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Kurukshetra

March, 1972

Ānanda Vārtā

VOL. XIX]

JULY, 1972

[NO. 3

Mātri Vāni

Every living being by its very nature longs for happiness. Only because this happiness lies hidden within him, is he able to long for it. If it were not already there, he would not desire it. Yet it is a fact that he cannot help desiring it. A deep yearning for peace and happiness can be observed in every living being without exception. Even insignificant creatures such as insects, spiders and the like try to avoid pain. They are after well-being, safety and peace. Animals, when exposed to the scorching rays of the sun, seek shade and cold water. Similarly, when man is afflicted by all kinds of suffering, he goes out in search of God, the haven of peace, the fountain of bliss. In order to be rescued from the three-fold suffering of the world, one has to take recourse to another type of suffering. By pain, pain has to be conquered. This is called *tapasyā*. To be able to bear hardships and troubles is called *tapasyā* by this body (Mātāji). Just as the suffering of the world is irksome,

so in the beginning one finds it difficult to concentrate on God's name. But although it may seem arduous, by this very exertion one will be liberated from all suffering. Thus, what is wanted is effort, sustained practice, action. Among animals and birds there is no desire to be liberated from suffering and to find God who is eternal Bliss, eternal Beauty; this aspiration is reserved exclusively for human beings. Although God has enveloped man by the veil of ignorance, He has also provided a door to Knowledge for him. By passing through that door man can attain to liberation. This is why he must be determined to realize the Supreme, to find God, to transcend ignorance as well as knowledge. So long as there are the opposites of knowledge and ignorance, in other words distinction and the idea of difference, the Brahman cannot be realized. By merging in the Brahman, all differences dissolve into IT and one is for ever established in one's true Being.

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At all times the repetition of God's name should be sustained. Through the practice of the Name enjoyment, liberation, peace—all of these will blossom forth. With firm faith, implicit confidence and devotion, casting away pride, adhere to the Name and you will see that all your work will be done, as it were, of itself. When this body was engaged in the play of *sādhana*, this kind of thing

used to happen and this is why so much stress is laid on it. Do not take anything lightly in order to test God, for by doing this you will not advance towards God-realization. Surrender your all to Him ! Your burden, the burden of the world is ever carried by Him, the One Who sustains the universe, remember this !

* * *

You say, the mind will not concentrate on the Name; what do you gain by feeling upset when your mind wanders here and there ? Rather reflect in this manner : the mind does not obey me; very well, I shall not obey the mind either, I shall continue to repeat the Lord's name. Have you never watched children flying kites ? How very high the kites rise up, yet they are limited by the length of the string to which they are tied. The kite can be compared to the mind and the sense objects to the air. Keep the mind tied by the string of God's name ; some day or other it will become still.

* * *

Such terrible calamities on all sides bring forth the black cloud of despair and darkness. It is natural that your mind should be terror stricken and harassed by all kinds of worries. What is to be done ? The only refuge of the helpless is God. Do not allow yourself to be broken. The very ground to which one has fallen,

receiving a blow, has to be used as a lever in the effort to rise up again. This is God's law. He whose tool you are, His indeed is everything. HE IS. You are in the arms of the Great Mother. As She keeps you, so you have to live. Keep mind and body healthy. Rather than allowing yourself unresistingly to be consumed by the fire of worry and anxiety, ever try to keep awake the conviction that everything happens according to His Will. Truly, the contemplation of Reality is the Path.

* * *

Knowing that one is but an actor on the stage of the world, one lives happily. Those who mistake the pantomime for reality, are of the world (*samsāri*) where there is constant movement and change, ceaseless going and coming, the oscillation between happiness and sorrow. Those who are dressed up in various disguises, must not forget their real nature. Verily, you are the offspring of the Immortal. Your real Being is Truth, Goodness and Beauty.

* * *

God's true Being cannot be described, for when speaking of 'being' there is the opposite of "non-being." When trying to express Him by language, He becomes imperfect. All the same, in order to use words, He is spoken of as *Sat-Chit-Ānanda* (Being-Consciousness-Bliss). Because HE IS, there is Being; and because He is Knowledge Itself, there is Consciousness; and to become conscious of that Being is indeed Bliss. To know the essence of Truth is Bliss; this is why He is called *Sat-Chit-Ānanda*—but in Reality He is beyond Bliss and non-bliss.

From the Life of Mataji

Bithika Mukerji

(Continued from the last issue.)

(1935-1936.)

Mataji left Dacca after a short stay of seven days only. The devotees of the town and nearby places had hardly had time to assimilate the reality of her presence among them. She had all the time been surrounded by a huge crowd of men, women and children. Many of the women had not returned home at night but stayed on with Mataji at the Ashram. The small Ashram had not been able to contain the swelling crowds, so that Mataji had again and again come out to sit in the open fields of Ramnā.

From Dacca, Mataji accompanied by about sixty to seventy people went to Paruldia, the village home of Jogesh C. Ghosh.¹ Elaborate arrangements had been made for Mataji's reception. The devotees were in a happy and festive mood. But this mood was short-lived. On arrival at Calcutta, they were saddened to learn of the serious illness of Kshitish Chandra Guha, who with his two brothers and their families, was strongly attached to Mataji. Their house in Ballygunje served as a meeting place for the devotees of Calcutta.

1. The trustee of Shahbagh Gardens in Dacca, where Mataji and Bholanath had lived for four years.

The day before Mataji was to leave Calcutta, Kshitish Chandra passed away, plunging his own family and the bigger family of devotees in great sorrow. The calamity, however, was robbed of its poignant tragedy by Mataji's presence in town at the time.

From Calcutta, Mataji went back to Tarapeeth. As written earlier, Tarapeeth is famous for its cremation ground of great sanctity. Mataji stayed there for some time, while Bholanath went on a pilgrimage to Gangasagar. The sacred thread ceremony for Didi and Maroni was performed at Tarapeeth during that time.¹

On Bholanath's return, Maroni was married to Chinu and went away with him and his family to Calcutta. Although no special arrangements had been made for festivities, yet all rituals connected with Indian marriages were performed with considerable pomp and ceremony. This came about because the ladies who were visiting Tarapeeth at the time, enthusiastically participated in the function and made it a great success. Maroni was like a daughter to Bholanath. He was considerably saddened at the inevitable parting. Many of Bholanath's relations had arrived for the occasion. For a few days, the desolation of Tarapeeth was overcome by the atmosphere of auspicious ceremonies.

Mataji had become quite well known in Tarapeeth. The Hindu as well as Muslim villagers crowded round her, wherever she would be. An old Muslim peasant seemed specially close to her. Mataji used to address him as *baba* (father). Whenever she visited his hut he would call out his two wives, saying.,

1. January 1936, probably January 14th.

“Come out and receive my daughter.” The family with great satisfaction and pleasure would make arrangements for Mataji to sit with them for some time.

One Maulvi Sahib from Calcutta used to visit Mataji sometimes. Mataji called him “Prem Gopal”. Some of the Muslim population of Tarapeeth did not approve of the Maulvi Sahib’s devotion to a Hindu Mataji. On one of his visits to Tarapeeth, the Maulvi Sahib addressed a gathering of Muslims in the Masjid, explaining to them that no Islamic tenets were broken by listening to the words of Mataji and that she belonged to the peoples of all religions.

At Tarapeeth, Mataji would walk along the footpaths of the cultivated ground for long hours. Small shops came into existence overnight and began to flourish, catering to the unusual influx of visitors. The precincts of the temple came alive and did not appear to be as deserted and uncared for as they usually were.

In February, however, Mataji again left Tarapeeth to its silent contemplation of death and departed with her devotees in a convoy of fifteen to twenty bullock-carts, to the nearest railway station of Rampurhat. The slow journey through the moonlit night was made memorable by the melodious singing of Bhramara. Mataji herself joined in the *kirtan* at times. At Rampurhat Mataji and her companions boarded the train for Serampore.

After Serampore, Mataji visited Navadweep, Bahrampur and Tatanagar. From Tatanagar, Mataji started for Vindhya-chal. They stopped for a few hours at Howrah Railway

Station. Calcutta was already notorious for its unmanageable crowds and now that Mataji was not staying in the city, everyone had come to the station. Only Jatish Guha¹ (the elder brother of Kshitish) was conspicuous by his absence although the rest of the family were there. His grief over the untimely death of his brother had alienated him a little from Mataji. Just before the train started he came up to Mataji and after doing *pranāma*, walked away in a very uncharacteristic grave and aloof manner. Mataji looked at him with great understanding and said gently, "Don't forget that Jyotish (Bhaiji) at least is your friend. Continue to write to him and give him news of yourself and your family."

Jatish Guha could not nurse his hurt after this and came and wept near Mataji like a child and thus perhaps was able to lighten the burden of his grief.

Before coming to Vindhyachal, Mataji spent a couple of days at Bethia, the village home of Dr. Girin Mitra. At Vindhyachal, she met a gentleman who had donned the robes of a sannyāsi. On enquiry Mataji elicited from him the fact that he had left home in anger and not because he had any religious aspirations. Mataji persuaded him to resume his former style of apparel, saying that the saffron clothes were sanctified and were not to be made use of for resolving one's own personal problems. However, with Mataji's permission, the gentleman stayed on in Vindhyachal for quite some time before returning to his home.

Mataji started on a course of ceaseless wanderings. On leaving Vindhyachal she visited Allahabad, Chitrakut, Agra,

1. Many devotees will know him better as Bunidi's father.

Mathura, Vrindaban and Delhi before coming to Dehra Dun. In Dehra Dun also she went from the city to Raipur and then again back to the Manohar temple. Occasionally she would leave her companions and accept the escort of one or two of the local people.

In the meantime an Ashram for Mataji was being constructed in Kishenpur, about five miles away from the city, by the devotees of that region. Hari Ram Joshi was the moving spirit of this enterprise, and was ably supported by the people of Dehra Dun. Mataji's birthday celebrations were performed with great enthusiasm in the new Ashram. Mataji and Bholanath were received at the Kishenpur Ashram in May, 1936 (25th Vaishakh, 1343) amidst a festival of great rejoicings. Manmatha Nath Chatterji, a very devout and respected resident of Dehra Dun performed the *tithi-puja* on the occasion.

The people of Dehra Dun had a taste of the experience of the devotees of Dacca, when Mataji announced her *kheyāla* to go to Solon, almost before they had time to congratulate themselves on the success of the function.

Raja Durga Singh of Solon, who exemplifies by his life, what we understand of the ideal of *rājarṣi*, received Mataji and made suitable arrangements for her. After a fortnight Mataji expressed her *kheyāla* to go on to Simla, a distance of about thirty-four miles from Solon.

This was Mataji's first visit to Simla, where subsequently she became so well known. Raja Durga Singh made arrangements for her to stay at the Kali-Bari¹ at Simla. Mataji

1. Temple of Kali. Generally all such temples have accommodation for pilgrims.

arrived at the beautiful hill-station of Simla in the evening, and went straight to the Kali-Bari. They were met by some unusual activities at the temple. Mataji was told that a sadhu, known as "Dayāl bābā", had just passed away. As a matter of fact, Dayāl bābā had enquired, only a short while back if Mataji had arrived. Mataji now went to the room of the sadhu and stood near his body for some time. Dayāl bābā was held in great esteem by the Bengali population of Simla. Groups of officers¹ came to pay their respects to the departed soul and thus learnt of Mataji's arrival at Kali-Bari. Some of them came to her room and told her about Dayāl bābā.

The next morning, Mataji went for a walk. Small groups of people came up to her and introduced themselves. More gathered in her room in the evening. One of them said, "Ma, we were greatly attached to Dayāl bābā. We should have been plunged in sorrow, but somehow, now that you are here, we are not suffering from a sense of bereavement."

Mataji behaved as if she were amidst people well known to her. Within a few days Mataji's small room began to overflow with visitors. Many of the new acquaintances came to the Kali-Bari straight from their offices. Much fun and enjoyment was occasioned by this because some of them would find their wives already with Mataji instead of awaiting them at home. Household routines were thrown overboard. Men, women and children began to crowd round Mataji. One lady, expressing the views of her companions said, "Ma, every day

1. Simla used to be the Summer Head Quarters of the Central Secretariat at New Delhi.

we impatiently wait for the office and school hour. No sooner are our husbands and children out of the house than we simply rush here.”

Mataji's companions were amazed that within a few days she had so endeared herself to the people that from morning till night she was the centre of an eager throng, talking to her, listening to her or sometimes just gazing at her with rapt attention.

One lady asked Mataji, “Ma, what sādhana can a housewife do ?”

Mataji : “*Sevā* and *japa*. All duties can be performed in a spirit of service and dedication. God Himself appears to you in the guise of your various obligations in the world. If you sustain the thought, ‘this also is one aspect of the Divine’, then there will be no conflict between what is worldly and what is called religious. More specifically, one should devote as much time as one can to *japa*.”

“Ma, on some days the mind is at peace and I can do *japa* but often the mind is so restless that nothing can be done. Why is this so ?”

“There are many influences operating on the mind. Your way of life, the food you eat, the people you mix with and many other things, perhaps unknown to you. But the remembrance of God will help you to overcome all this. Don't you see that in spring when new leaves begin to sprout, the old ones drop off by themselves ? They fall to the ground and are reabsorbed as manure and sustain the tree. Nothing is wasted in the Divine

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scheme of things. Sustained effort is required of you. The rest will follow.”

Nama yajna at Simla Kali-Bari.

The Bengali officers of Simla were mostly members of the *Hari Sabha* or attached to it. Every summer they would perform a *nāma yajña*¹ at the Kali-Bari. This function was to take place on Tuesday, June 23rd. The new devotees of Simla requested Mataji to stay till then.

A big concourse of people assembled in the Kali-Bari on the eve of the *nāma yajña*. The temple, the room in which the *kirtana* was to be performed and the adjoining verandah were tastefully decorated with flowers, leaves and lights. Garlands were festooned round the altar in the middle of the room. The fragrance of sandalwood permeated the atmosphere. The participants, dressed in sparkling white clothes, assembled in front of the altar. Mataji with her companions sat on the verandah. Bholanath, always a great enthusiast for *kirtana*, was happily participating in the function.

The *kirtana* began with an invocation to Sri Gauranga and Sri Nityananda, who are believed to be the propagators of *nāma sankirtana* in this age. Other members of the Vaishnava pantheon were also invoked to bless the function. Then the men stood up carrying their musical instruments. They went round the altar singing the main lines of the *kirtana* for the morrow. With this the preliminaries of the function known as *adhivāsa* were concluded.

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1. An altar with pictures of deities, decorated with flowers and garlands is erected in the middle of a big room. While singing *kirtana* the participants go round this altar.

Early next morning everyone gathered for the *kirtana*. Those who were late-risers and had never been known to attend before noon, were also there.¹ From sunrise to sunset the same *mantra* in an unbroken melody would be kept up by relays of singers. Mataji again sat on the *varandah*. The *kirtana* right from the beginning created a remarkable atmosphere. Everyone felt transported to a different world beyond the everyday humdrum one. Mataji's companions could see that Mataji herself was being affected by the singing. For almost five years now they had not seen Mataji in a *bhāva*. They also noticed that Mataji apparently tried to control the *bhāva* which was influencing her body. She would talk desultorily with her companions. Once she went out for a walk away from the Kali-Bari. Then again she would retire to her room and lie down for some time. Bholanath, noticing Mataji's changed demeanour, came and told her to try and check it if possible. The function was a public one, and Bholanath was not happy at the idea that Mataji would become a topic of conversation amongst comparative strangers. Moreover, Mataji's *bhāva-samādhi* could last for any number of hours, even days, and none knew better than Bholanath, how difficult it was to call her back to her surroundings. A nameless dread of losing her made him attempt to keep her attention anchored to the ordinary things of the world, as it were. Hence his injunction to Mataji to try and withstand the effect of the *nāma kīrtana*.

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1. Some of the leaders of this functions were Haran Banerji, Charu Banerji, Durgadas Banerji, Deben Chatterji, Manoj Lal Chatterji, Sudhir Sarkar and many others. At present the sons and daughters of these men carry on the tradition of *nāma yajña*.

Mataji, may be anticipating his reaction, was already doing it. The whole day she was restless. It appeared as if she were trying to check a terrific force which would otherwise engulf her body. In the words of a companion : "Mataji's ordinary talk and behaviour was shot through as it were, by flashes of lightning. Her face was flushed and luminous. The eyes tended to become fixed in a beautiful unfocussed gaze."

Evening drew near. Mataji once again came away from the *kīrtana* to her room. Here her body was seen to roll uncontrollably with the rhythm of the music. Then in the same *bhāva*, swaying to the tune of the melody, Mataji moved out of her room and entered the *kīrtana* hall.¹ The men of Simla had never seen such a sight. But nearly all of them were highly educated and also well versed in Vaishnava literature. They realized that they were witnessing the manifestations of *māhabhāva* which they had read, were possible in the divine body of Lord Gauranga only. The melody of the *kīrtana* reached sublime heights.

After some time Mataji sat on the floor. As before in Dacca, she uttered *mantras* in a beautiful language which sounded like Sanskrit. Then she became utterly still and motionless.

The *kīrtana* was over. The congregation bowed at her feet. Some of the men hurried home to fetch other members

1. A description of Mataji's *bhāva* will not be attempted here. It has been recorded earlier. Moreover, however detailed, a description can never touch the dimension of the experience. Didi has used the following words in describing Mataji in *bhāva* : "Like a wind-blown cloth . . . like a dry leaf blown along by gusts of wind."

of their families. Mataji's matchless smile and the inimitable unfocussed wide gaze struck awe and wonder in the hearts of the people. They reverently bowed their heads as if in the presence of the personification of their adored ideal.

Next day, some of the men remarked, "We have been performing *kīrtana* for many years. Our invocations have been answered. Blessed indeed are we, the people of Simla."

After a few days Mataji returned to Solon. Before leaving Simla, Mataji encouraged the ladies to organise themselves into a *kīrtana*-party on the lines of the parties already existing in Dacca and Calcutta. The men were a little sceptical about the programme in the beginning. They thought it would be beyond the physical strength of women to stand and sing for a few hours at a time. These fears were seen to be quite unfounded when the women successfully concluded a long session of *kīrtana*. Mataji smilingly told the men, "Do not keep your women-folk away from this sphere of your lives. Allow them to join their efforts with yours, otherwise you will face unnecessary obstacles!"

The new devotees of Simla accompanied Mataji to Solon on a Saturday, spent the whole night in singing *kīrtana* and went back to Simla the next day. Mataji had now come into contact with an entire new cross-section of society. At Solon, Raja Durga Singh's great courtesy and hospitality, captivated the hearts of the officers. They promised to perform *nāma yajña* in Solon as well, every year.

Mataji returned to Dehra Dun where Bhaiji had stayed all this time, undergoing treatment for an indisposition. Mataji

had no *kheyāla* to settle down anywhere. She again left for Simla and then Solon, this time, accompanied by Bhaiji also.

It was apparent from her manner that it was a matter of days only before she would again set out on a course of wanderings. One day she asked Bholanath, "Where shall we go?" He had no suggestions to make, so she said, "In that case, I shall do according to this body's *kheyāla*." Then she asked Bhaiji, "Where would you like to stay?" Bhaiji was more concerned to know that apparently he would not be accompanying her on her travels. To the great joy of Yogibhai,¹ Mataji asked Bhaiji to stay on in Solon until further instructions.

Mataji with her depleted party arrived in Vindhyachal. More drastic changes were made by her. She sent Swami Akhandanandaji to stay in the new Ashram at Kishenpur, while Didi was asked to remain in Vindhyachal. This was a severe trial for Didi. Since leaving home she had never stayed alone and independently. She always had had the guardianship of her father when not actually travelling with Mataji. Mataji now said to her : "You must learn to travel without escorts. You have chosen this way of life, so you must get used to independence." Mataji however, arranged that a reliable family-servant would stay at hand, in case Didi were obliged to undertake a journey later on.

Mataji and Bholanath left for Calcutta in the last week of July, 1936. From Calcutta, Mataji paid a short visit to

1, Raja Durga Singh of Solon. Mataji used to call him "Yogiraj", so the devotees are in the habit of referring to him as Jogibhai. This name will be used in these accounts rather than "Raja Durga Singh."

Rajshahi. Bholanath had been suffering from a pain in the stomach for some time. Mataji prevailed upon him to stay at his sister's place and get himself examined and treated properly by the doctors in Calcutta.

Mataji, then went to Serampore, accompanied by a crowd of people, but asked everyone to return to Calcutta the same evening. Only Kamal (Atal Bihari Bhattacharya's nephew from Rajshahi) and Virajmohini¹ remained with her. Kamal was a new-comer. Virajmohini had been travelling around with Mataji's party for some time. She was a woman of good sense and dignity of manner. Her ready appreciation of the unusual must have stood her in good stead because now Mataji left for an unknown destination. After a few days, Mataji sent back Kamal. Accompanied by Virajmohini only, she travelled to many distant places. Bholanath wrote to the devotees from Calcutta, saying that Mataji had expressed her kheyāla of moving about by herself and that nobody should try to find out where she was or go and join her in case he learnt of her whereabouts accidentally, and that she would come back to them in her own time. Mataji left Serampore on August 3, 1936.


(*To be continued*)

1. Many people will know her better as Brahmacharini Vishuddha's grandmother.

Oh Anandamayi Ma !

M. Rama Rao

Thou art the Mother of the Universe all,
From the biggest of the big to the smallest of the small.
Thou art the source of Truth and Love,
Thou art Space, below and above,
Nay, Thou art beyond Time and Space.
Thou dost shower kindness and grace.
Thine is the spark that emitteth Light,
Thine is the Spirit that burneth bright.
Thou art hidden and manifest too,
Thy Powers are known to only a few.
Thou dost lead the millions to the Goal,
To Eternal Salvation, to the Supreme Soul.
Thou dost give perennial Peace,
Thou dost shower Joy and Bliss.
Thine are ways unknown, Divine,
Withereth the ego of 'mine' and 'thine'.
Thou art the Heaven of Holiness Supreme,
Thou art the essence of *Anand*—its cream.
Surrendered am I at Thy glorious Feet
Of Solace Sublime which are a seat.
I crave for nothing but blessings from Thee.
How to be in communion, oh do tell me !



The Sprit of Renunciation

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

The word “*Sannyāsa*” means perfect abandoning or setting aside. *Sam* means “perfect”, and *nyāsa* means “abandoning or setting aside.” Though traditionally it is the fourth stage in the life of the Hindu, ever since ancient times there have been bright examples of young renunciates, full of *viveka* (discrimination) and *vairāgya* (dispassion), for whom the fulfilment of the first three stages of life, or particularly the *grihasta* (householder) *vānaprastha* (forest-dweller) stages, which are meant to be preparatory, were totally unnecessary.

In a society which regulated life with strict discipline and traditional observance of moral injunction, when the inroads of external influence into the cultural fabric of the Hindu religion were almost insignificant, when life was infinitely less complex than it is today, it would have been appropriate for a man to enter the order of *sannyāsa* after having attained the requisite maturity of mind and character through training in the *gurukula* (school) and fulfilment of household responsibilities. It should not, however, be supposed that even in ancient times all people observed the fourth *āśrama* (stage of life) : *sannyāsa*. Most did not, simply because people, as always, generally lacked *vairāgya* and strength of will.

In the context of the state of affairs in the society of today, it is not necessary and even by far less practicable to strictly

apply this convention, but it is important that people at large should rightly understand what constituted the true spirit of renunciation or the ideal of *sannyāsa*. This need is also particularly evident among the legions of *sannyāsins* themselves.

Sannyāsa springs from the renunciation of desires, a very long drawn-out process, and could be sustained in its pristine purity only through burning *viveka* and *vairāgya*. Its primary condition is the fire of *viveka*, before which no impurity could stand, no desire for mundane objects could fail to wither.

Sannyāsa and worldliness can never go together. One cannot be a *sannyāsin* within and yet exhibit worldly inclinations without. It is a great folly and downright deception to suppose that one could be mentally detached and yet submit to one's weaknesses for material objects and piously indulge in sensual craving. It is better for such a person to be an honest *grihastha*.

Circumstantial factors leading to *sannyāsa*, through the morass of frustration or expediency, can only succeed in putting up a hollow mask of piety and renunciation, a little probing of which is sufficient to prove how brittle its fibre is.

True, earthly disillusionment, leading to renunciation of the world, has resulted in the enblossoming of some of the great *sannyāsins*, but such cases have indeed been very rare, and have always been marked by a sincere aspiration for spiritual unfoldment, aided by a strenuous effort at self-discipline.

Knowledge is the primary factor which forms the backbone of *sannyāsa*—a knowledge that does not cease with learning through books, a knowledge that is not intended for parading before the gullible public in order to impress them for personal ends, but it

is a knowledge that is bound up with one's life itself, deeply touching the heart of the individual and guiding the course of one's action, evaluation, perspective and evolution.

It is this knowledge that gives birth to *vairāgya* and lends grandeur to it. *Vairāgya* without knowledge is a crude form of self-denial, the end of which is only self-defeating. *Vairāgya* does not cease with the denial of physical necessities but means a state of evaporation of desires through right understanding. *Vairāgya* indicates moderation and abstemiousness, guided by dispassion.

Therefore it is said that no genuine renunciate is devoid of a spontaneous glow of inner happiness, and if there is dejection or a shadow of frustration or the look of a hardboiled, hungry falcon in the individual's countenance, it simply means that renunciation in this case has only been a circumstantial impasse.

Viveka, *vairāgya* and self-discipline are complementary. One cannot exist without the others. The *vairāgi* may deny his body but his mind may rule over himself; his impulses of hatred and detestation might run amuck when he is jilted out of his pet course of infatuation, when his ego has been hurt, when his dogmas assaulted.

True *vairāgya*, on the contrary, should enable in the moulding of a perfectly disciplined individual, with a broad outlook, a deep understanding of the realities of life, sympathy for fellow-beings, great tolerance and a charitable heart. True *vairāgya* needs no advertisement just as *sannyāsa* requires no proclamation or parading or comparison such as : 'my *sannyāsa* is better than yours since it has been sanctified by traditional rites'.

These days, unfortunately, wearing the ochre robe has become quite fashionable. It is not like joining a glorified club, as some of the irresponsible members of the order might suppose, but entails on oneself the heavy responsibilities of a worthy monk. The life of a *sannyāsin* should indeed be like a burning flame which no mundane desire should be able to flicker. The life of a *sannyāsin* should be purity itself.

It is lamentable that some do accept *sannyāsa* as an opportunity to escape the normal consequences of life in the world but only to find a chance to live a worldly life under the cloak of pious deception or blase' hypocrisy. A *sannyāsin* with desire for money, personal comfort and weakness for the companionship of women is an anathema to the ideal of *sannyāsa* and a disgrace to the order.

It would however be a great blunder to jump to the conclusion that all *sannyāsin*s are such misanthropes in different degrees. There are countless bright examples of true renunciation, whom one could easily spot by observing the life of desirelessness and dispassion they invariably lead.

On the other hand, the householder who says that it is enough to be a mental *sannyāsin* and that one could live like a lotus leaf in a lake, as it were, is only exhibiting this weakness for worldly objects, however much he might deny it. It is only a very few great renunciates who could do so, and it would be foolishness to compare the common people with them.

Just as there are desirable and undesirable individuals among the people at large, one should be prepared to meet their counterparts among those who are supposed to be renun-

ciates. It is deplorable and irresponsible if the entire order of *sannyāsa* is denounced just because one finds a cross-section of characters in it. It is not the fault of *sannyāsa*, which does not discriminate human beings, but the society which encourages, causes the influx and perpetuates irresponsible elements in the holy order.

These days there is so much talk that the *sannyāsins* are parasites, that they must work. The protagonists of the 'you must work' slogan would do well in providing work for an unemployed householder who could then support a few dependants, rather than to a *sannyāsin* who has only to feed himself. He gives knowledge to the people and they look after his very modest sustenance. There is nothing wrong in it. The heavens are not going to fall down because of it. It is not given to a worldly-minded individual, who may have done nothing to promote the spiritual welfare of his country and who might himself be a slave of a hundred passions, to denounce the *sannyāsins*, when he himself has no power of discrimination.

There would always be the need for *sannyāsins* who engage themselves in spreading the knowledge of Yoga-Vedanta, in preserving the spiritual values through the ages. One should not forget that it is the *sannyāsins* who have kept the flame of *Sanātana Dharma* burning throughout, even through the stormy phases of history. It should also be taken notice of that there are many *sannyāsins* in many ashrams who engage themselves as busily and as effectively as anybody else, in public service.

The fundamental difference between the outlook of a worldly man and a *sannyāsin* is that the former works for himself and his family, with intense selfish attachment, and the latter

sruoꝿaedne to engage himself in some form of service for a common good, with detachment and non-expectation of reward. If the world is to cure itself from all the ills it suffers from, the idea associated with *sannyāsa* must seep into the perspective of the people at large, at least in a certain measure.

It is this ideal of renunciation, rightly understood and sincerely practised, which could solve many of the problems of mankind today. It is wrongly supposed that renunciation means irresponsibility and abandoning action. As the *Gita* says : 'The sages understand *sannyāsa* to be the renunciation of action prompted by desire, and the wise declare the abandonment of the fruits of action as renunciation.'

No one could be totally inactive. Even while sitting still, if the mind is restless, one is said to be active. It is not so easy to renounce action. Even a movement of mind towards an object of enjoyment is an incipient action. Abandoning attachment to any action and to the personal, selfish motivation related hereto is what the *Gita* indicates, in the eighteenth chapter of which a very clear exposition of the import of renunciation is given.

Renunciation is not something negative. On the contrary, it is positive idealism which lends sanity to life. The world is enveloped in an overwhelming shadow of selfishness and aggressive infatuation for material objects. Life is ruled by greed. In his blind quest for mundane interests, in searching after the little nervous titillation of the senses through fair or foul means, in his inordinate desire to possess and amass, man forgets his true being. He is blind to the interests of others. He is blind to the feelings of even those whom he swears to love

and care for just because, in reality, above everything else he is very much in love with himself and is primarily concerned with his own interests, in his heart of hearts, though he might assert that it is not so.

It is here that the spirit of renunciation comes to help—the spirit of detachment leading a mellow touch on man's infatuation, self-denial on his greed and self-love, self-effacement on self-assertion and possessiveness, dispassion on animal lust, the feeling of 'yours' and 'for you' on 'mine' and 'for myself alone.'

It is the spirit of selflessness that enables one to soften the sharp edges of primitive egotism and vituperative self-justification. Such is the ideal of renunciation, which every human being must espouse as best one can, within the framework of the circumstances one is placed in.

Sannyāsa or 'perfect abandoning, setting aside' does not merely mean abandoning family ties. Very often it so happens that after one has abandoned one's family ties, the force of desire and delusion leads one to acquire new 'family ties' with strangers, vitiated by exclusive possessiveness, even though inside the order of *sannyāsa*. The process of renunciation begins with a gradual weaning of the mind from selfish attachment to material objects and mundane desires, in moulding a correct attitude into the nature of things and values related to the ennobling of life, in merging the individual ego in the Cosmic Will through selfless service, prayer, self-discipline, reflection and meditation.

If the sannyasin does not possess this primary qualification, he is a worldly man indeed and, on the other hand, if a person, though engaged in the performance of normal duties that fate has bequeathed on him, is gifted with this idealism and is able to effect it in practical life, he is surely a worthy *sannyāsin*, even if the world does not know him to be so.

May the spirit of renunciation glow in the hearts of all.

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“Feel convinced that, no matter what the state or condition you may be in, out of that very state Enlightenment may come. Never harbour the idea that you are involved in sin and evil deeds and can therefore not get anywhere. At all times and under all circumstances you must keep yourself in readiness to tread the path to the Supreme.”

—Anandamayi Ma

On Meditation

Ruth Knowlton

How many words have been written on the subject of philosophy and religion, and how many words have been expounded!

Lao Tzu says :

Existence is beyond the power of words to define. Terms may be used, but none of them are absolute. In the beginning of heaven and earth there were no words.

Words came out of the womb of matter. And whether a man dispassionately sees to the core of life, or passionately sees the surface, the core and the surface are essentially the same. Words making them seem different only to express appearance.

If name were needed, wonder names them both. From wonder into wonder, existence opens. At a certain stage of our spiritual quest we read everything we can lay our hands on and attend every kind of lecture. Like sponges, we hope to absorb Truth in this manner—through words.

But the time comes when we must set aside the books and the mere talking about Truth and go within to find the Great Silence, to seek union with God. For each one of us has to prove in our own lives the validity of what the saints and seers have written. Their experience alone does not suffice. We must make it our own.

That is why meditation is recommended as the highest means for achieving our goal. But as we begin to seek the inner silence through the practice of meditation, in shutting out all the distractions of the world, we may find, to our great dismay that it is more noisy inside our heads than on the outside ! We come face to face with ourselves, the little self with its prejudices, opinions, complexes, fears and conflicts.

The Great Ones tell us to empty the mind. Yet, the mind can be compared to a glass of milk. When we empty the glass, the residuo of the milk clings to the glass. Similarly, thought impressions cling tenaciously to the mind.

That is why it is recommended to repeat the name of God, to use a mantram during meditation. It pulls the mind away from these distracting thoughts and helps to focus it. Then we fill it with lofty thoughts of the Divine.

Yet we cannot push down or repress the weeds of anger, jealousy, pettiness, which choke out the flowering spirit within which is struggling for survival. As the undesirable thoughts float to the surface, we need to gradually weed them out. Not until they have been removed can we really begin to meditate. Learning to purify the mind and make it silent is not something we should attempt to do only at the hour of meditation. We must discipline the mind constantly, during all the waking hours, being ever vigilant, not allowing it to entertain itself with destructive, petty thoughts. The daily discipline of the mind is an unfailing aid at the time when we sit for meditation. By making it a regular practice, to empty the mind of unwanted thoughts and reactions, we will find it bear fruit. The unruly mind will learn to be still when we wish it to.

All the great teachers stress the value of going into silence from time to time. Silence is a great healer. We derive strength from it. We dissipate our energies by too much needless, frivolous talking.

As the stomach needs time to digest the food we give it after a meal, so also the mind should have periods of rest in which to assimilate all that has been fed into it.

Zen Buddhism speaks of the "fasting mind". This is a very apt description of the meditative mind. We are so very careful about what we put in our stomachs. Many people go on fasts occasionally in order to remove the impurities of the body. But how many of us go on a mental fast? What better way to rid the mind of its impurities than to starve it occasionally, by not giving in to the temptation to listen to a bit of gossip, or the reading of frivolous books which pull the mind down to a lower level of consciousness. "As a man thinketh, so is he".

In this world of mass media and instant communication through radio, television, newspapers, the telephone, we are constantly bombarded with what is happening all over the globe. And at the present time it is all pretty grim. Unless we live as hermits, it is not possible to escape the voices of the world. We are all aware of the impact a bit of unpleasant news can have on our peace of mind.

No matter how happy or tranquil we may have been before, bad news immediately brings disturbance to the mind, causing us to worry, to even lose a night's sleep. Yet the irony of it is that we are usually powerless to change things or to do
