

MA ANANDAMAYEE AMRIT VARTA

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with the divine life and sayings of
Sri Anandamayi Ma

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MATRI-VANI

Try your utmost never to succumb to anyone's influence. In order to become firm, calm, deeply serious, full of courage, with one's personality wholly intact, pure and holy out of one's own strength, one has to be centered in God.

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Worldly life is no doubt a battle-field. By becoming conscious of one's spiritual wealth one must strive to emerge triumphant from the battle.

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God's Holy Name is itself the rite for exorcising undesirable influences. In the presence of God's Name ghosts and evil spirits cannot remain.

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On the journey through life in this world no body remains happy. The pilgrimage to the Goal of human existence is the only path to Supreme happiness. Try to tread that path which is your very own, where there is no question of pleasure and pain, the path that leads to freedom from egotism and the highest Bliss.

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Yes, if you can observe silence and be in harmony with every one all round, it will be excellent. Try to remain without the help of signs and gestures for as long as possible.

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The self, self-contained, calling to itself for its own revelation—this is happiness.

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Truth itself will assist in every way him who has gone forth in search of Truth.

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Divine Happiness - that which you call *parama sukhadam* is pure, unalloyed bliss, happiness in its own right.

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Having entered the kingdom of forgetting, everything is forgotten; this world is the abode of non-remembrance.

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No evil can ever overcome him who clings to God's name. What one suffers is in exact keeping with the nature of one's actions. If the flow of God's name is sustained, all work will beget the good.

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Where God may place you at any time and under whatever circumstances, recollect that it is all for the best. Endeavour to go through life leaving your burdens in His hands. He is the preserver, He is the guide. He is all in all.



ON THE TEACHING OF SRI ANANDAMAYEE MA

—Vijayananda (Dr. Adolphe Weintrob)

(Translated from the French)

What is Sri Anandamayi Ma's teaching ? This a question one can often hear, for it is put by most newcomers. All who are close to Mataji must of course have been present at some of the meetings in public or in small groups when Mataji with profound wisdom replies to questions on religious and spiritual subjects, often displaying a keen sense of humour. Many of these discussions have been recorded, noted down and published by men far better fitted for the task than myself. It is not this teaching that I want to talk about in the following few lines, but rather another aspect of Mataji's teaching, much simpler and more direct, which, has nothing or very little to do with big philosophical problems. In fact this side of Her teaching might well appear to be commonplace and as such often pass unnoticed : although in my opinion it appeals to a much deeper layer of our being and can therefore be extremely helpful in our spiritual search, if only we will listen to it and open ourselves to the Divine Blessing that pours down on us constantly in Mataji's presence.

To be in Mataji's company almost invariably brings us in touch with people of every psychological type. In western countries the saying that the face is the mirror of the soul is quite proverbial. Actually all our thoughts are reflected in our countenance, the slightest mental vibration produces a contraction of one or several facial muscles. I have watched a great many faces and never, not even for a fraction of a second, have I seen reflected in them the state "beyond desire and fear." Swiftly the thought waves follow one another, just like the billows on an expanse of water agitated by the wind. But in Mataji's face the mouth expresses a state of completeness, of wholeness, in which everything is included. Never can even the slightest trace of fear or irritation be detected in Her eyes. They ever radiate the same love, the same sweetness, regardless of the most trying circumstances. This is real beauty. What a great joy it is to contemplate such a countenance. To watch and lovingly remember it will unconsciously make us try to imitate its expressions and these will in due course lead us to the attitude of mind to which they correspond.

A reader who has never had Mataji's darshan might perhaps imagine that Her features are always set in a static expression of peace and serenity. But this is not

so. An endless variety of emotions pass over. Her face is like ripples which a light breeze produces on the surface of a quiet lake, while the immutable calm of its depths remains ever undisturbed. Mataji plays with feelings, but never Herself becomes their plaything as most of us do. An intelligent observer will soon notice how She mirrors the emotional states of Her surroundings without ever really being affected by them— like a crystal that assumes the colours of the objects entering its field of refraction.

Mataji's conversation about trivial everyday matters is never trivial. For those who know how to listen, it almost always contains some profound teaching. On several occasions, both in public meetings and in small gatherings, I have observed how Mataji suddenly utters a sentence that appears incomprehensible to us and sometimes perhaps even beside the point. I have repeatedly been able to discover afterwards that this sentence was meant for someone in the audience in reply to a query that had been tormenting him, or that it represented the solution of a problem that until then had seemed insoluble to him.

Last summer at Solan after the celebrations of Mataji's birthday, She was one day as usual taking Her evening stroll just outside of the Ashram veranda. At that hour a dog used to come and beg for prasad from Mataji. The entrance of the Ashram veranda is guarded by two wooden tigers, realistically painted, with their jaws wide open, ready to bite. Jokingly Mataji placed the sweets that were meant for the dog into the tiger's mouth. Everyone was highly amused to see the poor dog standing in front of the tiger, torn between the desire to snatch the sweets and the fear of being bitten by the wooden beast. Mataji then made a remark of which I do not recall the exact words. Its meaning was that the fear which keeps man fettered to the world was just as illusory as the dog's fear of the wooden tiger. Apart from the general teaching this statement conveyed, it was meant for a particular person present. Like an infallible arrow it hit the centre of the target and did its work.

It happens frequently that people coming to Mataji with distressing questions, problems or difficulties find a clear and simple solution merely by sitting in Her presence—the solution presenting itself quite naturally, convincingly and with obviousness. For, what a great Sage, a real Guru brings about spontaneously is not only to clarify the mind and to transmit power, but above all to disperse the mists that hide our true Self, our Eternal Being, and to put us in communion with THAT. Once this contact has been established, it is THAT which advises and guides us with unflinching certainty.

Many of those who live near Mataji have probably like myself experienced that when we approach Her with questions concerning our sadhana, She most assuredly

replies with wisdom and kindness, yet often only briefly, in a detached manner, as if it were a matter of secondary importance. When on the other hand we become actors in some little incident of everyday life and display anger or quarrelsomeness etc., She seems to take great interest. She summons those involved in it, inquires carefully into the details and sometimes spends hours over the solution of some apparently petty difficulty.

Spiritual practices such as meditation, japa and so forth are undoubtedly of great importance. Nevertheless, as I have heard Mataji point out on various occasions, their sole purpose is to assist us in removing the veil that conceals Reality from us. That veil is made up of desires, anger, fear etc. and it is in one's daily life that one has the chance to study these obstructions as they arise to bring them into the field of one's consciousness so as to get rid of them.

One day for some insignificant reason, I lost my temper in Mataji's presence. Impetuously I blurted out a few irreverent words, of which I repented immediately afterwards. She replied, as She always does with great gentleness, although it appeared to me tinged with a shade of irony. I felt ashamed. The same evening I asked for a private interview in order to apologize. I was naturally anxious that the whole matter should be forgotten as quickly as possible and that nobody should mention it anymore. But Mataji on the contrary dwelt on it at length, minutely examining the details and questioning the persons involved, which made me the more deeply ashamed.

A competent surgeon does not feel satisfied by merely making an incision when treating an abscess, but cuts a wide opening so as to be able to drain the sore completely, straightening out the folds in the skin and carefully removing any hidden trace of pus. Similarly Mataji does not merely settle a particular difficulty, but penetrates to the root of the evil and deals with it, so that it may be destroyed with all its ramifications and never sprout up again.

Later I came to understand the psychology of what had happened that day. The rage that had been smouldering within me was bound to explode against someone or other. Mataji Herself had deflected it towards Her own person, so as to direct its *karmic* results. This is how, again and again, She arranges things for our good. Many of Her devotees must have had similar experiences. I am told that She says : "If you must be angry, be angry with me, for you will not be able to keep it up for long." And also : "By *moha* (strong attachment) for this body (meaning Herself), all *moha* will be destroyed."

Wrath or affection felt for an ordinary person must inevitably produce a reaction in that person and set in motion a whole series of *karmic* consequences. Whereas if

the object of one's anger or attachment is a perfect Being, the waves of the emotion will find no resistance and therefore exhaust themselves and die away like fire that has nothing to consume anymore..

Anyone who wishes to remain with Mataji for a lengthy period of time, will have to spend a good part of his life at railway stations and in trains, for Mataji rarely stays in one place for long. The agitation of a railway station, the mental fever that usually accompanies the preparations for a journey are difficult to bear. Most people are unconsciously carried away completely by the current of excitement surrounding them. A few will now and again have bright moments in which they may be able to observe their own and other people's reactions, but those who in the midst of such mental whirlpools can stand aside and watch as disinterested spectators are surely exceptional.

As to Mataji Herself, She is ever calm, unperturbed and cheerful, like a rock that no storm can affect.

However, when travelling with Mataji things automatically arrange themselves: the train that one was afraid to miss arrives an hour late, the carriages are packed and it seems impossible to find a place, but somehow, as if by miracle, everything is managed ... one feels exhausted and longs to lie down and sleep—lo and behold, just then a berth becomes vacant. All the same, it is human nature to wish to direct every thing by one's own strength, while it would be so much simpler to let one self be guided by the invisible Hands of the Divine.

Yet sometimes, Mataji calls us to order. Once for example, we were waiting for a train that would in all probability be overcrowded. We were to reach our destination only the next day, which meant passing the whole night in discomfort. I had purchased an Inter class ticket and was, as it were lying in wait for the train, ready to jump into the first compartment and occupy a berth if possible—an attitude of mind no doubt quite unworthy of a *sadhaka* and even more so of one who had been travelling with Mataji for some time. At the very moment the train came into the station, Mataji passed in front of me and pointing to a large heap of luggage, requested me with a peculiar smile to see it safely into the train. Patiently I stood and waited until the last of the numerous baggages had been stored away in the compartment, imagining in advance the sleepless night I would have to pass amidst the dense crowd. In the meanwhile everyone had boarded the train and I thought I might deem myself fortunate if I could secure even sitting accommodation of some sort. But exactly where I was standing and guarding the luggage there happened to be an Inter class carriage. Someone whom I hardly knew had reserved an upper berth for me and helped me to get in with my bags.

These few lines will give the reader but a vague and limited idea of that which I call Mataji's direct teaching. It is in Her presence that one day after day has to experience for oneself Her Divine radiation. All one has to do is to see with one's eyes, to hear with one's ears, to understand with one's heart.

DEVOTION

—Shivananda

Be with Ma—the world will be thine.
Thou will be human, Thy nature divine.
As thy feet, hands, ears and eyes
Are parts of thy closer ties,
So also bird, flower and tree
Will appear none but part of thee !
Life could never have been without
Ma. Why Her existence doubt ?
Life is Ma and Ma is God.
Everything, everywhere is Her abode.
From base to highest bliss above
Are but manifestation of Her love.

FROM THE DIARY OF A EUROPEAN

—Melita Maschmann

(TRANSLATED FROM GERMAN)

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 midstream 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 Ganga; here and there a gliding shadow, boats that are seeking the harbour. Gradually the glow fades away and all waxes dark grey before river and sky wrap themselves in nocturnal blackness. The moment in which the last gleam of daylight decays into blackish grey ash, is oppressive like the nearness of death. But already have the stars appeared, pale and tiny. A few minutes later they fill the night with their powerful glitter.

The days have now a fixed programme. In the mornings we meet on the foundation of the hall-to-be. It is laid out with carpets and roofed by a canvas. On

one side, near the temple that is being built, Mataji's couch is placed and next it another couch as the seat of the speaker. The women sit in the right half of the hall, the men to the left.

The morning function starts at 10 a. m. with Kirtan, followed by the collective recitation of portions from the *Gita*, *Chandi* and the *Upaniṣads*. Then silence for ten minutes. Thereupon Swami Bhagavatananda Giri holds a lecture on the *Srimad Bhāgavata*. He is one of the permanent inhabitants of the Ashram. A broad, elderly man with a friendly, bearded face and intelligent eyes. Somewhere he has picked up a few words of German, and he speaks English. Of his lectures I understand only very little, but from what he says in English I gather that he is well-educated and versatile in his interests.

In the evenings we again meet on the platform—about 500 people crowd here together—and Tripurari Babu speaks on the *Mahābhārata*. He is in excellent form, this much I can see, although I do not understand Bengali. Again and again he succeeds in forcing his audience to breathless attention and often the tension relaxes into laughter. The secret of his success as a speaker lies in the fact that he identifies himself. He lives in the Epic which he interprets. Effortlessly 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 *kheyāla* 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 the 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 off 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.

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 now 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.

Today an English tourist who had seen Mataji only for ten minutes during *darśana* 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 transparency. 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 relaxed. Sometimes she sits straight, or else on one side or reclines against a cushion. At other times she changes her attitude. There is a calm flow in her movements, like the broad streaming of the Ganga. Not like the small agitated whirlpools that the wind occasionally excited on the surface of the water. Her eyes are usually shut. I can at times make out that the eyelids of the people sitting around me (I feel this also of myself) are merely let down in the manner of shutters. Our attention remains essentially outward turned, only the flowing in of pictures is interrupted. Mataji's face betrays that her gaze has turned behind her closed eyelids. It is directed towards the centre of her being. Everything in her draws together in that centre, enters into it. Sometimes a momentary effulgence is mirrored from there right in the periphery of her relaxed features. Occasionally her eyelids are slightly raised, Her

look then partly returns. I always have the feeling as if it came from above (in the concrete sense of space), as if her eyeballs had first turned that way, but her look does not fill with consciousness. A smile plays round her eyes and mouth. Is it a reflection of blissful vision ? Today it overwhelmed me : There have been years when Mataji lived almost uninterruptedly in a state of spiritual ecstasy. She has tasted God with every cell of her being—also the physical being. How can she bear the stale taste which our constant relentless proximity must inflict on her ? The other day an Indian Christian said to her : "You yourself are a proof to me of the correctness of the Christian doctrine, 'God is Love'. It is only because you are so wholly permeated by God that you are so loving. Or, put differently : only because you are so brim-ful of love do you flow over with God."

Towards the end of the meditation her eyes open and then slowly consciousness returns into her glance. It wanders calmly round the semicircle, radiating peace and kindness.

"Try to grasp the significance of 'all is His' and you will immediately feel free from all burdens."

—Ma Anandamayee

NEW DIARY LEAVES

—Atmananda

Ever more seekers from abroad write to Mataji, asking for help and advice. The following are extracts from a letter by a European gentleman received last winter and Mataji's reply to it.

The letter : "Will you hear my desperate appeal ? For the last 35 years I have been questioning all religions, so as to get peace : at first European religions, then Indian ones. I have questioned Masters of India, but alas ! none could help me and now after 35 years of vain search I am without hope, desperate

"I am asking whether as a result of this search one will be driven to madness or suicide ? I can no longer run after Masters, I am exhausted. Ma Anandamayi is my last chance. I ask this question : Ma Anandamayi, Happy Mother, Divine Mother, Pure Mother, will you help me ?I want to become pure as Ma Anandamayi. Why are you in this world, if not to console your unhappy brothers ?

Mataji's reply — "God is everywhere, He pervades everythng. He, whom you think you have sought in vain for so many years, is not apart from you. Just as man cannot be without bones, blood, flesh and skin, so the ONE is present everywhere, at all times, interwoven with everything that exists.

"A man who has gone forth in search of God—God will never give him back again. God is one's very own self, the breath of one's breath, the life of one's life, the *ātmā*. Not until his true Self has been revealed to him may a seeker ever relax his search. By seeking one will find, the Self is within one's own grasp. To feel fatigued, exhausted, because one has not found Him is a very good sign indeed. It indicates that one is nearing the purification of one's heart and mind."

"But what is this ? What is this that you say ? You wonder whether as the result of searching God one will be led to suicide ? By the search of Him, whose contemplation, whose Name conquers death ! To indulge in desires for sense objects, this is indeed what must be called suicide ; and he who thinks of committing suicide is, at that moment, mad. Never allow the mind to dwell on the idea of suicide, it is sin so to do. For one who has sought God for 35 years it is not right to contemplate suicide or madness. His mind should not contemplate suicide or madness. His mind should much rather be absorbed in theremembrance of God.

"In God's creation the possible becomes impossible and the impossible possible at all times. In order that this fact may become evident, one must ever remember to sustain the thought of THAT which is REAL. Verily this small child is always with you."

"Write to him that for the present it is imperative for him to remain concentrated with single-mindedness on the one Goal. He should stay in solitude and endeavour with the help of *japa and dhyana* (meditation) to control his mind and thereby become firm, calm and unwavering in his determination."

From January 13th —February 2nd, 1960 Mataji stayed at the Kumbh Mela at Allahabad. On February 1st I noted down the following conversations :

Question : Is it right to eat meat ?

Mataji : You should partake of whatever food that is helpful in your *sādhana* and abstain from what hinders it.

Question : But meat is *tāmasic* !

Mataji : Exactly. This is why I said, what I said. You can reason it out for yourself.

Question : When a man kills in order to eat, will not this affect him adversely ?

Mataji : Certainly, it will.

Question : What about animal sacrifice ? It is advocated in the *sāstras*.

Mataji : This body does not comment on what the *sāstras* ordain or forbid. However, it must be understood that the actual significance of the term animal sacrifice is not the sacrifice of animals but of one's own animal nature.

Vindhyachal, 19th February, 1960.

A young European lady who was touring India visited Varanasi. She had never heard about Mataji. Putting up in one of the big hotels at the cantonment she happened to meet there one of Mataji's admirers, who advised her, not to leave India without having Mataji's *darshan*. She took a taxi and came to Vindhyachal for just two hours. The following is part of the conversation she had with Mataji.

Question : Is it one's duty to act according to the wishes of one's parents or should one live one's own life ?

Mataji : If it is a life dedicated to the search after Truth (*paramārtha jīvan*) nothing else need be considered.

Question : Well, it is not exactly a life of this kind. I am asking on principle : is it my duty to conform to my parents' wishes or should I live my own life ?

Mataji : I have already told you; this body speaks of the Supreme Quest. There are two kinds of seekers : the one who wants to dedicate his life to the search of

Reality and for him there are no other duties. The other one would like to lead a religious life, but there are obstacles. If you choose to tread the Path to Self-realization but have a bad conscience for having left your parents, your thoughts will wander away to them and you will not be able to meditate. One must make a definite decision one way or the other. Even so there will be difficulties at times, but if one has made up one's mind once for all, these can be overcome. If on the other hand one feels pulled in two directions, one will not be able to proceed.

Question : Shall I ever find peace and happiness ?

Mataji : Peace and happiness are found on the path to God, never in the world, where one gets a little happiness, which is invariably followed by its shadow—sorrow.

On parting the young lady said : "I shall never forget this day and I shall never forget what you told me !"

Mataji : Forget ? This is not enough. You must meditate. Meditate at least for five minutes daily along the lines prescribed by your own religion. Not less than five minutes, but the more time you give the better. Try to dedicate at least fifteen minutes out of every twenty-four hours to meditation, no matter what kind of life you may choose—and do not forget your friend ! This (pointing to Herself) is your friend. Think carefully before acting, do not act thoughtlessly, only to repent afterwards !

Kishenpur, 23rd April, 1960.

During the *satsang* two blind men came to talk to Mataji. One of them asked : "How can I get the vision of God ? Please tell me the easiest way to it !"

Mataji : Seek Him for His own sake.

The blind man : Which is better, the path of devotion or that of knowledge ?

Mataji : Adhere to God's Name. Repeat His Name day and night and get engrossed in its sweetness.

Question : When I still had some eye-sight I used to read many books. But now this is impossible. How will I gain understanding ?

Mataji : Turn to God, He will give you understanding.

The second blind man : Mataji, give me your blessing !

Mataji : Pray to God and you will feel His blessing.

A lady from the audience : You said : Seek God for His own sake. Well then, if I seek Him with selfish motives, will I not find Him ?

Mataji : Of course, if you seek God with whatever motive, you will get something of Him and if you pray for anything of this world, you will also obtain

it. Yet the things of this world are not worth praying for. One should seek God, not with any motive, but solely for His own sake. Neither should one feel concerned about one's spiritual progress, for this is also not unselfish. Seek God because it is your nature so to do, because you cannot remain without Him. Whether and when He will reveal Himself to you rests with Him. Your duty is to call out to Him constantly and persistently and not to waste your energy on anything else. It is not fitting to compare and reason, saying : 'Such and such a person has been engaged in *sādhana* for so many years and yet has not reached anywhere'. How can you possibly judge of what is happening to anyone inwardly ? At times it occurs that a person while practising *sādhana* appears to have changed for the worse. How can you tell whether certain undesirable tendencies had not been hidden within him and have now been brought to light through his spiritual endeavours ? To say : 'I have performed so much *sādhana*, but no transformation has been effected,' is also not the attitude to be taken. All that you have to do is to call out to Him unceasingly and untiringly and not to look for the results of what you are doing. Who can tell whether you may not by any chance be the fortunate one among millions who will succeed !

Question : Sometimes I feel quite desperate, because I do not seem able to succeed.

Mataji : You feel desperate when you have desires and they remain unfulfilled. But when one aspires to God for His own sake, how is it possible to feel desperate.

Kishenpur, 22nd July, 1960

In the course of the conversation Mataji said : "It is well to keep in mind that whatever one enjoys of worldly happiness, be it good or anything else, uses up some of the merit (*punya*) that one has accumulated. It is therefore commendable to remember God at all times and to enjoy whatever comes as coming from God. Similarly should one try to bear in mind that any suffering or adversity that one has to go through expiates one's accumulated *pāpa*, wrong or evil actions and thoughts."

Mataji then related the following story :

"A very rich man died leaving his wealth to his son. Before closing his eyes for ever, he told him that if ever he got into very bad straits so as to be utterly helpless and destitute, he should open a certain cupboard in the house. However the cupboard was not to be opened under any other circumstances. The son was a spend-thrift and soon had exhausted all his wealth. At last he was virtually penniless, there was not even enough to provide the barest necessities for his

family; moreover there was illness in the house besides all sorts of other troubles. He remembered the cupboard and managed to open it with great difficulty. To his utter disappointment he found it empty. It was an ordinary black cupboard, so he threw it outside into the compound and started to dig and search everywhere for the hidden treasure—in vain. In his despair he finally went to solicit the help of a *mahatma*. The *mahatma* agreed to come to his house and see what could be done. On arriving there he looked around and then said : Give me a seat near the black cupboard. He sat down and scraped the varnish off the old piece of furniture and lo and behold it was found to be made of pure gold. "Simiarly", Mataji concluded, "the gold is to be found in everyone's own heart, where the One sits enthroned on His lotus seat. But unless one is completely empty the gold cannot be found."



"There are two kinds of pilgrims on life's journey : the one, like a tourist is keen on sightseeing, wandering from place to place, flitting from one experience to another for the fun of it. The other treads the path that is consistent with man's true being and leads to his real home, to Self-knowledge."

—Ma Anandamayee

MY DAYS WITH SRI ANANDAMAYI MA

[Nine]

—Bithika Mukerji

The decades of the Forties as well as the Fifties saw Sri Ma very often in our part of the country. She visited Varanasi repeatedly and frequently stayed in Vindhyachal. We, in Allahabad, saw her whenever she was passing though or whenever she came to Jhansi to stay at the Ashram of Prabhudattaji Maharaj and also at Satya Gopal Ashram in Allengunj.

In July 1943, I joined the University for graduation; Bindu was in College and Babu in School. My sister Renudi joined the Art School of Mr. Sanghal where her talent for water-colour painting was developed to a great extent and received some recognition in Art Exhibitions of the town.

The memory of my University days are shadowy compared to the memory of our life with Sri Ma. I did take part in such activities as were required of me, like debates, and writing in journals or exacting in plays for the annual functions, even in sports, which definitely was my weak point.

I and five other girls had more or less been together since our school days. We were a close-knit group, but I do not recall that we talked about Sri Ma at any time. My friends knew about my allegiance, but they, although respectful and understanding, did not share in my sentiments regarding Sri Ma. I remember one interesting incident which took place at this time — We had gone to the Railway Station to receive Sri Ma on one of her visits to Allahabad. Here I met a class-mate (not one of the group) Ms Shivani Banerjee who had come to see some one off by the same train. While we were waiting for the train, she expressed her doubts to me about paying such exaggerated respects to a person who after all was a human being. She was very sceptical about our devotion to Sri Ma. The train came. Sri Ma alighted on to the platform. I was amused to see Shivani bowing very low to do a *pranam*, when Sri Ma passed us on her way toward the exit. I asked Shivani as to why she had bowed in *pranām* to another human being ? Shivani said, " Well, it was involuntary - She truly has a majestic presence !"

So for us the real everyday world of college activities, social engagements, household routines etc. became insubstantial and unimportant., We counted hours and days to our next visit to Sri Ma or her advent in our midst. Other families who

were close to Sri Ma, became as if kith and kin, whereas people who had claims of blood-relationships, due to lack of reciprocity, gradually became strangers.

My mother's deep one-pointed allegiance to Sri Ma was like a benign aura of approval and sustenance. My father would at times express his misgivings regarding the breaking of too many conventions. Nobody went to live in Ashrams in those days. To be running after "a Mataji," was behaviour bordering on the outrageous. The orthodox ways of worship included visits to temples, the celebration of religious festivals, and the occasional observance of rules and ceremonies at home, presided over by the family-priest. But my father was himself truly devoted. He did not visit the Ashram too often, but would listen to the accounts of our visits with keen interest. His deep commitment and surrender at the feet of Sri Ma was proven up to the hilt as time went by. He was undemonstrative, but it could be seen that Sri Ma could call upon him for any service without any hesitation, just as she could ask her long-time devotees from Dhaka.

We came to know Prabhudattaji Maharaj quite well. He was very agreeable company for young people. His exuberant outgoing nature could galvanise the most stolid group of people; he had a way of landing heavy thumps on the backs of unwary young men, so everyone learnt to be very agile whenever he came by. Once he playfully landed a fist on my back between the shoulders. I think he did not know his own strength. I nearly fell to my knees. I was standing near Sri Ma's *chowki*. I held on to it and quietly crept away to the back of it kneeling behind Sri Ma, who was talking to Brahmachariji. I suddenly found Sri Ma's hand on my head. She had put back her arm inside her *chaddar* to touch me, so that nobody else noticed anything amiss. It stopped my trembling and sense of shock. Some people will remember that I used to be a very thin girl at this time. Only Sri Ma had noticed my predicament and unobtrusively taken care of it.

Before coming into contact with Brahmachariji Maharaj we, as a family, knew very little about the sadhus of our country. As a matter of fact due to our westernised education we had acquired some modern values. We had been taught that to turn away from the world was a form of escapism and cowardice. Religious beliefs should not be accepted dogmatically, but tested on the touchstone of reason. At this time, however, there was no consciousness of conflict in our joyous participation in all that happened near Sri Ma. If Sri Ma graciously accepted the hospitality of Sadhus, like Brahmachariji at Jhunsi or Udiya Babaji and Haribabaji at Vrindaban, then we were only too happy to trail behind her and also to sit quietly for many hours in *satsangs* listening to discourses. Sadhus no longer remained an unknown category but became an integral part of our growing up process, because

