



Venerable Swami Vijayanandaji Maharaj  
— a very lively picture

## SWAMI VIJAYĀNANDAJI MAHARAJ —HIS LAST DAYS

—Sri Vigyānanda (Jacques Vigne)

Most of the readers already know that Swami Vijayānandaji Maharaj left his body peacefully on Monday, the 5<sup>th</sup> of April, 2010 at 5.10 PM: He had attended the satsang in a very normal way up to the day before - Sunday evening, in spite of the fact that his breath was getting shorter and shorter and his voice more and more difficult to hear. Before, when we were very close to him, we could hear him, but for one or two weeks, it was getting more difficult, because his breath was shorter and shorter.

Mās *lilā* is really surprising: as I was just beginning to write this message to give some details about the way Vijayānanda "had merged into the Brahman", I received a phone call from a young Swami of Israel origin, connected to Swami Bhaskarānanda, who informed me that he had left his body that morning on Thursday, the 8<sup>th</sup> at 4.55 AM at the ashram in Bhimpura, on the bank of the Narmada, Gujarat. He was 93 and three months, what means two years and two months less than Swami Vijayānanda. They met Mā Anandamayī almost at the same period and were both of them very close to her. Mā had entrusted Bhaskarānanda with the task of giving initiation. When they were sitting together, it happened from time to time in the ashram in Kankhal for some celebrations, they did not show great emotion, but you could feel they had a deep connection and were united in a peaceful and spontaneous way. The fact that Swami Bhaskarānanda "merged into the Brahman" just two and half days after Swami Vijayānanda, and that they knew each other for about 58 years is a good proof of their bond. We can assume that he heard, when he was conscious, that Swami Vijayānanda had left his body and that it helped him to leave his body.

Swami Bhaskarānanda's pacemaker had failed on 1<sup>st</sup> February and he was then mostly in a coma. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, he had been brought back from the hospital to allow him to leave his body in the ashram at Bhimpura. He was then on ventilator, and feeding was through a tube to the stomach. After his return to Bhimpura he learned to breathe without the ventilator, though still with the tracheostomy. The times when he appeared to be conscious with open eyes increased day-by-day. Some people heard him pronounce "Jai Ma" quietly. He would nod 'Yes' or 'No' to ques-

tions asked. Moreover, on occasions he blessed people who were visiting him by holding their head with his hands, and would smile. It's touching from a symbolic point of view, you can interpret this as the symbol of what he had done his whole life to give his energy in the service of Mā, to give on behalf of Ma.

To come back to Swami Vijayānanda, we should first evoke the successive parts of his life in nutshell. Born to a Jewish family on November 26, 1914, at the beginning of World War I in East France, he was destined to succeed his father who was the main rabbi of the town of Metz. As a child he was very pious, even during his adolescence. He first followed a spiritual teacher, who was a French psychiatrist influenced by Buddhism, in Paris itself. In the end of 1950, he took a boat from Marseille in South France to Sri Lanka and India in the hope to find his guru. His idea was to ask instructions and to come back to practice them in this small town of South France, where he was practising as a doctor. He had hoped to meet Shri Ramana Maharshi and Shri Aurobindo, but both had just passed away when he reached Chennai in January 1951. He met Ma Anandamayi in Varanasi on February 2, 1951, asked her if he could stay for two or three days in her ashram, she said 'Yes', and actually he spent the next 59 years in Ma's ashram, and he never left the holy land, the *devabhumi* of India.

For the first 19 months, he was always with Mā, except for one day. In 1953 or 1954 She asked him to stay a full year at the Patal Devi ashram in Almora. He did so, and then came back to Varanasi. He went again to Patal Devi in 1961 for a year, and then for eight years at a stretch in Dhaulchina ashram, in complete solitude. He used to come down to see Ma for only a month every year, and still not every year. In 1970, he came back to Patal Devi ashram until 1976, when Mā asked him to stay in Kankhal. She arranged a room for him on the terrace of the Sadhu Kutir, and she told him: "*Yahan baitho!*" 'Sit here!' and so he did for 34 years, until his last breath in the afternoon of the 5th of April, 2010. He hardly left this room but for one month if we add the duration of his different hospitalisations in Delhi.

I stayed for the first time in Kankhal for three months and three weeks in 1985. At that time Swamiji used to come down every day for the evening puja, but not to stay long, hardly five or ten minutes after which he used to go back to his room. Only after Atmānanda left her body in October 1985, he started to see more visitors. We have a French quarterly called 'Jay Ma'. Atmananda did her last work of editing by revising the first number in September, 1985. In the following years, until perhaps 2005, Vijayananda continued to read the proofs and answer in writing the questions of devotees. These answers have been put on the internet, as well as the replies to many oral questions during the satsang, and articles on Ma that he wrote mainly in

the 50's at [www.ananda-mayi.org/devotees](http://www.ananda-mayi.org/devotees).

Let us now describe what happened in the last few months. At Christmas, 2009, he had bad flu that handicapped him and he missed the satsang for a few days. Afterwards he came back and gave satsang as usual up to Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> of April 2010 in the evening—that was his last meeting with the devotees.

On Monday 5<sup>th</sup> morning Izou, who was close to him for more than twenty years, went to his room because he was feeling unwell. He was tossing and turning in bed so as to find a position that would alleviate his pain, but in vain. The nape of the neck, the back of the head and his chest were very painful. He vomited several times. An Indian doctor from the place came, diagnosed gastro-enteritis and prescribed some medicines. Vijayānanda did not take them because he had understood that the diagnosis was wrong. In fact, it was probably the symptoms of an intracranial hypertension with the beginning of an engagement of the basis of the brain in the spinal canal. This results in depression of the breathing function that makes breathing weaker and weaker, and leads to death. For Swamiji, it was probably due to the considerable bending of the nape of the neck through osteo-arthritis, and the vertebral compression that was pressing the spinal cord and that had paralysed the lower limbs when he wanted to walk a few steps. In fact, for a few months, his breath had been getting shorter and shorter, and his voice was very weak during the satsangs. As we said before, for two or three weeks, he had difficulty in finishing long sentences. Beforehand, we could understand his words by getting very close to his mouth, but more recently there were some times when even when doing so, we were not able to hear him. Consequently, at the end of March, I said to my hermit neighbour in Dhaulchina, Swami Nirgunānanda, and to another friend of mine on the phone, that it seemed that Swamiji would not stay much longer in his body.

On Monday around noon, his breathing became more difficult, but he could communicate and even stand up to go to the toilet. At 5.00 PM, the breathing got even more difficult. Gonzague was next to him and Izou was calling the air-ambulance that was supposed to carry him to Delhi urgently. Izou went up to his room, to be with him and after 10 minutes he breathed his last. What is surprising is that he had predicted to her that she would be present when he would leave his body, in spite of the strict rules that prohibit women from entering the Sadhu Kutir, which is reserved only for male ascetics. He left his body in his usual position of meditation, resting against some cushions with the hands brought together and the legs stretched out; it had been difficult for him to cross his legs for several years. He was always very encouraging to people, for when Narayan his attendant came back from the exams he had on that day, he was very happy to see him and asked him with much interest if he

had done well. Narayan did not realize that he was at the point of death and that he had only one hour to live. Izou, and Sonia from Delhi, had done their best to charter an air-ambulance in order to transfer Swamiji to Delhi. He expressed his appreciation for their efforts by saying, "It's great!" These were almost his last words. He passed away a little after. Izou could somehow contact the plane that was already on the take-off runway and cancelled it. Vijayānanda had been living in that room for 34 years where Mā had installed him telling him: "*yahan baitho!*" "Sit down here!" Indeed he died there after some decades of intense *sādhana*.

Swamiji often said that the function of a guru is not to give merely intellectual teaching but to transmit energy. That's what he was doing in a way through several channels, sometimes very direct ones, but mostly very subtle ones. Those who have spent time at Kankhal, in particular during the last year, can testify personally. He himself had a lot of energy; for several months, he was sleeping very little. Despite that, he was giving much of his time to attend regularly the satsangs. When he knew that people had important questions and a strong desire to spend more time with him, he was staying more than the two usual hours, in spite of his old age. He was never complaining about his health. For this reason we had not expected his imminent departure. When he was asked about his health, he could not lie to say that he was going well, so he replied: "As usual!" He almost did not take any medicine. He had often said that to live to be very old was not always a blessing and could be a disadvantage. He probably meant that the handicap was a weight for oneself and for the others. Narayan, Pushparaj's nephew, who was brought up at the ashram in Almora, has taken care of Swamiji daily for the last two or three years, while he was studying. His departure is for him a very big change and it's even more beautiful to see how quiet he has remained and how helpful he was for all that has to be done during these last days. We can see the direct and stabilising influence of Swamiji, beyond the superficial change of life and death.

Vijayānanda's special way of transmitting energy arose when he was asked to bless something. If it was a rosary, he would take it in his hands and began to recite it; if it was a book, he would leaf through it; if it was a photo of Mā, he would comment briefly on the particularity of the face, holding the photo in his hand; and if it was a meditation mat, he would usually put it on his head before putting it on the head of the person who was expecting the blessing.

On the 21st of February, the satsang was unusually full of energy; the Italian Federation of Yoga came with its president, E. Selvanizza and his wife Antonietta. She is a devotee of Swami Chidānanda, who was up until his death, the successor of Swami Sivānanda as the head of the Divine Life Society, and who was also very

close to Mā Anandamayi. The group consisted of more than sixty people and we were rather concerned about the satsang because of Swamiji's weak voice and the fact that he persisted in holding the *satsang* at the noisiest time of the day during the puja in Mā's temple. Nevertheless, there were many questions, and as I repeated Swamiji's sentences loudly, with Antonietta's translation, of course the group could follow the *satsang*, ask some questions and have the appropriate answers. Moreover, Swamiji offered to each member of the group, (most of them are yoga teachers), a small meditation mat made in Gandhi ashram. As there were no more questions at that point, each of us was more sensitive to the vibrations of the moment, and we can say it was a magic moment. Vijayānanda took his time, kept the mat a long time on his head or on the head of the person to whom he offered the mat. It was the last evening of this big group in the area of Haridwar/Rishikesh and we can say that they left with "something", not only the meditation mat, but above all with a subtle and keen energy. The Kumbh Mela gave the opportunity to meet some sages and these Italian people have met one of them in Vijayānanda. Even if you can't fully be aware of his level, you can receive directly love from him, this is the experience of many people who came to visit him.

He often drew our attention to the energy of the Kumbh Mela that was taking place all around. He recommended that we go to the ritual baths and meet the *nāgā bābās*. These sadhus are examples of renunciation with their nudity and their simple way of life. Around the big bath of the 30<sup>th</sup> of March, dedicated to lord Mahāveer, the god of power and devotion, Vijayānanda said that he was feeling his presence in particular. For two months, the region of Kankhal was resonating with the names of Sita and Rama day and night. Several ashrams had organised continuous repetition of *mantras*.

After Swamiji left his mortal coil I kept watch over his body in his room and for sure, the name of God continuously repeated helped me and purified me in my meditation. The first night, some small surges of emotion arose quite frequently with the beginning of tears but that did not last. The second night was much more peaceful with the process of mourning that was happening quite quickly, at least in the first layers of the mind. The saddest thing, when you are with the body of the person who was the most important for you for about 25 years, is to realize all that you should or could have done and that you did not do. In this matter, it's similar to the psychology of the mourning of one's dear ones in general. During almost 70 hours I only slept three hours, but the energy was there and allowed me to take care about practical things during the day and meditate in Vijayānanda's room during the night. During all this period, Izou, Gonzague, Pushparaj, Narayan and Dinesh were particularly

committed to do what had to be done; Izou's family also gave up everything to be there for the last rituals.

After Swamiji's departure, I often remembered the story of the end of a great Zen guru. He was plunged deep in himself in the lotus position and his breath stopped. The devotees began to wail complaining, "Our guru has died, how sad it is! What will we do now, we are left to our own devices?" So that, the guru woke up and said: "You did not understand anything! We're going to organise a big banquet to celebrate together!" That's what they did, and only afterwards the guru fell asleep forever.

Swami Vijayānanda had told us that once when Mā had asked him about his body after his demise; he had answered: "Can throw it anywhere, I do not care about it!" Mā told him: "Your body has done so much *tapasyā* it can't be thrown away like that!" We interpret these words as meaning that we should not put Swamiji's body in the Ganga, as it is usually done for the *Sannyasis*, but that it was better to make a *samadhi*, a traditional grave. Seven or eight years ago, an old western friend of Swamiji, who had been long associated with Ma, had decided to buy a piece of land where they could build a *samādhi*. But Swamiji had no interest in being placed in a place that could become a temple, with morning and evening rituals. He wanted people's devotion to remain focused on Mā Anandamayī's *Mahā Samādhi*. Nevertheless, in order to respond to the numerous demands, he suggested that they could put his body in Pushparāj's garden, but the place should not look like a *samādhi*.

For the last few months, he was saying that Pushparaj had been a *sādhu* in a former life and that he was returning progressively to that kind of life; for several months, he was sleeping in Swamiji's room, at the bottom of his bed, to be with him when he wanted to go to the toilet, because Swamiji had fallen several times whilst doing so. In fact since he was five years old, Pushparaj was brought up in Mā's ashram, and his current house where he usually receives Mā's devotees at Kankhal, including the Western ones, can be actually considered more a part of the ashram than family home in the literal sense of the word. This verbal suggestion of Swamiji was accepted on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> of April in the evening even by some of the ashramites, including Br. Panuda, the senior sadhu, who has known Swamiji very closely for more than 59 years. But at the last moment there was resistance from some people as well as from the Mahānirvāni Ākhāra and a group of Pandās in Kankhal. When we heard this on the 7<sup>th</sup> in the morning, we had meeting with a special official of the Police in Haridwar, Br. Panuda, Debuda, the Secretary-General of the Sangha, Izou, Gonzague, and Swami Atmananda, a French-speaking disciple of Chandra Swami, who lives in Rishikesh. Vijayānanda had left with Izou and Gonzague a written

document where he gave them the responsibility to decide what to do with his body after his death. We must remember that neither Mā's husband Bholonath nor her faithful assistant Didi Gurupriya had a *samādhi*. Even for Mā in August, 1982, the devotees were about to put her body in the Ganga and it was the *Mahants* of the Mahānirvāni Akhara in Kankal who insisted and they took matters upon themselves for building a *samādhi*. We were very aware that Vijayānanda would not like having any conflict. We therefore decided that the best way was to repatriate the body to France. There was the theoretical possibility to bury the body for the time being in a garden and find another place far away from Haridwar and its Pandas, and to quietly build a *samādhi* far Vijayānanda. We even thought of Dhaulchina where he had spent about years. But it would have been a problem to look after the *samādhi* from a great distance and we finally decided on repatriation to Paris. In fact, it will be a blessing for the French people to have the body of this great sage close to them. For Indian people, it would not make a big difference, as even with *jal samādhi* (in the Ganga) the body would not be there anymore anyway. I know only one example of a sage of the Indian tradition who has a *samādhi* in France, this is Ranjit Mahāraj, who had the same guru as Nisargadatta Mahāraj. He left his body in 2001 and his long-time devotee built him a *samādhi* with a part of his ashes in a beautiful garden in her house.

Sonia Barbry has been visiting Kankhal for about ten years. When she finished her studies in the French School of Political Science in Paris, she had asked Swamiji if he felt that a diplomatic career would suit her, as she liked India very much, and Swamiji greatly encouraged her. Nowadays she is a Political Consultant in the French Embassy in Delhi. She came and visited the Kumbh Mela from 27<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> for herself and also to write a "telegram", which means a report for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs about this great event of India. She felt that Swamiji wanted to say goodbye to her when he asked her to come for two private interviews, included on her last day in Kankhal just before taking the train to Delhi. A few days later she was very helpful in organising emergency assistance just before the death, and afterwards for the formalities and the organisation of the repatriation of the body to France. She was the one who signed the Death Certificate in the name of the French Republic. May we thank her for her service to Vijayānanda.

### **Did Vijayānanda know that he would leave his body?**

Sandrine Oubrier spent about 15 months almost continuously at the ashram in Kankhal and attended almost all Swamiji's last satsangs. She said that twice during the last year, some visitors told Swamiji that they would come back for the Kumbh Mela and he answered that maybe he would not be there. As they were very sur-



prised, he made up for it saying that maybe he would not leave his room for the satsang. Moreover, some travellers, despite the fact Kankhal was not included in their trip, decided to come and visit Vijayānanda.

When Izou arrived in Kankhal on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March, just after her father's burial on the 19<sup>th</sup> Vijayānanda asked her not to leave. So she booked her plane ticket for after the big bath on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, the last one of the Kumbh Mela. Izou's father and Vijayānanda were born the same year in 1914; in age they were just one month apart; they had been in the same regiment during the Campaign of May, 1940 without knowing each other.

I should mention that another great Swami of Ma's ashram, Sivānanda, left his body just 4 days after Vijayānanda, on Friday the 9<sup>th</sup> of April in the morning. He had been to hospital two days before. My feeling is that the spiritual atmosphere of the Kumba Mela in Kankhal was getting stronger and stronger as the big bath of the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, *Mesh Sankrānti*, approached which marks the end of one cycle of 12 years and the beginning of another one. Many spiritually elevated persons tend to choose this auspicious period to leave their bodies.

In many ways, Vijayānanda was turning his back on many things and prepared people for his departure. Before he would often ask visitors who were about to leave, to come back later, but recently he did not do that. He often related one of his last private meetings with Mā, in the hall of the ashram in Kankhal. She told him as she was showing him her body. "This is just a cloth, I am omnipresent!". He concluded saying that he believed Ma.

Vijayānanda liked quoting a transcendentalist poet of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, may be Emerson, who explained that for the one who was at a high spiritual level death became a laughable eventuality. Swamiji said that the bodies were like leaves that were falling from the tree, while the Self was the tree itself and remained the same in any season. He did not dramatize death and said that there were two possibilities either if you were a believer you would melt in the spiritual light, or if you were a non-believer you would fall asleep. It was useless to make a big drama of it or to be always talking about death and becoming a specialist. He noticed that the thing that frightened people about the big passage was the prospect of endless suffering. But this supposedly endless suffering could be alleviated by medicine or at the most they caused a fainting fit or the death itself, so they were not endless. As a general rule, the simple way Vijayānanda considered death often reminded me of a sentence from Montaigne in his *Essais*: "Each day brings us closer to death and the last one gets us there."

Swami Vijayānanda suggested the real encounter with a sage was not a ques-

lion of quantity, but of quality. In this sense, he used to tell often the following story about Kabir :—

"Kabir was a weaver. He lived in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Benares. He was clad as a poor man. One day, it so happened that an ill-tempered and arrogant rich man had a big bundle to carry home. He called Kabir, who was passing by; "You! Come here! There is this bundle to carry home, can you do it?" Kabir said; "How much?" "As you want!" The rich man then got furious; "You coolies, you always say that, and afterwards you ask ten times the price!" Kabir replied; "All this does not matter, since when you reach at your door, you will fall flat dead!" At this point, the rich man became still more furious: "You will see when I am at the door of my house that I am not dead just by the sound beating I will deliver to you!" Kabir smiled, took the bundle and went with the rich man towards his house. While walking, he only remarked; "Just a piece of advice; when you reach the door of paradise, and when the angels of death will judge you, if they propose to you a day in paradise before many centuries in hell, accept their offer!" Everything happened as Kabir had predicted. When the rich man was spending his only day in paradise, Kabir was having a walk around. The sage recognized him and whispered in his ear the *tāraka mantra*, the *mantra* which saves one from the round of birth and death. From that very moment, the angels of death haven't been able to take him down to hell, and he continued to stay in paradise."

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## MY FIRST IMPRESSION\*

—Sri Vijayananda (Dr. Adolphe Jaques Weintrob)

It is a difficult task to try and to give a reader, who often is only curious, an idea of that which for you is the most precious thing, the jewel of jewels.

There are two dangers to be avoided : The first is to let your heart run away with you, to write an account so enthusiastic, so extravagant that the reader gets the impression of having before him the product of an unbalanced mind or at least of a rank sentimentalist, and consequently hurries through the article with an amused smile full of ironic pity.

The other danger would be to endeavour to remain completely cold and detached, to write like an impartial observer. This would be even worse, because one cannot speak of One, who is the very embodiment of Love Divine, as if one were dealing with a scientific problem. I shall, therefore, try to restrain my heart, without however reducing it to complete silence.

It is bad taste to talk about oneself, but all I can do, is to relate the story of how I got in touch with "MA". For it is impossible to describe Her objectively : She is different for every one of us. "I am, whatever you think I am", She has often said.

It was on the 2nd of February, 1951, at about six o'clock in the evening that I saw Her for the first time in Her Ashram at Banaras.

Having "provisionally" placed a substitute in charge of my medical practice, I had left France in quest of spiritual guidance in this country, which since time immemorial has illumined the world.

Landing in Buddhist Ceylon, then proceeding along the East coast of India I had arrived in Banaras the previous day. Tired and disappointed, almost convinced that my journey had been in vain, and determined to return to France, I had already reserved a berth on the "Marseillaise", which was to sail from Colombo on February 21st.

I am frequently asked what was my first impression of Ma, what made me decide to leave everything—family, friends, country, profession, wealth—to follow Her. Why I have clung to Her like a shadow suffering torments whenever I am unable to see Her even for a few hours. Why, though I could not understand what She says, I spent hours at Her feet, without taking my eyes off Her.

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\* Translated from the original in French.

It is very difficult to reply to these questions. Not because language lacks words, but because a word has not the same meaning for different persons, unless they all have experienced the corresponding to that word. Thus one may well try with the aid of comparisons to make a child in France realize what exactly is the flavour of a mango. Even if one spent hours over it, he would only get a very vague idea and that also most likely false.

Having made room for all these unavoidable limitations I shall now make an attempt all the same.

What then was my first impression? It was in the evening of the 2nd of February, I found myself in the presence of a woman of about 55, looking younger than her age, still beautiful. But at that moment I did not notice Her beauty, it was only later that I became aware of it. I still see Her focussing Her eyes on me with that strange gaze that seemed to embrace my whole destiny.

That same evening, at about ten o'clock, She had granted me an interview which lasted for about 20 minutes. She was supposed to answer my questions, but I had nothing to ask. I simply desired to make a spiritual contact. She seemed to be in divine thought. It was She who put the questions, clear, precise, going straight to the heart of things, raising exactly the points which interested me. But Her words were only a play on the surface. In those 20 minutes She had infused something into me, which was to last for a long time, which still continues. I returned to Clark's Hotel after having secured Her permission to come back the next day to live in the Ashram.

I was in a strange state—my heart swelled with jubilation, with joyful exaltation—the state of one, who has just found what he has always yearned for in the most secret recess of his heart. Her image did not leave me anymore, even at night, and the very thought of Her drove tears into my eyes.

What exactly had happened to me? My critical sense, which had been submerged by the first wave awoke on the 3rd or 4th day. "Take care", it told me, "you have fallen into the hands of a great magician. She has cast a spell over you to make you her obedient slave". And I began to be on the defensive, to struggle against Her influence—rather feebly, I confess, for how can one fight Love; there is no power in the world mightier than Love.

But what kind of love is this? It is not directed towards a woman. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the love one may feel for a woman. As by a strange alchemy my entire potentiality for affection, all that one can love and admire in the world, had been transferred to Her. But at the same time this love became so pure, so sublimated, that it merged into and greatly intensified the call for the Absolute that I had always felt. All worldly attachment lost its attraction and the spiritual ascent became easier,

since She had donned me the wings of Love. In one single person all that one can love, admire, respect and adore became identified with the *Sad-Guru*, the Lord. For all these years that I have spent near Her, have given me the conviction that She is the Lord Himself, incarnate in the body of a woman.

I thought that this Love (I am obliged to use this word for want of a better one, though it does not express exactly what it stands for) would disappear or at least dwindle with time. The very contrary has happened : It has only grown in intensity. For it is like with those ancient cities buried underground : as one delves deeper, even more new marvels are brought to light.

Something that has struck me from the very first day is the atmosphere of the miraculous in which one moves when one is with Her. Let me explain : In Europe (and no doubt here also) by the word "miracle" one conceives of a breaking away from the laws of nature, something that strikes one as impossible, as absurd. But this is only its crude, objective side. Its subtle, subjective aspect is quite different. What does it matter to me if a certain yogi has walked across the waters or flown through the air ? The real miracle is, when that which one needs, which one desires keenly or feebly, comes at the moment it is needed. And still better when it comes, not only as one desired it, but one would have loved to see it in the innermost depth of one's heart. It has been for me as if I were guided on a path beset with obstacles by the hand of the most loving mother- an All-Powerful Mother. As you advance She removes all the thorns, all the stones from your path, and when it is necessary, She even lifts you across in Her arms. And all circumstances adjust and adapt themselves with a marvellous precision, without hurt. "Coincidence". I thought at first. But a coincidence that goes on repeating itself daily cannot be called so anymore. And all this happens without apparently violating the laws of nature, for the Lord has no need to break any laws: He is the Law. Should I give examples? No, for those who do not know Her will not believe me and those who have lived near Her have already understood.

She is like the Ganges—Her very touch purifies. In Her presence one feels oneself getting better all the time. Not by the suppression of one's faults: The very fault is sublimated and becomes an aid in the search for the Divine. She does not seem to notice or does not want to notice the dark sides of the individual. She only sees our luminous aspects, enhanced considerably by Her Divine mercy.

All the *Jivan-Muktas*, all the emanations of the Divine, give in broad outline the same message; and Ma Anandamayi does not make an exception to this rule. Yet there is an aspect of Her which no other *Sad Guru* has ever before presented (not to my knowledge at least) except perhaps Sri Krishna: I am referring to Her power to attract human hearts. It seems to me (this is an entirely personal opinion) that the first

contact She makes with those who come to Her, is essentially a contact of Love. Instantaneously She recognises the dominant note in the individual's emotional nature and it is this aspect in which She appears to him or her.

For some- for the great majority-She is Mother, full of love and tenderness, to others a friend and elder sister or even their child. For others yet, who are spiritually more advanced, She is the Guru or an aspect of God: Durga, Krishna, etc. And it is not only in the imagination of the *bhakta* that She represents these various aspects; Her physical appearance, Her behaviour, Her voice are actually transformed and adapted to the part She wishes to play. To illustrate this I should like to mention a striking little incident that I witnessed. It was during the last *Janmashtami* festival (Sri Krishna's birthday) at Banaras. She had been dressed up as Lord Krishna and we were all allowed to go and see Her. I went with a certain reluctance and with a slight irritation, for I do not like disguises. But when I beheld Her, I understood that there was no question of a disguise. Her face, though one could still recognize it, was completely transformed. It shone with a Divine beauty, with a truly super-natural calm and sweetness. She had really become one with Sri Krishna Himself. This is only an example among a thousand.

I have often seen Her features assuming entirely different aspects within a single hour. According to the person who questions Her, She appears at times like an old mother with a sweet face, her features drawn and tired; a few minutes later the radiant face of a young girl of twenty emerges. At another time She takes on the noble, serious, almost severe, almost masculine countenance of the Guru, a little later again Her laughter, Her caressing voice, Her tender look conjure up those of a child.

This contact of love or affection becomes in some way the lure that will entice him, who has had the great good fortune of getting in touch with Her, away from attachment to worldly things. For it will be transmuted and turned to the Divine.

What else can I say about Her? But have I not promised to limit my effusions? Perhaps it would have been better, had acted like the friend who, when asked to write an article, replied: "All I can say is: Ma, Ma, Ma."

May these few lines be not from any ulterior motive, but as humble testimony of the love, the veneration and the gratitude I feel for Her, And may they induce some readers to come and quench their thirst at that source of Life Eternal, which is Ma Anandamayee.