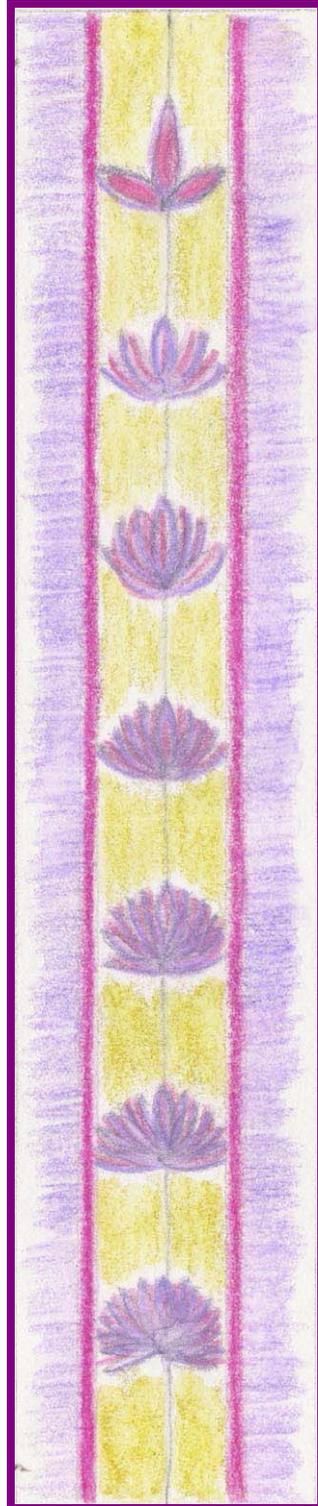


NAVARATRI 2007



Sankalpam

From where I stand, I stand everywhere else that I have ever been.

This is that place where our annual tryst commences.

This is that place where it ends.

And in every minute of the tryst, I am here
and everywhere else that it takes.

In every minute, every minute is a minute,
and the entire journey of that tryst.

And the journey is every bit as confusing as that verse.

To be at the beginning and the end,
to be the beginning and the end,
at all points between and beyond,
to be all points between and beyond,
is to be you.

And this is always the point of the tryst.

In this minute, I want to experience
all parts and all dimensions of this minute and its complementary eternity
together and separately.

To be
in this minute
to be this minute
and all other minutes as well.

This year, there will be no telling of stories,
no carousing through phases,
no steep and wrenching climb.

This year, we will be still.

We will still be.

Still we will be.

Be where we will
everywhere we will

and still be still.

Still.

Will.

Be.

You.

Me.

We.

Mahalaya Amavasya, October 11, 2007

I

A speck wafts through a boundless universe.
A whisper floats upon an ocean that hums with one sound.
I am that, I am that.
That speck, that universe.
That whisper, that ocean, that sound.

Aum.
Converging on a single still point.
AA...UU...MMMM.

And in that universe, I am immanent.
I am the tree, the branch, the leaf, the dewdrop, the droplet of sunlight.
I am the sun, the light, the heat, the shade, the shadow.
I am the night, the moon, the breeze, the quiver, the touch.
I am the mood, the movement, the here, the there.
I am everywhere.
I am everything.
I am life.

I am matter. I am life.
I am object. I am breath.
I am death. I am immortality.
So-ham. So-ham.

I am consciousness.
I am intelligence.
I am the breeze that rustles the leaves. I am the leaves.
I am the one that hears the leaves. I am the sound.
I am. I am. I am.
Everywhere, everytime, every way, everyone,
I am.
Forever.

You.
Am.
I.
Am.
You.

Prathamam, October 12, 2007

II

In and out and up and down,
full and empty and flowing on.
Breath is rhythm.
Counting up, counting down
Hold a little, come around.
1-2-3 1-2-3 1-2-3
1-2-3-4 1-2 1-2-3-4
1-2-3-4 1-2 1-2-3-4 1-2-3-4
Sa Ni Dha Pa Sa Ni Sa Ni Dha Pa Ma Ga
Ri Sa.

Breath is music.
In on the aarohanam,
hold the high Shadjam.
Out on the avarohanam,
hold the low Shadjam.

What sorties can you make on this
journey?
Can you go beyond, can you reach below?
Past and future anchored by the present,
Time pitched to a musical point.

Music is colour.
Long brush strokes, lingering notes in an
aalaapanai.
Pallavi, outline. Anupallavi, sketch.
Charanam, drawing.
Each embellishment, a layer of colour.
Each detail, an intricate juxtaposition of
notes.
Fast-flowing kalpanaswarams, stippled
points of paint.
Colour yields image.

Image hovers over form.
Form suggests reality.
Reality.
Reality?
Reality?
Reality.

That which I can touch.
That which I can see.
That which I can taste.
That which I can speak.
That which I can hear.
That which I can intuit.

Reality?

That which is my breath.
Is my only reality.
Like the multi-hued journey of an
elaborate ragam-tanam-pallavi
returning to the first matra of the taalam,
my breath is my only reality.

Dvitiyai, October 13, 2007

III

Breath ignites life,
energize that which it touches.

And so from that elaborate silence that we
cannot remember
comes thought.
Thought is real.
Thought is unreal.
Thought is unceasing.
Thought is everywhere
and when I try to contain it,
thought multiplies like a virus.
Thought is a virus
quietly decimating the silence that is our
birthright
and alienating us from our selves.
From our self.

As I write this, my thoughts quickly pose
counter-arguments.
We cannot all be bad.
There are good thoughts, positive
thoughts
happy thoughts, loving thoughts.
Divinity and its presence.
Love and its raptures.
Prose beyond perfection.
Friends long left behind
and futures barely anticipated.
In my dreams, real and unreal,
past, present and future,
come together.
They belong to me, inalienable and
personal,
like my breath.

Why, creativity is also a thought
and so is imagination.

Imagination is the golden chariot of
thoughts,
able to ooze through barriers
and travel through all elements.
Imagination is a kite, thought is the string-
that-can't-be-cut.

In my dreams, I imagine a world that must
be beyond thought.
But it is still a world of form.
My dreams have people, places, colours,
textures
tastes, sounds, activities, feelings
and lots of words.
The things that I cannot imagine when I
am awake
and my thoughts are playing censor in the
name of rationality,
are available to me in my dreams.

Tritiyai, October 14, 2007

IV

Bliss me out, my mind says,
and I know not whether I am alive.

But in anger, I am intensely alive.
My heart races so I know it beats.
My blood boils so I know it flows.
Words rush around so I know I am not in
a stupor.
Anger tells me I am alive.

Outrage gives meaning to my life.
When anger is outrage, I am moved to
action.
Action is the purpose of life.
“Don’t just stand there, do something.”

So I do. I move. And movement
reminds me of the kinetic energy I
possess.
To be still is to be dead.
Movement is a sign of life.
Fast movement, slow movement.

Slow movement is another moment of
life.
Sadness. When I feel pain in my heart,
I know I have a heart.
Or else, it is just a machine programmed
to a rhythm.
But when it aches, when it grieves,
when it hurts, I live.

So why must I return to an equilibrium
that takes me away from that
pulsating, aching knowledge that I am
alive?

My heart beats so loud and fast that I can
barely hear the answer.
I breathe in and out so it will rest calm
enough for me
to know: in order to hear this answer!

And in the laughter that bubbles up,
I know too, that I live.
A little anger, just enough to make me do.
A little pain, just enough to create
empathy.
A little laughter, a lot of laughter
to chase away the inertia.
To chase away the fear.
Of too much passion, too much
lamentation,
too much ranting, too much diffidence,
too much of me, the fear of being fearful
and doubtful.

Chaturti, October 15, 2007

V

From where we stand
to return and to proceed
have equal value.

We can keep moving
or we can stay where we are.
We can reminisce
or we can speculate.
We can be nostalgic
or we can be regretful.
We can be hopeful
or we can court dread.

Where we stand,
and have been since yesterday,
is an inert lake of emotion,
self-contained,
self-referential,
self-justifying,
self-perpetuating.

We can struggle to leave,
or choose to stay.
We can complain and weep copious tears,
or we can research the water's secrets.
The stagnant pool will neither welcome
nor repel us.
The choice is ours.

I revisit yesterday's thought:
when I feel, I know I live.
But today, as the sun has risen
and the clouds have lifted,
I can tell that there are limits to this water-
body.
What seemed boundless in the twilight
seems like a confined space this morning.

I know now, you already did,
that one day either I will choke the lake
or its weeds and mire will choke me.

Something in me shivers
and struggles to leave.
But emotions bind me to the lake
like tentacles. Sorrow,
happiness, fear, courage, ego,
lust, pride, anger, love,
avarice, hunger, grief
hold me like they will never let me go.

I close my eyes and breathe.
As my attention settles on the rise and fall
of my breath,
the tentacles fall away as well.
Freedom is only a breath away.

Panchami, October 16, 2007

VI

Coming back from the silence of the
infinite
gently into the quotidian,
there is a very tiny fraction of eternity
in which everything is possible.

Like light through a pinhole,
if you are receptive,
this is a moment of inspiration.

Grace is abundant and readily available
to those who welcome it
and everything is always possible
to those who realise it is.

But in this one moment,
inspiration can come to anyone
--a tiny seedlet from which an average
imagination
can afforest a universe.

Here I am,
now you see me, now you don't,
come get me,
come, play with me.
A tantalizing invitation is issued
and we follow, some of us, like
rats, children followed the Pied Piper,
each clutching hundreds of teasing strings
leading to thousands of journeys.

A single braid, carefully forged of some of
these hundreds—
a dream.
From that one speck of infinity,
a dream for a lifetime.

A special kind of magic this,
where we cannot explain why a certain
dream
chooses to spend our lifetime with us.

A special kind of imperative,
where we cannot defend why it drives us,
even when we know that none of it really
matters.

A special kind of madness,
to persist in tilting at windmills,
even though others think they are giants.

A special kind of grace,
to have opened one's heart at that precise
moment

when inspiration touches you,
imagination braids an accessible dream
and the sea starts parting before you.
A very special kind of grace, indeed.

Shashti, October 17, 2007

VII

Everybody tells me about effort.
The ant labouriously stocked up on food.
The squirrels carried pebbles one by one
to build a bridge for Rama.
The tortoise slowly moved towards the
finishing line.
And who can forget Insy-Winsy Spider?

And each painstaking moment of work,
I know from experience, quite quickly
amounts
to an enormous distance covered on my
journey.

But today, I want to acknowledge
two other lessons I have learnt
about effort and progress.
Both gifts from you to me.

Sometimes I work really hard,
blurring the distinction between night and
day,
between endeavour and compulsion.
I leave no stone unturned,
ignore no opportunity.
And still,
water cannot be wrung from stone.
Mountains will not move.
Brick walls do not yield.
You do not relent.

Now I know,
that which you deny me
despite my effort was all wrong for me,
like a fish wanting to run an overland
marathon,
or an iron ladle wanting to soak in shady
lagoon!

Thank you for sparing me
all the things I agonized
and slaved over
and did not get.

The second lesson is that
when I stumble upon the right choice,
my efforts work
like the Red Sea parting for Moses,
like a hot knife through soft butter,
like feet through quicksand.

When the path clears
and obstacles yield,
I know I am seeking the right thing,
in the right place,
in the right time,
in the right way.

Thank you for showing me that
in such an unambiguous way
that even doubt cannot create obstacles
when everything is right.

Saptami, October 18, 2007

VIII

Some days you wake up knowing
that everything you touch will turn to
gold.

There is magic in your being,
magic in your touch,
magic in your step
and magic in your heart.

Can you spring out of bed? Yes!
Will the morning swing along on a song?
But of course!

Can you produce poetry out of email
and paradise out of policy? Just watch!
Is there colour in your movement and
dance in your breath? Sing with me and
see!

Everything is possible on mornings like
this!

There are no naughts, no crosses,
no obstacles, no doubts.
A charm in the air, a song in the heart.
How can I explain to you
why I am so surefooted on some
mornings?

Some mornings, my grandest dreams
are simply a checklist to go through.
Finish writing everything.

Design the website and colour the
pictures.

Smile at everyone and stay calm and
pleasant.

Read several articles and think deep
thoughts.

Blog some of them and build a new
centre.

Engage lively minds and make world
peace happen.

All before breakfast.

On such mornings, my heart admits no
difficulties,
my memory erases all negativity,
my mind squashes doubt relentlessly.

Even that sounds like a downer!

If I were a melodious song,
sung by a voice like gold-dust rolled in
honey,
carried by a gentle spring breeze
with just a hint of apple-blossom and
jasmine
in the gentle winter sun of Bombay in
January,
touched by morning-dew,
I might be the magic of that morning.

If I were a monsoon spray,
gusty, joyous and irreverent,
unmindful of rain, thunder, lightning and
wind,

indeed making them my spirit,
cool to the touch, warming to the heart,
with a promise of fresh clean earth and
green grass

hanging in the air,
I might be the spirit of that morning.

Some mornings last a lifetime.
And to those who live in another
timezone

where it is noon or dusk or night,
cannot understand why it is always
morning in my heart.

And I cannot explain,
nor really do I want to.
To marvel at this gift is enough,
to live up to its inspiration is fulfilment
and to know it is so, is grace.
Your grace.

Ashtami, October 19, 2007

IX

On this day,
we hand you all the tools of our trade,
or so we think,
and desist from their use.
This is a way of honouring you,
I have heard.

But what are the tools of our trade?
Am I not a tool of yours?
And who are you?
Are you not me?

From that point to many others,
my mind, yet another tool,
spins a million questions
born of its tedium and
its profound alienation.

We cannot write,
but do words leave us?
We cannot sing,
but where do we go with these burdened
hearts of ours?
We cannot draw,
but images still traverse our heads
like a badly edited cinema reel.

The day hangs heavy
and the hours drag on.

In memory of those who have come
home to you,
we cannot approach you
until custom deems it appropriate again.

How fair is that?
In the moment that we need you most,
we are kept from you.
For those who have moved on,
you are available;
for those who have to cope
with the consequences of attachment,
you are not.

You cannot have made this rule.

I am not in a mood for revelry.
Sweets, new clothes, grand repast.
But to say, I cannot approach you.
That we cannot take comfort
in the small timeless acts of creating
beauty—
the lighting of a lamp,
the preparation of the threshold—
as if they will diminish our loss.
This does not make any sense.

It is not as if anything or anyone
keeps us apart through these artificial
measures?

Or is the idea that I should miss you
more than the person whom you have
taken back?
Is it to create some sort of homecoming
envy?

Then it is definitely not your idea.
You have no ego
leave alone the monumental kind required
to think of such manipulation.

Who made these silly rules?

You are always on my mind
and in my heart.
You are my mind,
you are my heart.

And if this is so,
how can we be separated just because
I am sick,
I am mourning,
I am dirty,
I am menstruating?

Is our oneness conditional?

I may stay away from certain spaces
but do I stay away from you?

The joke is on those who think up these
schemes
because they see the shadow for the
substance.
They separate breath from breathing
and life from living.
They see two where there is one.

You cannot have made up these silly rules.
But if you did, the only purpose I can
think of,
is to give us a chance to experience and
explore
the profound silence that is the only road
that leads to you.

Perhaps what you want us to see
is that the physical space where you are
are only shelves for your iconography.
And that the running around
and mucking about
are simply other ways of busying the body
to still the mind.
And that the stillness is the point,
not the icons or the activity.

Where your plan misfires
is that instead of upgrading our paths
we downgrade our hours.
We laze, we sleep, we chat
we eat, we watch moving images.
We while away the hours
so that we may as well inhabit a raft
drifting away from the shore that is you.

For the day then
that you want me to be most dedicated to silence,
I have the most words to give you
for they have buzzed through my head
all day long,
puzzling over this artificial alienation.

I did not write,
and here are the words to prove it!
I did not speak much,
and here are the thoughts to prove it!
I did very little,
and yet spent a whole day of precious time.

But you spent the day with me
so you know all this.

What the day has given me
is the confidence that you are always with me.
Unintended consequences can sometimes
exceed in value, the ones we intend.

*Navami, October 20, 2007,
written Oct 21.*

X

When I know that we are one
I have reached
for however brief a notion of a moment
the place where you wanted me to be all
along.

All the activity
all the ritual
all the rules
all the fuss
all the penance
and all the journeying
are meant to lead to this.

So here I am
in this dream
where my heart is beginning to be secure
in
and my mind is wrapping itself around
this knowledge.

This means
you are holding me always
you will catch me when I fall
you will lead me where I must go
and handle the strings
that guide my puppet brain and hands and
feet.

This means
that when the seas part before me
I am doing something you intend
and they will continue to part.

When I am your instrument
only the right thoughts will enter my head
the right words enter my vishuddha
the right feelings enter my heart
the right actions animate my hands and
feet
the right people walk with me.

When I am your instrument
I have no worries
no agenda
no anxieties
no explanations... for faith.

I know. I know who I am.
And as I am you
what limit is there to who I am?

Awakening into this wisdom
which is beyond everything,
I am for a notion of a moment
of this very fleeting dream,
enlightened, blessed, empowered,
as always.

Dashami, October 21, 2007

Poorna-Parikrama

What else is there?

What else is there but
the fragrance of fresh flowers
the moist morning dew
the gentle sun of the pink-blue-silver dawn sky
the brilliant golden sun of noon on a copper sulphate ocean
the beauty of a song on the breath
the warmth of a dozen candles
the comfort of water on skin.

What else is there but
the awakening of inspiration
the magic of creativity
the music of words and the silence of music
the colours and textures of the imagination
the allure of dreams
the miracle of dreams come true.

What else is there but
the presence of love
the gift of friendship
the joy of generosity
the release of caring
the freedom of doing
the simplicity of being.

What else is there but
the foundation of faith
the awareness of abundance
the rhythm of breath
the reality of infinite grace.

What else is there but
you.

Samapti, October 21, 2007