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by Nayaswami Asha Praver

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Through All Trials I Sing Thy Name

“Where there is dharma [right action], there is victory.”

– Indian saying adopted by Swami Kriyananda as a guiding principle

Tapasya

When Sant Keshavadas, a well-known spiritual teacher from India, came to visit Ananda Village in the late 1970s, he was given a grand tour of the community. Impressed by what had been accomplished in such a relatively short period of time, he exclaimed, “Creating this community required a great deal of *tapasya*.”

“Yes,” Swamiji said quietly.

Tapasya is a Sanskrit word usually defined as *austerity*. It is equally true to say that *tapasya* means *devotion*.

“Some Christians believe that God demands suffering in exchange for his blessings,” Swamiji explained on another occasion. “This is not true, nor is it what Jesus taught. To accomplish anything in this world, however, does require sacrifice. You have to renounce lesser desires—even real needs—in order to focus your energy on achieving the goal you set for yourself.

“Others may define such renunciation as suffering. To the devotee, however, if his attitude is right, it is not suffering at all. It is joyful self-offering to God. That is why *tapasya* can be defined as both austerity and devotion.

“The scriptures and epics are filled with heroes and devotees who do ‘penance,’ as it is called in the West, to strengthen themselves and draw the grace of God. You don’t have to go out looking for *tapasya*, though. It also comes of itself.

“Whether you call it Satan, the dark force, human jealousy, or human ignorance, any effort to do good in this world sets in motion a counter force that tries to keep that good from manifesting. Sometimes God Himself puts obstacles in the way of the devotee in order to test his sincerity and to help him build the inner strength he needs.”

Peter Caddy, one of the founders of the Findhorn community in Scotland, came to visit Swamiji. Just a month earlier, the brand new temple at Findhorn had been burned to

the ground by an arsonist. Peter told the story of this recent loss without a hint of self-pity.

“To be attacked in this way is a sign of success,” Peter said. “The more good you do in the world, the more people try to stop you. In fact, if you aren’t being persecuted, it means you are slacking off and need to work harder.”

“If you measure success in terms of how much opposition you face, then Ananda, too, is a *huge* success,” Swamiji said with a smile.

Peter and Swamiji laughed with delight at their mutual “good fortune.”

“I get so many brickbats,” Swamiji said once, “I can’t keep track of who has styled himself as my enemy. The simplest answer I’ve found is just to treat *everyone* as my friend.”

Ananda was besieged for a time by a series of petty acts of vandalism. When I described to Swamiji the latest incident, he reassured me cheerfully. “We have to expect opposition,” he said. “After all, we are trying to transform all of society and naturally it will take a little time.”

A Prayer and a Fall

The crisis descended on the Ananda community in Assisi, Italy, just a few weeks after Swamiji had left that country to start a work in India.

Some months earlier, a disgruntled ex-member had filed a lawsuit against the community. This was only one of many lawsuits this man had filed over the years against former employers, landlords, and even members of his own family.

The man alleged that Ananda was a dangerous cult that had brainwashed him, then forced him to work hard for low wages. Under Italian law, “enslaving” someone of “weak will” for “financial gain” is considered “criminal activity.” These are serious charges. It put Ananda in the same category as the Mafia.

As “evidence” that his claim was true, the man included allegations from an equally scurrilous lawsuit that had been filed against Ananda in America. Without conducting further investigation, the local prosecutor concluded that a world wide criminal organization was operating right in her neighborhood.

The Ananda leaders in Italy thought of the lawsuit as more of a nuisance than a threat. Ananda had already been through it in America. There was no basis for the allegations in either lawsuit and they knew it would eventually be straightened out (as in fact, for the most part, it has been).

Only in the middle of January 2004, when eighty armed policemen descended on the community at 5am to search for evidence, did the Ananda community understand how serious the situation had become.

When Swamiji left Italy, he had no inkling of what was about to happen. It looked, however, as if he had “fled the scene before the roof collapsed.” As the “Capo” of Ananda, Swamiji was first on the list of the “accused.”

A few weeks later, in early March, seven people from Ananda, the “ringleaders” according to the lawsuit, were arrested and taken to jail. In Italy, if the charges are serious, the “accused” can be imprisoned to keep them from fleeing the country or interfering with the investigation. The judge released them after five days, but at the time the “accused” were arrested no one knew how long they would be imprisoned.

The arrests were national news. In response, thousands of people all over Europe rose to Ananda's defense. Swamiji wanted to return to Italy immediately.

“I am the leader of Ananda,” he said. “It is me they really want. If they can question me, they’ll see that the charges are false.”

Ananda’s Italian lawyers said it would be folly for Swamiji to return. “You Americans don’t understand how much power the police have here,” one lawyer said. “Swamiji could be picked up at the airport and taken straight to prison. At the very least, he would be put under house arrest for who knows how long.”

“I am not a coward,” Swamiji replied.

If he were imprisoned, however, Swamiji knew he wouldn’t be able to help with Ananda’s defense, his main reason for going. Furthermore, the consternation it would cause to have him in jail would take energy away from the defense effort. Reluctantly, Swamiji agreed that it was better for him to stay in India.

In fact, he wasn’t physically strong enough to make the trip back to Europe. Ever since coming to India his health had been poor, and he had recently been released from the hospital after a near fatal episode of double pneumonia.

To dispel any thought, however, that he was “hiding” in India, Swamiji went to the Italian consulate in New Delhi where he presented medical evidence of his inability to travel. He then authorized the lawyers in Italy to speak on his behalf and offered to have his deposition taken at the consulate where it could be videotaped and sent to Italy.

Swamiji prayed to Divine Mother, “If there is anything more I can do, I offer myself willingly.”

In his bathroom in India, a marble sill, four inches wide and four inches high, with a curtain above it, was all that divided the shower area from the rest of the room. Soon after the arrests, while the “accused” were still in jail, and not long after his prayer to Divine

Mother, Swamiji lost his balance and fell backwards so hard across that sill that his back arched over it.

The resulting pain was excruciating. At first the doctors thought it was only a bad bruise. Only weeks later, when the pain had not abated, did a more careful examination reveal that a rib had broken and was now detached from the spine. It took months to heal.

To a few of his closest friends, Swamiji said, “I prayed. Then later I fell. I hope the pain helps matters in Italy.”

My Only Cause

In *The Path*, Swamiji describes Daya Mata as he knew her during the years when they both lived in the ashram of their Guru.

“Kindness,” he wrote, “was the hallmark of her personality. I looked upon her as my model in the ideal spirit of discipleship that I was striving to acquire.”

Considering how harshly Daya Mata treated Swamiji in later years, his generosity toward her in his autobiography, which he wrote during those later years, has always astonished me.

“Her worst persecution,” I said to Swamiji, “came after 1990, with the lawsuits she, through SRF, filed against you. But even in 1976, when you wrote *The Path*, you had already been expelled from SRF, and she'd shown herself to be anything but charitably disposed toward you. Yet you don't even hint at that side of her character. Instead, you helped create the image of Daya as Master's ideal disciple. Only a few know her personally, others take their cue from what people like you say. Because of what you wrote, many people later sided with Daya, not with you. In your autobiography, you worked against your own cause.”

“*Truth* is my only cause,” Swamiji said. “What I wrote is how I experienced her at the time. Subsequent events did not change that. In *The Path* I chose to emphasize a reality in her toward which she herself is striving, and which I still see as her deeper reality.”

I Choose To Love

A woman had a consensual affair with a married man at Ananda Village. When the man, urged to do so by Swamiji, decided to stay with his wife, this woman left Ananda in a rage, claiming now that she had been sexually harassed. She took her complaints to SRF, where she met with Daya Mata and other members of their Board of Directors. With the help of an SRF attorney, she pursued a lawsuit against Ananda. She claimed Ananda was a “sham organization” set up by Swamiji for the sole purpose of “exploiting women.” The charges were preposterous. Ananda refused to settle so the case went to trial.

“I was in the courtroom one day during the trial,” Pushpa, an Ananda member said later. “The judge hadn’t come in yet. I was sitting near the center aisle and had a clear view of Swamiji sitting alone at the defendants’ table, and also of Ananda’s accuser and one her supporters, seated on the plaintiff’s side.

“The two women were taunting Swamiji, jeering and pointing at him like school girls, then giggling at their imagined cleverness. Their faces looked quite evil.

“I was appalled. How could they be so mean to a fellow disciple, and a *direct* disciple of Master? I wanted to shield Swamiji from their taunting. I thought, ‘How vulnerable I would feel, sitting all alone as he is.’

“Then I looked at Swamiji. He was so relaxed; he could have been sitting in his living room at Crystal Hermitage. When they jeered at him, he didn’t turn away. He didn’t even flinch. In fact he smiled, and in his eyes, there was only kindness.

“Swamiji has endured years of persecution from SRF, without ever becoming angry or bitter toward them. I have often heard him say ‘I choose to love them, because I myself am happier when I love.’

“I thought of that passage from the Bible, ‘Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.’ This was the first time I had ever seen that kind of love actually practiced.

“Several years later, I went to India, where I met Master’s nephew, Harekrishna Ghosh, who is also a direct disciple. ‘What do you remember most about Master,’ I asked him.

“‘His kindness,’ Harekrishna said, ‘and his love. Master loved everyone.’

“Immediately, I thought of that day in the courtroom. ‘I never met Master,’ I thought, ‘but I understand what Harekrishna is saying because I have seen that kind of love in Swamiji.’”

Bicentennial Liberty Committee

In the early years, when the Ananda community was just getting started, the only dwellings many of the residents could afford were teepees they sewed themselves out of heavy canvas. When the local newspaper heard a rumor about what was going on out on the “Ridge” where we lived, it printed an article about the problem of “tent cities” springing up “all over the county” without proper supervision by the local authorities.

Swamiji knew that Ananda was the only thing in the county that fit that description. The day after the article appeared, he went to the county offices.

“I’m here to answer your ad,” he said.

In fact, Ananda was already under county jurisdiction as a “church camp” supervised by the Health Department. Once a year, the Fire Inspector came to make sure our extinguishers were working and that our brush clearing was adequate. Two or three times a year, the Health Officer came. He had worked for years in impoverished countries overseas, however, and had no problem with the rather primitive conditions in those years at Ananda – no electricity or indoor plumbing. As long as we were safe and sanitary, he didn’t object.

Being a “church camp” allowed us to live permanently in all kinds of “temporary structures”: trailers, teepees, and the equivalent of tarpaper shacks, which was all we could afford at the time. The handful of proper buildings we did have we had been allowed to construct without permits or inspections. It was a godsend. If we had had from the beginning to meet the stringent planning and building requirements imposed upon us later, Ananda literally would never have gotten off the ground.

In 1974, when we acquired an additional 365 acres of land on which we planned to build a new Retreat (now The Expanding Light), we went as usual to the Health Department to talk about our plans. To our surprise, the Health Inspector told us that he no longer had jurisdiction. From now on, he said, Ananda would have to answer to the Planning Department.

A group of us, including Swamiji, had a meeting with the Planning Director. We had never met her and she had never been to Ananda, so we explained in some detail the ideals behind Ananda, how the community functioned, what we had accomplished so far, and our vision for the future.

When we were done, she reached over to a nearby bookshelf, pulled out a thick volume of regulations, and thumbed through it until she found what she wanted. Pointing to the proper paragraph, she announced decisively, “So, you are a condominium.” A condominium is an ownership arrangement for an urban apartment complex. It bore no resemblance to what we were doing at Ananda.

The Planning Director had started as a secretary and risen through the ranks to the top job in the department without ever receiving the specialized education and training needed to do the job in a fair and professional manner. There was no real system of checks and balances in place, so she was able to wield her power according to her own perception of things with very little outside interference.

A planning problem as complex and unusual as Ananda was simply beyond her capacity to solve. As a cover for her own incompetence, she decided that Ananda itself was the problem. Her solution was to make things as difficult as possible for us until, she hoped, we would give up and go away.

She started by imposing a moratorium on all new building at Ananda pending the submission and approval of a proper Master Plan for the development of the whole community. By late 1975, we were on our third version of the Master Plan. The two previous versions had been rejected, because, *after* we submitted them, the Planning Director issued a new set of guidelines that made what we had done unacceptable.

Now the Planning Director tried to force us to remove all “non-conforming” structures before she would even consider the next version of the Plan. Just about everything on our land fit her definition of “non-conforming.” This demand would have put us out of business. Only after we hired an attorney did she back down.

The rest of us were too inexperienced to see the handwriting on the wall. Swamiji, however, knew we were in big trouble and the only solution was to get the Planning Director replaced. We weren’t the only ones being hurt by her capricious ways. She had caused great hardship for many citizens in the county. Some had even lost their property because of the unreasonable standards she imposed. Swamiji knew that Ananda, as one of the few organized groups in the county, had the capacity to create change in a way no individual would be able to do.

The coming year, 1976, was the bicentennial celebration of the founding of America. Swamiji saw it as the ideal rallying point for the campaign he had in mind—a county-wide movement reaffirming the principles of freedom and personal responsibility upon which this country was founded. He called it *The Bicentennial Liberty Committee*. He started with a petition describing the principles and intentions of the *BLC*, as it came to be called.

“Two hundred years ago,” the petition said, “our forefathers fought for the right to be represented in government by people who were responsive to their needs, rather than to rules and restrictions insensitively imposed from afar. In this Twentieth Century, increasing centralization of power has raised again the threat of insensitive legislation, originating similarly from afar, where the needs of the individual are ignored in favor of mass uniformity.

“We, citizens of Nevada County, feel that with the approaching celebration of our country’s bicentennial it is time to affirm with some of the revolutionary zeal of our forefathers the need for personal liberty and self-direction. We call upon our governments in Washington, Sacramento, and especially in Nevada County to pay heed not only to the rules that are imposed on us from above, but also to us, the individuals who must live by those rules.

“Particularly we demand the right to live our own lives as we choose to live them, so long as we do not infringe on the freedom and rights of others; and to develop our own properties and build homes thereon according to our own tastes and inclinations, provided only that we show sensitive regard for the land we live on, and that we not endanger the health and safety of others.”

Swamiji’s plan was first to get a hundred local businesses to endorse the petition. Then we would reprint it with all those names on it. Teams of people would then take those petitions out to the local shopping areas and gather individual signatures. He knew individuals would be more willing to sign if they saw that the businesses were already behind it.

Within the Ananda community, however, the idea of the petition, and the whole Bicentennial Liberty Committee, went over like a lead balloon. “The great majority of responsible people at Ananda opposed it,” Swamiji wrote later.

Most thought it was foolhardy to risk antagonizing the local government. “Don’t you realize the Planning Department could shut us down completely?” was the gist of their argument.

“We won’t even *have* a community if we don’t do *something*,” Swamiji responded. He alone understood that our survival was *already* in jeopardy.

Others protested that the whole idea was “goofy” and not at all in tune with Ananda’s apolitical nature. Some even said it was spiritually wrong for us to get involved in a project like this.

“What I propose to do isn’t immoral,” Swamiji responded. “Indeed, it’s *super* moral. The officials we are dealing with have been appointed to their positions and have a duty to listen to public opinion.”

Few at Ananda were persuaded.

“Rather than spending all your energy trying to win over those who oppose you,” Swamiji has said, speaking of how to be an effective leader, “give your energy to those who are with you. Generally speaking, negativity has little cohesive power compared to the magnetism generated by those who put out positive energy, and who set good examples.”

Swamiji knew if he could create even a small nucleus of support for the BLC within Ananda, he could build from there. That nucleus turned out to be me. As Swamiji himself described it years later, he got my support by appealing to my lively sense of humor! It was a serious situation, but, at the same time, it was so far out of the ordinary flow of Ananda life that it had a certain quality of madcap adventure about it, which he knew would appeal to me.

I knew Swamiji well enough to know that he wouldn't launch such a bold and public campaign without a strong sense of inner guidance. He was confident, and that was enough for me. Besides, the way he presented it, it seemed like a lot of fun. And it was.

My enthusiasm was the spark that soon convinced others from Ananda to help. We took the petitions into town and in just a few days had the endorsement of almost a hundred local businesses. After two weekends at the shopping centers, we had thousands of individual signatures, plus a bulging file of stories of how citizens had been mistreated by the local government.

Swamiji was chairman of the BLC; I was the secretary. We didn't hide the Ananda connection, but nor did we advertise it. He used his American name, J. Donald Walters. (Later, in order to reach a wider public in America, he published many books under that name, but at the time it was relatively unknown.)

Editorials and articles appeared in the local paper speculating about this "Committee" which seemed to have sprung out of nowhere. When curiosity was at its height, Swamiji called a public meeting at a large hall in Nevada City, the county seat.

Ananda people came "incognito," about a hundred in all. They arrived by ones and twos and pretended not to know each other, to swell the numbers without tipping our hand. Many from Ananda were still skeptical, some even predicted disaster, but all were as curious as anyone else in the county to see what would happen next! In all, the crowd numbered several hundred, an impressive turnout, duly reported the next day in the local paper.

Swamiji presided over the meeting as "J. Donald Walters, Chairman of the Bicentennial Liberty Committee." For the occasion, he had written a pamphlet he called *Your Freedoms Are Like Old Friends: Don't Take Them For Granted*.

Of the four hundred pieces of music Swamiji has written, *one* is a political song—*Salute the Nice Paper Flag*. Obviously, this was the time to sing it. The song satirizes the passivity that comes when people rely too much on the government to take care of them and the ruin that descends on any country that encourages that dependency. The crowd loved it. Nevada County was founded by gold miners, and that independent, rough-and-tumble spirit is still very much alive there.

Swamiji spoke of the widespread discontent with local government, as evidenced by the thousands of people who signed the petition in just a few days. He urged county officials to be more compassionate and responsive to local needs. Other speakers shared personal stories of mistreatment at the hands of local officials. The whole meeting was designed to fan the flames of controversy and it succeeded beautifully.

A few days later, an editorial in the local paper attempted to defend the county against the charges raised by the BLC. At Swamiji's instruction, I responded with a series of letters to the editor. The intent was to make the officials feel that the whole county was under siege. I systematically targeted, not only the Planning Department, but also the Building Department, the County Counsel's office, and others as well. I included specific examples from the bulging file of stories we had collected. My letters prompted a host of other letters from county residents, almost all in sympathy with the BLC.

I appeared on local radio talk shows and became a "regular" at meetings of the Board of Supervisors. I was fair minded and stuck to the issues and gradually I won the respect of most of the Supervisors, even those who didn't agree with what I had to say. At the right moment, I presented to them our impressive stack of signed petitions.

"They wouldn't have listened to us alone," Swamiji said. "County officials hold their jobs by public appointment. I had to make them see that there was widespread public opposition to their behavior. I wrote that petition very much in earnest. And the large number of people who signed it constituted a significant force."

When Swamiji finally declared his connection to Ananda publicly, he did it as a peacemaker, seeking to smooth the troubled waters with the voice of reason. It was amazing to see him calming a controversy he himself had stirred up!

In what he called *A Special Plea to our Supporters*, Swamiji wrote, "It is common, these days especially, to conduct civic protests in anger. But anger assumes bad faith on the part of those one opposes. Such assumptions are not always fair. Surely most of us in Nevada County would *prefer* to believe in the good faith of our public servants. In fairness, then, to those who have devoted themselves to serving us truly and well, let us assume the best of intentions in them all. Let us go even further: Let us offer friendship to those, even, whom we may be forced eventually to oppose. Let our struggle be not against *them*, as individuals, but against the uncivic attitudes for which they have chosen to stand. If they change those attitudes, there is no reason why we should not continue to give them our fullest support."

The Grand Jury investigated the Planning Department and recommended that the Planning Director be fired. Her replacement was a competent, trained professional who soon got Ananda's planning process back on track.

A side effect of the whole thing was that when it came time to elect a new supervisor from our district, I had gained a certain amount of notoriety and there was a movement to

draft me to run for the position. It was nothing I wanted to do, but for Ananda's sake I was willing to consider it.

I was greatly relieved when Swamiji said, "We have accomplished our objective. There is no point in 'flexing our muscles' any further. It wasn't power we were after; it was simple survival, so that we might continue in the way of life to which we are dedicated."

After it was all over, I asked Swamiji, "Did you know when you started how it would turn out?"

"Not exactly," Swamiji said, "although I am not surprised. I knew intuitively it would work and just took it a step at a time."

Master says that by the time a soul reaches the advanced state of spiritual realization that Swamiji has achieved, he has drunk the cup of worldly power to its dregs. Master himself was a king and a warrior many times before. Swamiji has made references to several such incarnations of his own.

He has a unique way of discussing current events. To him, the decision makers on the world stage are not names one reads about in the newspaper. He regards them as colleagues, and discusses their decisions not in the gossipy way most people do, but as if he were at the table of power with them, and had as much right as they to direct the course of history.

"Everyone is just a child of God," Swamiji says simply. "I feel no trepidation or exaltation at meeting even the heads of nations."

When he was in India working on behalf of SRF in 1961, Swamiji felt that the way to get Master's work established in that country was to build a temple in the capital city of New Delhi. The only available land where Swamiji wanted to build, however, was part of the "Green Belt." By government decree, virtually no building was allowed in that sector. More than two thousand charitable and religious societies had tried to get land there; all had been denied.

"The only way you will be able to build in that area," Swamiji was assured by those in the know, "is to get permission from Prime Minister Nehru himself."

"Then I will do so," Swamiji resolved.

"It never occurred to me," Swamiji said later, "that Nehru was out of reach merely because of his position. It had to be done, so I would do it."

From a chance meeting on a train, Swamiji had made the acquaintance of a highly placed government official. This man had been well impressed with Swamiji and was willing to recommend him to another highly placed person. One led to others, and soon a handful of officials were willing to back his proposal, *if* he could get Nehru to agree.

Encouraged by Swamiji's success so far, a friend was able to get him an appointment with Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi. It turned out they had attended separate schools in the same small village in Switzerland. In French, a language Swamiji learned as a child, they discussed their attendance there. At the end of their meeting, she agreed to recommend Swamiji to her father.

Prime Minister Nehru spent forty minutes with Swamiji. Some heads of state got only five minutes from him. Nehru agreed to walk the land Swamiji had requested, and, in the end, gave him permission to build the temple.

It was a triumph for Master's work in India. Incomprehensible though it may seem, the SRF Board of Directors, ten thousand miles away in Los Angeles, California, saw the whole thing in a very different light.

On the nine-person Board of Directors, there were eight women and Swamiji, the only man. For years the women had viewed his expansive spirit and never-ending flow of creative ideas as a threat, rather than a benefit, to the future of Master's work. Now this "presumption," as they saw it, of daring to confer with the Prime Minister of India, was the last straw.

Swamiji had acted with the approval of Daya Mata. When she saw, however, how the other members of the Board felt about what Swamiji had done, Daya made it seem as if Swamiji had acted entirely on his own. To them, his bold move was nothing but an attempt to gain power for himself by taking away from Daya Mata the control of SRF's work in India.

Nothing Swamiji said could change their minds. They absolutely refused to have anything to do with the land Swamiji had worked so hard to obtain for them. Even though he complied with their request to drop the project completely, from that point on it was a downhill slide. A year later, in July 1962, Daya Mata summoned Swamiji to New York City and expelled him from SRF.

Considering his background in this life, and in incarnations before, Swamiji was unimpressed when I expressed admiration for how skillfully he had orchestrated the whole campaign with the Bicentennial Liberty Committee.

"A tempest in a teapot," Swamiji called it.

"It may have been," I said. "But it is the teapot where we live. Thank God you had the foresight to save the day."

Stand Unshaken

(Told by Elizabeth Palmer)

One of the worst days of the Bertolucci trial was when Swamiji's most virulent opponents testified against him. Many of his closest friends couldn't even be in the courtroom with him. As "designated witnesses" scheduled to testify later, we weren't allowed to hear anyone else's testimony.

I know Swamiji to be a powerful spiritual person. He can take care of himself and all of us as well. Still, when the courtroom door closed behind him, I felt as if we were sending a lamb to the slaughter. For the next several hours, we sat in the hallway praying for Swamiji, just waiting for it to be over. When he finally emerged, we were so relieved we swarmed around him like bees around a flower.

Almost in tears, someone asked, "How are you, Sir?"

To understand what happened next requires a little explanation.

One of the lasting legacies of the two years Swamiji spent as a student in an English boarding school is his life-long affection for the humorous stories of P.G. Wodehouse. To our everlasting delight, he has passed that enthusiasm on to us by often reading stories aloud to the community. In every Wodehouse tale, some good-hearted, but usually inept, hero finds himself enmeshed in preposterous circumstances, from which he invariably emerges unscathed.

Swamiji has also enjoyed the adventures of James Bond, Ian Fleming's "Agent 007," who also wins out every time against impossible odds. Now, standing in that miserable hallway outside the courtroom, it was "007" who provided Swamiji's answer to that tearful inquiry.

"Stirred!" Swamiji replied, with the accent and attitude of a suave super-hero, *"but not shaken!"*

The "plot" of the Bertolucci trial was as preposterous as any Wodehouse tale or James Bond thriller. Yet, like the heroes of those adventures, Swamiji had emerged unscathed.

Our tension evaporated in a burst of appreciative laughter.

"When a battle can't be avoided," Swamiji said on another tension-filled lawsuit day, "you have to find your joy in doing battle."

Victory

When Swamiji was on vacation with a few friends, one of his companions simply took charge of the daily program, without consideration for his preferences. Swamiji quietly went along with whatever she wanted to do.

Later, the woman's job changed and she began to work closely with Swamiji in matters where the future of Ananda was concerned. When she tried to boss him around as she had done before, to her surprise he responded forcefully.

"When we were traveling together," Swamiji told her, "I went along with whatever you wanted for the sake of my own humility. If I were to go along with you now, however, it would not be humility. It would be abdicating my responsibility to Master's work, and *that I will not do.*"

A man at Ananda, who tended to be guided by his personal desires, sought to justify his uncooperative nature by comparing himself to Swamiji.

"I have always admired your independence," he told Swamiji.

"My independence is not based on personal desire," Swamiji replied. "It is based on doing what is right."

"Nowadays people equate strength of will with aggressive scowls and hostile posturing," Swamiji said on another occasion. "My willingness to go along with others when nothing is at stake but my personal convenience, and my seeming passivity even in the face of personal attack, gives some people the impression I am easy to defeat, that they can simply run roughshod over me. They misunderstand.

"I rarely dispute with others. It has never been my way to fight *against* anything. I simply find a way to go forward according to what I believe to be true, no matter what other people think. I will not allow others to impose their will on me when principles are at stake."

Anandamayi Ma, a great Indian saint, said, "Let come what will."

A devotee questioned her. "Does that mean you would go along passively with something that was wrong?"

Ma responded, "Let them try, and see what happens!"

"When Bertolucci's lawyer vowed to destroy me," Swamiji said, "I didn't respond on his level of argument and accusation. Beyond answering what was legally required of me, I didn't defend myself at all, not even mentally, because I was untouched inwardly. I surrounded myself with a psychic wall of inner freedom, which for him proved impenetrable. In the end, all his efforts against me came to nothing.

“Even in the face of seeming defeat,” Swamiji went on to explain, “I’ve turned every setback into another kind of victory – a victory of new opportunities and new directions, of guidance to do something broader and better.”

One secret of prosperity, Swamiji has said, is *creativity*.

“*Poverty consciousness* means to be locked into a single way of thinking,” he explained. “If that way doesn’t work out, you are defeated. *Prosperity consciousness* means also to have a wealth of *ideas*. If one way of doing things doesn’t bring the results you want, you keep trying other alternatives until one of them finally succeeds.

“When the Bald Mountain Association refused to let me build on my own land, I bought land elsewhere and built there. For years, I held Ananda back, out of a wish not to compete with SRF and in the hope that, eventually, we would reconcile. When SRF still refused to work with us, and even filed a lawsuit, I came to understand that Master wants us to be separate organizations. I stopped holding back and the result for Ananda has been glorious.”

I Had Work To Do

The founding of Ananda coincided for Swamiji with the onset of arthritis in both hips. Before that, he had been a fast runner, a good skier, and a tennis player of what he calls "mild ability." Soon arthritis made all that impossible. Much of the time, walking or even standing was painful for him.

He didn’t like to give in to the pain, or to draw attention to his difficulty, so he continued to stand while lecturing or giving Kriya initiations, sometimes for two hours at a time. Only after fifteen years was he willing to sit down for some of these public programs.

“I don’t think you’re hearing a word I’m saying!” a friend complained once to Swamiji during an afternoon walk. His inattention had offended her and Swamiji felt he owed her an explanation, so he spoke more frankly than usual.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “You are right. It is taking every ounce of my willpower just to put one foot in front of the other. I see to the end of the block and tell myself, ‘You can get that far.’ When I reach that goal, I set myself another one. In that way I manage to keep going.”

“How were you able to bear it?” I once asked him.

“I had work to do,” Swamiji said. “I couldn’t allow the pain to interfere. I related to it impersonally as just one of the many obstacles I had to overcome. You can’t imagine how much willpower it took to get Ananda going.”

Only after twenty years, when Ananda was secure and the arthritis had progressed to the point where it threatened Swamiji's ability to serve, did he finally put his attention to it. Something had to be done or he would end up crippled. In two operations several months apart, Swamiji had both hips replaced. He was a new man.

"Hello, fellow athletes!" he said to those who came to see him in the hospital. He wore a tee-shirt that proudly announced, "Watch my smoke!"

"In all my years," the surgeon said to Swamiji, "I have never seen hips in such bad condition! On one side, a full two inches of bone had been worn away."

"I did limp a bit," Swamiji admitted.

"I don't know how you walked at all!" the surgeon replied. "You should have been in a wheelchair, or bedridden."

The surgeon was delighted with Swamiji's quip after the second operation: "Hip, Hip, Hooray!"

Bullies

As a boy, Donald [Swamiji] never started a fight, but if a fight sought him out, he never ran away—especially if a bully tried to intimidate him. Even if the bully was much stronger and could beat him physically, Donald never gave in mentally, and in this way refused to give the bully the victory.

When Donald was eleven years old, he was a student at the Downs School in England. One day, an upper class boy, big enough to intimidate his own classmates, met Donald upstairs as he was coming out of the art room. Finding no one else about, he gave Donald a shove. Perfectly aware that he stood no chance against this bully, but nevertheless undaunted, Donald shoved him back.

This was all the excuse the bully wanted. He threw Donald to the floor, sat on him, and began pummeling him fiercely. "Do you give up?" he demanded.

"No!" Donald replied.

So the beating continued until the bully tired of administering it. From then on, though, he carefully avoided Donald's company.

Years later in America, when Donald was in boarding school at Hackley in Tarrytown, New York, an older and much stronger boy baited Donald for weeks. The bully weighed 230 pounds; Donald weighed 104. Still, Donald refused to be intimidated. This so infuriated the bully that one day he came into Donald's room and pinned him to his bed. There was nothing Donald could do, so he lay there quietly while the bully

pummeled him. Between blows, the bully whispered fiercely, "I'd like to throw you out the window!" (They were three floors up from the ground.) Finally, the bully tired himself out, and left the room, panting with rage.

"Why didn't you call for help?" one of Donald's friends asked later. Other students were in nearby rooms, and would have answered his cries.

"Because I wasn't afraid," Donald replied.

After the beating, Donald treated the bully with the same calm reserve as before. From then on, however, the bully gave Donald a wide berth, and never again threatened him.

Another time at the Downs School in England when Donald was twelve, he was in the sick rooms with a boy named Taylor, who was unpopular with his classmates. Sneeringly Taylor hurled the epithet at Donald, "Dirty foreigner!" (Donald was the only American in the school.)

"Well, maybe you're a dirty Englishman," Donald replied conversationally. This wasn't meant as an insult, only a question of how recently each of them had bathed!

Taylor, however, enraged, leapt angrily at Donald. This time, however, Donald was the stronger of the two. In such cases, his method was simply to wrestle his opponent to the floor and sit on him until he calmed down. Repeatedly, Taylor spat up at Donald's face, never quite reaching it. Finally, recognizing himself powerless, Taylor stopped writhing and spitting, and admitted he'd been bested. Donald calmly stood, allowing Taylor to leave. Thus, the matter was dropped.

Bald Mountain Association

The first land Swamiji bought for Ananda is the area known as the Meditation Retreat, six miles from the Village. He purchased the land in 1967 in conjunction with four other men. It was strictly an economic arrangement. They had no interests in common except that each wanted a secluded piece of land as a place of retreat, and they could get a better deal if they went in together.

Richard Baker, who was at that time the head of the San Francisco Zen Center, was the one who put the deal together. The others—two poets, Gary Snyder and Allen Ginsberg, and an attorney, Dick Wertheimer—were his friends. Swamiji didn't know any of them before he joined with them to buy land.

Richard had found one large undivided piece that they could get at half the going rate if they bought the whole thing. When Swamiji went to see the land he felt the Masters had already blessed the Eastern portion of it, and that he was meant to buy it.

The agreement was that Richard would purchase the land with the money the others gave him, and register it in his own name. He would then subdivide it into seven 24-acre parcels and give each man title to the one parcel he wanted. Then the partnership would end.

Swamiji was the fourth person to come in. Richard had a little more than a year to find buyers for the remaining three parcels or the whole deal was off. Ten months later, only one of the three parcels had been sold. Swamiji was concerned that Richard wouldn't be able to find buyers for the last two and they would lose it all. So he offered to buy the parcels himself.

"It is a lot of money and more land than I need for myself," Swamiji explained to Richard. "But I also want to start a community. I have a friend who would donate money for that purpose.

"It isn't ideal. The land is too remote. And a community is not what you had in mind when you included me. I could start there, however, and then, after, say, five years, move the community to another location."

Richard was not enthusiastic, but he didn't want to risk losing the land either, so he reluctantly agreed. However, when Swamiji began to develop the community, Gary Snyder raised a hue and cry against it. Gary and Swamiji were the only two owners actually living on their land.

Instead of standing by his word, Richard sided with Gary, and so did the other two owners, who were Richard's friends. Richard then told Swamiji not to do anything more until they all agreed on how the land should be used.

Richard had not yet carried through on his promise to give each man title to his portion. He was still the sole owner of the entire piece.

"You are a guest on *my* land," Richard told Swamiji, "If you go to court, you'll be evicted." Then he added, "I could consider the money you paid as rent."

Since it was four against one, a lawsuit was Swamiji's only option. The very idea of a lawsuit, however, was anathema to him.

"I would never sue you," Swamiji said.

As Swamiji explained later, the dispute was just about land and money. No eternal principle was involved. And land and money were of no importance to him compared to *ahimsa* – nonviolence, or, more accurately, harmlessness. In fact, now that Richard had made his position clear, Swamiji had no intention of disputing anything they asked of him. He would build the community elsewhere.

Assured, now, that there would be no lawsuit, Richard scrapped the original purchase agreement. Instead of each buyer owning and controlling his own land, it was now

decided that they would own and manage all the land together under what was called the Bald Mountain Association, after a prominent local landmark.

Forty percent of the total acreage belonged to Swamiji. He owned three times as much land as any of the other men. But the Bald Mountain Association was set up to be one man, one vote. The four of them were united against Swamiji on every issue. They had taken control of his land.

“The *Association* feels that the land is held in common,” Gary Snyder declared. “The intention is to establish ground rules for land use.”

Earlier it had been agreed that each owner could have one hermitage with two residents per acre of land. Swamiji was still well below that limit. Now Gary told Swamiji, “Our original estimate for development was much too high. The permanent structures you have already built amount to full land use.” Then he added, by way of explanation, “We should all be able to learn and change our ideas as we go along.”

Gary then proposed population and development limits that left no room for what Swamiji had intended to do when he bought the land. He had no choice, however. He had to go along.

“I’ll sign anything you want,” Swamiji told Richard, “as long as you don’t *destroy* what I have created so far.”

That was in 1973. Swamiji had already moved his home to another part of Ananda, and now he also withdrew his creative energy. Until then, Swamiji had played a leading role in the planning and development of that property. Since then, he has left it entirely in the hands of others.

Swamiji had worked hard to pay off all the land so the community could start debt free. When Gary and Richard objected to any community being started there, Swamiji bought another piece of land for it, six miles down the road. He didn’t have the money so he took on a debt of \$250,000.

Later, when Richard and Gary objected even to the presence of the Meditation Retreat on what was now “their” land, Swamiji added an additional \$350,000 of debt to get other land for the Retreat as well.

“If they had made any effort to work *with* me,” Swamiji says, “I would have been happy to cooperate with them.”

Swamiji encouraged those who were in charge of the Meditation Retreat to comply with the guidelines of the Bald Mountain Association. Considering the circumstances, though, he felt it was sufficient if they complied with the spirit of the agreement. The population remained low and development was kept to a minimum.

Gary, however, insisted that every provision be followed to the letter and he kept constant watch to make sure it was done. Any violation, no matter how small, he took as *proof* that Swamiji could not be trusted to keep his word.

Gary made no secret of his disdain for Swamiji. He broadcast his views throughout the county and beyond. He even wrote a poem ridiculing Swamiji and Ananda, published it in one of his books, and presented it at poetry readings. Of his own part, and that of Richard and the others, in taking the land from Swamiji in the first place, Gary made no mention.

It is largely because of Gary's insistence that Swamiji "cannot be trusted" that many of our neighbors are suspicious of Ananda. Even those who moved to the area long after these events took place, accept as true the commonly held belief that Swamiji "violated the Bald Mountain Association agreement."

"I don't care about my own reputation," Swamiji says. "I am here to get out of my ego, not to defend it."

When the issue of the Bald Mountain Association comes up, his usual response is, "Richard Baker promised to give me title to the land that I paid for and he never did." Then he leaves it to his listeners to put the pieces together from that one clue.

"Why fight with them?" Swamiji says. "It just isn't worth it. It is unfortunate, though, that Ananda has had to bear the brunt of it all these years."

A Choice

(Told by an Ananda devotee)

"Maybe this book will be the one that finally convinces SRF that we need to work together," Swamiji said. He was referring to his work-in-progress in February 1990, *The Essence of Self-Realization*, a collection of sayings by Master.

When Swamiji speaks of "SRF" in this way, I know he means the handful of direct disciples who lead the organization, the ones with whom he lived and worked closely when he was part of SRF, the very ones who later expelled him and have maintained toward him ever since an attitude of unrelieved hostility.

Despite this separation, Swamiji maintains a positive attitude toward them. They are his *gurubhais* – his brothers and sisters in the Guru's family. To respond with hostility, Swamiji feels, would be to betray not only his friendship for them, but also his relationship as a disciple to his Guru.

“I have a peculiar ‘quirk’ to my nature,” Swamiji says. “The way I feel about others has never been influenced by the way they treat me. Once I give my loyalty, I never take it back. I may alter my *behavior* in response to what others do, but not my friendship.

“As Master said, if you reach out your hand to someone and he keeps knocking it away, after a while you just put your hand in your pocket. That doesn’t mean, however, you have closed your heart.”

I know all this about Swamiji, so when he speaks in this optimistic way about SRF, I usually keep my doubts to myself. This time, however, I felt he had to be more realistic.

“I think the effect of this book on SRF will be to make matters worse,” I said to him. “The more inspiring the book, the more unhappy they will be with you.”

Very quietly, and *very* seriously, Swamiji answered me. “I simply can’t afford to think that way.” Simple words, but spoken with such conviction. Clearly, the discussion was ended.

I was taken aback, embarrassed to realize that I’d been wrong to think him naive. His positive attitude is not based on present realities, but on his hope for the future. Swamiji has the same commitment to helping SRF that he has to helping Ananda.

“I *choose* to love,” Swamiji has often said.

That day, I caught a glimpse of the will power, faith, and patient endurance it has taken for Swamiji to hold firmly to that decision.

Quick Change

It was Swamiji’s idea to incorporate Ananda Village as a California city. As a municipality, we would have control over our own land use, planning, and zoning. This would get us out from under the county approval process, which had proved to be cumbersome, expensive, and gave our neighbors too much influence over internal community affairs.

Many of our neighbors had come to the area to drop out of society. It was almost a principle with them to oppose *all* organized groups and strong leaders. Many objected, also on principle, to the population density and some of the land use inherent in having a community. We were not indifferent to their needs, but most of their opposition was not based on anything we had done, or planned to do, but on the fear of what we *might* do if they did not keep a close watch on us.

In fact, the community is quite self-contained. Most of what happens within the borders of Ananda has no actual impact on those who live nearby. Filing for incorporation was like filing a declaration of independence. Even if we didn’t succeed,

we felt it was time to stand up to our neighbors and at least bring the controversy out into the open.

Incorporation proved to be a long and complicated process. After a year and a half of hard work, it culminated in a series of public hearings, then a vote by a seven-member council called LAFCO, the Local Agency Formation Committee. Each hearing drew more people, went on longer, and was more contentious than the one before.

Before the public hearings started, the members of LAFCO seemed to favor our application. We didn't look like a city, we looked like a farm, but we met the legal requirements for a municipality, and that was all that mattered.

LAFCO was forbidden by law to decide our application on the basis of religion. Even to discuss religion in relation to the incorporation, or to let the subject come into a public hearing, was a violation of our rights. The fact that "Ananda City" would be both a spiritual community and a municipality was like a shadow lurking in the background that could never be brought into the light of day.

The LAFCO members visited the community, met Swamiji, and also met many of the residents. They liked what they saw and for a time it looked like our effort would succeed.

The opposition of our neighbors, however, was our undoing. They were determined, well organized, and came out in droves for the public hearings. We were largely unsuccessful in getting anyone outside of Ananda to speak in favor of incorporation. Gradually the LAFCO members began to side with what appeared to be the majority view: to deny our application.

At the end of the final hearing—which lasted seven hours and was attended by 800 people—only one LAFCO member voted in favor of our application. In that hearing, though, and in several leading up to it, LAFCO allowed extensive testimony from our neighbors about Ananda's religion and how it would affect the municipality. We protested repeatedly, but to no avail.

The incorporation effort attracted statewide media attention. After LAFCO voted down the application, I and another Ananda spokesperson vowed in front of the TV cameras to get the decision reversed on appeal, because testimony about religion had been allowed in.

Later, another television crew came to the Village to interview Swamiji. I met them at the community and rode in their car the three miles up the dirt road to Swamiji's house.

The entire time they plied me with questions about what we planned to do now. I was emphatic that this was just a temporary setback. Our rights had been violated. The process was compromised. This is America. We have not yet begun to fight.

In previous incarnations, no doubt I have been part of more than one revolution, probably including the American Revolution, so this kind of rhetoric comes naturally to me.

When we arrived at Swamiji's house, he said to the television crew, "I don't know how much time you were planning to give me, but if you let me have a full five minutes to read a statement I have prepared, I have a special scoop for you."

I turned to a friend who was there when we arrived and asked him, "*What* is Swamiji talking about?"

My friend paled, then said, "You don't know?" He refused to say anything more. The filming was just about to start and I couldn't ask Swamiji myself.

A few minutes later, in front of the camera, Swamiji started reading the first page of his prepared statement. Immediately I saw that he was speaking of the project in the *past* tense. That was the scoop. It was over. We weren't going on.

According to the law, Swamiji explained, LAFCO had acted improperly when they let religion come into the debate. But the fact is religion *is* the central question. Separation of church and state is one of America's most cherished principles. Even if "Ananda City" conducted itself in an honorable way—which we have every reason to believe it would, Swamiji hastened to add—to allow Ananda to incorporate would set a bad precedent. LAFCO made the right decision

The moment Swamiji finished speaking the crew turned the camera on me. I had to improvise on the spot all the reasons why I agreed completely with what Swamiji had just said. Of course, I was contradicting everything I had said off-camera just a few minutes earlier, but these crews interview a lot of politicians and it didn't seem to bother them.

I then took the television crew back to the community, talking all the way about the wisdom of the Founding Fathers and how much we support the basic premises of American life. As soon as they left, I made a beeline back to Swamiji's house.

"Why didn't you tell me what you were going to do?" I asked him. I described the scene in the car, how I gave the crew one story on the way over and another story on the way back. "Fortunately, I think fast on my feet." By this point, we were both laughing. The situation was so ludicrous.

"I'm sorry, Asha," Swamiji said. "It was a surprise to me, too. When I sat to meditate this morning it just came to me that it was not right for us to go on. It was already too late to reach you." There were almost no phones at Ananda in those days. Swamiji didn't have a phone, and neither did I.

"Why didn't that revelation come to me?" I asked Swamiji. "*I'm* the one who has been working on the project all this time."

“Probably because you didn’t ask,” he said.

“No,” I said honestly, “I didn’t. I just went on as if the guidance for today would be the same as the guidance for yesterday. A serious oversight on my part.”

“Yes,” Swamiji said. “It is not wise to presume. You have to be open, and continuously ask Master, ‘What do you want me to do?’”

“I only want to do God’s will,” I said to Swamiji, entirely reconciled now to what had happened. “I threw myself into this project because you asked me to do it and I felt it was right. If you feel it is God’s will that we stop, that’s fine with me.”

Then I added, “I don’t mind losing. I have to admit, however, that our neighbors have been so unkind, in fact at times so downright nasty, that I don’t like the idea that they have *won*.”

“It is not a matter of likes and dislikes,” Swamiji said. “It doesn’t matter if we lose face, or even if people think we were foolish for having tried in the first place, or for having vowed to go on and then pulling back so suddenly. The only thing that matters is truth.”

“Ahh.... Yes,” I said with a smile, “Where there is dharma there is victory.” Then jokingly I added, “Dharma has served us well so far. No point in changing horses in midstream!”

“Even though we didn’t become a city,” Swamiji said, “I think in the long run our neighbors will respect us more for standing up to them. That’s how they operate and we have to show them we are not pushovers. We can also play their game.”

After that, our neighbors still spoke against most of our proposals, but some of them had been so appalled by things that had been said in the heat of the moment at public hearings that they resolved not to let emotion take over like that again.

Swamiji paused for a moment during our talk, then went on. “Working on this has also been good for you,” he said. “At the beginning, when you spoke in public, you were inclined to tell your listeners what they wanted to hear, rather than tuning in to what needed to be said. Having to stand up to all that opposition at the public hearings has lessened this tendency in you. Now you will be a better minister. That’s the main reason I asked you to do it.”

Because the incorporation had been such a public event, Swamiji wanted to inform the whole county of Ananda’s decision and the reasoning behind. What he’d written was too long to be printed as a “Letter to the Editor,” so Swamiji bought advertising space in the local paper and printed the following statement:

April 16, 1982

A representative group of us at Ananda met yesterday and decided to go to court over the decision of the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) to deny our petition to be granted incorporation status as a municipality. Next week this matter would be taken to the entire community for discussion and final decision. Our legal counsel feels we have a good chance of winning.

The issue, from our own point of view, is clear-cut: We want the freedom to develop, according to law and to the broader interests of Nevada County, but without the restrictions of bureaucratic red tape, and without the all-too-frequent, basically emotional opposition of our neighbors. Our (to us) perfectly reasonable wish has aroused unprecedented, and unprecedentedly emotional, opposition. Ananda has been vilified; my own character publicly slandered. I have repeatedly expressed my desire to work for harmony, and for the general good of all, including the good of our neighbors as much as our own. The press, instead of quoting these statements, has tried to fan the controversy by quoting people who would make me out to be another Hitler, or Jim Jones.

For myself, I am interested in the truth. Lies, whether public or private, are still lies and simply don't claim my respect. I have consistently affirmed that only two arguments could persuade me not to proceed with our efforts to incorporate: One, that incorporation would not give us the one thing we want from it: greater freedom; and two, that incorporation would actually (as opposed to theoretically) hurt our neighbors. During the LAFCO hearings, no one in the opposition addressed these two issues in such a way as to convince me of the justice of their cause.

Rather, they expressed fears which, our legal counsel assured us, were groundless. They said we might, if incorporated, annex their property. Legal counsel told us they would have plenty of recourse in the event of our wanting to, a thing we would never be interested in doing anyway. They said that as a religious community we would be in conflict with the church-state separation guaranteed by the United States constitution. But the legal decision from Sacramento on this issue was that to deny us on these grounds would be to deny *our* rights as U.S. citizens. County counsel advised the LAFCO members to reject testimony against our bid on these grounds as invalid. Part of our suit against the county would certainly be based on the evident fact that religion was in fact admitted as a major part of the testimony, and could not but have influenced the final decision against us.

I have always said that truth is my guide—not opinion; not likes or dislikes; but truth. I am not interested in winning, or in saving face. In the present issue, I am only interested in the rights and wrongs of it. I feel that within the limited context of what Ananda's needs are, and of our contribution, past and future, to Nevada County we were right.

However, last evening, after the meeting at which we decided to appeal, I sat down and read reports on this issue in the national press. As a result I have come to appreciate the problem in the broader context of America as a whole. And I have come to feel that the church-state issue, despite the official pronouncement on the matter from Sacramento, *is* at the heart of the matter. At stake is not the question of whether I would abuse my power as leader of this religious community. I have never done so. Nor is the issue whether I might do so. I think those who know me are quite certain that I would not. The real issue, however, is whether I *could* abuse this power. And there we have to say, There are no guarantees that human nature will not express any of its hidden potentials, whether for good or for evil.

Our constitution was written with a clear eye to history, and to the evils that have occurred in the past when any group of people whose interests drew them together for one reason allowed those interests to dictate their decisions in other matters. One of the saddest periods in the history of Christianity was, in my opinion, when Christian teachings became widely enough accepted to become mixed up with national policy.

If, for example, Minneapolis were to become a wholly Christian city, and St. Paul (its sister city) a wholly Jewish one, to the extent that their definition as legal entities became rooted in their respective religious beliefs, I can see the possibility of persecution, perhaps decades down the road.

As long as Ananda was a local issue, our bid for corporate status revolved around land use, self-government, etc. I believe strongly, moreover, and said so at the last LAFCO hearing, that what Ananda stands for in a sociological sense—namely, cooperative effort at a time when our nation is becoming all-too-fragmented—needs to be encouraged, not discouraged.

This very fragmentation, however, that I see taking place on a national level might also be *strengthened* if religious groups like ours were permitted the status of legal entities. I foresee a time of great stress for this country, when groups will be pitted against one another in an ideological struggle. At such a time, I feel, religion will need to speak out on religious, not political, grounds if it is to be effective for the truth.

In the broader context of America's history and future directions, I think the LAFCO decision not to grant us corporate status was a wise one. This does not mean I think we were wrong, for what we wanted was valid. This does not mean I think LAFCO's *reasons* were necessarily right. But it does mean I think there were higher forces at work here, and that the truths that our neighbors intuited were valid, and a valid reason for concern.

I shall make my recommendation to our Ananda community that we drop the issue.

Sincerely,

Swami Kriyananda

(J. Donald Walters)

A Cheerful Patient

When he moved to India in November 2003, the transition was hard on Swamiji's body. He took several bad falls, had a near-fatal case of pneumonia, persistent dehydration, and several episodes of congestive heart failure. His friends were deeply concerned, but Swamiji accepted it all cheerfully.

Once, when he was recovering in the hospital, a swami from Rishikesh visited. "I am so sorry to find you unwell," the swami said sympathetically.

"Don't worry about me," Swamiji replied with a smile, "this is just *tapasya* to help get my Guru's work going in India."

The Bertolucci Lawsuit

A married man had an affair with an unmarried woman. At the time, they both lived at Ananda Village. His name: Danny; hers: Annemarie Bertolucci.

When Swamiji heard about the affair, he urged them to end it, and supported Danny when he made the decision to go back to his wife and daughter.

Annemarie refused to accept Danny's decision as final. She made it clear to Swamiji that she was determined that Danny should leave his wife and marry her. "I would make a *good* mother to his little girl," she insisted. The child was not developmentally normal and needed special care.

"I will not let you stay here and destroy that family," Swamiji told her firmly. Later, Swamiji said, "I didn't hesitate. I knew intuitively, however, that, in thwarting her desires and abiding by dharma, I would be faced with a difficult test."

To Annemarie he said, "You must move to another Ananda community." She pleaded to be allowed to stay, but Swamiji was unyielding. "You must live as far away from him as possible. That will make it easier to break the attachment." He suggested she

go to Ananda Italy, or, as a second choice, to Ananda Seattle. She rejected both in favor of Ananda Palo Alto, where she had lived before. Swamiji did not dispute her choice.

“She appeared to cooperate,” Swamiji said afterwards, “but underneath I could see she was seething with rage. Not at Danny, but at me. She was certain that if I hadn’t intervened, she could have gotten him back. She once told Danny, ‘I *always* get what I want.’”

It was no surprise when, a few months later, she left Ananda altogether. Her dispute with Ananda became her entrée into SRF. She visited SRF headquarters in Los Angeles, was given lunch by Daya Mata, and met with several other members of the SRF Board of Directors. Even longtime SRF members rarely get to see Daya Mata. For a newcomer to be received so royally was, indeed, exceptional.

Soon after, she filed a lawsuit against Danny, Swamiji, and Ananda. She claimed, among other things, that she had been brainwashed, coerced, and sexually harassed. At the time, the lawsuit said, she may have *thought* the relationship with Danny was consensual. Now, she alleged, *nothing* she had done, in the abusive atmosphere of Ananda, had been of her own free will.

When Swamiji heard about the lawsuit, he said simply, “This is not about Danny. It is SRF trying to destroy me.”

The SRF lawsuit took twelve years to resolve. By 1994, however, when the Bertolucci lawsuit began, SRF had already lost 95% of their case. The next eight years were mostly repeated attempts on their part to get the judge’s rulings reversed. SRF took its appeals all the way up to the United States Supreme Court, which refused to hear the case.

In 1994, SRF still had one possible way, apart from reversal on appeal, to retrieve what it had lost. It was a legal concept called “tarnishment.” If SRF could prove that Swamiji and Ananda were morally corrupt, and that any association in the mind of the public between SRF and Ananda would “tarnish” SRF’s reputation, then the judge could impose restrictions on Ananda that would diminish that association.

Even though the court had dissolved SRF’s copyrights, trademarks, and publicity rights to Master’s name and teachings, through “tarnishment” they might have those exclusive rights restored. Swamiji had told us to be ready for just such an attack from SRF.

Most of us referred to “Lawsuits” in the plural—meaning Bertolucci and SRF. They were legally separate, filed in different courts—SRF’s in federal court in Sacramento, Bertolucci’s in state court near Palo Alto. Swamiji, however, never referred to them in the plural. To him, it was just “The Lawsuit,” since it was obvious to him that SRF was behind them both.

Just as Swamiji had predicted, SRF soon filed a motion in federal court, describing the Bertolucci lawsuit, and asking for relief on the basis of “tarnishment.” We countered with the charge that SRF had “unclean hands.”

“SRF can’t be permitted to both *create* a scandal and then *benefit* from that scandal,” our attorney argued. He had considerable evidence to back this up, starting with the way Bertolucci had been received at SRF headquarters just weeks before she filed the lawsuit.

He went on to list other convincing facts. Bertolucci’s attorney was a prominent member of SRF. (Later he became the lead attorney in SRF’s federal case as well.) A major SRF donor had been fraudulently passed off as a paralegal so as to be able to attend Swamiji’s deposition in the Bertolucci case.

Swamiji had never met the man, but when he saw him sitting there Swamiji said to our attorney, “That man is an SRF member. What is he doing here?” Bertolucci’s attorney insisted that he was a paralegal. It was impossible at the moment to disprove his claim.

Not long after the deposition, SRF transferred to that donor a large and valuable property for the sum of \$1. The donor was already a client of Bertolucci’s attorney and our assumption is that he was the conduit through which SRF financed the Bertolucci case.

On the basis of this and other evidence, we demanded the right to question Daya Mata about SRF’s involvement in the Bertolucci lawsuit. SRF waged a fierce battle to prevent us from questioning her. Their efforts to do so did not, in the end, help their cause.

“Your very reluctance to allow her to be questioned tells me you have something to hide,” the judge said when he ordered Daya to submit to a deposition.

“It is not right for fellow disciples to be fighting each other in court,” Swamiji had written to Daya more than once since the SRF lawsuit began. He urged her to accept his invitation to meet together and find a way to settle the case. Always she had refused.

Now, faced with the prospect of having to answer questions about SRF’s involvement in the Bertolucci lawsuit, Daya contacted Swamiji and for the first time appeared eager to settle.

At the settlement conference, however, as a condition for even beginning the discussion, Daya demanded that we give up the right to take her deposition. Naively, we agreed.

Settlement negotiations dragged on for months. SRF expected us to cede back to them all the exclusive rights to Master and his teachings that the court had taken away. They negotiated as if it were they who had won, not we.

By the time it became clear that settlement was impossible, the window of opportunity to take Daya's deposition had closed and could not be reopened. Later, we were forced to conclude that Daya had initiated the whole settlement process for the sole purpose of escaping the deposition.

SRF did, however, withdraw its "tarnishment" claim.

The Bertolucci lawsuit proved to be exactly what Swamiji expected: a vicious personal attack on him. The linchpin of Bertolucci's case was the "coercive, cult-like atmosphere of Ananda." Without that, it was just an affair between two consenting adults. An abusive cult cannot exist without an abusive cult *leader*. Danny soon became an "also-ran," almost incidental to Bertolucci's case—at times even a sympathetic character, because he, too, was presented as a "victim" of the "abusive cult leader."

Swamiji and Ananda were not the first spiritual group or spiritual leader to be sued by Bertolucci's attorneys. By the time they got to us, they had perfected a method for destroying reputations and winning huge out-of-court settlements.

The first step in their system was to write the lawsuit and supporting declarations to be as lurid and shocking as possible, with an eye to how they would play in the media. The second step was to court the media like an ardent suitor.

Accusations in a lawsuit are exempt from the laws that usually govern libel. No matter how false they may later turn out to be, the accusations can be repeated and reprinted in all forms of media without fear of retribution.

Scandal sells newspapers. The same day the lawsuit was filed in court, it was also released to the media. From then on, Bertolucci's attorneys argued the case in the press as much as they did in the courtroom.

The lawsuit was so extreme as to be almost a parody of itself. It read as if the lawyers kept a boiler-plate, anti-cult lawsuit in a file drawer and just pulled it out as needed. Perhaps it is not so far from the truth to say that they simply inserted the names "Ananda" and "Swami Kriyananda" whenever a specific reference was needed.

Human nature tends to think, "Where there is smoke there is fire." Or, between two conflicting points of view, "The truth must lie somewhere in the middle." Few people are discerning enough to know when they are being taken in by a daring ploy that Hitler called the "Big Lie." This is something so outside of reality as to have no foundation in truth at all.

With this understanding of human nature, and by skillful use of the media, the reputation of a spiritual leader can be destroyed by accusation alone.

Nothing in the lawsuit reflected Ananda or Swamiji as we know them to be. It was the "Big Lie."

At Ananda, women are in charge of half the departments. Still, in the lawsuit, the community was described as an environment “hostile to women” in which they are “second-class citizens,” forced into drudgery, mere sexual playthings for “the Swami” and his male minions.

Swamiji was described as a ruthless dictator, indifferent to the welfare of anyone but himself, obsessed with power, pleasure, and money, who routinely took advantage of vulnerable young women. According to the lawsuit, Ananda was nothing but a “sham religious organization” set up primarily to keep “the Swami’s harem stocked.”

When she filed the lawsuit, Bertolucci did not accuse Swamiji of abusing her. She alleged only that he was responsible for creating the atmosphere in which abuse could occur. To bolster that claim, the lawsuit included declarations from a few women, former residents of Ananda, now all affiliated with SRF, who claimed that in the past they had been subjected to coercive sexual advances from Swamiji.

The most recent was alleged to have occurred thirteen years before the suit was filed in 1994, the most distant was twenty-eight years earlier. None of these women were plaintiffs in the lawsuit, but these declarations proved to be the core of the campaign to destroy Swamiji’s reputation.

The third step in the method used by Bertolucci’s attorneys in their attack on spiritual groups and their leaders, is, gradually, over the course of a lawsuit to uncover more and more abuse, and thus draw into the lawsuit an ever-increasing number of plaintiffs. Eventually, the sheer magnitude of the case against the “cult” and its leader forces them to pay whatever is needed to avoid a trial and the risk of an even greater loss of money and reputation.

Four years passed from the time the Bertolucci lawsuit was filed until the trial ended. During that time, Bertolucci’s attorneys sent letters, made phone calls, held public meetings, and at one point even dropped leaflets from an airplane onto Ananda Village, all in an effort to uncover further abuse and draw more clients for their case.

These efforts were entirely unsuccessful. There was no abuse to uncover. The only ones who spoke against Swamiji at the end of the case were the same ones who were there at the beginning: a few SRF-affiliated women.

Dozens of Ananda women did come forth, however, to testify and file declarations on behalf of Swamiji.

“Women have an instinct for these things,” one woman wrote. “They can sense when a man has sexual intentions. I have worked closely with Swamiji for more than two decades. He has been a guest in my home. I have been a guest in his. I have traveled with him. I have worked alone with him late into the night. Not once, in hundreds of hours of close association, have I felt from him, or observed in his interactions with other women,

even the slightest expression of sexual interest. Not even an appreciative glance or a remark with sexual overtones. Nothing. Sometimes I think he doesn't even notice the gender of those around him."

Another woman said, "To speak of Swamiji as 'coercive' is like saying the sun rises in the west. The truth is, when you are with him, you have to be careful not to express preferences that might interfere not merely with his convenience, but with his real needs. He is nothing less than heroic in his willingness to sacrifice his own well-being for the sake of others."

"I've been discussing Ananda personnel issues with Swamiji since the community was founded twenty-five years ago," a woman wrote. "I don't even want to think about how many meetings I've attended. I can't recall a single instance in which a decision was made on the basis of gender. That kind of bias just doesn't happen at Ananda."

In the "discovery" phase of the lawsuit, Swamiji was subjected to *eighty hours* of deposition. Bertolucci's attorneys videotaped the entire proceeding. Each day, in an attempt to unnerve Swamiji, the camera was moved a little closer to his face. Bertolucci's attorney was deliberately lewd and insulting in the hope of embarrassing Swamiji or, better still, enraging him and capturing it all on video.

Less than a year earlier, Swamiji had had open-heart surgery. His physician, Dr. Peter Van Houten, was present for the deposition to monitor Swamiji's condition and call a break in the proceedings whenever he felt Swamiji needed a rest.

"Bertolucci's attorney knew about the surgery," Dr. Peter said later. "Still, he was completely unconcerned about Swamiji's well-being. I think he could have pushed Swamiji to the point of a heart attack if I hadn't been there to prevent it. Even when Swamiji asked to be excused to go to the bathroom, the attorney would say, 'Just one more question.' Then he would go on with the deposition as if the request had never been made. If Swamiji reminded him of the need for a break, the attorney would say again, 'Just one more,' until Swamiji would simply get up and leave anyway, with the attorney calling out questions even as Swamiji walked out the door."

Later, Swamiji said, "I am so accustomed to microphones and cameras. It meant nothing to me to have the video even inches from my face. As for the attorney's attempt to bully and insult me, I saw no reason why his rudeness should affect my inner peace."

Hour after hour, Swamiji calmly answered all the questions they put to him.

During that time, in conversation with a few close friends, Swamiji shared some of his personal history that he had never talked about before.

"At my first meeting with Master," Swamiji said to us, "he asked me, 'Of the three major delusions – sex, wine, and money – which ones attract you?' Wine and money

have never been issues for me. I had no wish to get married, but I did experience sexual desires and I told him so. He made no comment.

“At the end of the interview, Master initiated me as a disciple and also as a monk. I took that for his answer and resolved to do my best. It was a struggle. Once I said to him, ‘I would commit suicide rather than fall into temptation.’

“‘Why speak of suicide?’ Master replied. ‘This is not deep in you. Keep on trying your best. You *will* overcome it.’

“On another occasion I asked him to whom I might go for counseling on this issue after he was gone. I was astonished when he replied, ‘Speak of it to no one.’

“‘Not even Rajarsi?’ I asked.

“‘No,’ Master replied firmly. ‘No one. You have a great work to do and no one must know.’”

Swamiji was twenty-two years old when he became a monk. For the first fourteen years, he lived within the protected environment of the SRF monastery. When he was expelled from SRF in 1962, he found himself suddenly, at the age of thirty-six, all on his own.

Most monks and nuns who, for whatever reason, find themselves suddenly no longer in the monastery, have usually gotten married shortly thereafter. Swamiji was determined to remain a monk, even without a monastery to support him.

In India, a solitary swami is a common sight and people relating to him understand his position. In America, there is no such tradition. Many women still considered him “fair game.” Some even found him more attractive because of his commitment to be a monk.

Swamiji maintains a certain detachment from his own feelings. That detachment, however, does not diminish the depth and sensitivity of those feelings. Only a few, even of his closest friends, have been able to appreciate how deeply he has been hurt by the way SRF has treated him. All these years he has not had the company of even one fellow monk. Instead, he has been vilified and relentlessly persecuted by fellow disciples, some of whom were, at one time, his closest friends.

It was only natural that Swamiji would long, as most people do, for a small haven of emotional intimacy as a bulwark against so much hurt and betrayal, especially when that comfort was freely offered.

“When I took my vows as a monk, and then a few years later, as a swami,” he later wrote, “it was not a declaration, ‘I am free!’ Rather, it was an affirmation, ‘I will do my utmost to become completely free in this life.’”

Swamiji struggled valiantly against a lingering desire for human love and intimacy. Mostly he succeeded. A few times he did not. Always it was consensual. It is not in Swamiji's nature to impose his will on anyone.

Mentally, however, he himself never gave his full consent, but acted always in obedience to Swami Sri Yukteswar's advice quoted in *Autobiography of a Yogi*: "Even when the flesh is weak, the mind should be constantly resistant."

"A slip is not a fall," Swamiji often says to encourage a person to cling to his aspirations even if, for a time, he fails to live up to them. Master said, "A saint is a sinner who never gave up."

When Swamiji started the community a few years after he was expelled from SRF, he had no choice but to mix freely with both men and women. If he had remained aloofly protective of his monastic vocation, Ananda would have failed.

"I made the decision to risk even my own salvation," Swamiji said, "in order to do the work Master had given me to do."

Later he wrote, "I could see no alternative but to go on, hoping for the best, clinging with faith to Master's power, believing that he would take me eventually out of delusion. To me personally, the risk was agonizing. Meanwhile, I never pretended to myself or to anyone else that it was *not* a delusion, or that it might be in some way justifiable. I always saw, and spoke of it, as a fault. At last, as it happened, I discovered that Master's blessings had been with me always."

During the time of the depositions, in that conversation with his close friends, Swamiji went on to say, "Bertolucci's lawyers tried to make it seem like sex was something I reveled in. That is not true. It was always something from which I wanted to be freed.

"There was no point, though, in running away from it or doing all those other extreme things people do in an effort to kill the impulse within them. Quite simply, I'd tried that and had found it didn't work. I realized I just had to live through it, maintaining as much mental detachment as I could.

"To maintain detachment in this way is a form of Tantra yoga. Many people think Tantra is about *enjoying* your desires. That is entirely wrong. The teaching of Tantra is to *withdraw* the feelings, by an act of will, from sensory enjoyment, not to indulge them.

"The follower of Tantra trains himself to keep the thought, 'Even in the midst of enjoyment, I myself am not the enjoyer.' The goal of this practice is eventual inner freedom. By maintaining mental detachment even while experiencing apparent 'fulfillment,' one gradually comes to see that desire itself is a delusion.

“Tantra can be dangerous, however, and the masters do not recommend it. I would not have chosen even this one practice for myself if my situation had not forced it upon me.

“It complicated things for me that Master had told me not to talk about it. Of course I would follow his guidance, there was no question about that. If he hadn’t guided me that way, however, I would have talked about it easily. I have done my best and I am proud of the life I have lived. Sexual desire is, after self-preservation, the most powerful instinct there is. It is nothing to be ashamed of.”

Bertolucci’s lawyers offered to settle, but Swamiji refused even to consider it. “It would,” he said, “be tantamount to admitting an untruth – a whole series of untruths, in fact.”

The Bertolucci trial turned out to be a travesty of justice. The judge was biased against us from the start. He told Bertolucci’s attorneys what arguments to make and what motions to file so he could rule in their favor. He put Ananda’s spiritual practices on trial. He issued a ruling that prohibited us from offering *any* defense against the fulcrum issue in the case: the allegation that Swamiji was a “sexual predator.”

When it came time for the women who had filed declarations against Swamiji to testify against him, *they knew in advance* that we’d been prohibited from cross-examining them. They could perjure themselves without fear of exposure. Some of their testimony contradicted what they had said in their own declarations and depositions, but there was no way we could bring even this fact to the attention of the jury.

The jury was *never informed* about the prohibition imposed on us by the judge. They observed, without any explanation, that we offered no defense. They drew the obvious conclusion that we had no defense to offer, and considered the issue proved.

The attorney we worked with from the beginning to the end of the SRF lawsuit is a brilliant lawyer, an honorable man, and has become a dear friend. But he is not a litigator. So we had to hire another attorney to work with him for the trial.

Swamiji was in Europe when this litigator was hired. He was a well-known defense attorney, who, we found out later, specialized in defending guilty criminals. His contribution to justice was to be sure that the criminals, although guilty, received a fair trial.

When Swamiji came back to California a month or two later, they met for the first time. The litigator had apparently decided he needed to make it clear from the start who was the boss. He treated Swamiji as if he were a guilty criminal who needed to be bullied into telling the truth.

Afterwards, Swamiji said, “He is the wrong attorney for us.” It wasn’t personal. It was just obvious to Swamiji that such a man could never tune in to him or to Ananda and therefore would have no idea how to defend us.

Swamiji’s remark was met by a hailstorm of reasons why we had to keep working with that lawyer.

“We’ve paid him a big retainer.”

“He’s done a lot of work already to prepare for the trial.”

“He has a reputation for winning.”

“We don’t have time to bring someone else up to speed.”

Again Swamiji stated emphatically, “He is the *wrong* attorney for us.” When the hailstorm began again, Swamiji made no further effort to persuade us.

Throughout all life’s challenges, Swamiji’s first thought has always been, not, “How to win?” or “How to succeed?” but, “How to maintain the right spiritual attitude required by the highest principles of dharma.”

Even in a matter of such importance, if we were not receptive, it was contrary to dharma for Swamiji to *impose* his will on us.

“I knew this attorney would be a disaster for us in exactly the way he proved to be,” Swamiji said later. “When I couldn’t get you to listen, however, I accepted it as God’s will.”

The irony is that the man was hired to defend Swamiji against the charge, among others, of being a dictator. Even though the consequences for Swamiji personally were enormous, he let us go forward as we preferred and let God to determine the outcome.

So we went to trial represented by an attorney who didn’t believe in our cause, who believed still less in Swamiji, who never understood the case, and who refused all our helpful suggestions. As a result, insofar as he was allowed to present a defense at all—given the judge’s prohibition—his defense was so weak that in many ways it strengthened the case against us.

We continued to affirm victory right up to the end, but it was no surprise when the jury ruled in favor of Bertolucci. Afterward, we consulted with several attorneys about filing an appeal.

“Even without considering all the other improprieties in the way the judge conducted the case,” one attorney assured us, “the prohibition against your presenting a defense to the key issues is enough in itself to *guarantee* that the verdict would be overturned on appeal. That verdict has the shelf-life of an *apple*.”

To our dismay, however, we found out that even if one wins an appeal, all he gets is the right to a new trial, sometimes even in front of the same judge. The first trial had lasted three months, cost us hundreds of thousands of dollars, and for the entire time, thanks to Bertolucci's attorneys, and our own lawyer's refusal even to let us talk to the press, we were raked over the coals by the media.

No thank you, we decided. We'd had quite enough of this so-called "justice."

"Where there is dharma there is victory." What does it matter how we are judged in the courts of man? All that matters is how we stand in the eyes of God.

Even in the worst hours of the trial, Swamiji said later, "I felt inwardly free. My constant prayer was, 'Divine Mother, they can take everything away from me, but they can never take away from me my only treasure: my love for You.'"

Bertolucci's attorneys very nearly succeeded in taking from Swamiji the copyrights to all his books and music, the fruit of a lifetime of work. Only by putting Ananda for a time under the protection of the bankruptcy court were we able to prevent that from happening.

In the end, the trial proved to be a great blessing for Swamiji. "Since then," Swamiji said, "I have not felt the faintest stirring of attraction toward human love."

It seems an inescapable conclusion that those women who helped Swamiji in achieving his ultimate victory also reaped for themselves, in time, some of the good karma of that victory.

Speaking to a group of friends, all of whom happened to be married couples, Swamiji said, "I don't mean to hurt your feelings, but Master told me something that I didn't understand at the time, but I do understand now. He was speaking of the attraction between the sexes. 'Once you have overcome that desire' Master said, 'you will see it is the greatest delusion.'"

Persecution has been the lot of many great souls throughout history. St. Teresa of Avila was called before the Inquisition. St. John of the Cross was cast into prison. One of John's persecutors was even there at his deathbed interviewing the nuns who nursed him in the hope of finding evidence of misconduct to use against the saint.

In his Christmas message to the community the year of the Bertolucci trial, Swamiji wrote, "We have so much to be grateful for. I wouldn't trade anything God has given us this year for some imaginary 'better deal.' Spiritual growth comes as much through divine tests as through overt blessings – so much so that I'm inclined to say, 'What tests?'"

"What we want from life is to grow closer to God. Nothing else – absolutely *nothing* else – matters. Speaking for myself, and I think for all of you, my love for Him is deeper than ever. So also is my faith."