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Courtesy : Sri Sadanand, Bombay

*Just as there is a veil of ignorance for the individual,
so there is also a door to Knowledge.*

Matri Vani

The man who is a seeker after Truth shall find his own true Self within himself through his Guru's instructions. In the mantra bestowed by the Guru, the Guru Himself is indeed present. You may see His body die, but the Guru never leaves you. When you are crying your heart out for the loss of His physical frame, why then do you put obstacles in the path that He has chalked out for you? Verily, the Guru is one.

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If a person decides to shape his life according to someone's directions and then again acts according to his own sweet will, this, from one point of view, creates a hindrance.

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It is a matter of rejoicing that he wishes to join the Ashram. The moment his desire to do so is genuine, he has already as good as entered the Ashram.

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About health and ill-health this body does not say anything. The real supreme and universal remedy for all ills is to abide in the constant remembrance of God. Put your whole trust in Him.

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Man's life must be turned towards the realization of Truth. The Lord is Love. So as to find this Supreme Refuge;

suitable practices and activities have to be adopted at all times.

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The moment that has passed, returns not. Time must be used well. Only when spent in the effort to know "who am I?" has it been used well.

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If one is to attain to the Immortal, it is helpful to look for THAT in everyone and everything. The search after Truth is man's duty, so that he may advance towards Immortality.

Conversations with Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma

RECORDED BY PROFESSOR B. GANGULY

Ranchi Ashram, 7th May, 1965.

Question : Some live in the Ashram and some outside; are they all of the Great Mother's kith and kin or are some closely related and others more distantly ?

Mataji : Mother Kali is here* in front of you. Does she belittle anyone ? Why do all come to the Great Mother ? Because all are alike to Her, all are Her kith and kin. But Her children ought to be aware of this !

Question : I always feel that everything in this world is fruitless and senseless—like in the workshop of a ghost. How can one escape from the grip of that ghost ?

Mataji : Who is the ghost ? What is the work of man in the world ? The ghost exists only because you think it does. Otherwise every man (*jīva*) is Siva, every woman Gouri. When you are yearning to do *sādhana*, you cannot remain without it. Even within the workshop of that 'ghost' you will very well be able to enter the current of *sādhana*. Depending on your interest, you will give preference to some work or other. On the spiritual path one has to fulfil one's duty. The Lord of Men comes in the guise of every human being to accept service from you. The housewife should regard her husband as an embodiment of the Lord and serve him with this attitude of mind. The small daughters of the family ought to be cared for as incarnations of the Virgin Mother and the sons as so many little Gopals who are in need of your love and affection. Why do you call this "the workshop of a ghost ?" Carry out all work as God's service and there will

* There is a Kali temple in the Ranchi Ashram.

be no such thing as a "workshop of a ghost." The Ashram of the householder is a field of service and every service should be performed as the worship of God. Let the husband adore his wife as Lakshmi, the Goddess who presides over the home. Then you will see how full of happiness and joy life becomes.

To be able to keep up this attitude of serving God in all your actions, you must at fixed times of the day retire to your shrine-room for meditation, prayer, japa, the reading of scriptures and so forth, just as a clock has to be wound regularly. In this manner you will gradually come to do all your work as a divine service.

Question : I am aware of the fact that I am unable to attend to my duty. Is this a sign of spiritual progress ?

Mataji : Do you feel that you are unable to attend to it or have you not the power to overcome the obstacles that are in the way ? The sense of want or insufficiency is salutary, for it awakens the remembrance of God and therefore helps one to advance.

Question : If I commit anything wrong, this is, according to the *Sāstras*, due to some evil mental dispositions (*samskāras*). Now the question arises : from where did the first evil disposition come ?

Mataji : All *sādhanas* are practised in order to discover this. Start meditating and invoking God's holy name and you will find that one day the reply to your question will come to you of itself.

Ranchi, 8th May, 1965.

Question : For the last thirty years I have kept *satsang*, yet my mind is not at peace. Like an ox that turns the wheel of an oil-mill I revolve and revolve. How can I find peace ?

Mataji : You have indeed kept *satsang*, but you have not reflected upon what you have been told. You have

listened to words of wisdom, yet have not acted according to the injunctions of the wise; you have not thought deeply, not contemplated as advised. How will you win the Guru's grace ?

Question : Why should the wise not let me have a share of what they have earned ?

Mataji : So you wish to enjoy the fruit of another's labour ? So long as you do not meditate and act upon what you have been told, how can the path open out for you ? If you practise whatever *sādhana* that suits your temperament and is within your capacity, your inner power will develop and increase. God is the Life of life, the Self. There is only one Life, one Self. In order to realize, to know it, you must resort to the spiritual exercise that appeals to you from deep within you. What have you done to find Him ? How much work you do for worldly ends, how much trouble you take. But you sit down idly over the fact that you have forgotten your true nature—that you are the Atma, that you yourself are Peace. Have you made a sustained effort to realize this ? Start right now some spiritual exercise for the purpose of this revelation. God has given you so much capacity to work. Dedicate at least a little more time to Him ! And all the work you do in the world, lay as an offering at His feet. Regard yourself as His manager, don't feel that you are the boss. As the Lord's manager, serve Him in every human being. In your home there are the Goddess Lakshmi, Kumari Devi and Balgopal. Do service to them, do not neglect them, and you will be at peace. And whatever time you can spare, morning and evening, sit in solitude in your shrine-room and contemplate God's divine form, meditate on Him, worship Him. Start today, do not waste any more precious time !

Question : Mataji, will I have the vision of God by virtue of the *sādhana* I am practising ?

Mataji : He does not reject or refuse anything. Whatever you offer to Him He will accept. In whatever way you

approach Him, He will respond. All *sādhana*s are different paths that prepare you for the realization of Him.

Question : Man's life is conditioned by his *prārabdha karma*. Where does free will (*puruṣkāra*), come in ?

Mataji : You must use your free will to find the Supreme. The practice (*kriyā*) by which you advance towards Him (*Puruṣottama*) that exactly is called *puruṣkāra* (free will or the power to decide for oneself.) By God's grace even your destiny may be modified. If a devotee has firm faith that his *prārabdha karma* can be changed by God's grace, then this may become possible. There certainly are laws in God's creation, yet nothing is impossible for Him. If you think that God's grace is also within destiny, this is so for you. If on the other hand you are convinced that God is more powerful than destiny, then He may do anything at all for you. He provides for the worldly as well as the spiritual needs of His devotees.

From the Diary of a European

MELITA MASCHMANN

(*Translated from German*)

(3)

Varanasi, October 1963.

Yesterday most of us left by bus for Varanasi. The rest of the party will follow today with Mataji. Only very reluctantly I left Vindhyachal. There, the foreign country with all its strangeness became familiar to me. This may sound paradox, yet is a fact.

Early morning I ascended to the roof of the Ashram where I had spent many mornings all by myself. I wanted to bid farewell to everything that had been within my horizon here. After a little while I heard the sound of quiet, regular breathing from the tiny room on the roof. Through the open door I saw Mataji lying fast asleep. Perhaps she had fled up here to escape the commotion of packing down below. I have often heard it said that she does not sleep as we do, but nobody has yet given me a satisfactory explanation of this. May be I was deceived by appearances, but what I saw was the deep, relaxed sleep of a person whose perfect inner peace was expressed in the delightful harmony of her features.

I stole away on tiptoe and sat down in my place on the roof. If God were a mighty magician and granted me the fulfilment of a wish—if he had asked me at that moment, “Where would you like to be?” (How many times had I not imagined this as a child!)—I could only have replied: “Exactly where you have put me.”

After the quiet of Vindhyachal, Varanasi seems pandemonium. What a jumble of people, cars, rikshaws, cows, camels, and again people, people, people.

We have to get down in a main street. A narrow lane leads to the Ashram. But here what a relief: the Ganga. Oceanic expanse, serene streaming, promise of calm.

The Ashram is situated right on the bank of the Ganga. This is the far end of the town. The building is rectangular, opening towards the Ganga. The main tract which runs parallel to the river is three-storied, with verandas in every storey. The left wing, at right angles to it, accommodates the *Kanyapith*, a residential Girls' School for religious education. In the right wing there is a small hall downstairs and on the first floor the two temples with a large veranda that protrudes far into the courtyard in the manner of a balcony. Besides these there are a few small rooms in which Swamis live. All the three buildings have extensive roof-gardens. Above the temples there is a tall, pointed tower, surrounded by four smaller towers at the corners. The courtyard is enclosed by the buildings on three sides and by a low wall on the riverside. Here there are shady bushes. In the centre, under a roof, is the well arranged place for the fire sacrifices.

Behind the back-wall of the main building there are several other lower houses, also belonging to the Ashram. There is also a second courtyard. In a low annexe food is prepared; another one contains the office and the library of the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha. Leaving the Ashram and crossing the narrow lane, one finds a large rectangular platform on which a *satsang* hall is to be built (the original hall that was right on the bank of the Ganga had to be demolished after a high flood). On one side of the hall-to-be a large temple is under construction. Beyond the platform there is a small house, which Mataji's brother has built for himself and his family.

Having passed through the teeming, tumultuous lanes one is surprised to find here such an imposing and extensive project. This Ashram with all its annexe build-

dings is regarded as a spiritual centre by Mataji's devotees who live scattered all over North and Central India.

Our Ashram family of Vindhyachal has in a trice multiplied by ten. I hardly see a familiar face among the crowd that constantly waits for Mataji. My companions of Vindhyachal have become almost invisible, as the large Ashram provides shelter for all of them, while at Vindhyachal they had to remain in the open most of the day. Mataji has disappeared into her room. Even the door to the veranda in front of her room is either locked or strictly guarded. If this were not so, people would at all times try to force their way to Mataji.

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One of the things that I appreciate immensely is that in Mataji's circle no false gesture exists and no artificial pathos. Of course, there does not seem to be any genuine pathos either, or at any rate not noticeable for me. It may well be that the religious poetry which is often recited contains pathos. But this I am unable to judge since I do not understand the language. The manner in which it is rendered does not sound in the least effusive. The same holds good for the style in which the *pūjās* are performed here: the movements of the priests are unaffected, sober and to the point. It is of course true that the numerous symbolic actions keep the *pūjāries* so fully occupied that there are, as it were, no gaps that would have to be filled in with empty gestures.

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Yesterday I paid a visit to Sri Gopinath Kaviraj. He had permitted me to do so. His house lies in a small garden. No sooner has one crossed the gate than one enters into an area of silence which encloses this unusual man in ever more silent concentric circles. A vigorous dishevelled palmtree, underwood grown wild and covered with white blossoms. On the terrace a small fire, tended by a servant who, without a

word, points across his shoulder to the entrance of the house. A lofty, dark corridor, a steep staircase, everything quite undecorative and austere. The study of the wise man, more a cell than a room: books, magazines, manuscripts are towering on all four sides of the couch on which he is seated. He points to a low stool: "Sit down!" But I prefer to settle myself on the floor. Quite effortlessly: several minutes of silence. At long last he begins to talk about the essay in which I have described my first encounter with Mataji. Great hushed appreciation. Then again silence, which this time is interrupted by myself. I ask whether I may explain to him where, at the time, I believe to stand spiritually. He nods and listens to me with half closed eye-lids. Occasionally a smile of consent flits over his face.

When I tell him that I have really no special desire to converse with Mataji, he opens his eyes in astonishment. "This is excellent," he remarks softly, "do not talk to her. Gaze at her and seek the contact which is beyond words." I then ask him whether I should meditate although I seem to have no gift whatever for it. "It would be of great help to you." We remain silent for a while, then he asks me to come again after a few days. He would then give me some practical hints. Without a word he folds his hands, a remote smile, a hardly perceptible bowing of his head, I am dismissed. After getting up, I remain standing for a moment. This room with its bare walls and its mountains of books seems more familiar to me than any of my own rooms have ever been. The sage on his couch, with his scanty silver hair and the heavy eye-lids was at one time my father or will some time be my brother. I know nothing about his life and yet seem to know all.

While riding on a rikshaw through the crowded streets, I have the physical sensation as if everything I see around me were not outside but within myself. The skin that confines my body seems infinitely widened and encloses all this as well.

I suddenly recall the peculiar sensation I had a year ago after my first *daršana* of Mataji. I felt as if my heart—the physical heart—were growing to double its size. For days I could feel it expanding slowly. It was a sensation that caused pain and bliss at the same time.

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This morning I got up very early to go to Sarnath, one of the holiest places of Buddhism. Here the Lord Buddha "set in motion the wheel of *dharma*". He preached for the first time after gaining illumination. I hire a rikshaw. It takes about an hour to get to Sarnath. We at first traverse the city. It is early dawn but the streets are already full of life. Then, gradually houses become fewer. Fields and fallow land, behind walls neglected gardens of old manor houses. A flock of goats by the roadside, donkeys loaded with bundles of dirty linen, peasants carrying milk to town; off and on we meet a monk walking with vigorous strides. Then the road becomes empty.

When I enter the holy district I am completely alone. The sun rises from behind a small grove, wild pigeons are cooing in the tree tops, and a strange perfume overpowers me with impetuous sweetness. I take off my sandals and leave them on the way.

Scattered over an extensive tract of grassy land are the ruins of several temples, stupas, monasteries from early Buddhist times. Before the first monasteries were built during the reign of King Ashoka (three hundred years before Christ), this was a large jungle inhabited only by ascetics and wild beasts. The first five disciples of the Lord Buddha were practising rigorous austerities here. Gautama had been one of them and had left. When after several years he met them again, Buddhagaya lay behind him; as a living man he had reached Nirvana. The ascetics recognized him as the Enlightened one, the Buddha, and became his first disciples.

