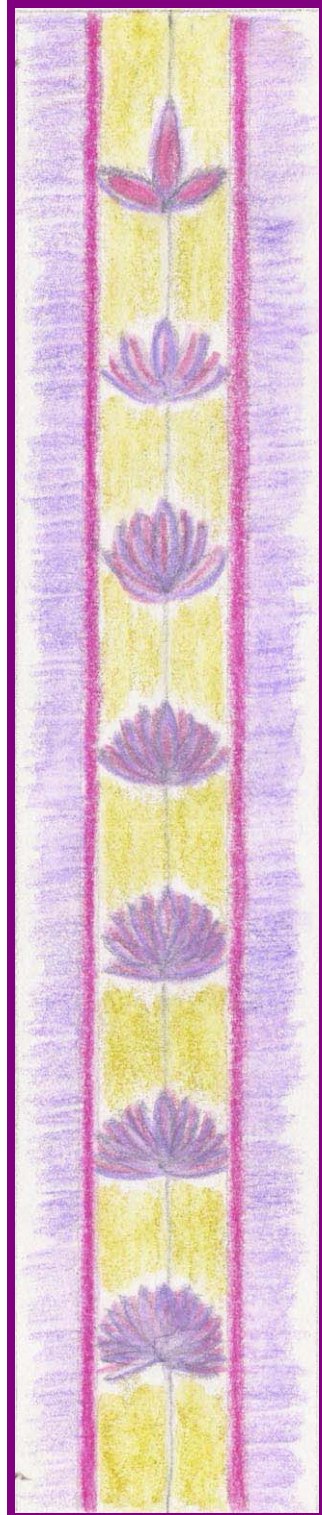


# NAVARATRI 2007



## 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*