given it offerings during her puja. When she was done with her offerings to this second lingam, and she walked back by me, she touched the top of my head, and I thought I heard a kissing sound. I smiled, and kept concentrating on the chanting. Later, I felt something shift off of my head. I looked down and saw a yellow flower on the floor. I hadn't realized she'd put a flower on my head! I put the

fallen flower on my music stand to see it while I continued to chant. And when I was done praying, I went and put it on the lingam.

\*

Walking on the levee of the Feather River, on the west side of the levee are cultivated crops and fields freshly ploughed, and on the other side is unchecked, thick riparian plants. I find a sign saying there was a restoration of natives here. There is oak, sycamore, elderberry, grape, and more, a wide stretch, untended, making even seeing the river impossible. Once in awhile, a cleared dirt road goes through the trees to the river bank.

I go there each day to get exercise and do meditative walking. Big river, most places moving quietly, deep and wide and cold, full of snowmelt. Singing, blessing.

At the temple, in the inner parking lot between the buildings, all we can see over the fence is the word "Self" on a sign for a next door self-storage place. The ashram site still has the business sign out in front for New West Solar.

\*\*\* 9/24-25/17

Tuesday 9/26/17

Maa put another flower on my head this morning!

Swamiji said last night they would chant for nine hours today, but they are going past that. I started much earlier, as is my routine, and prayed many hours. I could have gone a bit longer but Carol needed help.

Last night Swamiji was telling us that they moved here to Yuba City to downsize, and he's not going to administrate any more. He will still be guru, teach us, and he will spend more time chanting. I asked if he would be around thirty years, as he's said before, and he said yes. He complained, as he has so often, about how many emails he answers a day, 500, and that so many people want to talk about themselves rather than ask specific questions about our practice.

He talked about how we offer ourselves in various circumstances in equilibrium, not in surrender in the sense of back-against-the-wall powerlessness. I feel like this is what happened with Maa and me, we met each other face to face and dialogued about a solution.

I had thought the sari was a loan from Mary, and she had asked me to return it after the Saturday night program. But yesterday, she told me that it was a gift from Maa. So last night, before I went to bed, I went into the dining room to thank Maa. Maa and Swamiji are eating with the devotees, because the devotee kitchen and dining room have yet to be built into the Dharmshala building. I guess they are not doing a full fast this Navaratri. It's a rare privilege that devotees are sharing meals with them. At the Napa ashram, they always ate alone in their own home. I told Maa I didn't know that the sari had been a gift from her, and I was so glad it was like Sarada Devi's saris and skirts, not fancy. And I thanked her for the flower she had put on my head, told her I was surprised to see it when it fell off my head.

\*\*\* 9/26/17

Thursday 9/28/17

On the drive down to San Luis Obispo, I thought of how I am a bit of a heretic compared to the ones who could sit properly and were on the same schedule. I pray much, much earlier, eat my own food, sleep in my car. But I am not so heretical—Maa wanted me to sit in a chair, gave me her blessing for this!

When I arrived at the trailhead, I finished listening to the *Guru Gita*, and this verse popped out: I can be in the practice by a river, by the ocean, or in a temple. And it goes on to list many other places. Zing! Now I am writing next to the creek and the little cascade is singing. And soon I will drive over to the sublime wild ocean cove.

In Swamiji's introduction to the *Guru Gita*, he says we can find the guru in everything, learning as we live. And to keep focused on our personal intentions, using whatever resources we have for that.

It also said in a verse that spoke to me, you could sit or lie down while chanting the *Guru Gita*, you could be moving or be still, be talking or be asleep. Or be awake. You could be riding a horse—or an elephant!—in our case, probably driving a car—or Toyota truck with a camper shell! Well, hallelujah!

And, well, after all, when she is doing prayers, Maa does sit in a chair herself.

\*\*\* 9/28/17

I get updated on news I hadn't heard while I was away: On September 20<sup>th</sup>, Hurricane Maria ploughed into Puerto Rico and caused extensive devastation.

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I was reading some of the first parts of this manuscript when I was in the Sierras a few weeks ago, and I came across my notes from my 2014 visit to the temple. At that time, I was sitting in a chair when I prayed because my knees are more sensitive at this age. Swamiji had said that I couldn't be a pujari because of my weak constitution and not sitting on the floor. And then when I talked to Maa later about whether I was losing merit because of sitting in a chair, she said, Psh! It's ok! And she wanted me to have a protein shake before I'd start praying.

Some time not long after that visit, I tried again sitting in what I call simple swastikasana, and my knees did not get so achy. Simple swastikasana is when I sit cross-legged, legs resting on the floor, one leg in front of the other. When I need to relieve the stress, I stretch out my legs. I would, back then, if going for many hours, switch to a chair. I could not sit in the version Swamiji recommends where you tuck your toes into your folded legs, though I used to be able to do a version of that when I was younger.

Since then, I have been able to build up my time of sitting on the floor, going longer without stretching out my legs. It's variable, depending on my body's fluxes and if I have a routine of days in a row of long sitting.

When Maa got upset with me on this recent visit about my legs and feet, when I stretched them out, pointing toward the altar, it was the first time I'd heard that this was not ok. At my age, late 58, we will see how many more years I will be able to sit on the floor. For now, I know I can sit on the floor for part of the time of a long sit and switch to a chair, or stretch my legs out—not pointing toward an altar!

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I also had read from back in 2014 of some accounts from a few disciples who were having difficulties, feeling conflicted, about the ashram, expectations of practices and interpersonal dynamics. And they did not want to fully express their concerns to Maa and Swamiji or the community as a whole.

This reminded me of my story when I was in my 20s and early 30s, when I was involved in the San Diego and Los Angeles Catholic Workers, the Alliance for Survival with the LACW, and the Southern Oregon Women's Land Trusts. Each time I had left one of these groups, it was intensely painful. You commit yourself to being with these people because you have a shared ideal. What you face with the community is that each person is speaking and acting out of their own version of that ideal. I have great respect for the few ones who are able to stay for decades—because it is not easy. There are inevitable storms and conflicts among the members, not only about how to achieve the ends, but also with individual character differences. You eventually want to divorce some of the people you were once so attracted to.

What I had to find peace with when I once and for all broke with the Catholic Worker and Alliance for Survival was that I could still be a spiritual person acting according to our basic principles no matter where I lived. And claiming my poet-writer self did not mean I would be turning away from acting for a better, peaceful world. As Maa says, Don't think spirituality is different than doing for others as you would have them do for you.

Following this, I lived for a short while with one of the Oregon Women's Land Trusts, and was involved with the network of trusts in Southern Oregon, my conflicted feelings about being there led to confirming my personal intrinsic nature. There is a kind of insular environment in an intentional community, and that is magnified when you're living out in the country. I realized my personal nature calls me to actually have as much time as possible in solitude, not in community, and that my spirituality is in prayer and writing, being with the wilds, and just being with the everyday moments of living.

Versions of this conflict happen in all social arenas where there are ideals being pursued by a configuration of people—at your work, your church, your dance class. We learn about our personal capacities of being involved.

So when I was at the temple this time, and after Maa had hit me, I realized that it would be ok to talk to disciples about what had happened. I wanted to hear what they would say in response, and hopefully they would share their own experiences. And I wanted to tell the young adults because they, like me in the past in similar ways and even now in other ways, are searching for a framework and a path for their soul's calling.

When I was younger, I had read accounts of people leaving their communities and leaders, testimonies of leaving from both spiritual and political groups. The disillusionment is fundamentally about what you have disconnected from in yourself. You sought an outside source for your answers and framework, and now you can no longer turn away from the wise, evolved one within you. You have to dig deep there.

Most of us didn't know this because we have lived in environments that have not encouraged our seeing and knowing, environments that have required us to be enveloped in the veil of what yogis call "maya." We could say other terms as well—patriarchy, racism, an economic system, a community's culture, religion, etc.

Feminism has no wave. They were saying in the 70s and 80s that we were in the second wave in the "developed" world. But really, I think girls and women individually and collectively have acted to break out of oppressions throughout time. I learned, reading the feminists of my time, that I would not be less of a Christian if in certain circumstances I did not turn the other cheek. If I said clearly, no. That in fact, it is important to respect the self just as much as the other. We had to learn words to describe our experiences of abuse because the language, that vocabulary was not being used in public. While many women had done their part to change this, I believe Oprah was the biggest facilitator of getting that language out into the open, and lifting the weight of shame.

We were hearing in the 80s and 90s about gurus in the United States who had been taking advantage of women's faith, having sex with them. This, we knew, was the same story we'd seen in the leftist political movements of the 60s and 70s, women being seen as the same sexual toys and inferiors as in the dominant, oppressive culture, rather than as equal collaborators in the work.

When I left the life I'd known and believed in, the Catholic Worker, peace activism, and my long-term male partner in the 80s, my therapist gave me a book to read called, *If You Meet the Buddha on the Road, Kill Him!* by Sheldon Kopp. It was talking about listening to your inner guide and not putting the full responsibility of your life onto your therapist or any other external guide.

How do we find the divine one within?

I was so afraid to speak up at school when I was in public junior high and high school. And then when I became leader and spokesperson for the San Diego Catholic Worker, it was terribly uncomfortable.

But now, when Maa came in to the dharmshala/the dorm house, when I was talking to two disciples about leaving, my voice rose up from within me, with no uncertainty, saying no to her, I have to go.

Swamiji says, We don't surrender like its meaning in the West, with our backs up against the wall. Instead, we offer ourselves in equilibrium. Mutual respect.

So after the amazing turn-around of Maa's agreement to be kind—a disciple said it was a boon—I wanted to tell the young disciples the story, to encourage them to not be afraid, to say their truth to Maa and Swamiji.

Socrates told his students, The unexamined life is not worth living.

We fall in love with the guru just as we have with a romantic partner. But after the honeymoon, you must integrate what they are teaching. We find our wise voice rising up from within.

Jack Kornfield, Buddhist Insight Meditation teacher and writer, filmed Dipa Ma one day at her apartment in Calcutta around 1980. When she was hanging the laundry up to dry, he was struck by how present and happy she was—in this activity and in all her activities.

In 2000, he published a book for spiritual seekers, we who have had exalted experiences and have returned to the day-to-day living, having come to see our place in the everyday world. He called the book, after an old Zen saying, and thinking of the inspiration given by Dipa Ma's way of living, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*.

Who was that who spoke so clearly and certainly to Maa? I didn't know, really, until in the very experience itself, that that could be me. But here it was, this voice, this one. The laundry, yes—yes! And it appears I have a voice within me now who speaks from wisdom gained through living the highs and lows.

In class one night this recent visit, Swamiji was talking about stages of a sanyasi/spiritual life. About gradually going away from home until you leave it completely. He talked about it in terms of himself, the guru, who will eventually leave his disciples running the ashram and he will go live a life fully immersed in prayer again.

But, I asked/said, isn't this also a metaphor? Can't it also mean that we may live in the same home we always have, but we become less attached to our desires? That we stay and serve those we are in contact with—and there's so much endless, limitless love?!

He said, That's the blessing. Later, Maa's two "ladies in waiting" said to me, We're so glad you're here with us.

\*\*\* 10/5/17

The day going from hot to hotter. In the middle of the night, diving down to cold. Birds stay up past sunset to sing into the warm night. The heart of the moment taps out sweet love.

\*\*\* 10/6/17

Coming home to every place. Skeleton turned to dust under every step. They once had their ways of living here, so we're told. And now there's many ways in one place. I carry home inside wherever.

You may not live in a peaceful place. James Baldwin went one Sunday to hear Martin Luther King, Jr. preach at his Montgomery, Alabama church. During the potluck dinner, a congregation member showed James the recent marks of where their church had been bombed.

\*

Our county's watersheds—

San Juan  
 Santa Margarita  
 San Luis Rey  
 Carlsbad  
 San Dieguito  
 Penasquitos  
 San Diego River  
 Pueblo  
 Sweetwater  
 Otay  
 Tijuana  
 Anza Borrego

Living in the stream, down & up & along & in, our life.

\*\*\* 10/7/17

When I was at the Yuba City ashram, I walked alongside the Feather River. Most of the time, the river veiled in trees.

Here I was, just south of Lake Oroville, where the spillway had broken when the storms came. The story of the long drought and its break this past winter impressed there: the severe disappearance of the lake, boats grounded; the alternate, emergency spillway crumbling under the heavy onslaught of the stormwaters.

\*

This river, when I could see it, huge, quick moving, held in by levees. Levees we know may have other stories. The river just this side of flooding but for the rushed repair of the spillways and the rain stopping just in time.

\*

Here I was. With the river. Ganga!

Praying, going into side roads off the levee that quickly halted in the crowded trees. Old, small power stations still rumbling and turning with the passing water. I walked on, in meditation, in the hundred degree heat and wind, reaching the slough, no birds in sight, turned back.

\*

This coming and going by the creek, the sea, the river.

Dipa Ma went alone to the monastery but had to return home. Would go then with her sister and their children, and then return home. Go and return, go and return. They all grew in their meditations.

James Baldwin felt he had to go to France to be a writer, but eventually he returned to New York.

Swamiji: The koshas/sheaths of a human being, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Matter, air, thought, light. And then truth/consciousness/bliss. Step by step. You go up once, and then you know the way.

It's happening all at once. Every day. Even when you don't know it.

James Baldwin had to go to come back. Found the heart of his words in love for all people. And to write as a witness of the civil rights movement.

The river gets all that water from sky and spring and stream.

Here, there, everywhere.

\*\*\* 10/8/17

By some accounts, the demon Mara would now and then appear again in Buddha's life to give him a hard time. Buddha was able to maintain his calm. Once, when they were having tea, Mara complained about being bone-weary of playing the role of tormentor. And Buddha, too, admitted the burden of being who he was, seeing the various interpretations of his teaching playing out in temples.

Eventually, it is said in one story, Mara was released into his own enlightenment/Buddhahood.

\*

Go out, go in. In the labyrinth, the circle.

\*\*\* 10/12/17



Sky again bathed in cloudless blue. Hot and not telling of the fires in L.A. and Northern California. Wind gathering force here in afternoon but north, it has been ferocious and partnered with fire. Devotees in the Napa area have evacuated. Fire has come near the Napa ashram. We wait for news from them. They can't drive into the area, so no one yet knows what's happening with the ashram.

\*

A couple who had a custom-built home in the hills above Santa Rosa lost everything. By the time they got in their cars and drove down their driveway, fire had rushed in like a wall.

They went to their neighbors' swimming pool. It is only four feet deep. They stayed in the cold water, in the center of the pool, from midnight to 6 AM, while everything around them burned, including their shoes and phones that they'd left next to the pool.

\*\*\* 10/13/17

A disciple says, I am reminded during moments of stress and grief what Maa said to me, over and over, during the final days of my wife's illness. She said, Why are you sad? You must remember your divinity, you are divine. And you must remember that everything Shiva gives you, *everything*, is for your highest good, for your growth.

\*\*\* 10/14/17

The latest news about Puerto Rico: Although it's been three weeks since Hurricane Maria descended on September 20, much of the country is still needing their electricity and phone lines restored, and emergency resources of food, medicine, and water have been scarce. Thousands of homes and crops were devastated.

The Water Authority there says that because of the power failures, they have been unable to prevent sewage from being released into the La Plata River.

\*\*\* 10/15/17

Fires are still active and on the move in Northern California. Evacuations have been lifted. Thousands of properties have been destroyed, and the cleanup is going to be the biggest effort the state has ever had, costing well over \$100 million.

\*\*\* 10/19/17

Puerto Ricans are taking water and fish from streams and lakes in order to stay alive since emergency rations continue to be scarce.

\*\*\* 10/22/17

Thich Nhat Hanh felt great anger in 1991 when he heard that the U.S. was going forward with bombing Iraq. He had to postpone coming to the U.S. from his home in France for a scheduled teaching tour to give him some days to settle back into inner peace.

\*

When I told a good friend about being hit, she was outraged. She said Maa could have moved on to thinking of cooking something that didn't need a rolling pin or used some kind of substitute roller for the rolling pin. There's a power imbalance in the hierarchy of disciples or devotees and the guru.

She says Maa is how she is and no amount of flowers she puts on my head or skirts or saris that she gives me will change her. She will continue to "abuse" disciples and devotees because that is what she does. My friend doesn't think culture explains or excuses how Maa is.

I said, People expect all kinds of things from the guru or respected teacher, out of the person's own needs and expectations.

My friend said, What she did, what she does, the abuse, makes what she stands for, who she is supposed to be, false. She is not what she is supposed to be.

But I know this: no guru is. They are in human bodies and subject to mistakes and emotions. You learn from the teacher and you find what what part is integral to you. It is ever unique to the individual.

And I do not excuse or accept any guru/teacher's abuse.

\*

Another version to the Buddha story of the woman bringing him pudding: When the Buddha was fasting for so long and putting himself through all kinds of austerities, it had been six years and he still felt unfulfilled. He was lying down on the ground, and he remembered once when he was a little boy, he was sitting under a Rose Apple tree in the family garden, and he suddenly felt a part of everything, peace within his being and oneness with all of creation. Now, as a grown man, he realized how he could not deny his body in his spiritual practice. He could see that as a human being, he was of this earthly world, he would go on having feelings and experiences, and the middle way is to see them, recognize them, accept them at the same time that he would see his spiritual practice, and his innate peace.

It was then the woman came and gave him rice pudding.

Here and now. Here and now. Here and now.

Swamiji: I'm interested in spending more time in prayer, in being no one, going nowhere. And he started to recite the words to the Beatles' song "Nowhere Man."

Robert Aitken Roshi was a disciple of Master Nyogen Sensaki in the 1950s. The Master had given a koan to Robert: Nyogen held a bowl that was painted with a spiral. He asked, Does this spiral go from the outside in or from the inside out?

Years later, Robert was about to retire and was talking to a large group of Buddhist teachers, and they asked him if he would tell them a koan—and give its answer.

He told them the bowl with the spiral koan.

He then stood up. He was 80 years old.

He stretched his arms out.

He slowly turned one way.

And then he turned slowly the other way.

This was the answer that he gave.

\*\*\* 11/3/17

Same story and different. It comes around again. And again. How else can I know how to live, going on the familiar track, and thrown just far enough I can still find my way forward.

Can it be possible to learn from the drought?

Can it be that I was that young woman in the picture, smiling?

God hovers, God is in the details, God is all that I know and ever more than that.

Now fall seedlings come up.

Every teacher points the way and points to the next teacher. Yet I am home.

Just then clouds bundle together in the west and move east.

We now know so many of the saints of our time and recent history were not perfect saints. Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Krishnamurti, Amrit Desai, and more...

Still, put the yeast in and see the dough rise.

I could not stop putting my body into yoga angles, could not stop dancing and hiking, and noticing my breath. There is my practice in my body's motions as much as in the prayers ticking away in my head and heart.

Not a joiner. But what do you do when you feel compelled to go ask and learn from a teacher? You will be, at times, among the teacher's other seekers. Who may be like you or may not. Who may have lived or are living some of your story.

The angel came and touched the water and some at the pool were healed.

The cloud crowd is now gone.

Today, clouds quickly take shape and connect, reshape, and come undone.

Day becoming. So much here and there, each its own, shaping and reshaping, all at the same time.

We had slight rain on Thursday. They say it may rain tomorrow, Sunday, but the sky is not inscribed with those clouds yet.

\*\*\* 11/4/17

Swamiji: The guru understands who is coming to him. And among those who come to visit the guru, who is a disciple and who is a tourist, just checking out the scene. The guru can discriminate very quickly.

Even, moreover, he sees the behavior—do they really seek to make changes in their lives? Do they really seek to implement the teachings of the guru into their own lives? Who takes on the attitudes of the guru. Or are they merely seeking the ratification of the life they've chosen themselves. The guru can understand that.

And so in this way, Ramakrishna took one look at Narendra [later known as Vivekananda, who brought the teachings of Ramakrishna to the U.S. and Europe, and founded the Ramakrishna monastic order]. And he knew. Here is a man of ability, a man of quality, a man of character. A man who really seeks to learn and make changes in his life. And the guru fell in love. Much before the disciple fell in love. Because gurus need disciples even more than disciples need gurus.

Because gurus have the knowledge. They have the understanding. They know what they are looking to accomplish. Disciples don't usually know. They're wondering, Gee, is there something important for me to learn here? Is there something useful for me here?

But gurus know, they've been through it, they've done it, they're looking for the right recipients of that bhava, that attitude, that energy, that wisdom, that way of life.

So the gurus are even more hungry than the disciples are hungry for the guru.

\*\*\* 11/4/17

I am an ant, Maa said to us one night, going in one ear and clearing out your mind, and coming out the other ear.

And sure enough, back home, the weather so hot, ants moved in, walking surely in their lines, seeking water.

And crick, crick, crick in my left ear—I'd never heard that before—old dried wax? I wiggled a finger in my ear, trying to find it, nothing—nothing came out in the first look, and in the second look, nothing came out but a little dead black ant!

When we are Shabari, tasting a bit of each berry to give the sweetest to our beloved God, God eats that fruit. And this is a dark, dark age. But I do not see myself as a sinner. My God/dess is ever-loving.

Ramakrishna didn't have disciples that he initiated and then who followed a particular practice that he prescribed. There was an inner circle of men, some who came often, some who came rarely, who would sit with him and listen to what he had to say, or take care of him when he would be in samadhi.

After Ramakrishna died, Vivekananda had the group start doing regular puja.

And some time later, Sarada started initiating anyone and everyone who came to visit her.

Teachings bend and move with the receiver. Each person unique, yet of the One. Really, we have all that we're looking for right here in the body, in this self, selves of self.

And nature calls. Leaves and sky, fall's dusty ground, dry hot days and cool nights, singing with this sweet place in this bittersweet world.

\*\*\* 11/11/17

71% of the world's population is poor, living on \$10 or less per day.

11%

(767 million people,  
including 385 million children)

live in "extreme" poverty  
(less than \$1.90 per day).

The world's 8 richest people  
possess as much wealth  
as the poorest half  
of the entire human race.

6 of the world's most absurdly rich people  
are U.S. citizens:

Warren Buffet

Jeff Bezos (Amazon)

Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook)

Larry Ellison (Oracle)

Michael Bloomberg (former mayor of New York)  
and

Bill Gates ([Microsoft] whose net worth alone  
is \$426 billion, equal to the wealth  
of 3.6 million people).

The top tenth of the upper 1%  
in the U.S. has nearly as much wealth  
as the nation's bottom 90%.

7 members of the Walton family (Walmart/Sam's Club)  
have among them a net worth equal  
to that of 40% of the nation's population.

Half of the U.S. population  
is poor or near poor,  
and half lacks any savings.

More than one-fifth of the nation's children

live below the federal government's  
notoriously inadequate poverty level...  
One in 7 U.S. citizens relies on food banks.  
Many of them are families  
with full-time wage earners,  
but ... [they] cannot afford to  
purchase their food and pay rent.

—Adapted from information cited in *Catholic Agitator*, Oct. 2017, Vol. 47/No. 5, p.7. Source: truthdig.org.

\*\*\* 11/5/17

A woman who walks at the park said she was ten when her mother died. The mom's belly was puffed up and the grandma said, I don't want them cutting on you no more. It was La Marque, Texas, 1959. She would go up to the hospital in Houston, and come home sick as ever, and one more piece cut out of her back. A Black woman, her family suspicious about whether the hospital was really helping her.

And just before she died, all the puffiness went away.  
And she said, I see Him. He's coming for me.  
And she breathed her last breath.

\*

Clouds just now like bright ocean with zillions of shimmering ripples. Yesterday, brush stroked. The garden comes up and falters, sky so fickle, hot and cold. I stay rooted even though questions float through. Who is and is not the guru? Where does God appear? How can I do my best? Ramakrishna says we need extreme devotion. But what, really, is that? It must well up naturally within me. I feel such love—extreme? No, just an everyday reality.

And the light comes and another warm fall day, and there is no such thing as not loving God or being loved by God. The trail is cracked again by heat, acorns scatter about in the fallen leaves. I write down from the surface into the unknowns to discover and see other knowns. It takes days, it needs time. I turn a bend where the life known is upended. And even in the different dark, I can become, I can move through. Here is the oak's bark, underneath is the xylum and phloem.

\*\*\* 11/16/17

The 7.1 magnitude earthquake that hit Mexico City Sept. 19 destroyed 42 buildings and caused major damage to 1,000 more. 360 people died. As of yet, there is no in-progress plan for upgrading buildings to be retrofitted for future earthquakes.

\*\*\* 11/10/17

The Agua Caliente Cahullia tribe has filed a lawsuit against the Desert Water Agency. They say the aquifer has been overdrafted for decades and the quality of the water is compromised by the supplementary Colorado River water put into the aquifer. They tried to first discuss the problem with the agency to negotiate a solution, but the agency refused to recognize that there is a problem.

\*\*\* 11/11/17

The Julia Pfeiffer bridge on the Big Sur coast has been rebuilt and it reopened in October. The huge landslide at Mud Creek is still being worked on to make it safe for drivers.

The workers have been building two hill embankments within either side of the slide to bolster the mountain from collapsing more. At the bottom of the slide, that went 650 feet into the ocean, they are building two breakwaters at each end of the “toe”, as well as a wall behind them made of soil and fabric. It would have been too costly and risky to blast the slide for remaking the road, so the road is being constructed to go a quarter mile across the slide.

\*\*\* 11/12/17

Jack Kornfield says spiritual materialism is when a group imitates the teacher, without looking within to find the individual’s wisdom, and can include disregarding how inappropriate the teacher’s behavior may be. A devotee who left her teacher told Kornfield, “We were trying so hard to be Hindus we forgot to be ourselves.”

Crazy wisdom, some would say.  
My friend says, Some would say breaking the ego.

I said in answer to that, I have never thought the ego argument is compelling. Unless you’re in the highest form of samadhi, you’re going to have some ego. You can’t be a human without ego, a self or selves. Ramakrishna says this, too.

Then there is what is always friend, earth and sky, warming sun, mysterious moon. Chaparral in wispy blooms now.

Bees moving through, bees collapsing.

Heat again. Distant and up-close bird calls. Wind lifting and going. Brief. No sooner simple than a gust complicates.

A life these days filled with thanking the flowers, carrying the peace through the rough and easy of now and what will be.

\*\*\* 11/18/17

Federal controlled Sacramento River water was released in October to Central Valley's largest farms. California water regulations were bypassed and it caused much chaos and consternation among regulators and environmentalists. And it put the endangered delta smelt at greater risk.

\*\*\* 11/18/17

I was so in the moment with what was happening—to me—I missed the chance to ask Maa to use kind words not just for me but for anyone who is there at the ashram and to not hit them.

I'm crying a bit now. But I remember the difficulties also bring blessings. Isn't this the *Bhagavad Gita* story: You come to a point where you have to follow your heart, even if it goes against those who are closest to you. Isn't this the stories in Swamiji's *Purana*: You listen to your own truth even in the challenges among family and ashram—such as what the Pandava brothers and Draupadi were doing? Isn't this all my partners who I loved but had to leave, I couldn't ignore what became clear?

Once, resting in a yoga pose, I saw many, many scenes from my life flash in front of my mind's eye. Recently, meditating, something like that, but this time all the scenes were blank. When I leave this body, it's all going to be blank pages.

Why look for God? Why so much effort?

Many bikers and hikers on the trail today, heading to and from the lake. Leaves gold and it's still warm. A man says to his friends, The head of Goodwill makes over a million, and the head of Salvation Army makes 150,000. I'd rather give my used stuff to a place where the head doesn't make a million off of it.

One of the women says, Yeah but it's good...  
I've gone too far past them to hear the rest.

It will be ok. I didn't lose God. I'm not losing my teachers. It's not black and white for me. I'm just not going to go to the temple any more.

\*\*\* 11/19/17

Be teacher when I don't know or when I do, but what I know is not the common teaching, comes from my heart. Be my own student, my own devotee. There is meaning wherever I turn.

Such hot late November days. The very, very tiny lizards running as if they already know how.

Tears from my well come up and are used to quench these days. I'm told advice that percolates, but I am not swayed to go that way. And I'm hearing stories I've never heard before.

There is becoming and still being who you have been. Something comes up in me: It will be ok.

John the Baptist calling, He's here, he's here.



And I was walking to the river, my spirit rising, saying, This is who I am pleased with.

Even as the times pressed in, ploughing in negation.

I have been so in love with and so loved by God. The one.

Oh, to be the self

when even the sky is defined in religions.

The teacher is what was taken in by the open heart, by the faith,

is what has been but is also what I didn't see.

This love pouring from me is real

though some believers say we each have to be broken out of every real we settle into, broken by a hitting, yelling teacher

but I will not go to that teacher, I will not go there to that place.

The real, instead, my skin and muscle and bone

days as they come

imperfect, beautiful.

No sinner here, no sin committed.

Just like a tree planted by the water, I shall not be moved.

Even as I roam distances.

Look at the dove coming from tree.

Look at quail running to scrub.

There and here, what going is in motion?

Time goes on and some days get less attention. A travelogue. Journey to ruins and sublime mountains. Where I am and have been.

I supposed it could show a way through thirst and drought.

Here is the love. Ocean river creek

Every dry place does not take it out of me.

Impossible.

\*\*\* 11/23/17

Is it death or going through—yet another of many—birth canals?

\*

I couldn't be far, I couldn't be any closer than here. The temple, Swamiji says, isn't a place, it's in your heart.

All of the sky in my heart, all of the one the one the one.

There's a strange forgetting in streets and temples. The stones and creek go on speaking. The one never stops, even in the quiet, even in my sleep. I wake to you humming.

Immersed so young in Bible and saints, I learned a saint was someone who experienced something extraordinary. Every saint I've known has been in their day-to-day living.

There is bread. There is somewhere where we lay our heads. Sleep, hopeful day-dreaming, talking to someone. Someone who can, if we look, always be you.

There is a sky of so many colors.

There is talk of how to love God.

I walk the hill every day I can, praying. These days, seeing shadows of chaparral, seeing my own shadow. I'm still walking! Blessed to walk!

They say you can't know what will be now, here in this life. What came before in another life will have its play now. They say be good anyway. I can't think of it as much as live the love. Swamiji says the love can be more bitter than the bitter. And I don't know that. The bitter love takes me through the desert to the sweet spring. The glitter of the clear night sky.

What do I know? I know not to return to the bitter if I have a way. I know love and I build my days for you with you. It is of you. This is my beloved with whom I am well pleased, God says—speaking of you and me. Speaking of itself, love, in these bodies. Flesh of your flesh, blood of your blood.

Out of ruin and exile. Out of near genocide. Still the generations. Re-generated. Sweet spring. Still here. Temple, holy of holies. Where could I go but to the Lord?

\*

I'm thinking and praying her into a new way of being. Someone said she spoke again in public about hitting me. That's a start to, maybe, change.

\*

The day warms up. They say it is record heat. Here we are once more—the days climbing past their past beings.

Who will be written into the pages? Who will the pages speak to?  
The weather reappearing in these pages.

The weather giving the days their days. Sky is God.

We move around on this earth forgetting who we are. Forgive us.

Blessed is the earth. Thank you for our beauties, flowers, and bread. Thank you for our hearts, opening, closing, your love, our love.

\*\*\* 11/24/17

Searching online for Sinead O'Connor (now known as Shuhada Davitt) singing "Thank You for Hearing Me" renewed my interest in her music, and reminded me that she sings about her love for God, and that she is out of the box of religion. So I started playing YouTube playlists of her, old and new. In the midst of my initial search, I found recent videos she had posted via Facebook. She'd had a mental breakdown, caused by having hormonal shifts from menopause and a hysterectomy. She was in a care program in the U.S. and was asking, via her videos, to see her children. Apparently, there had been a family meltdown along with her breakdown, she said they all acted badly, she and them, and she apologized. The fathers hadn't been allowing her now to speak to the children. She was also advocating for around-the-clock supervision for a woman who was suicidal in the facility where she was staying. In her first of this set of FB videos, she is very upset, in a motel in New Jersey, and she says she wants the world to recognize mental illness is an illness, and that she is speaking for millions of people who have it. In another video she says the care center tells her that she is bi-polar and dealing with post traumatic stress disorder.

So a few nights later, I'm brushing my teeth, her video music is playing. And I hear a long, long audience cheering and booing and finally her singing very briefly—I can't hear the words. I wondered what was going on, I went to look at my computer, and there was Kris Kristofferson hugging her. I replayed it. This is when she had appeared at the 1992 Madison Square Garden tribute to Bob Dylan's 30 years of music. Two weeks before, she had appeared on Saturday Night Live and had ripped up the picture of the pope.

She wanted to sing Dylan's "I Believe in You" now, but the boo-ers weren't allowing her to. Kristofferson came over and hugged her and said, Don't let the bastards get you down. She replied, I'm not down. So she sang, a capella, what she sang at the SNL, the Bob Marley song "War." Bravely wanting to convey her message again, she sang it just to the first part where she had changed the lyrics to "child abuse" and then she stopped. She stood for a few seconds looking out at the crowd quietly, and then started walking offstage. Kristofferson came and hugged her again.

I was stunned to see and hear this. I had remembered her tearing the picture of the pope. I'd remembered there had been a lot of criticism, that although she was saying the Church is corrupt, what she had done was interpreted by the critics as being very disrespectful of a holy person. They missed her point in their Christian outrage.

What utterly surprised me now and nearly knocked me off my feet was that I'd forgotten or never really knew, having not ever seen the SNL segment, that her specific message was regarding child abuse, and that the Catholic Church has been both perpetrator and silent about it. And the critics missed both points of her message.

She has gone on through the years not letting the critics "get her down," speaking out courageously about child abuse, her own and throughout the world, and many other injustice issues. She says in interviews that nearly all criminals were abused as children. The forced starvation of the Irish by England's occupation, England shipping out, under armed security, Ireland's resources, led to domestic violence among the Irish, among the highest incidents in the world.

In the Catholic Church, she says, they tell us the two highest crimes are pedophilia and women's ordination. It's absurd to have a pope or priest, an intermediary between a person and God.

\*

And so then I thought:

We have had too much hitting and yelling and throwing and all other abuses in home and work and world

to then go to the spiritual sanctuary and find the leaders there doing the same—but in the name of spiritual development.

\*

She has a large tattoo on her chest of Jesus with an open heart. In an interview at her home, a wall behind her is painted with what appears to be, to me at least, Shiva with a flower in his hand. And in one of her FB videos, we see a picture of Durga behind her. She said in an interview regarding Pope Francis, God can have any name, and they are all the same god.

\*

In the *Chandi's* "Armor of the Goddess" poem, nine forms of Durga are named who appear along our spiritual journey or within a particular experience: the Goddess of Inspiration, the Goddess of Sacred Study, the Goddess of the Delight of Practice, the Goddess of Purifying Austerity, the Goddess who Nurtures Divinity, the Goddess who is Ever Pure, the Goddess of the Dark Night of Overcoming Ego, the Goddess of Great Radiant Light, and the Goddess who Grants Perfection.

I would like to skip ignorance, confusion, the injuries, the “dark night,” but she is in all that too. And by the dark we see the light (I know this has been said, is cliché, but it’s said as common language for the inexpressible).

BUT: This does not mean I have to stay *in* the dark—once I recognize it.

\*

Being called negative names, being yelled at, these are abuse, too. All of us come from one kind or another of abuse in our childhood, from the culture, from religion, from school, from family. But we don’t have to carry those places on our backs now. At least not as burdens.

Sinead tells her children in one of her videos speaking to them, Go on talking to God. Talk to God.

I believe we can be “home” in what it is we feel compelled to do—write, sing, whatever it is that is yours to do through the praise and blame and cycles of drought.

Hummingbird comes to flowers; yes, November flowers. High heat is cooling.

Ramakrishna says the purpose of a human life is to do all actions in order to know God. God is feeding God.

And we can live with light. The light of our blessed thank yous, you for me, and me for you.

singing at the edge  
reaching into the well

to bring up clear water

to know, to remember

and go on  
loving

\*\*\* 11/25/17

And then I remember the labyrinth story is also about Icarus, once he was up in the sky with his waxed wings, escaped from the labyrinth, he wanted to go higher—and got so high the wax melted, his wings fell apart, and he plunged to the sea, drowned.

\*

to believe in a sky ever in light  
 never giving shadow  
 is to  
 believe the sun always stays in one place

\*\*\* 11/30/17

Jack Kornfield says a spiritual teacher from the East needs to respect western ethics, not misuse their position as teacher for power, money, possessions, alcohol and drugs, sex, and violence. And the group needs to create a code of ethics for their organization.

\*\*\* 12/2/17

Another warm day. A little swath of sheer cloud near the sun.

Is there an answer? It comes through the silence and the destructions and sorrows. And it does not stay the same.

\*

How can it be, I asked, that when we die, we don't have bodies and we go nowhere, yet we hear in our purana stories that the gods and goddesses are in bodies, in a place, going through their ups and downs?

Yes, they are in a body in a place, Swamiji says, and they can act. When we have no form, no body, no place, we are everywhere! That is called liberation.

\*

More mystery!

More being here.

\*

It didn't come all at once, the right to vote in the U.S., for women, for Blacks, for others we haven't heard about who also were kept away.

To do something different from what I have been doing takes reminders and conscious practice until I'm not having to think about it.

Then when it's habit, I can do another practice—be looking at what I'm doing as if it is new.

Now has so many faces.

\*\*\* 12/2/17

Fires have been tearing through Southern California since Monday, Dec. 4. Santa Ana winds, some roaring at 80 mph, are making the fires difficult to control. Ojai was about to be overtaken when the wind suddenly stopped on Thursday. Record near-zero humidity and extremely dry wildland has helped fuel the fires.

Fire experts say that there were twice the usual Santa Ana wind days in October, and they expect that trend to continue throughout the winter due to cooler ocean temperatures in the equatorial Pacific zone.

Many areas have high air pollution and people are advised to stay indoors.

\*\*\* Friday 12/8/17

More of all taken by fire. We breathe God-knows-what of the all. Sky full of hoverings, the what-was.

What-is now ash, air, poison particles.

The past is past.

They say don't attach to what-was.

We get  
images of crying, those standing in the ruins.

\*\*\* 12/9/17

What we say now that comes from the *King James Bible*:

Pour out your heart. 1  
How are the mighty fallen 2  
as a lamb to slaughter. 3  
No small stir 4  
turned the world upside down. 5

A thorn in the flesh, 6  
get thee behind me. 7

So horrible afraid, 8  
fell flat on his face 9  
east of Eden. 10

Beat their swords into ploughshares. 11  
Know for a certainty 12  
to every thing there is a season. 13

Unto the pure, all things are pure. 14  
 Stand in awe, 15  
 set thine own house in order. 16  
 Suffer little children. 17  
 A man after his own heart, 18  
 the root of the matter. 19  
 Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. 20  
 From time to time, 21  
 listen to a still, small voice. 22

1 Psalm 62:8  
 2 2 Samuel 1:19  
 3 Isaiah 53:7  
 4 Acts 12:18  
 5 Acts 17:6  
 6 2 Corinthians 12:7  
 7 Luke 4:8  
 8 Jeremiah 2:12  
 9 Numbers 22:31  
 10 Genesis 4:16  
 11 Isaiah 2:4  
 12 Joshua 23:13  
 13 Ecclesiastes 3:1  
 14 Titus 1:15  
 15 Psalms 4:4  
 16 Isaiah 38:1  
 17 Luke 18:16  
 18 1 Samuel 13:14  
 19 Job 19:28  
 20 Matthew 6:20  
 21 Ezekiel 4:20  
 22 1 Kings 19:12

\*\*\* 12/9/17

So far in Southern California from the fires: 175,000 acres and 790 buildings have burned, and the fires are in varying levels of containment. The Del Mar Fairgrounds has 850 evacuated horses.

\*\*\* 12/10/17

The Lilac Fire in San Diego County was controlled quickly in two days by a massive counterforce of air and land crews.

\*\*\* 12/13/17



Factors contributing to the fires:

Santa Ana winds just this side of hurricane level. El Nina: a long seven-year drought, a heavy rain season last year followed by this year's dry, hot winter. Housing developments bordered by drought-dried chaparral, grasslands, and woods. Power lines downed by intense wind.

Governor Brown, visiting the recent burn in Ventura: This is the new normal. This could be something that happens every year or every few years.

Brown in Paris at another climate conference: This is an example of what we can expect. The fires are burning in California. They'll be burning in France, burning all around the world. The world is not on the road to heaven. It's on the road to hell.

\*\*\* 12/14/17

Friday, 12/15/17

The Thomas Fire is only 35% contained, and its flames are far reaching from Ojai to Santa Barbara. Bulldozers have been clearing chaparral for fire breaks, and fire retardant has been dispersed in the Santa Ynez Mountains behind Santa Barbara. Dry conditions continue and winds are expected over the weekend. 8,300 firefighters are battling the fire.

\*

California is one of the top three oil producers in the U.S. Governor Brown has not spoken out against oil production. Oil companies have the most lobbyists and top political contributions in the state. Wells continue to be made, fracking is still allowed, and taxes are not levied on the oil. According to Oil Change International, the carbon emissions of current oil fields and coal mines will make it impossible to meet the Paris climate accord.

\*\*\* 12/16/17

Mockingbird sings before sunlight comes over the ridge.

In the dissolved is the presence.

In the absence is the found.

\*\*\* 12/16/17

The evacuation for Santa Barbara was lifted on Thursday. The Thomas Fire has taken over 272,000 acres, 750 buildings, two lives, and is 65% contained. Firefighters have been conducting a controlled backfire around Highway 33 and in the nearby forest in hopes that that will deter the spread of the fire. Dry heat and strong winds continue.

The fires in Northern California in October destroyed more houses than any other California disaster since the 1906 earthquake that hit San Francisco.

October and November were the hottest in Southern California of recorded weather of the past 122 years.

There was a brief rain on Wednesday night. High atmospheric pressure created by El Nina and over the West has kept out the rain.

\*\*\*Friday 12/22/17

And listening again to a class I've heard before, Ramakrishna talks about three kinds of doctors: the kind who says take the medicine, the kind who follows up with asking if you took it, and the kind who tilts your head back and makes you take it. He says that third kind is the best type of doctor. And he's telling this story as an example of the kind of guru he recommends.

In the Q & A, someone asks about this and Swamiji says, We have that kind of teacher, and he looks back at Maa who is sitting behind him, and that's why our insurance is so high.

Maa, who has had a neutral face, breaks into a laugh.

When I'd heard this before, I thought it had to do with Maa's yelling at devotees. Now I know it's also about her hitting people. So, again, there it was and I didn't even know. I didn't know what I was hearing. I didn't know what was happening.

The next recent surprise came when I was talking long distance on the phone to a disciple. She said Maa and Swamiji have opposing goals now.

Just to hear this seemed shocking enough to me. But I knew in that moment I can never really be shocked about Maa and Swamiji because it seems that they are ever out of the realm of my full understanding.

I asked the disciple to tell me more, what did she mean? She said Maa wants to welcome whoever comes to the new temple. And there will be much more visitors because the temple is so accessible, being in Yuba City, just off the highway, instead of as before, in the backcountry off a winding road. And she wants to do public programs.

Swamiji, on the other hand, wants to do more sitting and praying. He will go to India with Maa this spring, they will be together for three months, and then he will stay another three months, with Adaityananda, praying. He is interested in leading those few of us who are also going in that direction.

I emailed him about what the disciple said, asking him, Is this what you want now? And do you want space from us? He confirmed that he does want to do longer sittings, but right now he's still being required to do some administrative work. He would like to stay in India for six months, but says he can't yet do that. But ultimately he says "go I must."

And then he assured me, he encourages me to also move forward with growing my sitting, "to do the same." And to join him in praying when he is in India via webcam.

\*\*\* 12/23/17

The Thomas Fire has now taken 1,000 buildings.

Some farms have suspended harvests due to poor air quality from the fires that puts farmworkers' health at risk. Some farms have continued their harvests—some providing face masks and some not. Occupational Safety and Health has been receiving reports from workers of violations. Farm labor activists have brought masks to workers on lunch breaks, and there have been incidents of supervisors blocking the activists' entry.

\*\*\* 12/23/17

More fire we didn't see coming through the coast hills. Arriving just this side of the shoreline highway. Too much dry underbrush ready for flame.

So many, who we know, out of their homes.

Can we breathe this? We must.

\*\*\* 12/23/17

Since December 1, air pollution has been at health-risk levels in the San Joaquin Valley. Even though L.A. and Orange counties issued wood-burning bans over the holidays, air pollution was high, partly due to the dry, hot weather and the recent fires. Record heat continues.

\*\*\* 12/28/17

Swamiji:

In the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, [and] Luke, and [also in] John, there are a number of "I am" proclamations which stand out as the epitome of Vedanta. Those are the most relevant to our search. There are so many proclamations that said, I am one with God. I am in the Father.

I am in him. I am a part of him. I am in the Christ consciousness. I dwell in that vicinity. I dwell in that location. That father, that universal body. The Creator. The Creator has created me, his express representative, and I am in the father. I dwell in him. And there's nowhere where he is not. And the father is in me!

Pretty cool. I mean, for a bunch of Bible thumping guys. I mean, they weren't really Bible thumpers. They were really Vedantas. They had a tremendous grasp of the universality of this philosophy, of the Christ consciousness being in me, and enveloping me, and I am in it, and I am of it, and—I am it!

And that's what it means: I am in the father. That means the entire creation consists of universal consciousness. And the father is in me—that consciousness dwells in this form, too. This form is the express representative of that consciousness. I am in the father. There's nowhere you can go

where Shiva is not. Don't get mad at me if I point my feet in any direction, there, wherever I put my feet there will be Shiva.

And the father is in me—that's pretty cool. You are a container of consciousness. These murtis [statues] are containers of consciousness. That's why we set them here. You are a container of consciousness. This form is a container of consciousness. Every form of existence is a container of consciousness. And when you realize that, you become pure consciousness. You have that Christ consciousness. You are the lover that loves all that you see. Every object of creation is the form of consciousness.

I am in the father—he's everywhere—and the father in me. Especially in my heart.

\*\*\* "Christmans Sankalpa." Retrieved Jan. 6, 2018. <http://www.shreemaa.org/christmas-sankalpa/> [December 2013]

The Thomas Fire continues. Forest areas that have not had any fire for years, controlled or set by storm, are torching from wind-carried embers that settle in duff and scrub. It is the biggest California fire on record since 1932 when wildfires started to be noted. Two people have been killed and 750 homes have been burned.

Recently, an ancient Chumash bowl was discovered by firefighters.

\*\*\* 12/30/17

California was spared major flooding last spring and summer because there was just enough snowstorms at just the right times.

The Thomas Fire has taken 1,063 buildings.

\*\*\* 12/31/17

A cold snap, also known as a bomb cyclone, has been persisting in the East, Midwest, and South. Niagara Falls turned to ice early; Texas sea turtles in cold shock are being rescued; three thresher sharks were found frozen in the Cape Cod area; a water tower in Southport, North Carolina, froze, succumbing to three days of below zero weather; and New York City has a code blue emergency notice to garner shelters for the homeless.

\*\*\* 1/4/18

The *Guru Gita* says don't talk about the guru and don't question their ways even if you don't understand what they're doing. But really, as a human, as a child of the universal God, I can't help but question. Even in questions there is faith. Like it's been said about agnostics, that there are questions shows there is a belief that God exists.

\*

Living here nearly twenty years, my potted herbs have never been nibbled by wildlife until now, after another year of too much dry weather, winter not yet wet, the canyon again charred dark brown.

\*\*\* 1/5/17

Ramakrishna said that people's desires can't be fulfilled "until God assumes the avatar, the incarnation of divinity. Their goals aren't complete."

Swamiji says that every person ultimately desires to have a personal relationship with God. We pursue other attachments and pleasures because God seems to us too out of our reach. But they are cheap substitutes. Eventually, we see that all our substitute desires are transient and we don't ever feel fully satiated. When we meet an avatar, a saint, suddenly our values change. we're no longer infatuated with all the little things, we would rather go for the big one. Our lives become different: we want a permanent solution to the wandering craziness, the crazy love of the world, the endless things of the world. We want to be crazy in love for God, and to look to our avatar, our example in a person who resembles supreme divinity, who shows the grace and bhava/divine love that we want to reflect.

\*\*\* 1/6/18

The Association of State Dam Safety had a forensic team investigate the damaged spillways of Oroville Dam, and the team reports that the California Department of Water Resources department of the State Water Project is largely to blame due to their lack of seeking adequate and competent engineering and regular evaluations. And they found that one of the designers of the original spillway was fresh out of college who had no background in this kind of design.

\*\*\* 1/6/18

Ramakrishna said ask your teacher questions, churn the milk into butter.

Maa and Swamiji: Churn us! Stir, stir!

\*

Charles McNulty, *L.A. Times* theater critic, talking about the necessity of theater, even more so in troubled times: Fictional journeys can help develop within us an understanding that the truth is an inquiry.

\*

Pema Chodron says we benefit if we don't bite the hook, react, and then try to even the score. We can see, instead, that some of the past is coming into the present, and we have the chance to make peace, instead of aggression or war. We can stop ourselves when we launch into:

I don't like...

I don't want...

It isn't fair...  
 How could they...  
 I don't deserve this...  
 They should know better...

We may need to negotiate, but we don't have to be stuck in being right.

She says the Dalai Lama sees that instead of fostering resentment and violent reactions, having a non-aggressive stance towards China's occupation of Tibet can help people. He and his people are having the opportunity to pay a karmic debt.

And it may be a slow process. The Chinese continue to be a hostile force in Tibet. But we and the Tibetans are paying our debt by our peaceful, slow process, and thereby creating more peace for the future.

\*

Better to accept mistakes on either side and move forward.

2016 Oscar Awards: The Best Picture award was announced by Faye Dunaway and Warren Beatty. It was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *Bonnie and Clyde*. The winners of this year for *La La Land* came up and the second speech was being made when suddenly the stage manager came onstage and was among their group talking to them. Then *La La Land* producer Jordan Horowitz, who had already given a speech, came back to the mic and said that there had been a mistake. The award was for *Moonlight*, and it was no joke. He held up the correct card with *Moonlight* written on it. He said this kindly, with no anger. And the *Moonlight* director Barry Jenkins came and made a brief thank you speech.

Then Warren Beatty stepped up again to the mic and said, It's no joke. He told the audience that when he opened the envelope, he read "Emma Stone, *La La Land*." He said, That's why I took such a long look at Faye and at you [the audience]—I wasn't trying to be funny. He didn't know what to do, so he handed the envelope to Faye. She read aloud *La La Land*.

After he said this, (host Jimmy Kimmel later on a talkshow explained) actor Denzel Washington, who was in the front row of the audience, was motioning and yelling to Jimmy that Barry was trying to get to the mic to say something again. Kimmel and Beatty were standing at the mic and Barry Jenkins was behind them. After Kimmel and Beatty realized what Washington was indicating, Jenkins stepped up again and gave a fuller speech this time, saying "much love" to *La La Land*, and the Academy for recognizing, awarding the movie, and saying there was a time when he didn't think it was possible to make such a movie.

\*

Maa:  
 God is with me, in me! And you! All action is God.

But we are so crazy in this world, we forget. It's so simple! If you are simple, if you remember, you get everything. Who is that in you? Atman! God is in you!

Funny, we say, I, I, I. Think of atman! We are living with atman!

Who moved the temple here [to Yuba City]?! God! Not I, I, I.

\*

In Swamiji's introduction to the *Guru Gita*, he tells us we practice what we are taught, and eventually we see God in all, and we realize we really are one with God. And this is not a turning away from our teachers, this is the natural course of where our practice leads us.

\*\*\* 1/7/18

The Delta Smelt is nearly extinct. The waters of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta have long been diverted to the agricultural needs of the Central Valley, and there are plans to increase diversions. Taking water out of the delta increases the salinity of the freshwater as the ocean water that enters the delta does not get its proper dilution. The decline of the smelt is an indicator of the delta's unbalanced state. Agricultural run-offs from the surrounding farms pollutes the water; non-native species, introduced from merchant ships' ballast water, displace natives; Chinook salmon, shad, and striped bass have all been affected by the brackish, polluted water.

\*\*\*1/7/18

It started raining Monday in Santa Barbara and Montecito residents had been warned on Sunday to evacuate areas at risk for flooding and mudslides from areas that had been scoured by the Thomas Fire. Early Tuesday morning, about 2:30, January 9, mudslides started flowing. Houses were torn from their foundations and a mudslide covered a large section of Highway 101. Many people who had not evacuated are missing.

\*\*\*1/11/18

The U.S. Geological survey conducted after the Thomas Fire reported that there was a risk for flood and mudslides if there was rain falling at a rate of half an inch per hour. When the rain came down hard on Tuesday morning, it fell at one point over half an inch within five minutes.

\*\*\* 1/12/18

Montecito update: 73 homes in Montecito were destroyed, hundreds of homes and buildings were damaged. 20 people have been found dead and many are missing. 30 miles of 101 have been damaged, and a two-mile stretch is still closed. A detour route uses Freeway 5, but it is a four hour detour. People are taking boats and Amtrak if they have the funds for a ticket.

\*\*\*1/14/18

The last three years have been the hottest globally on record. The highest was 2016.

\*\*\* 1/19/18

Women's March:

Clouds hung together above our gathering and could have rained but refrained.

We listened and spoke words about peace.

Inside the crowd, you could not see our edge.

Words we have said before, we said. Here, where we can say them. Looking again at despair and hope.

Little girl walks behind her mamma, shows up one side and then the other. Again and again.

Little boy sits on ground.

We are trying to talk and walk past the same past.

In the café, the woman at the next table remembers 1978, at the Washington Monument, standing for the Equal Rights Amendment. Saying, It was surprising, but a short Mass was said.

We turn, sea of fish, to the west, imagining we will walk down together from there.

We are near the statue of the Indian woman who stands with a water jug in her hands, who welcomes those coming into the harbor.

But we do not move.

We turn to the east and are able to walk—going slow. We walk-dance to “You Say You Want a Revolution.”

We talk later, my friend and I, walking across downtown back to the car. Dance can be all there is, stopping the thinking. She says she has an idea for people to do Karaoke with dance.

We are up in age. And how did we know, when we were girls, answers to say to our friends like we knew the answer to their searches? to ours? Somehow, we knew. I'd hear myself speak, and wonder, how did I know that?

My friend is wise now but she says it's not because of age.

Light grows stronger. Clouds go off in every direction's horizon.

She said at Christmas Eve Mass, she heard, Light, light, light, he is the light, you are the light.



So that was their word for it, she said.

We got light today, we got sun, it didn't rain on us.

At home again, wind grows forces now, gathers the clouds.

\*\*\* 1/20/18 Women's March, San Diego

We know that dams have compromised the waters that salmon have used for spawning, and a new report by U.C. Davis and CalTrout finds that drought and climate change are also impacting salmon. The Winnemem Wintu have learned that the salmon that used to thrive in their homeland's McCloud River are genetically linked to the Chinook salmon of New Zealand. The Winnemem are fundraising for sampling the genetics to prove their case. They want to have the New Zealand salmon aid them in reintroducing salmon into the McCloud River. The Winnemem creation story tells of the salmon's promise that if they gave humans the ability to speak, then humans would forever speak for the salmon. The Run4Salmon September 9-23, 2017 fundraiser involved traveling by foot, horseback, bike, swimming, or boat a 300 mile route along the winter salmon run from Glen Cove/Sogorea Te in Vallejo, up along the Sacramento River, to the ceremonial site of the Winnemem on the McCloud River.

\*\*\* 1/20/18

Cape Town, South Africa, is rationing water, 6.6 gallons per person, because they expect reservoirs to run dry due to three years of drought, and they do not have alternative water sources.

\*\*\* 1/25/18

More summer in winter today. And no clouds, no speck of moisture.

I'm told om is the center of my heart.

A: the sun.

U: the moon.

M: the fire.

The three eyes of god. The center of the universe, inside and outside.

Maybe being is the essence of faith, it slips between the lines of the page, will not be what I intend, will be a migrating bird, a shed, falling feather. Maybe all that I need is less than the sum of all that I already have.

Anything is possible. Someone has caught a fish. Someone has brought home milk. I heard the children, the usual claims of mine, no mine.

And there were two monkey brothers, Nala and Nila, who were cursed by sadhus/monks. They had been taking the monks' walking sticks, bowls, murtis/satues, and sitting pads and throwing them in the river.

The monks said, We curse you! You won't be able to put anything now in the water to make it sink. Everything will float.

But every curse is a blessing.

When Rama was at the edge of the sea, ready to cross over to rescue Sita from Ravana in Lanka, Nala and Nila appeared and said they could build a bridge. They told the monkey army, Go gather stones and logs, and we will put them on the water. And because of our curse, they will float.

Every day is the first and last, awkward and complete, providing a name for itself.

Odd climber, through frozen green land, fevered sand, the hunter, my heart of unbound love, must die a little. And on its own live again.

The holy tablets have told me in so many words, in so many years, put the shirt on knowing it's not mine. Cranky or giddy, go on singing in coming and going.

\*\*\* 1/28/18

Record heat, again, on Monday, January 29. Snowpack in the Sierras is at 30% of normal. The National Weather Service predicts continued above average heat and dry conditions for this spring.

\*\*\* 1/30/18

The recent devastating fires in California have led to \$11.8 billion in insurance claims.

\*\*\* 2/3/18

And the truth is unveiled to even another truth. Another bitter of the past surfaces.

Well, then, see how the light refracted and came through.

See how we have found sweet water in the parched lands.

Peas hang, yet in the balance of ripeness.

Lettuce thrives in the spare waterings.

Doves are making music.

When I heard it, I could see what I hadn't seen and it was clear.

Soon I was crying.

Soon I gathered the light and let the shock & bitter news & sorrow be with the light.

Love moves forward, back, and all around time.

\*

Another year of sudden torrent  
and most days dessicating in sun's bounty.

Duck walking by day. Moth fluttering by night.

Diver going off from deck sure in belief there will be something to see below.

We're using forks & keys, our usual tools; it's February.

Another name, so many, for God  
spoken, sung, prayed in silence.

Who makes the sky acid?  
Who cuts through with a heart  
that will not knot up in wishes & holds?

There were apples even way back when.

I have your words of wisdoms,  
your silences.

You coming through.

You who will not be one name.

\*\*\* 2/3/18

Quinoa cooking and the sun seeming to move.

I expect the floor to stay put.

Down the street, a party. But I'm going my own way. A back holding up straight while sitting, praying. These are the hours knocking, the clock is asking for more time to turn to noticing the one, the one in the many, the many in the one.

I watch the winged and four leggeds and tree and creek, their way of peace, their way of mistake.  
I'm in training, how to make my way true and good. And all my mistakes have their kin in nature.

I see the sun rise and sink in red & pink & yellow.  
All these colors being  
becoming  
and then dissolving  
in the daylight  
or the night.

\*\*\* 2/4/18

To make what I do solid. As if it could stay in place. But I have had to act with the faults of mind, body, and heart that flow in and out of being contained. Taken for a mistake. It is its own. We tread the water. We swim.

Unreliable sky, today rambling greys, cold wind. We go on and on without rain.

Not what you think, all is more or less. I'm here now because of the good, bad, and the indifferent.

\*

Sit down. Sky there but yet it is still dark. Pray as if. Pray as a child. Go into the land of innocence. Pray the story of Durga destroying what you think you want.

Sanskrit sounds inside me, sunlight touching. I don't even have to know their English. They go in spirit to this spirit.

I barely know where I really am. All this time of name and places. And I am at the window. I am in dangerous places. God runs the wandering and the sitting. I remember. I remember I'm still green. Ever green.

\*\*\* 2/10/18

A study of the air quality in Los Angeles conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has found that household cleaning and personal products are emitting half of the volatile organic compound pollutants even though they comprise only 4% of the total petrochemical products, the others being primarily natural and regular gasoline. Inside a house the air can be seven times more polluted than outside air.

\*\*\* 2/15/18

Wind up on the bluff. Here, on the shore, appeased by the bowl of cliff and rock.

And here! Here! A busload of children climb down to this secret solitude, to this hiding, their heads disappear from above as they go down the trail.

In the shelter of the cove, seal suns on rock, drops heavy into sea, talks, stirs up the calm water with play.

Flies gather around belly-up crabs and gulls.

I would hold this warm, sheltered place so shimmering with simple living and death, but it won't be held.

The dental hygienist tells me I'm uniquely sensitive. You feel the pain more in your mouth than anyone I've worked with for twenty years. This is why you help people. You feel their feelings.

Yet and still, the place like this shines inside. Question & quibble & insistent ramble live side by side the other.

There are the seals again flapping about in the water. Another lies on the small rise of rock, lifts its head to watch.

Sea spray, tide-searching children, just-right sun-warmth. The older I get, the less I know. The book goes on being written.

\*\*\* 2/15/18

Just now the cove shimmering with wind-tousled waves, waves coming with a stronger song than last week.

Up the canyon, tiny acorns resting, uncollected, where they've fallen.

Let the clear creeks by the sea make it through mountain cleft and gully to the ocean. Let fish swim up again and bring forth the next generation.

Friend of my friend says, I dropped out of the Phd program to write. I am writing all in one, part poetry, part history, part philosophy, part culture, and more.

Swamiji says the Vedas were first divine poems, songs, philosophy, and practice, teachings given by God to some rishis/wise poets. It was all shared by the rishis through singing and talking. Later they were written down. Later still, as time moved on, people said, This is all too much to remember. So the wisdoms were portioned into pieces, in writing, where some people could manage to memorize just a part, such as just the poems.

Light glints in the sand grains.

There goes dried seaweed, rolling on the beach with wind.

Somehow we got older. And now we have these other bodies.

Seal sits in light so bright it is also the black rock.

At the mountain canyon, woodpecker, sparrow, nit fly in and out, eat winter-dried poison oak berry. I am telling what I can, this little of the big, and every day forms. And then it all slips away in my sleep.

\*\*\* 2/20/18

God inspires every action, Sarada Devi says, yet we must work. We must act. Do not relax your spiritual practices.

On the porch, dudleya going on with little water.

Follow the om and prayer past the world's tragic despairs.

Now is the diaspora of believers. Intimate embrace of the holy in every sacred spot.

Out the window, clouds in motion. We do not know when or where it will rain.

Wind rattles the door, and I can not follow where wind goes.

Go, stay, I am imperfect.

Watch shadows shift.

In this gap, you have more names than I can ever know to pray.

You, a name for every something, every so-called nothing.

In the beginning was your word

sounds from the waves of endless sky.

Where is the beginning?

Here I walk    sit    cook  
live  
with earth  
sun    moon

every day going  
full circle

\*\*\* 2/24/18

February was the driest on record for California. And the snowpack in the Sierras is far below normal. The last few days, the East Coast has been having record heat and the West Coast has been having a cold spell due to an Arctic Express coming from Canada.

\*\*\* 2//24/18

i come to you, then,  
both full & empty  
conception embodied & formed into zero

in the rift of days' questions & confusions,  
you say, just remember me

remembering sarada saying,  
do not worry about meditation.  
just try to remember the master.  
that is enough.

\*\*\* 2/25/18

Thursday, 3/2/18, 30,000 residents of Santa Barbara county were evacuated because an incoming storm could once again cause massive landslides. Friday morning, residents were allowed to return to their homes and no major damaging mudslides were reported.

\*\*\* 3/4/18

when we say prayer  
the translation  
appears in many languages

going in different directions

\*

Swamiji says, We would go all day doing puja, on to 4:30 the next morning. We'd stop and bathe and change our clothes, have something to eat, and go on to the next puja.

We weren't thinking of teaching how to meditate for fifteen minutes.

ten fingers in the motions  
of turning prayer book pages  
of marking the mantras with the mala  
singing aloud  
singing silently

He says, I didn't go down the mountain to the market, out the ten kilometers to get offerings to bring back for my prayers. I gave flowers from my heart.

\*\*\* 3/4/18

Swamiji's mother, who is 98 and lives in Palm Springs, fell and broke her hip. Swamiji and a few disciples are taking care of her.

The disciples say Swamiji is Swamiji even when he is with his brothers—who live in L.A. He is funny, and tells stories, and they work together. One brother is a real estate broker, another does accounting, and Swamiji does stock trading. They combine their talents and profits. He is still doing administrative work for the ashram even though some duties have been taken over by others.

It's a strange time for the ashram community. Big changes. It's like the parents have divorced. Inner circle disciples are saying Maa and Swamiji are moving in different directions. And