

MA ANANDAMAYEE AMRIT VARTA

A quarterly journal dealing mainly
with the divine life and sayings of
Sri Anandamayi Ma

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MATRI VANI

New Year—Infinite forms of the God—His daily-changing ever new forms and formless too—endeavour constantly to perceive the same.

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So long as you are not finally established in that Supreme Knowledge, you all dwell in the realm of waves and sound. There are sounds that cause the mind to turn outwards, and others that draw it within. But the sounds that tend outwards are also connected with those that lead inwards.

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Look, the ocean is contained in the drop and the drop in the ocean, what else is the spark, if not a particle of fire - of Him, who is Supreme Knowledge Itself ?

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How many students attend college, but how few of them stand first, although they are all taught by the same professors ? None can foretell at what particular time circumstances will co-operate to bring about that Great Moment for anyone. There may be failure to begin with, but what counts is final success. An aspirant cannot be judged by preliminary results. In the spiritual field, final success means success right from the beginning.

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Every thing is infinite - infinity and finiteness are indeed the same. In a garland the thread is one, but there are gaps between the flowers. It is the gaps that cause want, the sorrow. To fill them is to be free from want.

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Inquirer : It is said that God's eternal Lila is based on duality.

Ma : The assumption of duality is also within Oneness; some advocate this opinion.

Q : What is the actual significance of the terms *dhāma*, *lilā*, *parikara* ?

Ma : They say that even in the midst of this Lila, Oneness remains unimpaired. What is enjoyed in Lila is *rasa*, which is unique; and in Vedanta too, duality is out

of the question. Although duality appears to manifest itself before the eyes of the bhakta, nevertheless, here also there is nothing but Oneness.

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As one continues day after day to carry out these acts of worship, one begins to question : "Is my Lord as small as this little image ? Does He dwell only in my shrine room and no where else ?" By performing His service one gradually comes to feel that all is His. This feeling grips one and spreads like an infectious disease. Some one once said : "Do not venture near Anandamayi Ma, there are small-pox germs around her." (Laughter)

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Single- minded devotion engenders deep thought, which expresses itself in action. The Lord's light descends on the devotee, His power awakens in him and, as a result, profound inner enquiry blossoms forth.

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Q : Are you suggesting that we must reach the state of Divinity ?

Ma : The question of reaching that state does not arise at all so long as the veil of ignorance persists. Whether what has been said refers to *Īśvarakoṭī* or *Sādhakakoṭī*, you yourself must ascertain !

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The many exist in the One, and the One in many.

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Samādhi means *samādhāna* (solution, completion.).



CONVERSATION WITH WESTERN DEVOTEES

[Fourteen]

—Vijayananda

1) Generalities.

Q : What is the place of meditation in sadhana ?

V : People who have a spiritual experience know that meditation is one of the last stages of the eightfold Yoga of Patanjali, and that henceforth a very firm basis is needed to practice it fully. Even rather advance *sādhakas* do something more corresponding to *dhāranā* (which is usually translated as concentration). Genuine *dhyana* is rare, it is almost the *samadhi*. The hippies of the second wave, those who along with the intake of drugs had an interest for spiritual things were the ones who floated the idea of meditation as an universal panacea, but it does not work like this.

One should certainly meditate at a fixed time but this does not mean that one has to force oneself. One should rather give to our body the good habit to sit regularly. It is said that our *prārabdha karma*, which means practically our destiny, is not reckoned in number of days to live but in the number of breaths. So those who breath peacefully will have a longer life. Several times in my *sadhana* I found myself facing a wall and said mentally, This is impossible to cross ! But I did it and then it was quite easy : impossible is not in the dictionary..... Of course in day to day life one must know how to adapt and to go around obstacles.

Q : A young woman being in the process of remarrying after a divorce : How to manage relational problems ?

V : One should make it a habit to see the Divine in the other.

Q : When we love them, this is too easy ?

V : Not so much, we should see them beyond their personal aspect, which means without attachment. For those whom we do not like, better to keep them away, except if we are already at a very advanced stage. If this is impossible, being near them should be taken as a *sadhana*.

Q : How to be introverted without being egoistic ?

V : By realizing that the Self at the core of oneself is not different from the Self at the core of others. At that time, love for others becomes completely natural.

Q : Question of a resident of the ashram before the departure of someone who spent several months there : 'You say that past is an illusion and thus no reality at all. Does it mean that if someone goes away one should forget him or her ? Is not the very basis of love is the capacity to remember the ones who are absent?'

V : First, someone who leads a life of a brahmachari in an ashram should not have love with attachment for another person. In addition to this, when I feel someone who thinks of me, this gives me joy inside. That comes in the present, not in the past. What is required is keeping away from mental constructions on past events. People constantly change, if one is attached to an image of them from the past, he will certainly be disappointed.

Q : Should sadhana in the world be spontaneous or the result of a persevering effort ?

*V : During sadhana, we should be able to go through hard time : There is the following hassidic story : one day two children came to visit a great sage who gave them beer to drink. The elder did not say much, but the junior who was perhaps only three or four years old exclaimed : *This is bitter, but good!* Immediately the sage concluded : *This boy will become a great spiritual person !*" And it happened to be so.*

Q : Some people say that Ma was a tantric.

V : Tantra corresponds to the worship of the Divine Mother. How could she have worshipped the Divine Mother, while she was herself the Mother ? From another viewpoint, for Ma as well as for any advanced sadhaka, all the paths merge in one single Yoga, the synthesis of Yogas if one can say. This is a total Yoga where all the ways are understood and integrated. Only in the beginning are the paths separate.

Q : A young girl came back from an ashram where she heard the guru say that the state of marriage and that of consecrated celibacy are the same, in both of them one can have the same spiritual life.

V : I do not agree ! If one is already married and remains so, while developing a spiritual life, this is good, but if one is not married and one gets committed in a householder's life, at that time this is a failure and a regression.

Q : A father whose daughter still is not married although she is not so young anymore : "It is a problem for a woman to marry late."

V : On the contrary, it is good to marry late, in this manner the number of years that one spends with couple problem is less !.... Some take the pretext that

they live in the world to say that they have no time for *sadhana*. But one can create a favourable surrounding for that: a room for the *puja* and the meditation, not meeting people indiscriminately, *satsang* (being together with spiritual people) and if this is difficult, at least the reading of books on or by saints and sages. In any case, if one has the intense desire to find favourable conditions for *sadhana*, circumstances will be arranged by themselves.

2) Basic qualities

Q : How should we develop intensity in sadhana ?

V : Our inside space is like a pierced bucket. One should obstruct its holes so that it might fill. We should observe well the places where the mind is drawn outward, 'leaks', and then plug up the holes, that is the purpose of *yamas* and *niyamas*. We know how a spiritual aspirant who was extremely attached to her dog; after the death of this one, her desire for marriage became very intense and again after it her craving for children became still more intense. Should she have been able to direct her intensity towards the Divine, she would have been a great saint.

Q : A young lady-visitor who follows the path of bhakti: 'It is said that there are two means to open a closed door: either to break it or to prostrate in front of it.'

V : A Jewish sage said that God loves those who break the doors; the self is a castle with many openings, but a time comes when the best way is to break the doors open.

Q : Is not the best way of sadhana telling oneself repetitively that one does not lack anything?

V : Yes, but once one has the awakening of the inner happiness, before that, such declarations are only words.

Q : Should we go to extremes in sadhana?

V : In general, one should follow the middle path; but in one's desire to consecration to God, the Guru, going to the extreme is good. It is told that when Ramatirtha was a young professor of mathematics, he was searching the solution of a problem: he went one evening on the terrace of the house with his razor and said to himself: 'If tomorrow I have not found the solution to this problem, I will cut my own throat!' And the next day when the sun was about to rise, he had not yet found the solution.... he seized the razor to end his own days, but at that time he got a

kind of illumination and the solution came. People who like Ramatirtha are very intense succeed in their *sadhana*.

A visitor speaks of a big ashram of South-Ind where those who become sannyasis have more comfort than others even if they still must work a lot.

Vijayananda comments with a smile : 'When they take the vows of sannyasi, they start renouncing discomfort....'

Q : What is more important, outer detachment or the mental attitude in this sense ?

V : It is the mental attitude, this is well exemplified by the story of the two friends on holidays: one leaves for a church while the other decides to visit a brothel. During the mass, the pious boy could not help thinking of the 'good time' that his friend had with women, while the other, suddenly overwhelmed with remorse, had his mind intensely focussed on the church and God who was present there and he was asking forgiveness for yielding to his bad tendencies. It happened that at that very moment the two chaps died suddenly. The one who was in the brothel went to paradise, the other to hell.

However, outer renunciation is also important : a change that I have seen in India in fifty years that I have lived here is that *sannyasis* look down upon those who follow outer renunciation as if they were stupid people while they accumulate for themselves material goods. When I arrived in India in the beginning of the fifties, a *sannyasi* was expected to have all the outer signs of renunciation.

Speaking of someone who lived near the ashram for his sadhana for many years : 'It takes time to go beyond time.'

Q : Why some people meditate but do not seem to progress ?

V : This reminds me of what La'ennec (a famous French professor of medicine in the 19th century) used to say regarding the treatment of acute pulmonary oedema: *Start emptying the car before lashing the horse*. This means that one should begin by bleeding the patient before giving heart stimulating drugs, for in this way the work that it will have to do will be less and it will not risk collapsing completely. Likewise in the beginning of *sadhana* one should first eliminate many negative tendencies before starting to stimulate the energy by intense meditative practices. Otherwise there is the risk of an 'acute heart failure', which means that nothing will work any longer.

Q : Why do you not give kriya to people so that they might purify their mind more quickly ?

V : Not by breathing exercises can people purify their mind, but by changing their lives. There is a difference between the simple relaxation practices which are in the field of psychology and the genuine *kriya* which gives a great intensity; to teach these to someone, one must know what he will do with his or her spiritual energy once it is awakened, if it will not go towards negative reactions or be deviated towards a search for powers. Those who have a complete sincerity for *sadhana* are very rare and even those who have even a beginning motivation for it are also rare.

To someone who was living a house holder life, who thought that he was never angry and was wondering whether it was normal or a sign of suppression:

V : (After speaking more with the visitor) In the beginning suppression is not so bad, it is much better than to let one's anger be vented through harsh words, even violent acts. You don't observe *brahmacharya*, do you? For those who practice it, anger is not a small matter as far as its mastery is concerned, because it basically comes from frustrated desire. Anger creates wounds in the *prānic* body. if repeated, it may lead to somatic diseases. (Speaking of a sadhu¹ in the ashram whose sometimes undisciplined behaviour invited strong criticism): people reproach him with slight madness but he must have a certain spiritual level because he never answers the criticism with anger.

Q : Is contentment an essential quality of sadhana ?

V : Yes. There was a hassidic sage who was asked to explain contentment. He answered by saying: *Better go and see Zisia. Zisia* means in Yiddish *soft*, like *susse* in German. He was a very poor man and, according to worldly criteria, he had all kinds of problems and sufferings in his life. When visitors started hinting at this he began laughing and said: *Ask this question from someone who suffered. As for me, I have never had sufferings !* He was mad for God, that which others considered a misfortune was not so for him. Once, people beat the living daylights out of him, but instead of defending himself he was laughing. He was among these great devotees of God who could perform a miracle just by one word.

Q : What is the role of humility ?

V : If someone is arrogant you can be sure that he has not reached a high spiritual level. (Speaking of a guru who was annoyed that his name had been omitted in a program where he was invited): the more gurus or religious leaders are high in rank, the more they are sensitive to contempt. They expect to be cared for,

while on the contrary if you send away a child he just will not worry. There will ever be reasons to be annoyed, so why should one be annoyed at all ? And why should a sage be arrogant ? His body is subject to a good deal of diseases, his mind produces all kind of non-senses and his Self indeed is not personal, it is the same in each and everyone.

Q : Is the vow of silence useful ?

V : I indeed know the best way to keep silent : being silent when you do not speak. It seems a joke, but in fact it is the sign of a high spiritual level : briefly telling what one has to say, and afterwards having a mind which is completely blank.

3) Spiritual psychology

Q : What is spiritual psychology ?

V : This is silence.

Q : Is not feeling the best leading thread to follow for meditation ?

V : Usually this 'feeling' corresponds to a bunch of superimpositions, of projections, but when we succeed in quieting the mind and have a really pure perception, we are very close to the Absolute.

Q : When we have closed eyes in meditation, is not the only pure perception that of body?

V : Perhaps, but body perception is indeed completely deformed by the representations which we have about it. When the complete stoppage of mind is reached, there is not even sensations to be perceived.

Q : Is this the direct perception of being ?

V : There are not even perceptions, there is pure subjectivity only.

A German man who had visited a few vedantin gurus : To get rid of ego, I observe my anger and all my emotions and I say to myself that in the midst of all that, there is no ego.

V : These are mere words. Where there is anger, there is ego and where there is no anger there is no ego. However, it is true that we should not try to 'kill' an ego which anyway does not have any essential existence. It would be like taking a stick and trying to kill a shadow by giving it a good thrash.

[To be continued]

FROM THE LIFE OF SRI ANANDAMAYI MA

—Dr. Bithika Mukerji

Multifarious ways of the sadhaka

Since the time of the lila of *sādhanā* at Bajitpur, Mataji hardly ever ate a full meal. When she came to Dhaka in April 1924, she was twice a day taking three mouthfuls of food including water. When Didi first met Mataji about a year and a half later, she was eating even less. On Mondays and Thursdays she would partake of three mouthfuls, and on the other five days nothing but nine grains of rice. There was, however, no rigid rule for her. She broke it now and then in response to the importunities of members of her family or of devotees. Thus, at the insistence of Pramatha Nath's son, Pratul, she once agreed to take a full meal on the day of the new-moon (*amāvasyā*). Other devotees quietly turned this into a regular feature at Shahbagh. They would organise a kirtana and everybody would partake of prasada, thus ensuring that Mataji also would have a proper meal.

Bholanath's nephew Amulya took up service at about that time and with his first earnings he arranged a special Pūjā on a full-moon night. This also was adopted as a permanent practice. Thus, Mataji ate proper meals, twice a month.

At about this time it was noticed that Mataji could not anymore raise her hand to her mouth. Her hand would stop midway, and she would bend her head to take food from her hand. Sometimes, instead of eating, she would smear the earth with the rice. None knew better than Bholanath that all phases in Mataji's life came about naturally and spontaneously. It would be as futile to remonstrate with her as with any other onlooker. So he took it upon himself to feed her like a child. Didi was pleased to be given the opportunity of rendering this service to Mataji, when she came to stay with them at Shabagh.

Mataji explained this phase of her life in these words : "Once this body lived on three grains of rice daily for four or five months. Nobody can live for so long a time on such a meagre diet. It looks like a miracle. But it has been so with this body. It has been so, because it can be so. The reason for this is that what we eat is not all necessary for us. The body takes in only the quintessence of the food, the rest is thrown out. As a result of *sādhanā* the body becomes so constituted that, though no food is taken physically, it can imbibe from the surroundings whatever is necessary for its maintenance. In three ways the body can be maintained without

food : One way has just been referred to, namely, the body can take from the environments the nourishment necessary for its maintenance. Secondly, one can live on air alone. For I have just said that in everything there are all other things, so the properties of other things are in the air in some measure. Therefore, by taking in air alone we get the essence of other things. Again, it may so happen that the body is not taking anything at all, yet it is being maintained unimpaired as in a state of *samādhi*. Thus you find that as a consequence of sadhana it is quite possible to live without what we call food.¹

"At one time I had the *kheyāla* that I was one with everything. At that stage I would give food to whomsoever and whatsoever was in front of me. Sometimes I even smeared the earth with rice and vegetables. When Bholanath saw me doing this, he removed the food in front of me and fed me like a child that had not learnt to use its fingers for eating."

Mataji abstained not only from eating but also from drinking on two occasions—once for thirteen days and the second time for twenty-three days. During this fast she did not even rinse her mouth with water. On the 24th day she asked for a sip of water saying, "I wanted to see what it would be like without drinking but the very necessity for water is becoming extinct. This will not do. As a matter of convention, a semblance of normal behaviour must be kept up."

For some time Mataji followed the rule of eating only fruits found under trees in Shahbagh. Now the fruit-trees in Shahbagh were mainly mango and leechi. It was not the season for either, so Mataji lived on practically nothing. She would sometimes take fruits if brought by somebody of his own accord. But her companions were strictly forbidden to make any arrangements for procuring them. On the other hand, if they were plentiful one day, she would not allow them to be stored for the next day. It almost seemed that Mataji did not require food, but just wanted to keep up the habit of partaking of something or other.

At one time she did not eat any cereals for about six months. Then, one day she happened to come into the room where Bholanath was taking his midday meal of rice and vegetables. She asked Matari Pisima to fetch for her all the rice that had been cooked. Mataji, on that occasion, had a meal which would have sufficed for seven or eight people.

There were other instances of consuming enormous quantities of food. During the Christmas holidays of 1925, one of Bholanath's sisters, Mokshada Devi (wife

1. From the article by Sri A. K. Dattagupta in "Mother as seen by Her Devotees", 2nd ed., 1967, pp. 117-118.

of Sri Kali Prasanna Kushari of Salkia, Howrah), had come to stay with them. She was very fond of Mataji and treated her like a younger sister. She felt greatly concerned to see that Mataji was eating next to nothing. She planned to cook *khīr* (thickened and sweetened milk with rice boiled in it) from 40 lbs. ($\frac{1}{2}$ maund) of milk because there were always guests at Shahbagh. She depended upon Bholanath to persuade Mataji to partake of a little of this. Although as a rule, Bholanath did not interfere with Mataji's ways, he could not say 'no' to his sister. He asked Mataji to have some of the *khīr* that day. So Mataji sat down to her meal. After finishing her first helping, she asked for more. Highly pleased, her sister-in-law hurriedly brought a larger second helping. Mataji got through this very speedily and would not pause till she had eaten up the entire quantity that had been prepared. In the meantime, fresh milk had been put on the fire, but it takes a long time for milk to thicken. Like a hungry child, Mataji was quite inconsolable till the yet only half-cooked and boiling hot *Khīr* was brought to her. The women fanned the *Khīr* to cool it. By the time Mataji had finished this, everybody was thoroughly alarmed. Mokshada Devi, who was a very devout lady, scraped a little of the *Khīr* from the bottom of the serving dish, and pronouncing a mantra, placed it on Mataji's head. Mataji immediately stopped eating and everybody heaved a sigh of relief.

Didi relates that once a devotee, seeing Mataji's lack of interest in food, implored her to take a full meal. Acceding to his request, she sat down to eat. Didi was feeding her. Mataji seemed to be swallowing the food at double the normal rate. She impatiently remarked, "You are not quick enough. Call someone to help you." But even two people could not keep pace with her that day. The devotee, now quite frightened at the unexpected result of his request, with folded hand implored her to desist from eating. Mataji said plaintively, "First you ask me to eat, but no sooner do I start, than you tell me to stop. Now, what am I to do?"

Didi relates that while eating, Mataji did not seem to pay attention to the food in front of her. She recalls, "Once when I did not know Mataji so well, I thought I would take advantage of this absent-mindedness and feed her as much as possible. In my enthusiasm I fed her more than a normally big meal and yet Mataji did not object. Finally, I was obliged to stop of my own accord. Mataji seemed to awaken from a dream and said, "Why, have you finished?"

If not watched carefully and told not to do so, Mataji would swallow even the pips and peels of fruit. If one expostulated with her, she would say in a surprised tone, "You asked me to eat fruit, so I did. You did not tell me that I had to choose and reject also."

As in everything else, Mataji remains unchanged in this pattern of behaviour. A few years ago in Dehradun, a gentleman brought *Khīr* for Mataji, prepared with much loving care. He then asked to be allowed to feed her himself. He was an addict to Pān (betel leaves) and also very fond of talking. After Mataji had finished, she asked him smilingly, "Pitāji, have you put saffron into this?" The gentleman answered in the negative and following Mataji's gaze glanced at the left-over *khīr* in his hand. How great was his embarrassment and remorse when he saw the white surface coated with red dots !

Another incident may be cited here which was related by Mataji, because the person concerned did not know about it. At that time Mataji was moving about in the hills of the Himalayas. Her only companions were Bholanath and Sri Jyotish Chandra Roy, more commonly referred to as Bhaijī (brother). Bhaiji used to go to neighbouring villages once a day and beg for food in the manner of a *saṁnyāsī*. He would bring back whatever he was given, mostly *ātā* (wheat flour) and cook for her. They had no cooking utensils. Bhaiji would, therefore, choose a rock near a stream, clean it with the flowing water and knead the dough on it. Then he would light a fire, built up with dry sticks and twigs, and somehow bake the *chapātīs* on it. Mataji relates : "One day, when Jyotish lit the fire I saw that particles of refuse matter² still adhered to the minute crevices of the rock. When the rock had been washed and was wet, it looked clean enough, but the heat had made the dirt visible. I saw that Jyotish had not noticed anything and that the dirt was getting kneaded up in the dough."

On hearing this story, the very first horrified question was, "But why did you not tell him?" Mataji answered calmly, "Why should I? It was all the same to me, and Jyotish in any case was doing his best."

A few years ago at Raipur, after she had finished her meal one day, she asked the person who had fed her, to taste a little of the *khīr* she had been given. Accordingly, the girl took a mouthful of the *khīr*, but it was so hot that she could neither swallow it nor retain it in her mouth. In spite of Mataji's presence she had to spit it out. Mataji smilingly opened her mouth and showed her the scalded red patches in her throat. Mataji suffered from these sores for months.

Didi has always maintained that it is easier for people to worship Mataji than to render her personal service. She makes no demands, shows no preferences and accepts everything, or the lack of it, with the same calmness. Mataji's tranquility remains unperturbed even under severe provocations. Not only so, but she has,

2. The hill people of India have no lavatories. Rocks and streams suffice for them.

more often than not, to console and relieve the mortification of the devotee concerned. Her graciousness is unwavering and all-inclusive. The stranger may think that the persons surrounding her are intimate with her. That is not really so. It is a fact that she is as close or as distant with a stranger as with a constant companion. Mataji herself has emphasized this point many times. One of her own favourite stories may be cited here, which she narrates in other contexts, because she would never refer to herself as a sage, sādhu or mahātmā. A large lotus was growing in a pond. A wanderer passed by, who had never before seen a flower of this kind. Struck by its beauty, he stopped to admire it. He noticed a frog and a fish just below the lotus. 'What is this wonderful flower right above you?' he asked the frog.

The frog's answer was : 'Well, why this question? It is just a common thing!' and it turned away to hunt for insects. Disappointed, the man addressed the fish who replied, 'Did you not hear what my friend the frog said? It's just a common plant of the pond !' At that moment the wayfarer saw a bee flying swiftly towards the lotus. He wanted to address it, but the bee would not stop for him. It alighted on the blossom and drank deeply of the honey in it. Then it flew back to the man and said, 'What did you want to ask me? Speak now'. The man repeated his question. 'Don't you know', said the bee joyfully, 'this is a lotus full of marvellous honey. I am replete with it and am a transformed being now'.

"It is quite possible to live for a long time in the close proximity of sādhus and mahātmās, sages and saints, without being able to recognize their true quality. Whereas, one who has the insight may come from a great distance and within a minute know the Great and Holy for what they are—it depends on one's capacity to penetrate to the essence of things".

Mataji was at Solan (Simla Hills) during the summer of 1946. Revered Haribabaji Maharaj of Vrindaban and Swami Sharananandaji were also staying at Solan at that time. Haribabaji would read a book in the *satsang* and there would be discussion on it afterwards. For some days he read about the early life of Mataji. In answer to questions Mataji touched on some phases of her life described in the previous chapters. "After the līlā of initiation," she said, "for five months, there was hardly any time for me to take food. My body was like an automaton. I went through the motions of my daily routine of housework like a machine. I would light the fire not thinking about what I could want it for—then like an onlooker I would go through the actions of cooking and serving."

In a different context, she explained this phenomenon in these words : "Lack of food did not have any adverse effect on my body. As a matter of fact, at that time

the necessity for food itself vanished." Mataji laughed and said. "You are told that people have to abstain from the pleasures of life, but in this case everything was the other way round—I saw that I had to partake of food—sometimes less than a mouthful, so that I did not get the *kheyāla* of doing without it altogether.

"Sometimes this body would be affected by the reading of religious books, just as it used to be by the strains of devotional music. Then again, there was a time when the words of the book were not important at all—they would appear to be of little significance—whatever had to be known was already there. After this came a time when it was realized that everything is THAT only. Just like sparks of fire, where each itself has all the characteristics of the whole.

"The variety of experiences at the time of *sāadhanā* can hardly be enumerated exhaustively. A stage comes when everything becomes clear to the vision, just as when you light a lamp, the house, tree, bushes, people around you, everything becomes visible at the same time. there may be another way of looking at things, namely, what is there to visualize? After all, there is nothing which is to be known further—whatever is, is THAT only. "An idea of this comprehensive vision may be formed by anyone who takes an interest in Mataji's ways of dealing with people.

Some years ago, in a general *satsang*, Mataji was answering questions put to her by various members of the congregation. People who were familiar with the general trend of her answers to typical questions, were surprised to notice that she was branching off into new channels and using unusual phrases and terminology. The difference was not so much in the quality of her answers, as in the way of expressing them. So much so that people, at a loss to follow her thoughts, desisted, thinking that she must be in one of her cryptic and unfathomable moods. Mataji, on her part, went on elaborating her points, giving a wealth of detail. At the end of the meeting two men came forward and bowed to her saying that they were Buddhist Bhiksus (monks) who had come for her *darsana* from afar. They were specially gratified to find her elaborating on the very problems which had been exercising their minds for long. They went away convinced that Mataji had an extensive knowledge of the Buddhist scriptures, for she seemed to know the minutest details of their faith.

Once a *hathayogi* came to see Mataji. She asked him numerous questions regarding his way of life. Thus encouraged, he related the story of his life to her. He and a few friends, had started to practise *hathayoga* at an early age. By and by they had become so filled with enthusiasm that they renounced the world in order to devote themselves fully to this way of *sāadhanā*. They were determined to attain the goal of Self-realization, but it did not seem to have worked out that way. Although

to the best of their knowledge they had done nothing but what seemed right, they had met with disastrous results. One had died young and two had fallen victims to incurable ailments. He himself was suffering from severe stomach trouble. After twenty-two years of *sādhanā* they did not feel that they had attained anything, rather were they feeling disillusioned and frustrated. He was weary of the whole thing and thought that it was merely habit that was holding him to the path of renunciation.

Although he did not ask for a private audience, Mataji called him aside and talked to him for more than an hour. At the end of the interview, the air of desolation seemed lifted from his face. He said that he had received inspiration to continue on his chosen path. On being asked, Mataji said that she had questioned him in detail about his practices, pointed out where he had gone wrong, and told him how to proceed in the right manner.

Quite recently a young girl from a foreign country asked Mataji for initiation. On being told that Mataji does not herself directly initiate anybody, she asked, "What *japa* can I do?" Mataji asked her, "Are you a Christian? Do you believe in Christ?"

"Yes".

"Meditate on the form of Christ surrounded by heavenly radiance, and await His guidance."

"What can I do to rid myself of this fear I have?"

"Fear of what?"

"I don't know. Just a terrible fear."

"Meditate on God. Fill yourself with the presence of God so that there is no place for fear. Imagine that God is with you and that there can be no place for fear at all."

From these random instances it can be seen that Mataji's aim is to enkindle hunger for the Divine in man. All methods conducive to this aim are acceptable to her. She does not encourage any talk which is not concerned with religious endeavour. Gently but invariably she will guide a conversation back to considerations about a life of *sādhanā*.

All this knowledge about her personality was acquired by her companions gradually by a method of trial and error. At that time in Shahbagh they were far too overwhelmed by the extraordinariness of the entire experience. The impact of Mataji's personality was too new to be put in any sort of proper perspective. They could hardly believe in their good fortune and there was always a fear in their minds that Mataji would not be with them for long. After a state of *bhāva* or *samādhi*, they

would try their utmost to recall Mataji to her surroundings. They spoke to her about everyday affairs, sought to engage her attention in daily problems, and in other ways endeavoured to dispel her moods of exaltation. It was like trying to restrain a powerful motion with cobwebs. Mataji herself had the *kheyāla* to be where she was and therefore these attempts met with success. Mataji at that time had no need to eat, drink, sleep or cater to any other needs of the body, but she kept up a semblance of normal behaviour, or rather a shadow of it, because it was her *kheyāla* to remain with the people.

PARAMA-GURU, PARĀ-SHAKTI, PARAMESHWARI

[ONE]

—Antonio Eduardo Dagnino

*A red halo vibrating
around your dark form,
a deep red light
that turns to bright blissful fire
carrying the heart
to a joyous pulsing space
beyond stone and form and name.*

*O three eyed generatrix of all,
ever unfolding energy,
womb
where springs
eternal life from life eternal
by the mystery of your Māyā
creating the universes that expand
in limitless time and space
and dissolve, when ripeness comes,
into the one dark glory.*

These poems are flowers offered at the all-pervading beloved feet of Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma, who inspired them during the spring Durga Puja of 1971 at Varanasi.

—Antonio

OUR VISIT TO VRINDABAN

—Shraddha Davenport

The next day we flew to Delhi, then went by hired car to Vrindavan. The countryside was so beautiful. We were always attracted by rural India and its timelessness.

We were fortunate to be given rooms at the Jaipuria House dharmasala, where monkeys looked for handouts as they played in the garden courtyard.

Vrindavan, the land of Sri Krishna's childhood, is a wonderful place. Not a business town, but rather the sacred haven of pilgrims and devotees of Lord Hari. Temples abound and everywhere one hears God's Name in greeting and in song.

Mother's ashram in holy Vrindavan is very charming and peaceful. We entered the gate and proceeded up the wide path way leading to the temple steps. I felt as though suspended in the stillness. What a contrast to all the activity and crowds of two days past. Here we found the India that thrilled our souls.

Inside the temple doors was a spacious hall used for satsang and various religious functions. Just beyond the hall were shrines for Mahaprabhu and Nityananda, Sri Krishna Chhelia and Radharaniji and Lord Shivaji.

Mother's asana was placed in the hall very near the shrine of Lord Chaitanya. We stood as Mother entered from a side door and came to take Her seat. I breathed deeply the perfume of that exalted atmosphere, intoxicated with the joy of Her nearness and the luxury of sitting uncrowded to gaze at Her for long periods of time.

In those days the Vrindavan ashram was also housed the boy's school. When they were all allowed to come for darshan it was delightful. Each boy had been given a lovely gold-colored shawl with "Om Ma" imprinted all over in red Sanskrit letters. They sat respectfully before Mother, singing bhajans to Her or quietly enjoying the chance to be in Her presence.

Brahmacharini Chhabi sat at Mother's feet with eyes closed playing the harmonium and singing "Ma, Ma, Ma". Little birds came into the hall through the open grill work above the windows and joined their voices with hers. At other times Chitra and Reena Mukherjee from Calcutta would chant verses from the Gita with Chhabi.

One day Mother allowed us to each sit at Her feet for taking photos.

When Mother arose from Her seat to leave the hall we would all do *pranam*, then follow behind Her down the brick path that led past the graceful *bougainvillea*, sacred trees and gardens to Her house. On the patio at the foot of the steps we would stop, watching as she disappeared behind the double doors. Her presence was so irresistible that we often stood on that patio for some time after She had gone inside—still held captive by Her sweetness. Only then would I become aware of the heat. But it was never so consuming as was Varanasi's.

On our second day in Vrindavan, Chitra arranged for us to have our "Private" with Mother. It was late in the evening when we were called to the roof patio of Mother's house, just in front room. Mother's cot had been placed on the roof. She reclined on Her right side, resting Her head on a pillow or propped up against her hand. We sat very near Her with Chitra. No one else was allowed to be there.

The heat of the day was gone and millions of stars filled the Indian sky. There are more stars in India than anywhere else in the world. At least that is my belief, for I found it impossible to find even a tiny spot in the heavens that did not hold a star.

Mother was in a divine mood. She allowed us to take all the time we needed to ask our questions. Dear Chitra carefully translated for us. Intoxication made me bold as I said, "Mother, my heart is your ashram. What will you do with it?" Mother said, "Always think of God in your heart and when doing *japa*. Mother is one with the mantra. Doing *japa* advances spiritual progress. The more *japa* done, the more advancement is evident."

Wondering if we had any duty to pursue some social cause, we asked if we should concern ourselves with worldly matters. Mother said, "Do not concern yourselves with any worldly things; concern yourselves only with spiritual things."

Feeling the last days of this trip is slipping away, I was seized by the thought that I might never see Mother again, so I asked, "Mother will I ever come to India, to You again?" Mother's thrilling words, which would reassure and inspire me from that moment on, were: "I am always with you, wherever you are. I always see you sitting at My feet, as you are now"

Returning to our *dharmasala* that night, I wondered at Her great and perfect love. Never in this life had I known anything even remotely suggestive of such unchanging purity. And this was only a touch of Her, who remains far beyond my comprehension.

We had only three days in Vrindavan with Mother, but each one was filled with Her sweetness as She sat with us morning and evening. During the middle of the day we returned to the *dharmasala*. Swami Nirmalananda and the *brahmacharis*

