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

MATRI VANI

The practices leading to the ideal that has been shown by the Guru as the goal, are performed in order to become one-pointed. When the disciple with single-eyed devotion advances towards the one goal, how can one say that there is no ideal? To labour for the attainment of the goal according to the Guru's instructions, this indeed is called firm faith (*niṣṭā*). To engage in action for the sake of enjoyment is one thing, to perform action as *yoga*, quite another. Directed towards the Supreme Quest it is called *yoga* and directed towards worldly aims it is called *bhoga*. He who treads the path of action as *yoga* is on the way to liberation. Whatever current he may be able to enter, he should, ever united with that current, endeavour by that yogic practice (*kriyā*) to attain to liberation from action. In the realm where one is ever free, in the transcendental and beyond it, there, no question can arise. First of all become united to yogic action with single-mindedness along whatever current it may be, then only can you reach liberation from action. To be a *yogi* means to be eternally united; and he who is eternally united is also eternally free.

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Your sorrow, your pain, your agony is indeed my sorrow. This body understands everything.

You may want to leave this body (Mataji). But this body won't leave you for a single day—it does not and never will leave you. One who has once been attracted to this body, even though he may make a thousand attempts, will not be able to efface or blot out the memory of this body. It will remain and persist in his memory for all time.

The search after Truth is man's duty ; so that he may advance towards Immortality"

—Ma Anandamayee

Conversations with Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma

RECORDED BY PROFESSOR B. GANGULY

(Translated from Bengali)

Ranchi Ashram, May 13th, 1965.

Question : Why should the vehicle of *Kālabhairava** be a despised creature like a dog ?

Mataji : You do not seem aware of the many virtues of the dog. Do you not know how faithful a dog is to its master, how one-pointed in the pursuance of its aim, how it regards dirt and delicacies with an equal eye ? When a dog has eaten dirt and is driven away by kicks or is pelted with stones, it will go away without any spite. But its attention remains on its purpose. As soon as you are gone, it will return to where it wants to be. It is happy in the soft bed that a rich man provides for it or on its master's lap but is equally contented to lie by the roadside or in the gutter. The dog's sleep is very vigilant. If a thief comes, it acts as a watchman and rouses its master. It never neglects its duty and accepts happiness and pain with equanimity. If, overlooking the short-comings of its animal nature, you observe its one-pointedness, devotion, dutifulness and equality, you will find that the dog has, like a Guru, taught you many lessons.

Ranchi, house of Sri Kamakhya Prasad Roy, May 13th, 1965.

Question : There is a hymn in which the world-mother is praised as the bestower of both, devotion and liberation. Does She grant both of them, or to whom does She grant devotion and to whom liberation ?

* A form of Siva.

Mataji : The MOTHER can and does give everything. According to each person's capacity to receive, she measures out precisely to every one, depending on his need and merit. This is why She is called MOTHER. Whatever anyone may desire, exactly that he will get—if not today, then to-morrow. One who craves worldly pleasures will find them; and the seeker after Truth who wants liberation will definitely some day attain to it.

Question : Why then have some people sought it in vain throughout their lives ?

Mataji : When He manifests as desire He will certainly reveal Himself also as its fulfilment. But the desire must grow intense. Half-heartedness will not do ! Why, the fulfilment is already there : You are indeed the self-effulgent *Ātmā*. The desire and its fulfilment, everything is in fact contained within you.

Ranchi Ashram, May 29th, 1965.

Question : Mataji, what should I understand by 'festival' ?

Mataji : Whatever you behold.

Question : How can I know whether this festival* has fulfilled its purpose or not ?

Mataji : Everyone will know in his own mind what has been gained by him through these celebrations. In every field of life each person will have to understand this festival and its significance to him according to his capacity to assimilate and the place or level on which he happens to be.

Question : What is an *āśrama* and what is its purpose ?

Mataji : You people speak of four *āśramas* or stages of life, namely : *Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vānaprastha*, *Sannyāsa* (that of the student, the householder, the ancho-

* The question obviously refers to Mataji's birthday celebrations held at Ranchi in May 1965.

rite and the renunciate). *Aśrama* means freedom from stress and strain, that is to say, life in harmony with the exigencies of one's true nature (*Sahaja jīvan*). What shape such a life takes depends on the level on which one happens to be.

Question : Why is the same kind of festival celebrated every year ?

Mataji : The actual purpose of the festival is the complete revelation of one's own Self. The festival will have borne its fruit in the fulness of Self-realization. For the sake of Self-realization these celebrations are repeated year after year with energy and enthusiasm. The outer, conditional action is performed as a *sādhanā* to lead to the unconditional offering of the final oblation (of oneself), *yūrnāhuti*.

Question : Are the paths of knowledge, devotion, action and yoga accessible to all or are they hidden ?

Mataji : Even though accessible, the essential secret remains concealed. Along every path there are some profound secrets unknown to all and not laid down in any book. Whether you take the path of knowledge or *bhakti* or vedic ceremonies or tantric practices or the yoga of selfless action as expounded in the Bhagavad Gita—behind the outer exercises of all of them the essential principle remains a mystery unless revealed by the Guru or gradually understood in the course of protracted and sustained *sādhanā*. Thus, according to four different lines of outer activity there are four castes : *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya*, *Shudra* (priest or teacher, warrior or statesman, merchant or craftsman, labourer); four objects of human pursuit, namely : *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma*, *moksha* (Religion, acquisition of wealth, enjoyment, liberation). In this way you may become fulfilled. Again, he who is fulfilled has transcended this fulfilment. (*sholakalā*)* Besides, the four paths are different on each level for each

* Mataji uses the word '*Sholakalā*.' *Shola* means sixteen, *Kalā*, part of the disc of the moon. Thus *sholakalā* means fulness.

caste and for each *aśrama*. Thus, by multiplying 4 by 16 you can arrive at the number 64 (which symbolizes the highest perfection). When one perseveres on the path of *sādhanā*, many carefully concealed secrets will be revealed. Not everything can be made public and what cannot be disclosed is called secret. 'Secret' must not be understood as any bad or contemptible *sādhanā*. In the kingdom of the mind not all secrets can be apprehended. On reaching the state in which the mind has been stilled, nothing remains a mystery; there, everything stands self-revealed. Then, a state also exists in which there is no more question of revelation or non-revelation. When the goal has been reached, everything comes fully and perfectly to light. This is so in the supernatural; while in this world, one advances step by step towards one's goal, in other words, partial realizations come gradually. The religious functions of this world are held as a preparation for the final, total sacrifice, for the sake of complete Realization – merely in order to get ready for it. This kind of celebration is performed with great perseverance and enthusiasm so that the real inner festival may come into being. Even when the action which is carried out within the limit of time is perfect, unlimited realization has not yet been achieved. Beyond that, after the final *Pūrṇāhuti* the question of boundary and boundlessness, of relative and unlimited can no longer arise. This festival is an attempt to bring about a fully integrated, perfect life. What has remained mysterious of what this body (Mataji) says can become fruitful in the soil of each one's heart by practising the seed-*mantra* received from one's Guru. In order that this seed may germinate and fructify, there are according to people's capacities and conditioning, various lines of approach. One of them will have to be adopted. The person who proceeds along the path of love will realize God as Love and Bliss. One who takes the path of knowledge will realize the *Brahman* as Supreme Knowledge. He who practises *Karma yoga* will realize the *Brahman* as consciousness or receive the grace

of the World-mother. Again, just as the same individual can be father, husband, son and so forth, similarly the one *Brahman* is Being, Consciousness and Bliss. No matter what be the path anyone may tread, he will find the One who is all in all. In Yoga one has to achieve eternal union, which is beyond the opposites of union and separation; then the Eternal will be found. Again, where the eternal and the fleeting are transcended, where the question of the beyond and 'beyond the beyond' does not arise anymore—such a sublime and final condition also exists. This body speaks in this unreasonable and illogical manner. Now let the *pandits* reflect and give their opinion.

Question : Who is a *pandit* ?

Mataji : He who has got rid of the idea that he is learned, he is a *pandit*—where what *can* be destroyed *has* been destroyed. He who has left off being a teacher and guide to others and, becoming a teacher unto himself has taught himself so that nothing more remains to be learnt, he is a real and true *pandit*.

FORM

RAMANUJAM*

Still, as the waters of Kailash
O Thou that art
The timeless contemplation of Nilgiri,
ONE within the FIVE
NOT-TWO within the ONE !
Whose Glance is the Door !
Who art that white lotus risen
Out of the ineffable blue —
Limitless as the Space in the Heart !
Praṇava Rūpi, Tree of Wisdom,
Thy branches shade the seventh orbit.
Between Being and Non-Being
Thou emergest as Sack-cloth and Ashes,
Thrilling the hearts of Rishis,
Of Rishis of countless ages.
Thou wanderest ever—being still—
Being still, Thou movest,
Still as the waters of Kailash,
Yet, Thou movest.
Still, as the Ancient Dust upon
The pathless land of truth,
Yet movest Thou amid
The ceaseless wheelings of the stars.

* The author of this poem, a South Indian gentleman, came to Suriya, Hazaribagh Rd. to talk to Mataji, two days before the *Samyam Vrata* started. This was his first *darśana* of her. Instead of leaving the next day as originally intended, he participated in the *Samyam Vrata*. He wrote this hymn during that time : At the close of the function it was read out before Mataji and the assembled *vratīs*.

O FORM of matchless Beauty,
Fair as the Dawn of perennial Creation,
O Secret of Timelessness
Thou destroyest the mansions of time
Shaking earth's foundations,
Filling the Universe with
The terror of Thy foot-steps.
O Mother, O Friend,
Soothe this frightened heart,
Bestow peace once more
Where ring the strident notes
Of the voice of Thy Silence,
Where the mind is stricken down
By Thine Immensity —
Boundless, limitless, immeasurable.

From the Diary of a European

MELITA MASCHMANN

(Translated from German)

(4)

Varanasi, October 1963.

The Ganga has a fascination that is indescribable. As far back as I can think, all rivers on the banks of which I have stood have been a disappointment: the Rhine, the Oder, the Danube, the Weichsel, the Rhone, the Moskwa, the Nile.....I always knew that this here existed, this river, although I had no idea in which country I would find it. If I were a Hindu, I should be convinced that I had lived here in a former life.

The Ganga has the power of an ocean. Early morning, when the opposite bank is veiled by mist, the Ganga lies spread out like a slumbering sea: reposing infinity. Later the distant banks emerge. One perceives a broad, white beach, and beyond it a green rampart limiting the horizon. Towards midday the surface of the water becomes lively: innumerable silvery flashing whirlpools move hastily towards the city. Broad boats with dark square sails drift on the current.

At dusk the opposite bank takes on a rosy hue and recedes ever further into the distance. The water in mid-stream is deep blue, its colour growing lighter and lighter over on the other side. Near the Ashram the shadows are increasing and colouring the water inky. Before night-fall there is sometimes a brief span of indescribable enchantment: water, banks and sky melting without transition into one luminous purple. Never before have I seen such a mysteriously scintillating light: The air resembles violet-coloured silk, and a shade darker than the silky-violet streaming of the

lessly he quotes long passages and sometimes he is moved to tears. Usually his talk ends with a homage to Mataji. Then he makes obeisance to her and she decorates him with a garland.

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The conception '*kheyāla*' seems to be one of Mataji's key-words. In its current meaning it signifies a sudden and unexpected psychic emergence, be it desire, an instantaneously arising opinion, memory, or the like. Mataji has invested it with a different meaning. Since in her case there is no ego to account for a sudden impulse of this kind, the word *kheyāla*, when she uses it, denotes a spontaneous upsurge of the Divine in herself. It is free and unconditioned, a divine voice that speaks through her and directs her steps.

Mataji has no ego-will. This is why she never binds herself to plans or engagements. She knows that she has to be available at every instant for the promptings of her *kheyāla* : and it does interfere with an apparently ruthless spontaneity. Therefore Mataji's movements can only rarely be calculated in advance.

In the course of conversation someone said to her : "Ma, I want to ask you a question. Please reply so that I shall be able to understand !" Mataji : "It all depends on my *kheyāla*."

When questions are put to her, it is not her intellect that answers. She does not reflect. She allows the *kheyāla* to reply from within herself, she serves it as a mouthpiece, as it were. Last year I was present when she turned silent in the midst of a discussion and finally remarked : "There is no *kheyāla* to reply to this question." She then does not answer of her own accord.

In this attitude her total submission to God's Will is expressed. Only because she has given herself up completely, Divine Truth is voiced by her. This is an interpretation of

keyāla that one of Mataji's girls gave me the other day. She then added : "It may well be that we ordinary mortals are occasionally used as mouthpieces of Truth. But Mataji is always one with the Truth of God or the *Brahman*; this is what distinguished her from the rest of us. Even when she does not reply to a question, her silence is an expression of the Will of Eternal Truth."

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In the afternoons Mataji nowadays often sits between the two Ashram temples and gives *darśana*. In the twinkling of an eye the veranda fills up around her. It is one of my favourite places. One has an extensive view over the Ganga, both upstream and downstream. The course of the river is bent so that one can also survey our bank and a large part of the city. At night one sees the fires by which the dead are cremated.

The veranda is like a large room. As soon as Mataji sits down among us, a personal contact is established. To begin with, severe crowding ensues, as all want to do *praṇāma* and many offer flowers. A blind old woman clad in the ochre robe is often led to her. She looks frail and sickly. The blind woman touches Mataji. Sometimes she utters something that sounds imploring. Mataji bears the touch of the groping hands with complete stillness and with an expression that suddenly reminds me of a blood transfusion. Years ago I once watched a man who had his blood tapped in order to donate it to a child who had met with an accident. This feeling : take of my life-force ! Here the spiritual—there the biological.

When the old woman let her hands sink today, she raised her head and her unseeing eyes were fixed on Mataji's face. Mataji stood close by her. She looked composed and serious. A long, quiet glance sank into the blind eyes.

Did it pierce through the night ? There was suddenly

great clarity on the old woman's face. Then she hid it in her hands. Mataji quickly turned away. When the blind woman was led downstairs she wept.

Another woman with a shaven head in *sannyāsi* dress, who also seems advanced in years, frequently sits at Mataji's feet on the veranda. She has a fine, fair-skinned face. One cannot help thinking that she most likely derives from a distinguished old family. In Mataji's presence her countenance becomes ecstatic. She seems a typical *bhakta* : she has obviously chosen the path of the love of God to attain to Enlightenment.

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Last night I could not sleep. Just to kill time I walked to the Ashram after midnight. I was in no hurry. At about 1 a. m. I got there. It was still lively as if it were plain day. I counted nine people who were waiting to have a private interview with Mataji. Every morning when I arrive at the Ashram I am told that Mataji has retired for rest only in the small hours and usually rises again at about 5 a. m. to scan the preparations for the Durga Puja which is being celebrated at present. Throughout the day she has not a minute's rest. Between two engagements I sometimes see her eat or drink something, standing. Although for about twenty hours daily she attends rituals, lectures, gives *darśana*, replies to questions, grants private interviews, dictates letters, and so forth, she never seems in a hurry and only rarely looks tired. Ever the same calm, cheerfulness, kindness, alertness and mostly a sparkling spiritual intensity. At that she is 68 years old and, I am told, not too well physically. What her body achieves under these circumstances is well nigh miraculous. But of course, it is not a bodily but a spiritual achievement. One is reminded of the reports about some Christian saints.

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Today an English tourist who had seen Mataji only for ten minutes during *darsana* time, said to me: "I do not understand anything about holiness, but the beauty of Sri Anandamayi Ma is bewildering." Similar statements I have heard several times from Indians. Again and again I ask myself: What is the secret of this beauty that makes an equally powerful impression on men and women, young and old? Transfigured, sometimes crying, I see them sit before her and their faces express what I feel on occasions when music is divinely beautiful: a bliss that is not my birthright, that I am permitted to sense only rarely for the length of a few heart beats—in order to miss it for the rest of my life.

A woman, aged nearly 70, dressed in the plainest white cotton dhoties, with hair that according to western standards never looks combed. And yet: bewildering beauty! And that in the most diverse situations, not only in moments of spiritual transference. I should say: *always!* The secret of it is impenetrable, but one might perhaps circumscribe it: for instance Mataji's freedom from any kind of self-observation. She does not either seek herself in the mirror of admiring eyes. Long ago and for all times she has let herself go. Whether—watched by thousands of eyes—she stands, walks, sits or lies, there is invariably absolute freedom and artlessness in her movements. One has the feeling that she never has to conquer any resistance in herself, be it of bodily or psychic origin, never to restrain any impulse.

When walking there is something royal in her attitude. One senses this distinctly from the manner in which she responds to someone falling at her feet in obeisance. With folded hands she then bows slightly. Usually in silence, occasionally repeating softly God's name: "*Narayan, Narayan!*" This resembles the greeting of the dervishes. "Be greeted king of kings!" they call to each other who possess nothing but a begging bowl and whose empire is the whole universe.

However paradox it may sound, this majesty in her

gesture of thanking has an admixture of girlishness. Or should I say : childlikeness ? At any rate, there is also something delicate, almost shy, unadorned reverent in it.

Everything has a share in this beauty or calls it out : her unrestrained laughter in which sometimes her whole body participates, the vivacity with which she relates. The play of her features that seems to transform her inexhaustibly--expressing all ages, every temperament, every mood in every situation. Sometimes this almost frightens me. Suddenly I discover on her face the exact reflex of what I have just been thinking or feeling, although I was occupied with things that lie entirely outside of her world.

Or the expression of detachment and composure when she enters meditation. Or her way of talking to children : the simplicity, directness, unaffectedness. Or the charm and the friendly mockery with which she reacts to challenges in the discussion. The motherly seriousness when she reprimands, the confidence when she comforts, her attention when she listens. The pleasure with which she enjoys fun.

All these situations have something in common : they show Mataji in spontaneous response and ever full of spirit. Besides they disclose the central impulse that pervades all her relationship to human beings : kindness.

Spontaneity, liveliness, kind heartedness—do they make a person beautiful in the sense in which Mataji is beautiful ? Do they impart to this beauty the power to transform hearts ? They certainly do. Of course only when they are rooted in the very centre of Being where reigns absolute peace. The Self reposing in Itself establishes undisturbable balance, a harmony expressing as beauty when translated into the physical, although beauty is not of the body. This harmony operates even in the most insignificant gestures : the expression of a hand during sleep; the position of a foot; the sound of laughter, the bearing of the head while drinking. There is no gap whatsoever. The peace originating in the

centre of Being radiates right to the periphery of the hairtips. Mataji's beauty is but her sanctity, her perfect reposing in God.

The elegy of the remoteness of God that has for years been sung with such fervour in the west! Its pathos is gradually getting on my nerves. Perhaps because I myself have sung it so perseveringly? Even the sermons and prayers of priests are full of this pathos. It has almost become the only testimony for 'true religiousness.' Does anyone still dare to say: what do you want, He is right here among us, in every selfless action, in every loving word! The reaction would be an outcry of scorn by those who enjoy their depravity.

Two years ago: the young woman on the staircase who showed me the mark of a child's wet foot. Her face shone as if the archangel Gabriel had appeared to her. Afterwards someone told me that she was the victim of some religious delusion. Perhaps the immanence of God was still real to her? This would—for the desperate apostles of the remoteness of God, not only for the so-called agnostics—be a reason to declare her as insane.

Mataji just said to an Indian infected with the disease of westernization (a student from Paris): "Do not be so voluble! You are now in a state in which God is present in the guise of absence. Contemplate the One present even in the guise of absence!"

She herself ever dwells in the fulness of Divine Presence and has surely not the slightest inkling of western philosophy, but one should think that she has read the Christian Existence Philosophers.

Especially impressive I find her during the periods of meditation which are a regular part of the evening programme and occasionally also inserted into the morning function. While the *sādhus*, both men and women, sit in rather stiff looking yogic postures, Mataji's body is wholly