

“Thy Light Within Us Shining”

*Conversations and Stories with Ananda Sanghis
on Membership and Service*

Introduction

When people first discover Ananda, their interest often centers around learning to meditate, enjoying the Sunday services, and spending time with new-found spiritual friends. It's a wonderful time, full of discovery, inner growth, and finding new meaning.

Later, a crisis often occurs. "Why am I not feeling as inspired and joyful as I did initially, and as others seem to feel?"

The answer, nearly always, is that in order to receive more spiritually, we need to give more. In the beginning of the spiritual path, God may encourage us by giving us uplifting experiences. But at some point, the spiritual law requires that in order to receive more, we must develop greater spiritual maturity, by expanding our awareness. God wants us to open our hearts wider, so that He can give us more of His love, joy, and grace. And one of the most effective ways to do that is by serving Him.

This is why service is such an important part of the spiritual path. Not because God needs our help to "build His church," but because it enables *us* to keep growing and receive more.

"Blessed, the life that is given to God," Swami Kriyananda writes, in a beautiful song. We hope that these conversations and stories with Ananda Sanghis will inspire you with the blessings of a well-rounded spiritual life of devotion and service.

Nayaswami Asha

When David and I moved to this area to take responsibility for developing Master's work here, we quite innocently began with the idea that people would want to become members of Ananda.

We had moved to Ananda Village years earlier, before we married, and we had both immediately become Ananda members. At the time, there was an earthy reality around the idea of membership, because when you paid your membership fee, you literally became a part-owner of the land.

However, being a member was by no means a matter of ownership. It was a declaration: "I have found my place. This is my path, and these are my brothers and sisters."

When you decide to make a commitment, the result of which will gradually dissolve the ego, it isn't an egoic thing to do. Claiming Ananda as "ours" meant affirming a higher identity that undermines the hold of the ego. That new identity was: "I am a disciple. I have a Guru. Self-realization is my goal." And "I have brothers and sisters in God."

Modern life is isolating. We no longer have multi-generational families living in the same house. And if you aren't married, you may be quite solitary. Even if you marry, there may be just the two of you. So there's a tremendous sense of isolation in contemporary America.

Now, one of the enormous strengths of the American character is our sense of individuality. Unlike societies where there's a strong caste and class system, in America we

aren't very interested in where you came from. We value people for what they are. Only in small pockets of the society do you find that a person's family defines them. Mostly, you can be from anywhere, and people will take you at face value, for what you've become. And that's an idea that's very consistent with Self-realization.

Paramhansa Yogananda called his work "Self-realization," because he wanted to take spiritual authority out of the hands of the churches and priests, and put it in the hands of the individual. He wanted to create the thought in people's minds that we are responsible for our own spiritual development.

Also, he gave us Kriya Yoga, which is much more than a technique of meditation – it's an entire way of life. It says that we define ourselves by the direction of our consciousness, and we believe that we can determine the direction of our consciousness by our own decisions, our energy, and our determination.

Adding these trends together, you have a culture that is very independent, and we have a teaching that emphasizes individuality. And when you ask people to become "members," there seems to be a contradiction.

In fact, many of those who are attracted to this path are strongly biased against religious organizations. I often hear people say, "I don't believe in institutional religion."

Now, what is "institutional religion"? It's when the institution assumes authority over your spiritual life. It says, "If you aren't Catholic, you won't go to heaven. If you aren't a Christian, you won't go to heaven. If the priest

doesn't carry out the proper rites, you'll be damned to hell. If you dance and gamble and play the wrong music, you'll be damned. But if you join our church, you'll go to heaven."

That's institutional religion. It's important to realize that a religion is not "institutional" because it happens to have an organized form. It's the emphasis on the institution that makes it institutional.

The organization simply gives people a form that allows everyone to be served and to understand what's going on. But there's this bias, where the people who are drawn to Self-realization have an almost exaggerated sense of independence.

Yogananda called his teachings Self-realization. But then he added "Fellowship." And so we have two ideas that appear to be in conflict.

He wanted us to understand that Self-realization is the goal, but that by following this path we don't suddenly rise above the need to support our brothers and sisters, and be supported by them – what to speak of following the Guru and supporting his work. He taught that we need both sides, meditation and fellowship.

It's especially important today that we have fellowship, because we're living in an overwhelmingly materialistic culture that tries to pull us away from our aspirations.

I went out recently to buy a small appliance, and I became aware of the extremely disturbing music that was being played in the store. They were demonstrating a TV with the

volume turned all the way up, and I told every manager I could find that if I had come in to browse, I would have walked out, because it was so disturbing to my peace of mind.

In such a world, you need all the help you can get, because it isn't easy to generate enough spiritual magnetism to counteract those downward-pulling forces on your own.

It isn't easy to keep a regular meditation practice without coming together with others. It isn't easy to understand the teachings without drawing on help from others. And it isn't easy to understand right attitudes that please God, without having solid examples of spiritual people who'll help you know which way to walk.

Without the company of other seekers, it isn't easy. We need those who are more advanced, as well as people who may be less advanced, or even just like us. They can all help us find our way on the path.

It also isn't easy to open your heart and expand your awareness to include others, if it's only an idea, and you don't have people around you that God can use to help you grow.

Spiritual fellowship removes these deficiencies, and this is why Master wanted those who are dedicated to Self-realization to band together. When people attune themselves to the Divine together, they create a strong spiritual magnetism, and it's easier to feel the presence of God.

Spiritual company – *satsang*, fellowship with truth – is very practical. Ours is an

individual path, but it's made infinitely easier when you have company.

Spiritual company, Master said, "is stronger than will power." Satsang has a very practical role in our spiritual life. You can chant with other people. You can sing in a choir with them. You can listen to their experiences. You can have like-minded friends. And you can explore the possibilities of selfless friendship, knowing that your gurubhais' character and values will be enough like yours that you'll have a common foundation of understanding.

It's easy to say "This path is important to me." But in the real world, we vote with our time, energy, and money. If we think and talk about how serious we are about the spiritual path, but we never actually give – then the real problem is that you won't get nearly as much out of it.

The more we give, the more we find coming back to us. If you want to be an athlete, you must give by practicing. If you want to be a good mother, you must give to the child. If you want to have a good marriage, you must give to your partner. You can't pretend – because your spouse or child will know if you're truly giving. And it's the same with God.

When you have other people around, it helps you refine your understanding until you're truly giving, and reaping the rewards.

When we consider service and membership and commitment, a very good question to ask is "*Why not?*"

If this path is important to you, why not put energy into it? Put your name on the line, and devote yourself to making it happen.

If you believe in it, and you're benefiting, and you think it will help others, then naturally you'll want to give energy to it. At the very least, it will be good karma, because the energy you put into it will bring great benefit to others, and that benefit will come back to you in the form of success karma, karma of spiritual opportunities, good health, inner well-being, and so on.

Good karma comes from giving, and the higher the level on which we give – "higher" in the sense of the higher the vibrations you help set in motion for others – the more it helps you.

That's why I urge people to become involved and committed and give, for the simple reason that it makes it better for them.

The Master gives his life to create this work, and he needs instruments to keep it going and make it grow, so that it can serve many others.

"I'm just going to take initiation. I'm just going to get Kriya." What is that saying? It's saying "I'll never become a friend to the Guru." What kind of mother would you be, if you gave birth and then abandoned the baby? You must commit yourself to that which is important to the one you say you love.

My observation, after four decades on this path, is that those who embrace it not only as a principle and a practice, but turn it into a flow of energy through their participation, their enthusiasm, their money, and their service, go

much faster and much deeper. And those who claim the teachings but don't put anything behind it, to my everlasting regret and theirs, nothing much happens, and as a result they drift away.

It isn't that the blessings aren't there; it's that they don't open themselves to receive them, by giving.

Julie Willard

Occupation: Middle School Science Teacher

Children: Twin boys on the way! Due in early February 2011

Hobbies: Yoga, meditation, bicycling, swimming, reading, hiking

Pets: We are thinking about getting a cat.

Favorite ways to spend time: Hiking or mountain biking in the Sierras; bicycling the beautiful SF Peninsula; lap swimming; enjoying meals with husband Tim, friends, and family

Anything else interesting about yourself? (1) I feel blessed to have been able to go on many bicycle trips around the world – through India, Italy, England, the Netherlands, Belgium, and down the coast of North America from Vancouver, B.C. to Santa Barbara, California.

(2) Lived in Ecuador and Zimbabwe – worked for Outward Bound doing wilderness education and personal growth trips in Zimbabwe.

(3) Did a solo backpack trip for five nights alone in the Chimanimani Mountains of Zimbabwe (communed with baboons, leopards, klipspringers, and greater kudu).

(4) I'm a second-generation SF Peninsula native. My sister Lauri is also a member of Ananda – this is a great blessing. She is currently serving Ananda's work in Los Angeles.

What year did you first come to Ananda? In 2001, and I am so happy I did.

What was the most rewarding and enjoyable experience of service that you've had with Ananda? I love playing the guitar for Sunday service, kirtans, and Christmas caroling.

What aspects of Ananda Sangha have you found most life-transforming? From the first time I attended Sunday service, I knew I had found my spiritual “home.” I grew up in a Protestant church and always had a relationship with God, but Ananda made the relationship much deeper, more personal, and something that I put first in my everyday life above all else. The teachings have bridged my Christian upbringing with Eastern spiritual traditions, and have expanded my consciousness to embrace all religions and all life. I now look upon every experience that I have (both “good” and “bad”) as a gift from the Divine. I am much calmer and able to look upon my life with a greater sense of humor, joyfulness, and gratitude.

I have also loved the satsang (fellowship) with other devotees, as well as the friendships and positive inspiration I continually receive from individuals and Ananda as a whole. I love giving back to Ananda because it has given so much to me.

Can you tell a story about an experience where you gave freely of your time and energy to Master and experienced blessings or personal growth in return? Although I have participated in many forms of service, such as preparing meals and helping set up for Ananda's many events, I think the greatest personal growth for me and sense of “giving back” comes from opportunities to play guitar. This is true for

Sunday service, kirtans, and other “fun” Ananda special events. Once, my sister wrote a funny song about learning to meditate. She set it to the tune of “I Can't Say No” from the musical “Oklahoma.” She recruited me to play guitar and sing along with her and perform it at Ananda’s Thanksgiving brunch. We had so much fun getting ready for that performance. Although I never would have done anything like that on my own, the joy that my sister felt in the whole experience was so contagious, I couldn’t help but ride that joy wave all the way through the performance. When I am playing music for Ananda or just chanting alone, I am always filled with joy and gratitude to be part of such a wonderful spiritual community.

I have always had a tremendous spiritual affinity for nature, and I have recognized my connection to the natural world from a very young age. At one point I organized a “Green Satsang,” and interested devotees came to Chela Bhavan (Asha and David's house) to share ways for individuals and the Ananda Community to be more “green.” We had a lovely discussion, and I felt great blessings from being able to expand our collective consciousness to include the natural world. Small changes can make a big difference, and Ananda has implemented a few, such as using real silverware instead of throwaway plastic for all our events, and changing light bulbs to compact fluorescents. For a while, we also put a “Green Tip” in the weekly community newsletter. It has been a great blessing to feel that we are serving Master by also caring for our natural world, and living more sustainably on this beautiful planet.

Just writing this has been a blessing!
Thank you for the questions – they made it easier. :-) Joy! Julie

Nayaswami Haridas

Just for fun, 10 or 15 years ago, I tried to count the jobs I'd held at Ananda, and I counted 17 and then lost track.

I've had many varied duties, lots of them running concurrently, and it's been an excellent experience spiritually, because it's helped me learn to stay fresh in my sadhana.

Scurrying around in so many jobs has reminded me how much I need God's presence. I've found that whenever I went by my own power, I became rigid and got stuck in my old ways, and then the heart shuts down. The creative process gets cramped, and my zest for living takes a nosedive. But if I can hold the thought that every day God has something for me to do, and that He's interested in what I'm doing, then my work becomes a joy instead of a hardship.

People often hold the subconscious thought that God can't be interested in what they're doing, because after all, it's pretty boring stuff. And, in fact, much of what we do in our work *isn't* very special. But it's a cornerstone of our path that we have to "go after" God. And whenever I've made that effort, I've discovered that God is *very* interested. When I bring Him into what I'm doing, when I reach out with sincerity even though I'm doing the dishes for the umpteenth time, then He invariably gives me some humorous thought to chew on, or perhaps He shows me how I can be more efficient, or how I can switch over to some work that's more fun and creative.

While I work, I like to talk to God,

because I find that if I don't communicate with Him I begin to feel that He's withdrawn. In fact, those boring, mechanical times are when we need to be most vigilant. I think God takes pride in finding ways to infuse the mundane chores of our lives with His creative, fun-loving spirit, if only to let us know that we really *can* call on Him anytime.

I've also discovered that if I want to be successful when I practice His presence, I have to make it a lighthearted, relaxed relationship.

I remember how for a long time I tried so hard to hold on to God and right attitude that it made me tense. And at a certain point, an inner part of me just broke and I simply couldn't put out that kind of effort anymore, because it was too much of a strain.

I thought, "Well, I'll suspend practicing the presence for a time, and learn to relax. Everyone else is learning to relax – I think *I'll* try learning to relax." (laughs) And as relaxation gradually became part and parcel of my being, I thought, "Now let's go back to practicing the presence of God, but let's do it without strain." Let's not worry about the days when I'm getting fried by the demands of the work, or by karma that's coming up my spine, or by attachment to what I'm doing. Let's let that go and just appreciate any trickle, any least bit of the presence of God that I can feel, and then let's take that little bit of God's joy and take it along to whatever I have to do next.

God's presence never changes, but the medium for attracting his presence changes all the time.

Sometimes I love nothing more than to

feel the presence of the Guru by visualizing his eyes and feeling that he's drawing my consciousness into the light. At other times, it's a mantra, and at other times, it's chanting.

Sometimes it's easier to practice one method than another, depending on my mood that day, or the particular kind of work I'm doing. But the medium changes, and I try to be on guard lest the spiritual practice I'm doing is no longer meaningful and becomes stale.

For example, I'd rather rest and not have any spiritual practice, than sing a chant mechanically and build up a lot of resistance inside because I'm going after Him with my mind and will and chasing out any real desire I may have felt in my heart to experience His presence. It's a curious place to be in, because on one level I wonder if I'm being a little lax. But it's all that I can do at this point, and it seems to be working very well.

I also employ what Swami Ramdas called "watching the mind with amused detachment." I can't get enough of that!

I love it, because there's so much humor in the antics of the ego. When you refuse to take yourself too seriously, you begin to see the humor in your own foibles, and it breaks down the heaviness of your situation. Humor is a very good way to break the ice with God and relax in a friendly relationship with Him.

So I try to keep my sadhana fresh, and not be too hard on myself when I have an occasional lapse. Then during the day I practice the presence of God.

Sometimes I like to think of it as

practicing seclusion wherever I am, where I feel I'm living in the center with God, even when I'm very active outwardly.

And finally, instead of thinking about how many moments I have or haven't had with God during the day, I try to call back into my mind the moments I've been with God that were particularly rich.

Again and again, I take a little pilgrimage back to those special moments when I was in my spine and in the presence of God, and I see how far I can extend them. As Master put it, I "find a little bubble of joy and puff on it."

Liz Aguilar

Sometimes it takes a crisis to shake us out of complacency with our spiritual state of being. That was certainly the case with me.

I was in the throes of acute emotional pain after the end of a 20-year relationship with my then-husband and the father of my two children. I told one of my friends, who was not a member of Ananda, that I was looking for a meditation class to help me restore some inner balance, and he suggested that I go to Ananda's East West Bookstore in Mountain View.

Years before, I had tried meditation through different Buddhist organizations and even through the Self-Realization Fellowship's lessons by mail, but nothing had stuck. They had only given me a glimmer of spiritual possibility. However, I had read *Autobiography of a Yogi* in the distant past, and I vaguely remembered that there were profound thoughts and ideas in that book.

When I walked into East West with my friend, it was encouraging to see something familiar: the face of Paramahansa Yogananda looking at me from several books. I already had a good association with Yogananda, and East West Bookstore had (and still has) something special about it that I couldn't quite place. But I knew that it felt good to be there.

Here I am 14 years after taking my first meditation class at East West, and every day I feel total gratitude that I was introduced to Ananda. I was not the type to jump with both feet into something new. Over the years, I have cautiously become more involved with

membership, classes, and activities. My career and family take a lot of my time, but it is the time I spend with Ananda that really recharges my batteries. I volunteer once a month as an usher for Sunday services, and I try to help out with all the other activities that come up throughout the year. I continue to take classes, workshops, and seminars whenever possible, because Ananda turned that glimmer of spiritual possibility into a rewarding spiritual life that helps guide me through this very rich but confusing world.

Sarah Landau

Occupation: Personal Assistant and Childcare

Children: None

Hobbies: Music, history, walking in nature

Pets: None at present, but I have had several beloved cats.

Favorite ways to spend time: Singing with the Ananda choir, talking and being with other Ananda devotees, watching documentaries, listening to music, reading, walking in nature.

Anything else interesting about yourself? I was born into an Orthodox Jewish family. I'm now a dedicated member of Ananda and a disciple of Yogananda. Quite a switch in lifestyles!

What year did you first come to Ananda? In 1982.

What aspects of Ananda Sangha have you found most life-transforming? Singing in the choir, taking classes with Asha Praver, and listening to Swami Kriyananda's and Asha's audio talks.

Can you tell a story about an experience where you gave freely of your time and energy to Master and experienced blessings or personal growth in return? I've been singing with the Ananda Palo Alto choir since about 1991. I don't read music, so I've had to learn all the Alto parts by rote, by going over them again and again. I think it's been a good thing in my case, because doing so has helped me attune to Master and Yogananda more deeply, as I can't rely on reading the notes.

Singing Swami Kriyananda's music with the other choir members is always extremely uplifting. The group energy is very special, and I can understand from personal experience that we really are one.

Stephen Manus

Q: You serve as an Ananda minister, and you sing Swami Kriyananda's music with the choir and in a small ensemble. Has service in these ways been a natural expression of who you are?

A: When I came onto the spiritual path in 1991, I didn't truly know what service meant. It was a time of transition. My marriage was falling apart, and I needed something that I thought of as a greater sense of spirituality in my life.

I was living in Seattle, and I was practicing a meditation technique taught by Eknath Easwaran, where you memorize a scriptural passage and repeat it. The passage he recommended was the "Prayer of St. Francis." I set up a chair in the basement, and I would open the door so I had the outside coming in, and I would meditate and repeat the Prayer of St. Francis, over and over. It resonated very deeply, but in time I felt I should take a meditation class.

A friend had told me about East West Bookstore in Seattle. He said, "It's a place where you can find out about a spiritual path."

I can vividly see myself walking in the door at East West for the first time and seeing all these shelves labeled "Christianity," "Hinduism," "Judaism," etc. I thought, "My God – how long will it take? How can I find my path? Just look at all these books!"

Then I saw a photo of Swami Kriyananda, and some information about Ananda, with a sign that said "Meditation I

Series Starting at the Bookstore."

I thought, okay, this is a good place to start. I signed up for the class, which was led by Nayaswami Dharmadas Schuppe, who is now the leader of Ananda's work in India together with his wife, Nayaswami Nirmala. I had a glorious five-minute meditation, and Dharmadas sang one of Swami Kriyananda's songs.

During the class, Dharmadas recommended that we watch a series of programs on cable TV that had been created at Ananda Village. During each program, the singers would perform a song, and then Swami Kriyananda would give a talk.

I forget what they sang. It may have been "Come Gather Round," or "Joy in the Heavens." But I was watching literally with my mouth agape, because I was seeing it all and thinking, "*Is this real? Does such a place exist? Do such people exist?*"

The sensibilities that I was perceiving were so clear and clarifying that I was just enthralled. It was, without exaggeration, as if the astral world had descended to earth. As I'm saying this, I can vividly feel the experience. I thought, "*I've got to know more about this.*"

Dharmadas told us that Ananda Seattle had a teaching center and a temple where Sunday service was offered, and that a community was just being started.

I took more classes, and I got to know some of the other teachers – Nayaswamis Devarshi and Maria Warner, and Purushottama Selbie.

“Puru,” as he is usually called, really drew me in. He told me about the community, and I remember saying, “Well, what do you expect me to do? Sell my house?” Because I owned a house and was living in it. It was a \$75,000 house, which was available in Seattle at that time, and it was a perfectly fine place. But the idea of selling it was just so ludicrous to me. And Puru said, “Well, yeah.”

But it was all a bit much for me. I had struggled to get this house, and if a person is in that mode of ownership, one doesn’t give it up so easily.

Lo and behold, the next day I got a card in the mail from a realtor that said, “If you need to sell your house, I will sell it for you.” This was in a very challenging Seattle real estate market, where houses weren’t selling. But I looked at the card and thought, “I’m not ready now, but I’ll put it in a drawer.”

Several months passed, and I thought, “Okay, let’s see what we can do.” I called the realtor, and in the midst of a very difficult market, the house sold in five days.

I thought, “If this is happening, there must be more to the picture than I’m aware of.” So I was willing to suspend disbelief and go along with the game.

I moved into the community, but service was still not something I was very clearly aware of. It didn’t come naturally to me, and I wasn’t aware that service is an *essential* part of the spiritual path. But I did help out at workdays while we were creating the community, and it was wonderful. We would hold these glorious workdays where you could meet people, serve

together, have a meal, and sit and chat, and it was great. But the concept didn’t stick.

For the first time in my life, I had a successful job. I was enjoying my work, and I was doing really well and making good money. And then Puru said, “Would you be interested in working at East West Bookstore?”

I had an interview with the store manager, Nayaswami Nivritti Stienstra. She told me about the position. But I was a retail manager and salesperson, and I was very, very good at it, and I was selling like crazy. I said, “You’re asking me to move from being the most successful salesperson in this company to being a clerk behind the counter.” Because in my mind it was a step down. I don’t remember her response, but I essentially said, “Thank you – no.” (laughs)

Then Puru and I went to lunch, and I can picture it as clear as day. He said, “Gee, I hope you weren’t offended by what we asked.” And I thought, “Wow!”

I said, “No, of course not.” But I was so impressed that he would have the sensitivity to think I might be offended by being asked. I probably did feel it as an affront, but I didn’t connect the affront with him personally or with Ananda.

As it happened, Puru’s wife, Lakshmi, was planting seeds for me to go on a pilgrimage to India that Ananda was offering. I had an interest in India, because I was a history major in college, with a minor in Indian political development.

I went on the pilgrimage, and it departed

from the Ananda community in Palo Alto, so I flew down and met some more Ananda people and saw the Palo Alto community. And it eventually led to Asha and David Praver, the leaders in Palo Alto, asking me to move down there and co-manage East West Bookstore in Mountain View.

When I came to East West, the concept of service still wasn't there for me, and I got in trouble as a result, because of my attitudes and the nature of my energy. I did some things well, but I also did some things rather poorly, mainly because I hadn't yet caught on to the idea of selfless service.

For lack of a better term, I believe God felt He needed to knock me upside the head to get my attention. I have a strong will, and a level of stubbornness, and I'm sure that's what it took. But it was all fine, because this is how it goes in life. Whatever it takes is what we get, if we're open to learn the lesson. And because I was open, I got pounded around a bit.

I spent two years at East West, and then I worked for two years at Bookbuyers, a huge used-book store across the street from East West owned by Ananda members. And I got pounded around a bit more.

Then I was asked to move to Ananda Village and serve at Crystal Clarity Publishers as its salesman. I was laid off after a month, but I was immediately offered a position at Earth Song Café, a health food store and restaurant that Ananda formerly owned in Nevada City. I was one of the two assistant managers, and I worked with Daiva Glazzard as the manager and Scott Roberts as the other co-manager. And that's where I finally began to learn about

service.

When you work in a restaurant, you don't have a choice but to work very hard. I like physical labor, so that part I really enjoyed, but it was very, very taxing.

It was there that I truly saw service in action, in the examples of Daiva and Scott. They served selflessly, as others there also did. It was a group of very strong devotees, and service was modeled to me over and over, in a way that I was able to absorb more readily. I really began to see what it meant to serve in a selfless manner, and to realize what it meant for one's spiritual development.

I resonated with Scott in particular. All he did was serve. He did what was before him, he did what was asked of him, and he did without being asked, over and over. And I admired that greatly, because it was not my nature. I was willing to do things on my own terms. I had no problem putting out lots of energy, but there were circumstances under which I was more reluctant to put out energy. He didn't seem to have any limitations as to the circumstances under which he would put out energy. It didn't seem to matter to him, and I was mightily impressed by that.

I still have my own way, which is different from his. So the lesson was twofold – one, it was seeing strong devotees serving heartily, and seeing how important that is. And I also realized that we all have different natures. In other words, I could admire and glean a great deal from Scott, but I'm not able to adopt his ways, because they aren't mine.

It gave me an opportunity to see service

in a very vivid and real way, and to understand the worth of it, and the benefits, in addition to realizing that I needed to find my own way through the spiritual path.

I also needed to get a stronger sense of who I was, as the small self connected to the larger Self. And, really, it was through serving at that time that that connection began to open up for me.

It's such an essential part of what we do at Ananda, beginning that process of growing from identifying with the small self with a little "s," to feeling our oneness with the larger Self with a big "S." And working at Earth Song helped me begin that process.

As a result of that experience, I've grown bit by bit in willingness. Willingness to say yes to life, not just as a cheerful slogan, but under circumstances that might be uncomfortable for me. And for the most part, I now know enough to "say yes." There's work still to be done, but there's a threshold that I've moved through, of saying yes when something's asked of me. It's very seldom now that I don't say yes when I'm asked to serve. There are a few areas where I may bristle, and there are times when I've said no, because I've gone inside and felt "It seems okay to say no under these circumstances."

But service is something that one should never do mindlessly. Openness – absolutely. Willingness – by all means. Yet at the same time, we need to understand that there are some people who will always say yes, because they can. And it's great for them, and it might even be great for us. But if there are circumstances under which you are not able to say yes joyfully,

then it's probably better to commit only to do what you can do with joy, and just do your best otherwise. But, right now, virtually all of the time I do say yes.

It's not as if I broadcast it and say "Hey, I've said yes again!" It's internal – "Yes, let's do it, because I know it's my area of growth."

Q: Swami talks in terms of "humble service." It evokes pleasant images of a state of happiness where we're childlike before God. Is that a state of service that you get to once you release resistance?

A: I relate to that sense of simplicity. It resonates with me strongly. But the route that I've chosen is perhaps a bit more complex. I'm striving for that sense of simplicity, and that childlike acquiescence and openness in the most positive way. I enjoy that relationship with Master; it's very fulfilling. But I find that, at least in my experience of service, it comes a little differently to me.

In the moment, I find that I can be sweeping the walkway, which is a very simple service, and I can get that sense of joy. In fact, physical tasks help me connect with that joy more readily than other types of tasks. So I latch onto them for that reason. But I also feel that other things are being asked of me, and I strive to open to that same connection in those particular ways.

I find that my ability to serve is enhanced when I am asked to speak, because I'm finding that it's where God is coming through me, and where I'm able to open up in a way that's deeply fulfilling. "The instrument is blessed by that which flows through it," as

Master says.

At the same time, I see the effect it has on others when God serves them through me; and it brings an even greater sense of fulfillment.

Q: You also serve by singing. Swami Kriyananda says that the music is not a peripheral aspect of this work, but that it's central.

A: It's definitely been central to my experience on the spiritual path and at Ananda.

The music is fulfilling beyond words. When I came to Ananda, Nirmala Schuppe brought me into the choir from day one. If nothing else, learning to sing with others has been immensely helpful in learning to get along with them. And this has been a very important lesson in my life and on the spiritual path.

The music is a wonderful way to explore this, because it gives us the ability to get in touch with the way energy is flowing through us. You get immediate feedback on whether you're hitting the notes, whether your energy is harmonious with the others in the choir, and it's even more so when you sing in a small group. It's a tremendous arena for that kind of change. And, of course, the larger experience of God coming through us when we sing Swami's music and Master's chants is not to be missed.

Sometimes we have many "thwarting crosscurrents" of energy, as Master put it, where our awareness is cluttered. And the music can clarify us in a moment. In a second, it's gone and purity reigns. Purity comes through the heart. It's the portable paradise of which Master

speaks. And to know that it can happen so readily and so consistently tells me that Swamiji is channeling at the very highest level of consciousness. And I want more of it. It's an amazing experience, and I recommend it to everybody.

Kristina Stone

1. Chopping Fruit and Veggies

I was a fairly new member of Ananda and had taken a couple of meditation classes, and had begun going to Sunday Service. Then at one point I was invited to help prepare for a special dinner. I was a bit surprised to be invited, because I thought very few people knew me.

For about two hours, I chopped fruit and vegetables. While chopping there was light conversation, which I found pleasant. After the two hours, I sat behind the wheel of my car to drive home and noticed that I was completely relaxed, centered, and had an inner glow. It felt as if I had just finished a week's vacation. At that moment, I realized that the deep feeling of calm was the direct result of being with those who had been with Ananda for a long while and who also meditated regularly. I had heard that it is important to associate with uplifting people, and I experienced it on that day. I knew that being with Ananda people would benefit me, and that by being in their presence I might one day be a calming and centering person for others.

2. Thursday Nights

Thursday is my favorite night of the week. On that evening I volunteer at the teaching center and participate in a drop-in group meditation. I have the privilege of interacting with many people taking meditation classes. It is a great joy to see them change as they come back week after week, their eyes brighter and their smiles more frequent. Often,

they mention how life has gotten better for them.

The drop-in meditation group (which is free) has transformed my life. I know it sounds dramatic, but it is true. To meditate for an hour with others and then have the opportunity to ask questions of one of the ministers who lead the group is a treasure for me. It has helped me stay focused on meditation and to be more peaceful in all ways.

3. The Choir

I asked to join the choir because I was seeking a spiritual connection through the lovely music. It has been hard for me, but also extremely rewarding. The hard part is that I am not an above-average singer. In the past, if I found that I was not above average at something, I would abandon it. So my ego had to be put to the side to enable me to stay. Singing the beautiful songs and singing with all the other folks is uplifting in ways that are difficult to convey. Sometimes I wake up with the songs running through my mind. Now, that is a terrific way to start the day!

4. Greeting

Welcoming others on Sunday morning is a great treat. It is fun to let people know about Sunday service. It is also a fantastic way to get to know lots of people. My sense of belonging really jumped when I began serving as a greeter. Helping others truly is its own reward.

5. Sunday Service

Initially, I was only planning to take meditation classes at Ananda. Partly out of

curiosity, and partly because I liked the meditation classes so much, I went to my first Sunday Service. It was a bit overwhelming for me. I was accustomed to the Catholic Church, and it was very, very different. Chanting and Indian words were out of my experience, but I had a strange feeling that I belonged. It certainly defied logic.

My husband and I used to have Sunday to ourselves, and we would read the paper and drink coffee. When I went to Catholic Mass, it was at 5 p.m. on Saturday, so there was no conflict with Sundays. But the connection with Ananda was strong for me, and I began attending every Sunday. It did cause some tension at home for a while. Now, I am glad to say that even though my husband does not attend service, he is impressed with the Ananda people and organization. He has even been known to “talk up” Ananda at dinner parties. He says if he were ever to be part of a spiritual group, it would be Ananda.

6. Spiritual Home

I have been an active participant for about six years, and I can say without equivocation that Ananda is my spiritual home and that I am surrounded by my spiritual brothers and sisters. There is a warmth and feeling of wholeness that comes from finding one’s genuine abode. I was not aware that I was searching for this, but now that it is found, it is the greatest. Sometimes I am still in wonder that I have been this blessed.

7. Prayer

Being in the prayer ministry is a gem, indeed. Praying for others is so dear to my heart. Sending light to those in need is one of those things that is very easy to do and filled with abundance. The more I pray for others, the less I think of myself and my little life issues. We have all heard “The more you give, the more you receive.” Praying for others is a great example. The more light I send, the more light I receive.

Tyagini Shanti

I think of myself as being two things in this world. First, I'm a minister, and I'm also a physician. I've never been sure that they're terribly different. But I was trained as a physician in internal medicine, and at one point I had the third-largest practice in the U.S. for many years – just a huge practice of medicine.

Before I went to medical school, I was a nurse for many years, and I loved it, because it suited my nature perfectly, which is that I love serving people and taking care of them. It may sound trite, but it's profoundly true for me. Ever since I was a little girl, the way I've found the deepest satisfaction is by giving something away. So I went into nursing, and I loved it. But it soon occurred to me that if I were more in charge, I could serve people in a better way.

I had begun to explore holistic medicine, in its truest form, as the healing of body, mind, and soul. But I knew that as a nurse I couldn't fully manifest that form of medical practice, and that I would have to go back to school to become either a PhD or an MD.

My husband I were living in Southern California, in a little town called Leucadia, which is next door to Encinitas, where Paramhansa Yogananda had his hermitage. I was in my late twenties, and I didn't know anything about the spiritual path, but we were runners, and whenever I was running on the beach below the hermitage I would always have to stop. My husband would say, "Are you tired? Did you hurt yourself?" And I would say, "No." It felt like a force was pulling me to stop, because I was compelled by this place.

In the middle of a run one day, it came to me what I needed to do. I went home and told Barry, "I am definitely supposed to go into medicine. It's like I heard it on the beach. And I need to go to an Ivy League medical school, because I'll be practicing in an unusual way, and I need to have really good credentials." He said, "Great. What do we do?"

I've never been an intellectual person. I've always been a *bhakta*, a devotee. But I knew, because I heard it that day, that I was supposed to go to an Ivy League school. And so I applied to Duke, Harvard, Yale, Stanford, and many other schools – and I didn't even have an undergraduate degree! But I got accepted everywhere, and so I went to Stanford.

A few weeks before I graduated from medical school, I was scheduled to give the address to our class at the graduation ceremony, and the dean called me in. We had become friends, because I was ten years older than everybody else in the class, and I was meditating and on a spiritual path, so I was an unusual student. Certainly not a straight-A student, but very present, and I loved medicine, and I was really thriving.

He said, "We have a problem."

I said, "What is it, John?"

He said, "Well, we can't find your undergraduate degree."

I said, "I don't have one."

He said, "That is impossible! Stanford would *never* accept anybody without an undergraduate degree!"

I said, “I don’t have one. I never got one.” He said, “How did you get in here?!” I said, “Well, you accepted me.”

I certainly wasn’t going to tell him that I was on my knees under the Swami’s place in Encinitas, because he would think I had lost my mind!

He said, “Well, we can’t give you an MD without an undergraduate degree.”

I said, “Then you’re right – you do have a problem.”

So I got an honorary undergraduate degree from Stanford. I mean, it was all so guided, you know, the way God puts His arms around us and doesn’t let us go, even when we’re not very conscious of Him.

So I went to Stanford, which was a completely wonderful experience for me – but in a unique way. I was never somebody who was going to excel intellectually the way Stanford expected me to. But I eventually went back to Stanford and taught there, during a chief medical residency. It’s not that I wasn’t accepted, but I was always a bit of an enigma, because I could just as easily teach yoga postures during med school, or talk to people about vegetarianism. My third year, I taught a course called Health Alternatives for the Whole Person, about eating well, exercising, meditation, and yoga. But I trained in internal medicine, and I did a medical residency.

Q: You must be pretty smart.

A: (laughs) You know, I’m smart enough to have gone to Stanford and done well,

but I’ve never been an intellectual. I’m not enamored with knowledge. I’m really taken with people and their experiences and knowing them. But that kind of knowing is a much more intuitive process.

I’m a really good diagnostician, but I’m often diagnosing things beyond my knowledge, where I feel I’ve been guided. I’ll get an intuition, and I’ll know something’s going on.

Q: Do you ask for help?

A: I ask for guidance all the time – over and over, I’ve had miraculous stories, and I think they’ve happened because I’ve been willing to practice being quiet and listen with my heart. So that now, before I walk into a patient’s room, or while I’m sitting with a patient, often I won’t know what to say. And I’ll stop and pray, “Okay, Master, I need to know what to say to this person, and how to say it so they can hear, and so that it helps them take their next step.” And then the words come, and diagnoses come. I’ve received much more credit and applause in my career than I deserve. And I just want to say to people, “This has nothing to do with me. You don’t understand.”

Before I was in medical school, we were in a bookstore in Southern California, and a man was eavesdropping on a conversation that my husband and I were having about moving up here. He said, “If you’re moving to Palo Alto, you’ve got to go right away and find East West Bookstore!” He said, “I can tell by your conversation that you will both love it.”

Right after we moved here, we visited East West, which was in Menlo Park. We walked in, and Prahlad and his brother Danny

were there. It was perfect for us, because we were these very Jewish souls, and we bumped into Danny and Prahlad, who were also very Jewish souls.

I began incorporating yoga and the spiritual path into my career, while always making sure I was learning a lot about medicine and becoming a fine physician. Because I knew I had to be respected and trusted in order to incorporate all these things.

My service now is what I call transformational medicine. It's working with people to help them accept what comes to them in life, and help them take the next step. But, really, what I've become is a spiritual coach.

I share an office with Connie Hernandez, a naturopathic doctor and Ananda member. And I'm medical director of a large drug and alcohol program. I've always been involved in chemical dependency, because it's the one area in medicine where you can come out of the closet and talk openly about God.

When you're looking at a 12-step program, it's based entirely on a spiritual understanding of the world, that we're part of something bigger, and that we need to evolve toward it, or we cannot get well and stay well. I've been blessed to have a wonderful career – it is truly a ministry, and I often feel deeply spiritually attuned when I'm at work.

Q: You spend lots of time helping out at Ananda Sangha. From your perspective as a person who loves to serve, what are people missing when they don't give more of their time and energy to helping God and Guru to help others through this work?

A: The question is how well we understand the absolute truth about spiritual growth, that it has to do with giving away the little self that we're so attached to. How can we develop the courage or the grace to let go of what we've known, and all that we've been taught? Because that alone is what will bring us joy, and everything we truly want.

Our great delusion is that the more we exert our will and our ego, and the power that we can amass in the world, the happier we will be. It's such a flagrant lie! But it's the delusion of the material age in which we are living.

When I give talks, I often tell people that the only problem with the way we're trying to find what we believe we want is that we're looking in exactly the wrong direction. We're so focused on looking "out there," and if we truly want the happiness we're seeking, we have to turn around and come back inside.

People think that the more they give away, the less they will have. But, in fact, the more we give away, the more we have.

We're not being asked to give away anything that's been serving us well. We are all looking for joy, but we're so far off the mark! It's totally understandable that we're afraid to let go of what we have, and that helps us feel sane and grounded and successful and safe. And it's a big deal to walk into a place where people are suddenly saying "No – you need to do just the opposite."

Time and energy are huge issues for people. For many years, I've been involved in helping people volunteer at the Sangha. And so often, when I've said to people, "How would

you like to..." I've seen them immediately say no. "I don't have the time. I don't have the energy."

I often think the best way people can learn about service, and the upliftedness and joy that it brings, is by watching others who serve, and who live it and love it. I often say, "If you want to know these teachings truly, and not just grasp them with your mind, come to church and look at the people in the front rows. Look at their faces and ask yourself, 'Would I like to have a piece of whatever is helping them feel what is written on their faces?'" Because there is so much joy on many of those people's faces.

Q: What about people who think that it's because those folks meditate a lot? It seems to be a common assumption – "I'll meditate, and once I have God's joy in my heart, I'll give. Because then I'll have something worth giving." It's difficult to understand, at first, that joy comes in the giving, even if it's only serving in tiny ways.

A: It's unfortunate. It's really very sad. When I was thinking about going to medical school, my husband said something to me that was very wise. After you finish medical school, you go through a year of training during which you're working 120 hours a week, every week, and in that year you get just two weeks off. It's life-and-death situations, it's intense, and you aren't sleeping. I was on call every third night, sometimes every other night, and you stay up all night. It's a very complicated and rigorous path to become a physician. But my husband said, "I will support you in this the entire way, if you can hold on to the understanding that we love the path, and not that we think we'll be happy when we get to the end."

It's exactly the answer to your question. I don't feel that our connection to God, which is our connection to ourselves, and our connection to joy, happens only when we attain ecstasy. Our ability to know joy, and to feel inner peace, and absolute safety happens when we give to God, without waiting for Him to give to us.

I'm speaking to you with great passion. I certainly do forget about God for moments in my conscious mind. But the instant I turn back, and every time I go, "Oh!" and ask for guidance, ask for help, and acknowledge a divine presence – every single time, I find that I'm knowing and affirming and expanding that joy.

I think that if God were waiting for us to be perfect, He would be very lonely. God is in the practice. He's in the effort. He's in every step of the way. We are there – really, in a way, we are right there already.

Q: When people begin to serve, do they find that Master is with them more because they're serving? And that he's helping them serve?

A: I see that people come to Ananda because they're on a spiritual search, and they want to feel "something better" within themselves. And they truly begin to find what they're wanting when they become involved with this path.

A couple came to the Sangha recently, and they immediately felt that it resonated with them. They began coming every Sunday, and one day I said, "I want to ask you to start volunteering a little, because when you volunteer you'll instantly feel more a part of this

family. You won't keep feeling like you're always a visitor."

They said, "Great!" And they helped set up the fire ceremony before service. I taught them how to do it, and I left them on their own. Later, they told me, "Doing this just once, we feel so much more a part of Ananda!" The husband is a physician at Stanford, and his wife is an accomplished business person. They could be doing a lot more than putting cotton balls and alcohol in a bowl. But the experience of belonging and joy happened instantly. They told me, "We want to do this every week while you're looking for other people to help."

I think the concept of "service" has more meaning in the Sanskrit term, *seva*. When we talk of "service" and "commitment," it sounds like hard work. But it's *not* work. It's knowing the blessing that comes from surrendering, and giving our hearts to something that's so much larger than we are. I'm always looking for ways to convey the joy that serving brings.

In India, they have many white marble statues of spiritual figures, especially the chariot that Arjuna rides, which is pulled by big white horses in front. There's a moment in the Bhagavad Gita where Krishna tells Arjuna, "You have to be willing to accept this charge. You have to say 'Yes, I want to move down this path.'" And the statues show the moment when Arjuna accepts the reins from Krishna. And looking at these big marble statues, you get the feeling that all we have to do is say okay, and you feel these horses sort of coming into line, to go where he wants them to go.

The instant we say yes, in whatever is our own way, in whatever way is given to us,

we begin to feel the Guru's power flowing through us and helping and blessing us.

The spiritual path is not only, or even centrally about seeing great visions. It's about the little stories where you feel God's presence. It's like being a child, where you keep trying and talking to God, and cooperating with the Divine Mother. And in the end, it's all so beautiful and simple.

Supriya Goldberg

Occupation: School teacher

Children: None

Hobbies: Backpacking, singing, writing, horses

Pets: None at the moment

Favorite ways to spend time: Engaged in the above hobbies! And time with friends at the Sangha, of course!

Anything else interesting about yourself: Will be hiking the John Muir Trail this summer- – 220 miles in 25 days!

What year did you first come to Ananda? Four years ago? Five? Can't remember!

OK, my testimonial:

What first “wowed” me about the Ananda church and community was hearing Asha talk at a Sunday service, and hearing the choir sing. I knew, with absolute certainty, I had discovered something very special, indeed. I wanted to know more, I wanted to be part of this place, this energy, these people. I had to know more!

I began by taking meditation classes, but that was not enough. I wanted to “hang out,” be part of everything, as much and as often as possible! Why? Because it just felt so good... so sweet, peaceful, and homey. Everyone was so kind, cheerful and friendly! I was drawn like a moth to a flame... I wanted to dive straight into that flame!

I found Karen, the choir director, and asked her if I could become a choir member. My “audition” consisted of singing a few lines of the only kirtan song I could think of on the spur of the moment, “Door of My Heart.” Done deal! I was in. Thus began one of the most joyous endeavors I have ever partaken in. The music has transported me to realms I never even knew existed before. I felt myself to be among a consortium of angels! It became my most cherished practice.

When one is blessed with an abundance of love, the gift of the highest forms of friendship, divine classes, fabulous talks, music, and myriad other precious treats available for anyone with an interest, the natural response is to want to give back, simply out of gratitude. It also helps one immerse oneself even more deeply in the joy of the community and the wonderful energy present there.

Thus it was that I felt impelled to offer service in other ways: I volunteered to be an usher – first at Sunday services, then at other events as well. What joy to be able to greet and assist all the lovely people who came in the doors of the church! A short time later, I happily discovered the immense fun and joy of being involved with food preparations for major events. Not long after this, I was invited to be part of a newly formed sadhaka group, where the major focus of our practices involved serving the community.

The sadhaka group lasted several months, and became my most precious experience at Ananda. The service we performed culminated in two unique events. The first involved spending a weekend serving at Ananda Village. On this occasion, I arrived

somewhat sick, not sure what work I could actually perform. It was most dismaying. And yet! I was soon amazed to find that the more I did (organizing the yurt where art classes were conducted for the village children), the more energy I felt! Even more miraculously, the sickness left me! At the end of the first day, after several hours of serving in this way, I only wanted to keep going. It was truly unbelievable – a wondrous experience, and one I will relish forever.

The second event our sadhaka group put on, and the culmination of our time serving the community, consisted of a gourmet lunch created at the church, complete with a raffle drawing and entertainment. I myself had the joy of being an “entertainer” in the role of MC for the drawing of raffle prizes. Oh, what gloriously good fun! As I called out the winners, I looked over the sea of glowing faces and realized I loved every one of them. Each person was a friend, and more – my kin. The basic truth, so evident to me, was simply this: the more I gave, the more I received! What I received were the best gifts I could ever want: the most sublime friendships, and from them, great joy, much love...

And there you have it. My greatest challenge this past year was that I had to relocate to the East Bay, more than an hour away from my beloved Palo Alto Ananda community. Nonetheless, I have faithfully made the commute most weekends; and always, I feel like I am coming home....to paradise. As the expression goes, “wild horses couldn’t keep me away!”

God bless Ananda, now and forever!!!

Much love,

Supriya



Nayaswami Haridas: Early Days

(The photo shows the original Ananda Community – all of it! – in 1970. Haridas is standing at far right – with big, bushy hair.)

Years ago, when the residents of Ananda Village put on a “Winnie the Pooh” play at the Expanding Light (embellished with Ananda themes), Haridas played – of course! – Tigger. It’s impossible for those who know him not to think of “willingness,” “energy,” “good humor,” and “high spirits” when Haridas comes to mind.

Until recently, Haridas served as a minister with his wife, Roma, at Ananda Sangha in Palo Alto, and as co-manager of the Ananda Community in Mountain View. He and Roma then served in Ananda India, and are now serving with Ananda in Los Angeles.

Q: Tell us about your early experiences at Ananda.

Haridas: I was trying to find Ananda, but I didn’t realize it. I was just out of high school, and I was hitchhiking around the country and Canada and Mexico, looking for my spiritual family.

I saw Ananda’s address on the back of one of Swami Kriyananda’s first books, *Yoga Postures for Self-Awareness*. (Retitled *Ananda Yoga for Higher Awareness*; out of stock, but used copies are available at Amazon.com.)

I thought, “Yogananda...Ananda...hmm, there’s some kind of tie-in there.”

My friends and relatives knew I was looking for my spiritual family, and my brother gave me the address of Ananda Village. He said,

“Why don't you try this?” Because I was always returning to Manhattan Beach, where I would work in a gas station or some other job for three to six months to make my stake, and then I'd head out and try to find Ananda again. This was over a two-year period, and I always wouldn't find it, and so the address was my latest clue.

This time, I really meant business. I had bought a sleeping bag, because I was heading to the East Coast to get snowed in and see if I wanted to be an SRF monk. This was my latest campaign. It had been just one campaign after another, and everybody would laugh when I returned home and they'd find that for the umpteenth time I had failed to find my family.

At the end of those two years, I had that little address of Ananda in Nevada City, and I didn't know anything other than to go to Nevada City and ask if they had heard of Ananda, just ask at a store or something, because I was on my way to the East Coast, and this was going to be just another stop before I landed in Vermont or New Hampshire.

In my fantasies, I would get snowed in, and I would have a “Big Think” about whether I should join SRF. I didn't think I could do that, but I didn't know what else to do, because I hadn't found anything. I had spent time at the SRF shrines, and I'd loved it, but it didn't feel like it was my own.

I arrived at the Village on May 25, 1970, and I was totally entranced. I met Swami the same night at the Meditation Retreat. And of course it was an amazing experience. It was love at first sight, recognizing such a magnificent being.

Q: Did it feel like home?

Haridas: Absolutely. I went into the temple, and it was funny because I must have had a veil over my consciousness. I didn't even know that this was Yogananda's community. I went into the temple at the Meditation Retreat, and there was the line of gurus, and I was so shocked I could have fainted. That was the old temple, and six weeks later it burned down.

Q: Did you move to the community right away?

Haridas: Yes. Jyotish willed me his tipi at the Meditation Retreat.

Q: So, you got to live your dream of being snowed in.

Q: Yes, that's exactly right! In fact, one morning I woke up in the tipi, and it was so light, I didn't know what to think. We had those big 60-mile-an-hour winds out there on the point where my tipi was, and my whole tipi skin had blown off during the night, and all that was left was the plastic inner liner. So I was waking up all groggy and looking around, and I was thinking what's going on? And it didn't dawn on me until I walked outside that my whole tipi had just disappeared. Sadhana Devi was making tipi skins at the time, and so I humbly asked her to make another one, and she did.

There are so many touching stories of how people came to Ananda, and it's still happening, where they won't have any money and they'll just land there, and the next thing you know, they're members and they're serving at Master's Market or the Expanding Light. As we get along in years, we become like the old

dogs. And when the new puppies come in, fresh with enthusiasm, we remember how it was.

As Yogananda said, if we could keep the “honeymoon” alive, we would find God very easily. And so, when these new people come in and see this place with fresh eyes, seeing it through their eyes sends the energy soaring up the spine, and we vow to renew our efforts.

Q: Where did you work when you arrived at the village?

Haridas: I worked for Shraddha Ma, who was the cook at the Meditation Retreat. (She’s no longer at the Village.) I was her sidekick. I was on work study, where we paid \$30 a month, if you can imagine it, and \$15 if you wanted to eat. So, for grand total of \$45 a month, you worked for about 4½ hours a day and got room and board. I slept on a picnic table for the first three weeks, in my sleeping bag, and then Jyotish willed me his tipi.

Membership back then cost \$1000, which was quite daunting, because I didn't know how I would come up with that kind of money. But I thought, well, OK, now that I know the place exists, that's everything, and if I need to go make the money, I will. But it was a very hard decision, because I did not want to leave, no way! But I was willing. And you know how it is on the path, as soon as one is willing, invariably it all comes together.

As it turned out, I found out that Binay was starting a little company along with Jaya and some others. Swami had asked him to start a cottage industry, and I got in on the ground floor. I ended up being Binay’s right-hand man for three years, with his jewelry company. It

turned out great – we had a dozen employees and a sales crew that went across the country and sold to big department stores, and it didn't take long for things to take off. It must have been that the timing was right. Jyotish had a little incense and oils factory, and between the two companies and the publishing company and meditation retreat, we were the four main employers in the early years.

Then I was the foreman of another little cottage industry together with Santosh. It was a firewood company. I did that for seven months, and it was an amazing job, delivering firewood. We had a thousand-cord contract with Southern Pacific Railroad.

We would work all day, and load the truck with wood and deliver it, and then come back and start all over again, and that was our routine. Our shift would end at 1 a.m. in the morning. We were farming the wood on very, very steep and rocky ground – it was like climbing up a fire pole to get the logs, half the time. So we could only get out three cords a day, working with a 12-man crew. That’s how difficult it was. And we would load up the truck, and we would go and deliver it and come back and do it all over again.

Binay and I would always wake up Santosh at about 1 in the morning, and we’d meditate for an hour. Again, the joy of being young, footloose, and fancy free! I remember those meditations in those little tents, and they were so deep. And then we’d get up in the morning, get fired up, and go at it.

I remember, at the very end of the season, we were delivering the last little bit of wood by winching the truck up a very steep hill,

and then winching it back down. This was in November, and snow was falling. That was a pretty dramatic way to end the season, after we had begun in early spring. So that was our job. It was a lot of fun. I also helped out with many other industries as they got started. We had a sprouting kit business, an incense and oils business, and a macramé business.

Q: Was there a strong feeling of community, back then?

Haridas: Well, it was a little rocky. None of us wanted to move down to the Village. We were at the Meditation Retreat, where Swami was living at the time, and there was no way we wanted to get involved, because it was still like the Wild West down there at the Village.

Q: I recall hearing that there were people at the Village whose attachment to Ananda was rather loose.

Haridas: Well, that's a good way to put it. But then Swami asked Jyotish to go down there and start pulling things together. And, the next thing we knew, Swami began to build his dome on the first segment of the property down there, where Crystal Hermitage is now located. So, in the fall of 1971, we moved all our tipis and funky trailers down and started a monastery. There were seven of us, and we would commute from the monastery over the hill to the Village – we'd walk, because there was no road at the time.

It was pretty scary moving to the Village, but when the monastery started up it was fine because we had support, we had our meditations and we had the group. But, even then, it was challenging. At the retreat we had showers, a

kitchen, etc., but at the monastery we had nothing. It was just bare ground. So we really had to tough it out. After a couple of years we finally had outdoor showers, but prior to that, it was bucket baths, or go over the hill to shower at the Village, where you wondered if you were cleaner before or after because the water was piped in from the pond. But it was fun.

Q: Was there a community-like feeling at the monastery?

Haridas: Yes, it was very strong. The monastery was strong. The women had more esprit de corps, and Swami would remind us of that from time to time. The monks tended to be fiercely independent. We were always teasing the head monk, Nitai, because he was always dragging us off to sadhana or to a workday, and we kind of prided ourselves, which is sort of silly to think of it, on joking, "Here comes Nitai, let's run off in the woods somewhere."

But there was a wonderful feeling, and Swami was there, and we were over at his house for satsangs all the time, the monks and nuns, when he was writing his early books, *14 Steps to Perfect Joy* (since retitled *The Art and Science of Raja Yoga*) and *The Path*, and he would read us his transcripts. A lot of the time, he was in seclusion and silence, and Jyotish would read for us while Swami would be sitting there. Lots of great memories.

In our heyday, I think there were three dozen nuns and a couple dozen monks. We had about 60 in all at the monastery, and that comprised about a third of the community at the time. And we were very, very active. Meditating long hours, because we had free time, and serving during the day. There were hardly any

activities outside of serving and meditating, with long meditations on the weekends, and of course Sunday service. Sunday service was at the Meditation Retreat, because the Expanding Light didn't exist then. We'd all jump in any vehicles that were going and ride up together. When Seva arrived, she had her VW, which of course we ran into the ground; or we'd hop in the old farm truck, which was called Crummy.

Q: How would you describe the quality of life in those days?

Haridas: Well, the quality of life wasn't anything. I remember when Vidura and Durga put in a telephone, I was very sort of skeptical about whether that was truly simple living. And the first toilet, everything was a big question, because we didn't want to get caught up in materialism, and so on. I remember when Jyotish put an oil stove in his dome, I would wonder if that was a departure from the simple life. But that was just me. Everybody else perhaps was more mature, but I would question everything. I had been raised in an affluent home, and I knew all that stuff was fine, but now I had become a monk and I was living in a tipi, and I thought perhaps I'd be there in that lifestyle the rest of my life. But even I, after several years, built a platform and put a Servel propane refrigerator outside. So after a while we began to appreciate that people have to define for themselves what it is to live simply.

But the quality of life was very Spartan, at least for the monks and nuns, and I think for the householders, too, because I had a hand in helping build a number of the houses at the Village, and by the time you'd finish, you would wonder if they would still stand up, because we didn't know what we were doing. We got all our

wood from Sage's mill, just rough-cut lumber, and we'd haul it over, and find used windows and doors, so there were lots of leaks.

We had lots of plastic houses. One house that was very unique was Tom Sutcliffe's. He made a rammed-earth house, but unfortunately he didn't seal it, and doggone it, it was all hand-tamped, unlike the rammed-earth houses we built later, which were hydraulically pressed and so forth. So it disintegrated that winter, and he left soon thereafter. But it was quite a feat, because that was one of the first real modern houses.

This was before Arjuna came up from Southern California with the know-how to build real houses. There was a fellow named Steve Sheridan from Florida, and he was a contractor. And there was so much excitement for months before his arrival, because we didn't have people who were skilled. Jaya hadn't learned the trade yet. He'd built a little cabin for Seva, but he wasn't a certified builder, as he became in later years. And so, as soon as Steve came, he landed at the Meditation Retreat and we asked him to build an outhouse, because we wanted to see if this indeed was true, and he built this magnificent outhouse, and then of course he went on to bigger and better things.

But that is the kind of childlike spirit there was, and it is still very much a part of Ananda now. Someone would come in, and they would know how to do something, and everybody would be in awe. Because most of us were artists and philosophers, you know. Jaya was an anthropology major out of Berkeley. Which is perfect for the city, but we didn't know a carrot from a broccoli.

We also had a lot of fun spending time with Haanel Cassidy, a 70-year-old man who was retired after a long career as a top professional photographer for the Conde-Nast magazine chain in New York City. He ran our garden, because he knew all about raising organic food. And I was one of Haanel's sidekicks. I ran his Roto-Tiller in the early years.

He would take us to town, and I remember one time he wanted to teach us how to eat properly. And so off we went to a restaurant, and he showed us where the forks and spoons went. But for Ananda to have Haanel Cassidy in our midst was a bit of a phenomenon. He was always giving singing lessons, and everything had to be just so, and the tools had to be brought back clean. He was just like a grandpa. He was a dear soul, and we learned a lot from him.

Haanel's house at the Meditation Retreat was one of the few houses up there, and it was such a simple dome. I ended up later living there with Roma and our daughter, Rose. And I laugh now, because I remember when it was first built, thinking, "Now, is this simple living?" Because I was still pretty austere.

Q: It sounds like a fairly higgly-piggly existence, but at the same time, if it was all holding together, surely you must have seen God's hand taking a part.

Haridas: Yes, at all times. On the material plane, a forest fire burned everything down in 1976, and I think it was partly because the buildings we'd built were so bad that they needed to be rebuilt, and we had to start over again. The material plane was pretty crazy. We

had two or three washing machines for 200 people, and one funky shower where you wondered if you were getting cleaner or dirtier. It just went on and on, and yet the spiritual energy was very high. I didn't know anything about these things, "vibrations" and so on, but there was no question that when I first walked on the property, I thought, "Aaah – my gosh, something's going on here." Because there was just no question about it.

At one point, we had the strength to begin to leave Ananda and form colonies. But, you know, Swami waited – that didn't happen until the mid- or late seventies, so it was a good ten years after it was all started. He didn't even give the higher Kriyas for nine or ten years. We didn't even know they existed, because he wanted us to get ourselves grounded in the practices that he'd given us.

And in those years, too, he gave every Spiritual Renewal Week, plus all of the Saturday classes and Sunday services. He would do a fire ceremony in the summer before Sunday service began, and he was with us all the time, doing all of the entertainment, all of that. It took a while, but then this person would learn to play the guitar and sing a few songs. Swami kept us on track, and it was important, because we didn't know what "spiritual" was, we didn't know what service was, we didn't know what meditation was, we really didn't know anything at all. We had just come in raw, completely raw, green troops.

Q: Swami Kriyananda held it together?

Haridas: Well, just as he holds it together now, because he's irreplaceable. Yet, after all these years, people like Jyotish began to go out

and teach. I remember when Jyotish finally became a minister, and his first Sunday services. His first Sunday service was ten minutes long, and most of it was about a bug crawling up the windows of the dome or something. We were green – even Jyotish, and he had been teaching with Swami in the Bay Area prior to coming to Ananda. And his first Spiritual Renewal Week, when Swami was in India and Jyotish had to do the whole thing, I mean these things were a big deal. But it gave us confidence to put out more energy and try to find ways that we could serve. All of us were so new, and we were scared, because we didn't know.

I remember when we started the center in Sacramento, we had a couple hundred people that Swami had drawn to an event that we had promoted, and I was to announce Swami. I was incoherent, that's how scared I was. I could hardly get out a word. So we had lots of tests, to get to the point where we had the confidence that we could serve in any of these ministerial capacities, not to mention in other ways.

Q: This is all very interesting in light of what's happening in the community here in Mountain View. It seems that the creation of the Village was "deep background" for what we're doing here now.

Haridas: Oh, absolutely. When you think of it, a hundred years after Christ, his disciples were still the pioneers. So, here we are, Yogananda has just left, only fifty-plus years ago, and a hundred years from now when they look back at Ananda, the people that are our great grand-kids will still be the pioneers. I don't think we often realize that this experience we are having is really, really special, and that we are very fortunate.

Q: Because the spiritual energy of a great movement is still new?

Haridas: Absolutely, this is still the golden years. When people say "Oh, I wish I had been at Ananda in the early years," I can appreciate that, but really, it's happening right now. We are still – you know, the pipes are breaking here in the community, and what's the difference between now and then? The same challenges are being given, inwardly and outwardly. The same fun, same adventures, same opportunities. They're all there. It's a great spiritual adventure for anyone who wants to take part.

Bill Meyer

The reason I spend time at Ananda is basically because I enjoy it.

Like so many others, I read *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and it left a lasting impression. I found Ananda at a time when I needed to enhance my meditation practice. I believe I was able to make an inward connection with the teachings because I was able to actually experience them on various levels.

When I look at the world, I see a planet run by the self-interests of the most powerful. When I look in upon myself, I see someone who aspires to joy, love, and grace. For a long time, I had a hard time reconciling the two.

My time at Ananda has helped me to better understand people's behaviors, including my own. I believe I have been able to make positive changes in my life because of these teachings. I understand more fully that to be a happier person, I had to treat others better. My relationship with everyone, including myself, is more deeply rooted in loving and accepting behaviors. And I am healthier for it.

I was a religious skeptic for most of my life. I was not raised in a family that went to church. Our cousins were Catholics, and I occasionally went to Sunday Service with them, but I knew I wasn't Catholic. I was turned off by religions that condemned other faiths. But at my core I knew I was a beautiful soul.

Being the skeptic that I am, I eased my way into Ananda. I guess I was looking to find fault with these beliefs. But I came away from my early encounters feeling good. Meditation

was good for me. But I think I most enjoy the service I am able to donate to the cause. It's important for me to feel that I am doing something good in this world. My service time allows me to interact with people with similar ideals. I believe it allows all of us to raise and refine our energy.

When the love, joy, and grace I'm speaking of truly gets rolling, I believe we will be able to accomplish great things in this world. Namaste.

Ron Cantoni

Q: How did you come to Ananda?

A: I walked in the door when the new church opened on El Camino, seventeen years ago. I had known about Ananda for some time, and I was looking for a spiritual home. I worked with somebody from Ananda, and they invited me to come to service.

Getting to know the people at Ananda was a joy. I recognized, "Oh, these people are all right." After that first Sunday service, that was it – I never left.

Q: You were at the first service at the Palo Alto Sangha after it moved into what was formerly a Catholic church?

A: Yes. I think Asha gave the service. And then, of course, there were all kinds of work parties for painting and so on, and I immediately got involved. I liked the Sunday services, I liked the singing, and I liked the people. And so I thought, "Well, I'll volunteer and see what happens. Because it was just a good vibration that I felt being around Ananda.

The workdays were a good experience, otherwise I probably would have stopped coming long ago. It was hard work, but somehow I enjoyed it. At first when I volunteered, I was always asking other people "How do you want this done?" "You asked me to build these shelves – do you want me to buy new lumber or get some used lumber?" "What do you want me to do?" And they would try to give me some direction. But after a while I

learned that they didn't know any more than I did, so if I saw something that needed to be done, I would just do it. But it took me a while to learn that I could do stuff without asking all the time.

I gradually moved into doing other things. The woman who was managing the Sangha's website moved to Italy, and I was interested in learning to create websites, so I kind of learned on my own. I asked David Praver if I could take over her job, and I've been doing it ever since.

My background is in mechanical engineering. I worked for GTE's government systems, and I learned computers while I was there. But when it came to helping the Sangha, I just basically learned what was needed as I went along. For instance, they needed somebody to figure out the telephones, and build a telephone interface box on the outside of the church offices. I didn't know anything about telephones, but I started learning, and one thing led to another. Being a mechanical engineer helped, because I like to get my fingers on things.

Then somebody gave us a grant to buy a video camera. Everybody agreed that it would be nice to video the Sunday sermons, and they asked me if I'd be willing to learn to do that. I knew absolutely nothing about video or cameras, but I went online and searched for recommendations, and it turned out that I made a decent choice. But that's just one more thing I had to learn and pick up along the way.

I used to spend three days a week helping at the Sangha, but now it's maybe a half-day, because I can do most of the website work and video processing at home. I'll come in when I'm

needed, but it isn't as often.

Q: What are the rewards of service?

I started helping out because of the original thought, "These are really good people. I like their energy. I like being around them."

I feel that they've become family to me. In my retirement, I didn't have anything pressing that I wanted to do, and I thought, well, this feels good. And it's continued to feel good for seventeen years. I recognize that someday I'm going to have to slow down a bit, but I'm not ready yet.

I didn't have much resistance to service and membership. I didn't know it consciously at the time, but I was looking for an outlet for my energy, and I found it. I didn't have any other agendas for what I wanted to do. I had done all the traveling I wanted, and I was fortunate to be retired, so my life is my own.

Q: Have you found that connecting with Yogananda's work, there's an extra energy that helps you do the work?

A: Yeah, it does help. There's definitely a special energy here and in this path. At one point, I had an experience of heartburn. I was feeling awful, and I was driving home. I started chanting, and it went away. Another time, my heart went into atrial fibrillation, and I wanted to get it recorded by the cardiologist in Palo Alto. So I left my house, and I was driving along very carefully, trying to control everything. And as I passed the church, it suddenly stopped. I thought, "Oh, no – I wanted to record it! But I'll take this." (laughs).

You can be feeling kind of down in the dumps, and you go there to volunteer, or you come to a kirtan or a Sunday service and it lifts you right up.

I had another experience when my heart was in atrial fibrillation. I was talking with a friend who was going through terrible back pain. And all of a sudden I felt totally empathetic toward them, and boom, the atrial fibrillation went away. It told me to be there for others, don't worry about yourself, because Master will take care of it.

The atmosphere at the Sangha can make a difference, if you're open to it and flow with. And sometimes when you go away, you realize what you're missing and you want to come back.

Q: Do you feel that you've grown because of your connection with Ananda?

A: Oh, yeah. Yes. I used to be very shy, and in the last 40 years I've come out of my shell more. Ananda has helped with that. The people are very friendly. Friendly and happy and joyful, and they have good energy. I think Ananda accepts people as they are, and it allows them to come out and be who they are.

Nayaswami Chidambar

Chidambar is an Ananda Lightbearer and co-manager with Tyagini Amara of the Mountain View Ananda Community.

Q: People come to Ananda Sangha for a variety of reasons. They come to Sunday service because they enjoy the music and fellowship, or they take a class series. But then sometimes they don't feel a need to make a further commitment. Perhaps it's because concepts such as membership, service, and commitment were defined in an earlier era by religious institutions that wanted to control what their members believed. People now find that approach off-putting. So perhaps it's no wonder if they reject elements of Ananda that they see as hangovers from the older ways.

A: It's a tough sell. It takes a while for people to understand what service is, and to experience the spiritual benefits.

Gary McSweeney told me how, at first, he didn't grasp the need for service. Then the community hosted a get-together, and afterward someone asked him, "Want to help me tear down?"

He began helping, and he suddenly realized, "Oh – I get Ananda now!" He took the opportunity to experience what it was like to serve, and he found that he enjoyed it.

Service opens your heart. When you're purely serving, there isn't the thought "I'll give you this much, and this I'll get this much in return." Service frees you from that grasping attitude, and I enjoy that. In our culture, we're always exchanging goods and services for

money, and I find it gets tedious. To be able to give freely, and have the feeling that people would give freely to you, was a great awakening for me.

I first heard of Ananda around 1973 or 1974 when I attended a lecture by Swami Kriyananda in San Francisco, but I wasn't much interested in exploring it further. Then my sister decided she wanted to see Ananda Village, and we drove up and spent a weekend. We were the only people in the class we had signed up for, and we spent lots of time with Asha Praver, who was the teacher.

It was only when I started to spend more time at Ananda that I began to see how service works. I realized that people weren't trying to get anything out of me, because the people at Ananda were genuine, and they were there to help.

Q: In what ways do you serve now?

A: I give Sunday service occasionally, and I sing in the choir. On Thursdays I lead a meditation at the Sangha that's open to everyone. I basically do anything that's needed.

Q: Have you seen that service helps people?

A: I've seen that folks who serve begin to truly understand the spiritual path, but the ones who don't serve, sooner or later spin out, and then they're gone. Unless God's energy flows through you, you tend to get stuck in "me," and in the thought "What am I getting out of it?" And it works against your spiritual progress. It's immature, and until you can break out of that syndrome, where your first thought is

always “me,” you can’t make much progress on the path.

If you observe Swami Kriyananda, you see that he’s unceasingly serving. It seems there’s no Kriyananda there at all; it’s just service. It’s Master’s work going on through him all the time. And that’s his example for the direction that will help us grow into the bliss that he continually enjoys.

I’ve seen that people who don’t serve never seem as happy. The world is still “happening to them.” They aren’t creating and moving forward. Service seems such a simple thought, but it’s very profound. Service is, in a real and deep sense, the lifesaver for your spiritual path.

Q: Do you find that people’s meditations improve when they serve?

A: I would say yes. Until you open up by serving, the most blissful inner spiritual experiences can’t come to you, because you’re closing your heart to what God wants to give you. You need to expand your heart to receive it. And nothing does that quite as well as service.

The spiritual path is a continual process of giving. Until you can give up “me,” you find that your meditations reach a certain level, and you can’t go further.

Q: Do you think the word “service” looms larger in people’s minds than it is?

A: That’s true. People worry that they’ll be taken advantage of and lose something. The culture around us is oriented toward the give-

and-take “merchant” attitude – “I give you so much, and I get that amount back.” In India, it’s called the *vaisya* mentality – the shopkeeper level of awareness, where there’s always a concern that someone will take something from you.

Q: Do people magnify the word “service”? Do they tend to overlook that even small service can be very rewarding?

A: Some people feel that their service has to be big and important, because then they’re really doing “Service.” I think the best thing is to do anything. I’ve seen very competent people do the dishes after an event at the Sangha, and I’ve seen that they’re in joy. They’re fully absorbed in the moment, doing the dishes, and they’re getting higher and higher, to where they’re floating. But it’s something you have to experience. You can talk about it, but unless you pitch in and experience it, it’s not satisfying.

It is heart-opening. If you do it for God and for joy, you’re taken care of. You’re floating. You’re just taking off.

Years ago at the Sangha, we had a series of programs called “Yogananda for the World.” Swami Kriyananda came and spoke, and we had hundreds of people in the audience. One evening we rented a church, because we didn’t have enough room. Before the program, I wandered into the kitchen, and I saw that it was a big mess, because we didn’t have enough cleaners. We needed to be out of the church by midnight because of our rental contract, and I looked at that mess, and I thought, “There’s no way we’ll get out on time.”

So I started cleaning. Swami Kriyananda was talking in the temple, and I was cleaning. But the longer I cleaned, the happier I got, and pretty soon I was just in joy. I was having more fun than I could imagine, even if I'd been sitting in the audience listening to Swami. I thought, "I hope everyone is having as much fun as I am." (laughs) And we got out on time.

It was a great lesson for me. It helped me understand that, in life and on the path, you get exactly what you need. You never lose anything. I've come to see that it's neurotic to fear that something will be taken away if you serve. You're there, this is what's going on, and this is exactly what you need at this moment. As soon as you accept it and say "Yes," your life is perfect.

Q: Swami Kriyananda talks about how the Divine Mother plays a game with us, where She sometimes asks us to do what seems worst.

A: You're tempted to fight it, until the point comes where you just laugh and say "Okay, I give up – whatever You want is fine!"

I had a job in the community that I didn't enjoy at all. I really struggled with it, and it went on for almost a year. Then at one point, I said, "Oh, well, this is what I have to do. I don't have a choice. I'm not going to quit and go somewhere else." And as soon as I made that decision, the job disappeared. It was gone – someone else was doing it, and it was out of my hair within a week. (laughs)

The thing is to learn "what is." Had I learned that lesson a year earlier, I wouldn't have had to endure the grief.

I'm trained in accounting, and the manager of our community said, "Here – you can do the books." I wanted to be outside working on the lawn and trees. I wasn't being paid to do the books, and I had the feeling, "I'm being ripped off."

And then the books wouldn't balance. For months, they wouldn't balance – this mindlessly easy set of books. And I realized that the problem was my attitude. But as soon as I changed my attitude and started doing a good job on the books, they were perfect. They took care of themselves, and I got them done in a third of the time I had been spending.

It's as if God is saying "Wake up! Do what's in front of you. Everything's fine! It's only yourself that you're running into."

Q: Do you find that when God asks you to do a job, that you somehow have the resources to do it?

A: There are situations that come up in the community office where I have no idea what to do. Over time, I've realized that if I give it to God, He'll give me the answer. I've got Yogananda's picture here (points to wall behind the desk) and Swami Kriyananda over there (points to opposite wall). Someone will come in, and they'll be upset, they'll be in tears, and they'll have some huge issue, and I'll have *no idea* how to answer. And I'll say, "Okay, boys, I need a little help." And I'll sit and wait, and I'll say what comes. I won't have thought it out. I'll just open up and say "All right, I need help." And then generally what's said is what's needed.

It's something you have to practice a bit. But we do have the answers, if we will only ask for help.

Q: It sounds as if service is making a relationship with God.

A: It is. It would be wonderful if we could help people experience it, and realize for themselves that they aren't losing anything, but they're gaining. The people I see serving are happier. It takes your life out of that exchange of energy for money. As soon as your heart opens, you're happier.

People can serve in their own way. For some people, moving chairs is something they'll never do – but maybe they're singers, or they know how to help in the office, and they can serve just as much in their own way.

The ideal would be to serve wherever you're asked. Because it's not like "someone's" asking you. God is asking you, and if you realize that, then what you're asked to do doesn't matter.

How can we invite people to serve so they can have those experiences of the Master and his joy? How can we offer people many options to serve? It's important for Ananda to help people in this way, because as soon as they begin serving, they start to feel what Ananda is really about.

Q: Is there a need on Ananda's part for service?

A: Only that if you let people serve, they can feel a part of what's going on. If you're always serving them, then they're guests, and

they never own it. But when they begin to serve, there's ownership. Without ownership, they never feel truly part of Ananda.

The Sangha needs all the help it can get. Here in the community, it's less obvious, but that's changing. Over the last ten or twelve years, the focus has shifted from the community to the Sangha, because the church is the outreach part of our service. But we're starting to have more community events, so we're having more opportunities to serve.

Q: Do people need move into service at their own pace?

A: It's a heart connection. That's how I started serving in the late 1980s. I saw that Asha and David were always serving, and I liked them, and I wanted to be doing something with them, and so I started serving. As I began serving, I realized that service has intrinsic value. Once you realize the joy in service, it opens up a world for you.

Tyagini Amara

Occupation: Co-manager of the Ananda Community in Mountain View; staff member at East West Bookshop; yoga instructor

Hobbies: Gardening, yoga, creative arts, singing, hiking, cooking

Favorite ways to spend time: Enjoying nature while hiking or gardening, satsang with gurubhais, Sunday service (spiritual highlight of the week – and great satsang!)

Anything else interesting about yourself? Current creative art is making jewelry. I have a little shop online, and also sell items at East West and in the boutique at Palo Alto Ananda Sangha.

What year did you first come to Ananda? In 1996.

What was the most rewarding and enjoyable experience of service that you've had with Ananda?

Coordinating hosting for a group of devotees from India and Italy. Some years ago, we hosted a beautiful group of about 25 devotees from India in our community. They stayed in our homes for several days, and helping with meals and lodging was a wonderful way to help give them an expanded overview of Master's work in America.

At the same time, we hosted approximately 50 European devotees who stayed in a motel nearby. They meditated in the community temple and had their meals in the community kitchen.

Putting forth more energy than I had ever thought was possible turned out to be an amazing experience. We had to begin serving early in the morning and continue until late at night, planning, cooking, coordinating, shopping, cleaning, and just sharing friendship and inspiration.

I knew that "I" could not do the many tasks at hand, and so I prayed sincerely to be a channel for God and Guru. The presence of God in many forms permeated our time together. Moment by moment, God poured through many hands to make a miracle. "God was serving God." All the meals were served, all the tours were given, all the entertainment was offered, with joy, grace, love, and gratitude. Although we didn't speak the same language, we could see the Divine light in every face.

What aspects of Ananda Sangha have you found most life-transforming?

Yogananda has given us countless tools for living a life that progresses steadily in the direction of God-realization. I would have to say that the most transforming aspects, for me, are meditation, yoga postures, and service to others. It can be hard to see the changes from one day to the next, but if we stick with it, over time we find that we are actually changing the cells of our bodies through meditation and yoga postures, and by expanding our sense of self through service to others.

Can you tell a story about an experience where you gave freely of your time and energy to Master and experienced blessings or personal growth as a result?

Before I came to Ananda, I didn't know the simple joy of giving to others. I had learned that tithing ten percent of my income to the source of my spiritual inspiration was an important key to financial success. But I didn't understand that giving freely of my time and energy could lead so powerfully to expansion of inner freedom and joy.

Soon after I moved here, I walked into the community room one evening and found about 20 people coloring Easter eggs and making decorations. The room was alive with laughter, meaningful conversations, and music.

Someone invited me to join in, and I couldn't resist. We colored eggs and wrote inspiring quotes until late in the evening. The next day, I came to kitchen and found people preparing food, and they invited me to join in. Once again, I couldn't resist. I wasn't used to being up so late, or being so social. Normally, I would have to rest after spending so many hours with other people. But I was astonished to find that not only was I not tired, but I felt VERY well.

At Ananda, people are encouraged to look for ways to give to others in many ways. It's common for us at Ananda to pray to be channels for the grace and joy and healing light of God and Guru in this world. I found myself, day by day, choosing to join more and more in that flow. I found myself choosing to give of myself freely, and forgetting the sense of limited time and energy. In the years that followed those first experiences, the joy of giving has continued to deepen and expand my awareness of God's unlimited energy as the foundation of everything.

Tyagi Dambara

Q: You've served Ananda's work for many years. You sing Swami Kriyananda's music. You and Manisha cook at Master's Kitchen in the Ananda Community. And you're on the Ananda Sangha staff. What do you enjoy about service?

A: I see service as fun. From the moment I joined Ananda, there was never any hesitancy. My thought was, "I want everything that Ananda has to give – a hundred percent." So service was natural for me.

We each need to find the balance of service that gives us joy. Some people don't want to be part of an organization, and that's normal at this point in time, because we're breaking free of old forms where the spiritual institution was all-important. But, of course, you do need an organization. Paramhansa Yogananda said that he was creating "hives" where people could come to sip the nectar of divine inspiration.

Ananda isn't like an Indian ashram, where everything is free. Here in Silicon Valley, it's a different reality. The energy and money to keep Ananda going has always come from the people who love to give back, because they've received so much. They love what Yogananda has given them, and they want to help Ananda share it with others.

Q: Should people assume that if they see something going on at Ananda, they can ask "Can I help?" and they'll be welcome?

A: It's a wonderful thing to do. "How can I help?" They can assume they'll get a

really positive response. It might be "Yes, you can help right now!" Or, "Let's figure out a way you can help."

Stephen Gaskin, who started The Farm, a cooperative community in Tennessee in the 1960s, said, "You are God's eyes on the planet. If you have the thought 'Someone ought to do something about that' – then you're it."

I often remember that saying, and I'll think "Maybe it's me." It's easy to sit back and enjoy the benefits. But that's like a child who's dependent on its parents. At some point, it's good to step up and take on ownership – good, because it's good for you.

Asha tells how she came to Ananda Village in the early years, and she loved being near Swami Kriyananda and absorbing his vibrations. One day, she was riding in the car with him through Ananda Village, and she looked around at all that had been built, and it occurred to her, "If I'm a true friend, I should be helping my friend accomplish what he's trying to do."

After people have been at Ananda for a while, there comes a point where they realize how meaningful it all is, and how wonderful it could be for others. And then you look around, and you don't see a ton of people doing it, and you realize, "Oh – it's just us. Oh – I really do have a place in this." So, yes, it's very appropriate to check in and ask "How can I help?"

Q: Do you find that when people give back, it helps their spiritual lives?

A: I see more joy in their faces. It's an "Aha!" moment. Asha remarked that our primary work at Ananda Sangha is to create excuses to get together and have fun. In the early days, we created many big events, mainly as an excuse to give people a chance to participate in serving. Because that simple process gives them a taste of the joy that naturally comes when you serve. You're directing your energy to God, and in service to God in others. It's just as important as our private meditation and sadhana. They go hand in hand.

We all go through a phase of searching, where we're "checking it out." In the beginning, you go to various places searching for what's yours. I remember visiting many classes and having the feeling "This isn't it," until I found Ananda. It's normal for folks to check us out and move on. But it's different for those who find something here that speaks to their heart. "This is special. This is mine. I need to know more about this."

I see a light in people's eyes when they finally "get it." That this is theirs, and that they find their joy in participating. But it always needs to be done appropriately, without overdoing it or becoming stressed. If you try to do everything, you might get burned out and have to pull back. It's better if you relax into the process, take a small step at a time, and move ahead naturally.

Any least step is a good thing, because it brings big rewards. It might be as simple as helping clean up after the bagel bar on Sunday. But, really, it's a good idea to look around and see what needs to be done, and ask how you can

pitch in. Really, it's a question of going at your own speed, and gathering your own experiences.

As I mentioned earlier, when I discovered Ananda, I was ripe. It was such a great blessing that I went full-speed ahead. I didn't take on any big positions, but I volunteered. For example, I loved listening to the audiotapes of Swami and the singers. There were tons of them, and they needed to be sorted out and organized, so I helped make a list of the tapes. It helped me, because it was fun to see what all these tapes were about, and I was this naturally organizing Virgo type, and it felt good to do something that was fun and useful. There are lots of opportunities, depending on your nature.

I'll tell you, we really bow before and appreciate anybody who has any time and energy to help, because it has big returns for us. Ananda Sangha has a staff of just four people, and we're spread pretty thin. We have a few part-time volunteers, but it's not a lot of people. So anybody who can help is deeply appreciated.

David G.

Q: You've served Ananda for more than 20 years. What motivates you to give so much of your time and energy?

A: To my way of thinking, service is a question of making a commitment to something that's outside yourself. We're very skilled at doing what we feel like. But doing what we feel like is what's gotten us where we are today. And if you're truly trying to change, then doing what you feel like, over and over, isn't going to get you there.

It's like a marriage. If you're married, you can be in a state of constant war, or you can adapt to the person you're married to. So if you want to be reasonably happy, you have to learn to adapt.

The whole point of the spiritual path is to get out of your ego and desires. If every time something gets difficult, you quit and go somewhere else, you will learn nothing, and you'll always be running. So if you make the commitment to become a member, then when it gets tough, *you* have to change.

That's an analogue for the spiritual path. When you become a member, or you serve, or you make a commitment, what you're saying is "This thing will become the fixed part, and when it gets uncomfortable, I'll need to change my own consciousness."

If you can easily quit, then you build a habit of quit, quit, quit, and you run and run.

Master told the story of a young monk in the ashram at Mount Washington who left the

monastery because there was a man there that he couldn't stand. Later, he returned to Master and said ruefully, "At my new job, there are five people just like him!"

You can run forever. "Oh, Ananda isn't serving me. I'll join another church." "Oh, now this church isn't serving me – I'll join another church." "Someone gave me a dirty look. I'll quit and join another church." You can do that your whole life, but you aren't going to learn anything.

You can try to get what you want, but until you can want what you want, you're a slave. Because until you can control your likes and dislikes, you're at their mercy.

Becoming a member means "I'm committed to Ananda. And when it gets tough, I need to look at that part in *me* that is finding it so difficult."

Which is not to say that Ananda is perfect. But spouses aren't perfect, either. Nothing you ever commit to is perfect. If you wait for something to be perfect before you commit to it, then there's no point in that, either.

Q: You make commitment sound a bit hard.

A: Well, it is hard. Because changing yourself is hard. But the benefit that you get is that you accomplish something that's difficult, which is changing yourself.

If you're not interested in changing yourself, you definitely should not become a member of Ananda. Because you're completely missing the point.

You don't become a member to listen to pretty music, and eat nice food at banquets. I mean, that's fine if it's what you want. But if you actually want to become a member of Ananda, then you make the membership decision, understanding that things will be difficult sometimes.

Look, you're a runner, right? It's difficult to run a marathon. What's the benefit? It's the satisfaction and joy of self-expansion and accomplishing something difficult. You don't quit after 100 yards and say "This is too hard. I'll go golfing." You're not going to become good at anything that way.

Ananda is a vehicle. If you can find God faster by doing something else, do not become a member of Ananda! Find God! The point is to find God. Ananda is irrelevant. Ananda is a vehicle for finding God.

It's similar to discipleship. I think it would be better for someone to disciple himself to a bookshelf, or to a pebble, than to nothing. Because if you're a disciple to nothing, then you're just going to follow your whims for the rest of your life.

Make a commitment to something, so that when push comes to shove, you actually have to change your consciousness and attitude, rather than following your whims all the time.

I think it's cute when people say "I don't want a guru telling me what to do." Well, your egoic desires are telling you what to do, 24/7, and you don't mind that! So what's the difference? The guru at least has your best interests at heart, whereas your passions don't.

So this whole thing about membership, I think is kind of goofy. This is to help you become a free human being, to help you have control of your own consciousness. Because you can influence your own consciousness.

And it works. I've been at Ananda for almost 30 years. And I've seen, I don't know, maybe a thousand people come through the door. And the people who make the commitment, and work on changing their attitude, are the ones who turn into glowing, shining souls. The people who run away every time something gets difficult, stay weak.

Part of the change comes by experience. What are we talking about? When you make a commitment to Ananda, it's not like someone's going to ask you to cut off your finger. People don't ask you do things that are weird. If it's an invitation to help set up tables after service, good gosh, it's not like people are asking you to jump off a cliff. So this fantasy that people have, that "Well, if I make a commitment, what if they ask me for all my money?" I mean, it's ridiculous, because it's just not going to happen.

When I first came to Ananda, I basically made a soul commitment early on, but with an asterisk, that if anybody asked me to do something that seemed completely nutty, I would say no. And in all these years, nobody has asked me to do anything that seemed nutty.

Which doesn't mean that I haven't been asked to do things that were unpalatable to me. But that reflects on my own likes and dislikes. And if you don't feel like setting up tables, it's not a big deal.

So I found it pretty easy to make a commitment at the very start. If you step back and look at it clearly, what are you actually being asked to do when you become more involved with Ananda, or sign up as a member? Nothing. Hand out brochures when people walk out after Sunday service? What's the big deal?

It's trivial. Of course, even trivial requests can sometimes get our goat. "I don't *want* to hand out brochures!"

I was at a Whole Life Expo, many years ago, where Swami Kriyananda was a speaker. I was in Ananda's booth helping out, and Swami gave me a stack of brochures about his talk the next day. He said, "I want you to stand in the middle of the aisle and hand them out to every person who walks by."

I didn't want to do it. It felt like I would be intruding on people. But then I thought, "Come on, Dave, what's he asking you to do? Lie down in the middle of the highway? This is just not that big a deal." So I sort of gutted it out and took the stack and went into the aisle.

The first person walks past, and I go, "Swami Kriyananda is speaking tomorrow." And she grabs the brochure and says, "Oh my God! I've been wanting to hear him talk for ten years! I can't thank you enough for giving me this brochure. I'm so excited! Thank you. Bless you." And she walks off.

I'm thinking, "Well, that was pretty good." And the next person walks by and I hand him a brochure, and he says, "Swami's going to be here? I didn't know! I'll be there – thank you so much."

Five seconds later, a guard walks up and says, "You're not allowed to hand out brochures in the aisle." So I say, "Fine," and I go back to the booth.

Swami says, "Back so soon?" And I say, "The guard said I can't do it." And Swami says, "Oh, okay, fine."

So the whole test had nothing to do with the brochures. It was about my attitude.

Why can't I be sufficiently disciplined and self-possessed and mature that when someone asks me to do something trivial like that, I say "Sure!"

You know, if I hadn't made a pledge to Swami in my heart, I would have said "No, I don't want to hand out brochures." And I wouldn't have learned anything, and those two people might not have been helped.

The point is, turning yourself over to God's will instead of your own will can be a very expansive thing to do. Left to my own will, I never would have handed out those brochures. But what the heck do I know? If I were God, it would be fine. But I'm not God. And I have lots of stories like that, where it's been clear to me that the lesson was about attitude, and saying yes, and being willing to serve. And then all sorts of doors can open for you.

Follow the magic. Follow the blessings. But if you sit around saying no because "I don't like handing out brochures," you won't get anywhere. You'll always be a slave to your likes and dislikes.

Q: What are some of the roles you've had at Ananda?

A: Oh, gosh, I've washed dishes, I've managed businesses, I've handled finances, I've sung with the choir and small ensembles. I've carried baggage for Swami. I've dug ditches, hammered nails – I mean, everything, because when it comes up, I've gotten used to saying "Sure."

How bad can it be? When you agree to serve, you aren't signing a contract. If someone asks for your help washing dishes, and you wash dishes for ten minutes and it feels like it's the wrong thing, you can say "I'm sorry, I don't feel like I should do this anymore." If you were being asked to sign a long-term contract, I could understand being nervous. But there is no contract.

You can at least take the first step. How can you know what an apple tastes like until you bite into it? To sit on the outside staring at the apple is not going to help you. Take a bite, and if you don't like it, spit it out. But take the bite. I'm not sure what people are afraid of.

Give it your heart. Do it as an experiment. Give it everything you've got for 90 days, and if at the end of that time it doesn't feel good, drop it. You don't have to make a lifetime commitment.

I came to visit Ananda for thirty days, twenty-seven years ago, and I never left. It worked for me. But you have to try it. If you don't try it, you won't even know what you're rejecting.

Nayaswami Roma

Nayaswami Roma and her husband, Haridas, lived in the Ananda community in Mountain View, California, where Roma managed the community kitchen and Haridas served as the community's co-manager. They are now serving with Ananda in Los Angeles. This is from a Sunday service that Roma gave at Ananda Sangha on April 10, 2005.

We've had a wonderful experience in the Ananda community the last few days. We've been blessed to host 40 pilgrims from Assisi. They've come to America to learn how to start a community, because they're feeling the need for a place where they can raise their families and commit to living a spiritual life together.

They were with us for four days. It was beautiful, because they were from many European countries, but their faces were all shining with the light of the spiritual life.

I was asked to cook for them, and a dear friend gave her time to help, and then Ishani transformed the community room into a beautiful place with flowers and bright colors.

Living at Ananda, you sometimes hear people say that they couldn't imagine living in a spiritual community, because they need their own space, and so on, and it would be so hard. It's definitely a challenge to move into a community, and to live with your brothers and sisters and say "Okay, everything is from God. God is in my brothers and sisters." But when I was asked to cook, I had a great feeling of joy. I thought, "This is going to be fabulous. I'm so

excited." And I immediately started planning.

The first night, we were cooking for a hundred people. Then for breakfast the next day we were cooking for sixty, and then the next night for eighty, and the next morning for breakfast, and the next day. And it just went on and on. It was one of those experiences where you put your head down and get immersed until you come out the other end. But I felt such joy. I couldn't wait to get into it.

The night before the visitors arrived, I was asleep, and I woke up and sat bolt upright and thought, "Oh my God, I forgot to tell Gaetan not to get the cheese." Haridas woke up and said, "What's the matter?" I said, "I forgot to tell Gaetan not to get the cheese." He said, "Is there anything I can do?" "No, no, just go back to sleep."

The next night, we came home very late, and I checked my phone before I went to bed, and there was a message from a friend, "The school is leaving on a field trip in the morning, and it's traditional that we take pots and pans and all kinds of utensils from the kitchen. I'll try to make sure I don't take the wrong things."

I went to bed, and at three in the morning I sat bolt upright again, and I said, "Haridas! They're taking all the pots and pans from the kitchen. We have to stop them!" He woke up and said, "Is there anything I can do?" I said, "Yes! Go to the kitchen and put a sign on the big pot that says 'Call Roma before you take anything!'" He came back and said, "It's all taken care of."

Then, at six in the morning I got a call from my dear friend Uma Devi who lives by the

community room. She said, “They already took the pots and pans. They didn’t see the sign. They took them last night.” I thought, “Oh my God!”

I hung up the phone, and this is where it ties in with our Sunday service theme this morning, which is that you’re not supposed to kill a person. (laughs) Well, my dear friend, I didn’t think of killing you, but I just laughed. Because I thought, “What an amazing thing. I’m going to walk into the kitchen and there aren’t going to be any pots and pans, and I’m going to cook for 100 people, and it’s going to be really fun.” Well, in fact, the teacher had left all the right things, so it turned out all right.

But, you know, this world will try to shove us off our center. We think we have it all planned out. But remember that saying – “Man proposes, God disposes.” And why do these things happen? Well, in a spiritual community especially, these things happen so that we can check our hearts.

Where is our consciousness? How will we react? Will we panic and say “I don’t deserve this. How can this be happening to me? I have such good intentions, and everything’s going wrong – and, why me, Lord?”

In fact, even if there hadn’t been any pots, it would have been fun, because we would have started a big phone-calling spree, and we’d have found all the pots we needed.

Everything always works out for the best. Always, always. And if we can keep our consciousness where it needs to be, steadily advancing toward God, and if we can be in our heart, then everything in life will flow in the

right way.

It’s a diminishing of the ego, and of the thought of “I, me, my, mine.” What I want. What I deserve. Those things need to be put aside. The ego needs to be let go, so that we can live more in our souls.

It’s a very good practice to look in the mirror and ask “Who am I?” We think we are a man or a woman. But, are we? No – we are more than that. A schoolteacher? No. We are in this role for this incarnation only. We’re playing these things out. Do you have a good or bad personality? You don’t have a personality, because you’re more than that. We are more than anything we can conceive of with our mind.

If you keep asking who you are, you begin to feel a bubbling-up of joy in your soul, and you begin to understand that you are infinite joy and infinite love. Anything that happens to us, anything exterior to that feeling in our souls of who we really are, is superfluous.

I was listening to a recording last night of a talk that Swami Kriyananda gave recently in India. He told how he was riding in a taxi, and the cab driver was listening to the song “Oh, God Beautiful” in Hindi. And Swami began singing along. He told the driver, “We sing that song, too – my guru sang that song when he was in America.” And they began singing the song together. Then the cab driver said, “Oh, what would life be, without singing to God!” And Swamiji was weeping. He couldn’t get through the story, because he was so filled with the joy of living for God, and singing to God, and giving everything to God.

How do we begin to realize the soul that is beneath the surface? What can we do? Well, we have to be humble. We have to see God as the doer, in the good and the bad, in our successes and failures. That's humility. It's the most important thing, because it diminishes the ego. What is humility? Living for God is asking Him to work through us, to speak through us, act through us, and see through our eyes.

If we live a life filled with enthusiasm, joy, and the love of God, and filled with service, viewing our lives as an instrument to help others, then we'll be truly alive.

Nayasami Rambhakta

A Difficult Test

In his recent talks, Swami Kriyananda has warned that the world now faces the prospect of severe economic hardship. How will we live, if the material foundations of our life should suddenly be shaken or destroyed? I have no set answer – but I pray that the following stories may inspire us with the possibility that our most reliable “resource,” in good times and bad, is our relationship with God.

When I moved to Ananda Village in February 1976, the community’s photographer had recently left. A big event, a “Village Fun Faire,” was being planned, and it promised to be photogenic, with colorfully costumed performers and even an elephant. I wanted to take good pictures, but my camera wasn’t up to the job.

In the early years at Ananda Village, many of the single people lived a very simple life, earning just \$50 a month plus room and board.

Wondering how to raise the money for a camera, I recall reaching in my pocket and finding 34 cents – the extent of my net worth at the time. But I sensed that if a camera was truly needed, the money would come. I told God that I would do my part, if He would show me how to make the money.

The next day, a friend called to say that he had written a book for bicyclists, and he needed some photos. Could I do them? The amount he offered was just enough for a camera that would serve Ananda admirably.

Fifteen years later, I was training for my first ultramarathon, when an injury threatened to end my running career altogether. I tried all manner of remedies, from anti-inflammatory drugs, to massage, icing, cheap shoe inserts, and special exercises, but nothing worked. I even

stuffed leaves in my shoes! Finally, feeling desperate, I prayed for help. And then I heard an intuitive voice that I recognized as Swami Kriyananda’s. It said, “Go see the podiatrist.”

I said, “But I have no money, and the podiatrist will prescribe orthotics (shoe inserts) that cost \$400, plus he’ll charge \$40 for the office visit.”

Yet the inner guidance was unrelenting – again it said, “Go see the podiatrist.” Seizing my faith in my hands, I made an appointment, and sure enough, the doctor wanted \$40 for the visit and \$400 for inserts. I asked him to bill me, and the next day I received a phone call from the same friend who had “come through” 15 years earlier. “I’ve written another book,” he said. “Can you do the photos? I need them quickly, and I’ll pay \$500.”

This story has repeated itself endlessly in my life as a devotee – not always as spectacularly, but often enough that I’ve come to understand that certain principles are at play. I’ve seen, for example, that when the need is real and we humbly ask for God’s help, He willingly provides.

But I evidently still had much to learn about money and grace, and in due time God saw fit to teach me a difficult lesson.

In the late 1990s, I was able to make a comfortable living as a writer and editor in Silicon Valley. When the high-tech industry experienced a down-turn in 2001, the company I was working for began to struggle, and my work fell by the wayside. Following 9/11, my other clients reduced their spending, and I found myself essentially unemployed.

I prayed for help, and the next day, a friend who lives in our Palo Alto Ananda Community told me of an opening in the department where she worked at Stanford University. I happily took a part-time job helping the department manager.

My boss was a wonderful person. Before

I went to work each morning, I would pray to be able to make her day easier by being supportive and cheerful, and offering her God's friendship. I loved that job, and I stayed for two years. But then the department trimmed its budget and my job was eliminated.

For the next six years, I had a terrible time making a living. Why? I can think of at least six reasons. All of them relate to mistakes that I had made in the past. But I don't think it helps to dwell too much on our mistakes, because what ultimately matters is the lessons we learn from them.

When I was new on the spiritual path, I recall making what I considered a big mistake. That evening, I sat to meditate, feeling very sad that I had let myself and God down. I like to think of God as my Divine Mother. I prayed, "Divine Mother, I guess You'll have to accept me as I am." Instantly, I heard a feminine voice, as of a bustling, efficient mother, that said, "I am not concerned about your faults; I am concerned only with your *continual improvement!*"

After I left Stanford, I applied for hundreds of jobs for which I was highly qualified, and I went to scads of job interviews that always seemed to go well – yet nothing resulted. I had countless responses to my ads on Craigslist, but I was never hired. I began to run up debts.

I had a reading with a Vedic astrologer whose predictions had proved impressively accurate over the years. He told me that I was in a deeply inward period of my spiritual life – "on pilgrimage," as he put it, and that I was "invisible to employers."

It was both a wonderful and a deeply confusing time. I was writing a book on fitness, based on Paramhansa Yogananda's teachings, and my work on the project brought me joy. But the satisfaction was balanced by a growing sense of frustration over my inability to make a living.

Over the years, I had developed an excellent resume, with wonderful testimonials from respected companies, and two degrees from Stanford University. Yet – nothing! I had a handful of regular clients who gave me enough work to keep food on the table, but little more.

The time of testing stretched to six years. After five years, I had another astrology reading, and learned that I had entered a period when it would be possible to make a good living. Yet months passed after I entered the "money period" with no change. I realized that my Guru was capable of holding up my astrology chart, and with a gentle smile, ripping it to pieces, if it would help me learn a needed lesson.

Just when I felt that I had truly reached the end of my rope, I had a vision one day in meditation. I saw a young man with brown skin and long black hair, standing in front of a gray stone hut, high in the Himalayas. He wore a simple wool robe, and it was obvious that he had nothing, only a crude rock shelter and food. But the smile on his face was radiant. I realized from the vision that it was possible to be sublimely happy while having almost nothing in material terms.

The vision reminded me of how I had lived 30 years earlier, in the pioneering days at Ananda Village. At the time, I owned just two pairs of jeans and two shirts. When one set of clothes was dirty, I washed them in the garden shower at the village, scrubbing them with hand soap and setting them on a fence to dry. At Christmas one year, Swami Kriyananda drew my name in our Divine Mother gift exchange. Someone told him that I only had two shirts, and he gave me a pale-blue long-sleeved cotton turtleneck. I loved that shirt – it felt wonderful to wear it, and I was sad when it finally wore out.

I knew that I wouldn't "pass" the test until the lesson had been driven deep into my cells. In fact, I wanted to learn the lesson completely, so that I wouldn't have to return to

it again. I wrote to Swami Kriyananda, “I am glad that my Guru is uncompromising.” His secretary replied that Swami had read my email, and that he had said he understood.

Some weeks later, I had a further realization. I wrote to Swami Kriyananda, “I have come to understand that I am in this world for only three reasons: to love God, to serve His work, and to live simply.” I sent the email and forgot about it; I would have been content to receive no reply. Even if I became homeless, I felt that I had learned an enduring lesson.

A week later, nothing had changed. Then I received an email from Swami's secretary. He told me that Swamiji had read my latest email, and that he had said, “Very good.”

I can't tell you how much those words meant to me. It was the most precious message of my life.

The sequel is that, bright and early the next morning, the phone began to ring off the hook. The same Craigslist ad that had failed to elicit a single job for more than six years was now unleashing a torrent of offers. It was actually scary how many people were calling and asking me to work for them.

From then on, I've had a regular flow of work. But the lesson, of course, didn't end there. It was not as if Divine Mother said, “You've learned your lesson – now you'll be able to find work easily.” I found that the flow of work continue to the extent that I took time to reflect on and affirm, over and over, the purpose of my life: to love God, to serve His work, and to live simply.

I began to tithe – for no other reason than from the grateful love of my heart. Reflecting on the loving help that Swami Kriyananda and Ananda had given me over the years, I wanted to give back. I began to participate more in the work, by singing in the choir and in two small groups, and by writing, volunteering occasionally in our community garden, and helping the manager of our

community. And to the extent that I offered my service cheerfully, from my heart, I found that I was immeasurably blessed.

Looking back over my life at age 69, I see that one of the most difficult, yet rewarding lessons I've had to learn is to go along happily with Divine Mother's way of doing things.

In our culture, we like to imagine that we can plan our lives logically and mathematically. Nowhere is this more evident than in our relationship to money. “I will invest this much energy, and I will receive this much money in return.”

We hope to find security by gaining control over the material circumstances of our lives. How lovely it would be, if life were all straight lines and right-angles! Yet it would be a perfect recipe for forgetting God.

This experience showed me that all of the money in creation is contained wholly and entirely within Divine Mother's purse. Whenever I serve God's work, the sense of abundance increases. But when other things distract me from the threefold purpose of my life, I find the flow of opportunities mysteriously cut off. Abundance, I realize, comes by opening ourselves to its only source, in God, through our love and service to Him.