

Shri Shri Ma Anandamayee— The Eternal Flame

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To say anything about Ma Anandamayee is like showing a feeble candle to the radiant sun - it is a futile attempt. Ma is everything and much more and all descriptions of Her are mere fragments of a limitless infinity. Ma's mahasamadhi is a phenomenon of the physical world. Ma is eternal. She exists as a brilliant flame within us. We need the perception to see Her. Her fragrant presence is always with us. We have to get rid of our ego and self-deception to be conscious of Her closeness. She is there - purity personified - to guide our thoughts and actions only if we are big enough to be humble and to surrender ourselves completely to Her care. To such a One I offer my devout salutations.

Our country has had an unbroken tradition of great sages and seers from times immemorial. These great ones have preserved our wisdom and ensured the continuity of our values and culture. This has been the backbone of our unity and national integrity. Each great one has devised his own system of conveying maximum benefit to the yearning humanity. Some spiritually realized Souls have taken birth amongst us for our salvation and their advent has been heralded by sages who came before them.

When my father-in-law, Dr. Panna Lall, was a student at St. John's College, Agra, he was fortunate to come under the wings of Prof. Surya Kumar Karfarma, who was a "Grahastha" but had secured spiritual advancement through his "Sadhna". Dr. Panna Lall learnt a lot at his feet not only in his studies but also in the path of spiritualism. The relationship continued and later Dr. Panna Lall introduced his whole family to Prof. Karfarma, whose teachings influenced them all. In 1925 Prof. Karfarma, who had retired long ago, came and visited Dr. Panna Lall in Unao where he was posted. During some intimate conversation Prof. Karfarma told my father-in-law that as far as he (Prof. Karfarma) was concerned he had imparted all the knowledge that he possessed but a great enlightened one who was already born, would in due course take care of him (Dr. Panna Lall) and lead him on further. Prof. Karfarma was referring to Shri Shri Ma Anandamayee. Later when Dr. Panna Lall narrated this episode to Shri Ma, She only smiled benignly. Thus Shri Ma's coming to Earth was known to other spiritually high souls, who were on a common wavelength.

It was in 1938 that Shri Ma came to Allahabad where my father-in-law Dr. Panna Lall (Father) was posted as Commissioner. Swarnalata Jaspal (Brahmacharni Billo Ji) and her family used to visit Ma. Billoji was a class senior to my wife Chandra. Billoji mentioned to my wife that a great Saint had come and she should visit her. My wife went to have Ma's darshan with Billoji and then she took her parents along to have Shri Ma's "darshan". At this first meeting with Father Shri Ma laughed and told him, "Pitaji, you and many others were present at the Sanyas-taking Ceremony of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu". This observation of Shri Ma sent an electric current through Dr. Panna Lall's body.

which kept him charged with devotion throughout his life.

During 1941-43 I visited Ma at various places along with Father but there was apparently no direct link between Ma and myself till then. I was shy and introvert. I remember attending Ma's 'satsang' on the roof top of Hari Ram Joshi's house in Lucknow. There used to be about 25 devotees. During "Kirtans" Ma would often go into "Samadhi". Soft "Kirtan" would continue and Ma would return to the physical world after short periods. I remember intimate sessions with Ma, again in the company of Father in Vindhyachal, Dehra Dun and elsewhere. I was getting more and more charmed by Ma's ever present sweetness and extreme graciousness but I must confess that the real spark had not awakened in me.

In December 1943 - January 1944 I was posted as Magh Mela Officer in Allahabad and my wife and I with our two girls were camping for a month at the Sangam. The whole atmosphere there looked sanctified with 'Bhajans' and 'Kirtans' starting from early morning as streams of devotees went for their holy dip in the severe cold weather. A new township had cropped up with lakhs of people - Sadhus, devotees, Pandas, tradesmen and various services. Elaborate arrangements had to be made. On one day, as we had finished our midday meal, we found Ma standing at the gate of our Camp accompanied by only one Brahmacharni. My wife and I rushed towards Her. Ma laughed and exclaimed, "I heard Govind Narain lives here, so this body came". We were dazzled by Her charm. We didn't have anything much to offer her except two left over bananas. In her graciousness Ma blessed us both and our girls and disappeared. The spark was kindled.

In 1946 Ma was celebrating Holi in Vrindaban and Father was going there. My wife and I along with our small daughters Chandan and Nandini also went there. The atmosphere in Ma's presence is always divine and the presence of a large number of Mahatmas and devotees added to the grandeur of the occasion. During one of her smaller sittings Ma revealed that all those who come to her have been associated with her during so many previous births and each one according to his/her Sadhna is escalating the spiritual ladder. What a magnetising impact this had on us who listened to her. The link was getting stronger and stronger. After a couple of day's bliss the time came for us to return to our work. Ma enjoined upon me to leave after taking "Prasad". I was in a hurry as I had to attend a meeting in Hathras on way to Aligarh. So I persuaded my wife to leave early. Our small Morris car was being driven by a driver. We had travelled about 7 miles from Vrindaban when suddenly an oldish woman crossed the road in front of our car. The front bumper hit her and she was carried forward about 10 yards before the car stopped. We were scared. The woman was howling and was soon joined by her son. I put my family under a road side tree and took the woman and her son back to Vrindaban to the local dispensary and got her thoroughly examined. By Ma's grace there was no injury - not even a scratch but there was shock. I got the woman admitted to the hospital for care and comfort till she decided to go. Then I went to Ma's ashram to report the whole matter to my father-in-law. Ma saw me, smiled and repeated that I should take "Prasad" and then go. So the lesson was well taught. I took the "Prasad" for the whole family and returned to Aligarh. My wife retorted "what happened to your being late for the meeting in Hathras". Ma's ways are inscrutable!

In early 1947 I was posted in the Secretariat in Lucknow and living in 2, Olliver Road. Ma blessed us again. At half an hour's notice She visited our home and with our modest means we welcomed Her and paid Her our obeisance. Her divine grace was apparently preparing me for bigger responsibilities.

From 1951 to 1954 we went to Nepal. I was deputed as Adviser-cum-Secretary to His Majesty King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah of Nepal. Winter used to be rather cold in Kathmandu and my wife used to stay with her father for a few months. In 1953 she went with her father Dr. Panna Lall to Vrindaban to Ma's ashram. Ma had arranged the "Sthapana" of "Shivalingas" there. On the day fixed, my wife was expressing her concern to her father that she had no flower garlands for the "Shivalingas" Soon thereafter an oldish man appeared at the rest house asking if she needed any flower garlands. My wife was overjoyed and bought the two big and beautiful garlands that he had. With this confidence my wife went with her father to the ceremony in the Ashram. There she found that there were three "Shivalingas" and she had only two garlands. She shared her worry with her father who advised her to watch quietly and keep the garlands hidden. Ma was examining all the articles that had been assembled for the "Pooja". When she saw the garlands that had been arranged by the ashram she did not approve of them and wanted better and bigger garlands. Dr. Panna Lall again asked my wife to keep quiet as there were only two garlands while there were three "Shivalingas". On her own accord Ma explained that one "Shivalinga" had been established earlier and the Pooja had been done. So that day, only two "Shivalingas" had to be worshipped. Father and my wife exchanged happy smiles and they offered the two garlands to Ma. Ma was very pleased and said those were the garlands befitting the occasion. Was this all a mere coincidence? I wonder! It was Ma's 'lila'.

In 1954 Kumbh in Allahabad, my Father, my wife, our children and other members of the family were in Ma's ashram at the 'Sangam'. Ma took them all for a dip in the 'Sangam' and returned to her camp. After some time Ma looked very restless and exclaimed that so many people were trampling over her body. Later it was learnt that the big tragedy - the stampede - killing several hundred pilgrims had occurred on the slippery slopes of the Bund. I was in Kathmandu and naturally got panicky on hearing about the tragedy from the radio. Ma's immediate flock was safe but Ma remained concerned about the bigger human family.

Once my wife and I went to Varanasi Ashram with Father on the occasion of Shivratri. In the day Father was sitting in the courtyard and Ma emerged from her bathroom with a wet towel. Father, as usual, said something witty. Ma laughed and squeezed her wet towel over his head. Father felt thrilled and prostrated before Ma for the extreme kindness and blessings. Those who are familiar with the theory of "Shaktipat" or of awakening the "Kundalini", will easily appreciate the significance of this "Lila"

Ma's arrangements for Shivaratri Puja were always made with meticulous care under Her instructions and supervision. All participants in the holy worship were required to observe complete fast since the early morning and not even a drop of water was permissible.

I remember once in Delhi Shivaratri puja was organised in Kalkaji Ashram and Smt. M. S. Subhaluxmi had also come to join us. I was not too well and had just got up from an illness. I asked Ma if I could take milk. Ma did not say 'NO' but smilingly She said in that case I might watch the puja from outside the hall. The message was firm and clear. I kept Nirjala fast and thought I might sit for one Prahar puja only. My wife and daughter were also there. After one Prahar we exchanged glances and I conveyed to them that I could sit for another Prahar. M. S. Subhaluxmi was regaling us with her Bhajan in between the puja and Ma was going round and talking to the worshippers. After the second Prahar I felt strong enough to sit for third Prahar and then the fourth. And so with Ma's grace the whole puja was completed. I marvel how this became possible in my poor state of health? There are no limits to Ma's Kripa if one would only follow Her instructions.

While in Nepal we had procured two 'Chaur' with silver handles (these are used in religious worship of the deities). Father, Dr. Panna Lall, had donated two idols of Ashtadhatu - Mahaprabhu's and Nityanand's to be installed in Vrindaban Ashram. Ma had very kindly arranged for the proper installation with all traditional worships. We all assembled in Vrindaban. The idols were beautiful and with great love and feeling Ma described the whole procedure of their installation in order to prepare us for the ceremony lasting a few hours. When, on the previous evening, Ma was doing the stocktaking of all the arrangements and all the articles that were required, various Ashramites in charge were reporting to Her what had been done. It was revealed that while everything was collected, there was no "Chaur". As it happened, my wife had packed one of the "Chaur" with her baggage but Father asked her to keep quiet for a while. He wanted to see Ma's leela. Ma was talking about the "Chaur" and showing Her concern. Then She stated that the Lord Himself made all His arrangements and no one need worry. Something will turn up. At this stage Father quietly asked my wife to bring the "Chaur" and present it to Ma. My wife did this. Ma laughed and was happy and remarked "Didn't I say that the Lord made all His arrangements Himself". We were amazed how Ma, the All-knower, staged this leela to carry conviction to the whole gathering.

When one begins to talk of Ma one loses sense of time and space. There is so much to say about One who is all pervading, limitless and all knowing. But I have to restrain myself for the present. May Ma's grace extend to one and all. Jai Ma.

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ban or Kankhal. It was because Ma could come to Calcutta that thousands of her poor devotees had a chance of seeing her.

Memories come flooding in, but I must stop. In Sankaracharya's famous verse 'Sivaparadhakshamapanastotram' there is a line "The days that are gone will not return again. Time consumes the world." With me, however, the memory of those glorious days will always abide.

Ma -- Ma -- Ma