

Ananda Varta

*A quarterly presenting the divine life and teaching of
SRI ANANDAMAYI MA and various aspects of
Universal Dharma*

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ANANDA VĀRTĀ welcomes contributions on the life and teachings of Ma and reflections and personal experiences of Ma's devotees and admirers. Articles on religious and philosophical subjects as well on lives of saints and sages of all countries and all times are also invited. Articles should as far as practicable be typed with double spacing and on one side of the page.

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ANANDA VARTA

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*The Eternal, the Ātman—
Itself pilgrim and path of Immortality
Self contained—THAT is all in One.*

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Everyone has to reap the fruit of his actions. The suffering is for your own best. A mother occasionally gives a slap to her beloved child for his own good, in order to keep him on the right path. God cleanses you from the effects of your actions committed life after life by what you call suffering. When a fond mother gives her baby a bath, the child may scream desperately, yet the mother will not let the baby go until she has thoroughly washed and scrubbed him. Then she will carefully wipe the child, dry his tears and take him on her lap. Likewise, when you have been cleansed, God will comfort you and take you into His arms. Whatever happens in this world is His Līlā, His pleasure

* * *

By studying science the thirst for knowledge is aroused, and thus one will awaken to the search after Truth. But the Truth that denies God and all deities, is a partial, one-sided point of view—it is not comprehensive vision. An integral, complete vision unites the point of view of science with that of faith. In a full vision, the stand-points of the believer and of the non-believer meet. To lay stress on righteousness and ethics will educate your character and eventually lead to perfection. A complete, unobstructed vision will open out. By accepting your own line wholly and with all its implications, you will finally realize all lines of approach.

—ĀNANDAMAYEE MĀ



MĀTRI VANI

(Dictated by Sri Ma as letters in response to devotees' requests for personal advice and guidance.)

It is everyone's duty to adopt the path which is congenial to spiritual life. It is He who calls and again He who hears. Try to be devoted to Him.

* * *

Wherever you may be, be there in the spirit of a seeker of God.

* * *

A human being must spend his or her life in contemplation of the Supreme. With this thought in mind walk on your path.

* * *

In one's life of sādhanā different stages come and go – but one should stick to the spiritual path with patience and fortitude.

* * *

The more sādhanā you do and the more you live in God's presence, the better will you know His will.

* * *

Concentrating on the form of God you love most, repeat the Name. By the practice of God's Name the ego is burnt up.

* * *

Meditate on the words you heard when you felt a spiritual presence in your home. Keep them in your mind. If the hearing is genuine ; no questions arise. While hearing one understands instantaneously, one's doubts are solved.

* * *

When questions and doubts have remained, it means there has been no real *samādhi*. When there is genuine *samādhi*, the path that transcends all questions opens out. You can reason it out for yourself at what stage you are since questions are still there.

* * *

In the *Ātmā* Mataji is always present with everybody. One's actual experience of this fact is according to the state one has reached.

* * *

When Mataji says ; "follow the *Rishi Panthā*," it means that one should try to live as the *Rishi's* lived who were married, yet great saints. This should be the householder's ideal to aspire to. Everything comes about according to the state of achievement one has reached.

* * *

In reply to the question : "How can I tell the difference between imagination and intuition ?" Ma said :

Use your intelligence and discriminate carefully. Make an effort to discard the merely pleasurable for the sake the highest good. Spiritual *sādhanā* (*satkarma*) must be done with the utmost sincerity—

even physically—because thereby the *śakti* to tread the path to God will be awakened. This *śakti* will guide you to discriminate right from wrong.

* * *

Keep your mind calm by thinking of God and about God. The delight that God gives you when you contemplate Him is the way to peace. Serve God in everyone and everything. Pūjā and āraṭi are also God's service.

* * *

By engaging in japa, meditation and keeping *satsanga* one's inner power (*śakti*) increases. What one receives depends on one's attitude of mind and heart. In all states and conditions it is man's duty to tread the path to God-realisation. If you cannot get *satsanga* read spiritual books.

* * *

At all times remain steeped in what is REAL—remembrance and refuge! Thereby even death dies, where the remembrance of God persists there is no room for sorrow. Where is the time even to think? Jealousy, hate, anger, greed—none of these have the chance to arise.

—————

MATRI SATSANGA

Swami Bhagavatananda Giri

(Translated from Bengali)

New Delhi, 25-11-57

Question : Suppose someone has prostrated himself in *pranāma* and is then unable to get up, how would you define such a state ?

Mataji : The saying : “Roots above and branches below¹” applies to the human being, whose head is his root and his body represents the branches. With a tree it is just opposite : its head or root is down below and its branches up above. The seeds are present in all its limbs, you may know what is written in the *Śāstras*. This body talks in a higgledy-piggledy fashion. What is not potentially contained in the root, how can it become manifest in due course ?

There is a definite procedure for doing *pranāma* to the Guru. *Naman* means to render oneself pliable or lowly ; *naman* also means *na-mana* (no mind) in other words, not to be confined to the mind. If one has got rid of the mind, that is to say if whatever is in the mind has been surrendered, what is one's true Self (*svarūpa*) ? This will then become revealed. There is a Bengali Song² : Only the one *namaskāra* oh Lord, only the single *namaskāra*.” If *namaskāra* in the true sense comes about, nothing will remain any more. If *namaskāra*

1. “*Ūrdho mūlam adha śākhā*”, Bhagavad Gita, XV/I,

2. By Rabindranath Tagore.

is real and total, *samādhi* will supervene of itself. If the thinking mind does not function, then who will get up ? By performing *namaskāra* again and again, real *namaskāra* may take place provided there is a favourable conjunction. Some people get a headache when they try to meditate. Why ? It is due to a clash between the upward and downward tendencies of the mind. In the case of full and genuine brahmacharya contact with the source or root is established and the mind automatically gets wholly absorbed in meditation. So long as the ego remains, proper *namaskāra* cannot be performed. Egotism brings suffering ; where, by doing *namaskāra*, sorrow and strife are mitigated, there one should do *namaskāra*, there indeed one should sit and lie down. By the sustained practice of *japa*¹, *dhyāna*² and *namaskāra* these occur effortlessly.

Don't you sometimes say "such and such an image, is made of stone and another one of metal" etc. But if you think of it as a stone, the presence of Śiva is not felt any more ; and if you consider it to be Śiva it cannot be a stone. Similarly, if you look with reverence at a *śālagrāma* (*Nārāyaṇa śilā*)³, it is no longer just a piece of stone ; but if you call it a stone it cannot be *Nārāyaṇa*. All names are God's names. Name and the nameless, form and the formless—all are He and no other.

-
1. *Japa*—The practice of repeating a mantra or the Lord's name as a means of the continual recollection of His presence.
 2. *Dhyāna*—Meditation.
 3. *Śālagrāma* or *Nārāyaṇa śilā*—A special kind of small stone regarded as an emblem of *Nārāyaṇa* (*Viṣṇu*).

What do you consider a stone actually to be? These are all different expressions of the ONE. If you look with devotion you will perceive God in a stone. We must regard our *vigrahas* or Deities as embodiments of THAT. Even if this is actually perceived, the perceiver has still remained. The *triputi*, i.e. division into knower, knowing, knowledge must be abolished. The presence of God must be realised by direct perception. Go higher up, beyond the level of knowledge (*bodha*). Everything is just an expression of God. Formless and with form are one and the same—just like water and ice. What is ice? Nothing but water. So long as the vision of Reality is not constant, so long as the touch of Supreme Being is not felt uninterruptedly, conflict will persist. Try to go further beyond! To perform *namaskāra* in order to become free from conflict and doubt—transcend even this! Rise above the state where one argues whether God exists or not.

Some people inquire: "Where does God reside, for I cannot perceive Him?" But there is no question at all of His existence or non-existence. While doing obeisance remember, "the deity I worship is indeed the Lord of the whole universe, and within all the deities of the whole universe my Lord is present. Just as my Guru is the World teacher and the World teacher is my Guru." The *vigraha*¹ has to be looked at as an embodiment of

1. *Vigraha*—Concrete External Presence as Form. An image consecrated through mantras or through the devotion and adoration of the worshipper becomes the Deity Itself.

Reality Itself. The joys and sorrows of this world are transitory. Therefore bow down in *namaskāra*. Not to be able to rise up after doing obeisance is also a stage. Then there follows a state where the question of rising up or not does not exist anymore.

When performing *namaskāra*, first of all think : "God is right in front of me," and have His *darśana*. Next, when you bow down in *praṇāma* to Him, let your gaze wander from His lotusfeet to His head. Some people hold the breath within while viewing the Deity from the feet upwards and exhale when glancing at Him from His head downwards at the time of doing their *praṇāma*. Thereafter imagine : "the Lord's merciful hand is resting on my head in benediction." You believe don't you, that electricity can be passed on by hand ? Similarly also, from the point of view of the world, He whom you venerate as your Guru or as God, does possess this power (*śakti*) in each of his limbs, and by His mere touch this power can be transmitted to you. Thus, when you start by gazing at His feet and then have full *darśana* while inhaling, think earnestly that with your breath His power is entering into yourself. Further, when exhaling slowly, slowly, while viewing Him from His head downwards, dedicate yourself totally. By this type of *darśana* you are being purified. Now you have earned the right to fall at His feet, so prostrate yourself full length (*danḍavat*). Whatever you may now say or do, it all represents Him alone.

Question : You have taught us all this by your personal example.

Mataji : Well, but this little girl is crazy.

The next stage is *bhakti* (devotion)—one starts worshipping with deep feeling. There is a great difference between going through the motions of *namaskāra* and genuine *namaskāra* coming about spontaneously. Just as taking *saṁnyāsa* and the actual state of *saṁnyāsa* are two entirely different things. One gets initiated into *saṁnyāsa* in order to become a true *saṁnyāsī*. *Pranāma* means full prostration (outwardly and inwardly) so that full power may be received from Him.

Pitaji, you are a learned pandit, see how impudent is this little daughter of yours ! She just converses with her fathers, mothers and friends.

Every form is indeed a *vigraha* of God. Whether changing or changeless, He is present in all shapes and guises. Everyone must strive for the revelation of his own true self (*svarūpa*). To pursue *Brahma-vidyā* (knowledge of the Eternal) is the only real study. The learning, in other words the action (*krīyā*) within the disciple that is brought about by the Guru's *śākti* is the only learning worth while.

“If *SĀDHANĀ* is one's purpose in life, one must not allow it to become shrivelled and emaciated.”

—Sri Sri Ma.

IN ASSOCIATION WITH SRI MA ANANDAMAYI

Amulya Kumar Dutta Gupta

(Translated from Bengali)

Sri Sri Ma visits Calcutta and Dacca.

After the month of Jaistha (June) 1937, I did not meet Ma again until over a year later, on Oct. 16th, 1938. During this long interval, many memorable episodes had occurred round Sri Sri Ma. Towards the end of Jaistha in 1937, Ma left for Kailash from Almora with Baba Bholanath, Jyotish Babu, Swami Akhandananda, Gurupriya Didi and the eldest son of Sri Pran Kumar Bose, etc. I heard many interesting details about their travels from Baba Bholanath and Didi. Jyotish Babu was seized by an intense spirit of renunciation on reaching the shores of *Mānas Sarovar*, so much so that he entered *Samnyāsa* spontaneously. Ma thereafter named him Maunananda Parvat.

On the 10th of Śrāvaṇa, Didi had written to me from Dharchula (on the way back) that Jyotish Babu was very ill, but that the rest of the party had returned hale and hearty from Kailash. In such a serious condition Jyotish Babu was brought back to Almora, and on the 2nd Bhadra (mid-August), at the feet of Sri Sri Ma, he left his body, uttering the name of Ma with his last breath. He had requested everybody present to sing the name of

Ma around his death bed, and had himself initiated the tunes so far as he could. This report of his demise could serve as an example to be emulated by the foremost *sannyāsi's*.

Sri Sri Ma's condition had changed perceptibly from the day after Jyotish Babu's death and She gradually lapsed into a deep *samādhi*. When She regained outer consciousness after two or three days, they all started with Her for Dehradun. On reaching the Kishenpur Ashram, Ma for several days took only a few sips of water, later She had fruit juice and finally a little rice.

The next event within Ma's orbit had been the death of Dādāmaśāi (Her father) in Calcutta on the 1st. of Paus (mid-December) 1937. Ma had arrived in Calcutta a few days earlier for a short visit and returned to Tarapith. At the exact moment of Dādāmaśāi's death, Ma was in a train on route to Kashi.

A few months later Baba Bholanath left his mortal frame. In April 1938, Ma was in Hardwar to attend Pūrṇa Kumbha Melā. Many of Her devotees gathered there and took part in bathing with great joy. Baba Bholanath used to take out kirtan processions daily.

After Kumbha, Ma went to Dehradun but within a few days Baba Bholanath returned to Kankhal for the initiation into *Sannyāsa* of Swami Akhandananda, brother, Sri Kunja Babu. Probably it was during this period that the virulent poison of small pox entered Baba Bholanath's body. When he returned to Dehradun the disease was well

advanced. At this juncture, Ma sent Didima, Didi and others away from Dehradun. Sri Bhupatinath Mitra, Jogesh Brahmachari and a few others remained with Her. At Bhupati's advice, the well-known Kaviraj and devotee of Ma, Śri Śiva Śankar Sen was summoned from Dacca by telegram. But all his treatment and Sushilā Māsīmā's devoted nursing proved of no avail. Baba Bholath left his mortal body on Friday, the 23rd. Vaiśākh (May) 1938. At the time of his passing Sri Sri Ma's merciful hand was resting on Baba Bholanath's head.

I further learnt that four or five days before his death, Baba Bholanath had started addressing Sri Sri Ma as "Ma" and had also prayed to Her, saying, "Ma, please forgive me !" He had been initiated into *Samnyāsa*, so in accordance with the practice prevalent for *Samnyāsis*, his body was consigned to the holy waters of the Ganga at Hardwar.

The news of Baba Bholanath's death reached Dacca during Sri Sri Ma's birthday celebrations. A pall of gloom descended on Bholanath's disciples and devotees. All of them felt that they had lost one of their very own and been deprived of his protection. Even though Baba Bholanath's external behaviour had sometimes appeared abrupt, his nature was truly artless and tender. Whenever he saw anybody afflicted with grief or sorrow, he used to feel anxious and coaxed Ma to relieve the sufferer. So far I have never noticed anybody ask any favour of Ma directly. This task was always left to Bholanath. In our difficulties and tribulations it

was he who used to reassure and comfort us. In times of distress we never were deprived of his sincere sympathy. Thus, by his departure we were plunged into a dismal abyss.

During the Pūjā holidays in 1938, I was staying with my family in Calcutta. On enquiry from Sm. Bhramara Ghosh, I found out that Ma would reach Calcutta on Sunday, Oct. 16th, and was likely to take up residence at the Deshabandhu Girls' School on Russa Rd. Sm. Bhramara was the Principal of the school and had taken the Secretary's permission to provide accomodation and food for Ma and Her party in the school premises. As this was very near our residence, this arrangement proved a great boon for me.

On Oct. 16th, Ma reached by the Delhi Mail. A large crowd had gathered at the Station to welcome Her. The devotees smothered Ma with garlands inside the train and thunderous shouts of "Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma ki Jai" rent the air. I just could not squeeze through the crowd to get near Ma but mentally from a distance silently tendered my homage to Her.

On reaching the school, Sri Sri Ma had a wash and sat down in the 1st floor hall at about 10 a.m. Ma asked me when I had arrived in Calcutta, how long I was going to stay, and so on. At about 11 a.m. Ma was taken away for a rest.

Since Ma's health had been indifferent for some time, the retired Civil Surgeon Dr. Pant had accompanied Her from Hardwar. In consultation with him the times for Ma's darśana were fixed

from 8 a.m. to midday and 4 to 9 p.m. daily. Without a doubt such an arrangement was very necessary because thousands of people wanted to see Ma and offer their *praṇāmas* at Her feet. Faced with their agitated persistence, Ma would at times ignore the limits set by the doctor and run outside to meet people.

Adhivāsa Kirtana by Simla Devotees.

At about 5-30 that afternoon Ma attended a programme of recitations of stotras but before the end Ma was taken for a drive. On returning, Ma sat down near the Kirtana Mancha (alter). The courtyard of the school had been specially decorated. Above was spread a canopy in all the colours of the rainbow. Every pillar was wound with bright silk ribbons. At one end of the courtyard was Ma's dais and at the other end a less high alter on which pictures of Śrīkrishna, sri Gauranga and Sri Ma were artistically displayed. In the middle, facing Sri Sri Ma's seat, were the dual images of Srikrishna and Sri Radha.

Several well-known Kirtana singers had become Ma's devotees, accompanying Her from Simla. It was due to their initiative and enthusiasm that this *Nāma Yajña* was being performed in Calcutta.

As soon as Ma took Her seat, the *Adhivāsa Kirtana* started as a prelude to the continuous kirtana to be performed the next day and night. At the start the devotees burnt incense and lit a 5-wick oil lamp in front of the deities, put garlands round their necks and sandal paste on their foreheads, and commenced singing :

"Sri Krishna Chaitanya Prabhu Nityānanda,

Hare krishna Hare Rāma Sri Rādhe Govinda,"

while perambulating round the *mancha*. At this stage the crowd became so dense that not all present could catch a glimpse of Ma, so She stood up on Her *āsana*. Ma's face was radiant and full of bliss. There was a wonderful glow on Her countenance and a beautiful garland round Her neck. An inspiring sight ! Ma clapped Her hands in rhythm with the music to encourage the participants who became carried away by enthusiasm and danced around, singing kirtana. After some time, Ma was taken to Her room and the kirtana died down.

Nāma yajña and Sri Sri Ma's Bhoga.

The next morning I arrived at about 9 O'clock. Ma was still in Her room. Didi took me Ma. I performed my *praṇāma* and asked : "Ma will you not go on to Dacca ?" Ma replied : "It is you all who will have to decide that. This body is at your disposal." She pointed to Dr. Pant, and added : "You can talk to Pitaji about going to Dacca." Then She turned to Dr. Pant and said : "Having come to Calcutta from so far, if we do not go to Dacca, people there will be most disappointed".

Dr. Pant inquired from me about the weather in Dacca and about facilities during the journey. I understood from Ma's demeanour that She would definitely visit Dacca.

Thereafter Ma went to the kirtana. *Bhoga* had been fixed for midday in the hall on the 1st floor. Six *āsanas* had been spread, one for Ma, the other

five for Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Nityānanda, Srinivāsa, Gadādhara and Acharya Advaita. Before each *āsana*, *bhoga* had been placed consisting of 16 different items. On each *āsana* was placed a garland; a incense five-wick oil lamp and camphor were being burnt. *Āratī* and kirtana for *bhoga* were started to the accompaniment of cymbals and mridanga (drums). The ladies frequently blew conch shells and uttered auspicious sounds. Ma kept sitting on Her *āsana* with Her head bent sharply and appeared to smilingly observe everything without actually looking. At the end of the *bhoga āratī* She was full of praise for the efficient arrangements made by the Simla devotees.

After *bhoga* Ma was taken away for a rest but as the crowd invaded even Her bedroom. She was removed for privacy to a nearby park. Ma returned at about 5 p.m. and after a while sat down once more near the kirtana altar. A large crowd had by then collected for Ma's *darśana* and to offer *praṇāma* to Her. The singing had continued non-stop from the morning. Whenever Ma approached, the enthusiasm of the assembly rose to a crescendo. Since many were unable to catch a glimpse of Ma She stood up on Her *āsana* for some time. Then suddenly Ma Herself joined the singers and, swaying from side to side and clapping Her hands in rhythm with the music, She commenced circling round the altar with everybody. The entire congregation were charmed by Her serene smile and the vigorous movements of Her hands, feet and body, and started coming closer and closer. To

save Her from being crushed, Swami Akhandananda, Didi and a few others formed a cordon around Ma by joining hands, and after a while Ma was taken out of the crowd. But she could hardly walk. On the way from the school courtyard to the main road, she sank down limply. Everyone felt anxious. There was still a substantial crowd round Ma and hardly room for us to penetrate within. So at the last resort a hand fan was pressed into service and nearby devotees started singing kirtana softly. After a while Ma recovered somewhat, sat up and was taken out for a drive.

Sri Sri Ma's Unsolicited Mercy.

After dinner that night, at about 9-30 p.m. my elder brother expressed a desire to visit the kirtana, so I accompanied him. On arriving at the School, Sri Brajen Ganguli, the well-known exponent of kirtanas, was singing very melodiously. We sat for a long time listening. At about midnight we had just come out into the main road before returning home, when we heard the sound of kirtana emanating from the 1st floor of the school. On looking upwards, I beheld Ma standing on the balcony adjoining Her room. By the light of someone's torch shining on Ma, I perceived that She was dressed as Sri Krishna with armlets, garland and crown made of flowers.

On seeing me, Ma laughed and exclaimed : "See how they have dressed me up ! Now, if bashful modesty assails me from right or left, what am I to do ?" We all started laughing loudly. Ma then took off the ornaments one by one. The crown

from Her forehead She flung towards me. Before it could hit the ground, I caught it, touched my forehead with it, and considered myself very blessed indeed. To devotees singing on the 1st floor, Ma threw Her flute, also made of flowers. Near us an aged person was slowly proceeding along the road. On noticing Ma, he cried out : "Ma, I have to take my leave now, I have not been able to have your *darśana* even after waiting for so long ! Ma threw a flower armlet towards him and said : "Take this, it will suit you admirably well !" The gentleman obviously did not understand the significance of Ma's words. The armlet hit his body and fell to the ground. I picked it up and gave it to him, saying : "Ma has presented this to you." The gentleman's face lit up with inner joy. He said loudly. "Ma, have you really given this to me ? So may I put it on ? I shall return to-morrow wearing this." Ma asked him : "Tell me, why did I say it would suit you admirably ?" The gentleman replied : "Will you please enlighten me ?" Ma said something that none of us could grasp. Then Ma addressed the old man once more saying : "You see we are all women meant to serve. There is only the one *Parama Puruṣa*.* Is it not so, Baba ?" Ma left the veranda and entered Her room and we all returned to our homes.

(To be continued)

* This reference of Ma is well illustrated by the following anecdote in connection with Mirabai who in her later years took up residence in Vrindaban to savour Krishna *līlā* fully. Mirabai had heard of the wonderful love and devotion to Sri Krishna preached by Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu and his followers. Rupa Goswami, his leading exponent,

IN THE FULL MOON LIGHT

M. P. Jain

In this sylvan silence sitting still
As I look at the full moon above,
My heart gets drenched in Thy love
And the whole being feels the thrill.

In this stillness of night as I wait
For Thy coming on the wings of waves
And watch the environs in silvery grace,
I lose my entity and my weight.

This river flowing majestically in rhythm
Despite all hurdles will reach the sea,
Even so all thoughts are dissolving in Thee
And all phenomena are attuned with Thy hymn.

These hills and vales, shades and shadows,
Moon and stars and firmament bright,
These only reflect Thy effulgent light
And point to the eternity behind evanescent shows.

In this quietude of the Soul as I dive
And glide into the waveless sea of bliss,
All words, images, rhymes and rhythms,
Mind's buzzings and conceptions are left behind.

was then living in Vrindaban and Mirabai expressed the desire to meet him, who was then living as an austere ascetic on the shores of Radhakunda. He said : "I am a Vaiṣṇava *sannyāsi* and cannot meet any woman whatsoever." Mirabai, on hearing this, exclaimed : "Oh, does then Rupa Goswami consider himself a *Puruṣa*, when Sri Krishna is the sole *Paruama Puruṣa* in existence ? In fact we all without exception are only His *gopis*, meant to serve Him in our various capacities."

Needless to say, Rupa Goswami at once nobly rectified his error by meeting Mirabai personally.

WITH MA IN ALMORA

(Reminiscences)

Satish Chandra

In June 1977, when Ma was at Almora, my wife and I had the good fortune to go there for a few days. Ma was in good health and was able to move around on Her own. She was also in an excellent mood and more communicative than usual. The local crowd was very orderly. They came for darśana morning and evening but did not stay beyond the appointed hour. This gave us an opportunity to have long informal sittings in Ma's room every morning and evening.

In perfect peace, we along with a few others, listened to numerous anecdotes with Ma's explanation of the lessons to be drawn from each. A notable feature of these anecdotes was that most of the listeners were left with the feeling that one or the other anecdote was related specially to provide an answer to the unasked questions in his or her mind. Encouraged by the informal atmosphere, we were able to freely express various doubts which had arisen in our minds from time to time and received clarification from Ma in Her unique style. All in all, it was a rare opportunity—a dream came true. The gains from this visit in the field of *Adhyātma*. I do not have the capacity to describe or evaluate. But I can say with conviction that such opportunities can never be the result of

our own planning. They have to come as gifts out of Ma's graciousness.

I am giving below a gist of some of the questions and answers with my comments hoping they may be of interest to the readers.

Question : We know that in a subtle form Ma is always with us wherever we may be. But on special occasions such as an accident or sudden illness is it possible to invoke Ma's special presence or protective hand? Does the Guru-mantra have the power to achieve this purpose?

Answer : Yes. The mantra has the necessary power.

Observation : I am sure the answer given by Ma will be a source of strength to all devotees.

Question : Sometimes when there is a large crowd we have to stand in a queue for doing *Praṇāma* to MA. After a long wait when our turn comes, we sometimes find that MA is looking in some other direction or busy talking to some one else. As the queue has to move on, we have to lay the flower garland or whatever other offering we have brought at Her feet and go away wondering whether MA has at all seen and recognised us. On such occasions are we justified in feeling deprived of MA's attention which we are always craving for?

Answer : This body can take in any queue at one glance irrespective of its length. In fact when thousands of people are sitting in a Pandal, this body can register in one glance not only who all are present but also the posture and mudra (attitude) in which each one is sitting. On the occasion to which you have referred, when this body looked at the queue I found you were busy talking to the person next to you and were not paying any attention to this body. This body

wondered whether Pitaji had seen and recognized this little girl. So, when Pitaji came close, I turned my face away like this (and MA actually turned Her face away with Her characteristic smile).

Observation : The lessons which I drew from MA's reply were :

- (i) There is no reason to feel dissatisfied when we find that MA did not look in our direction when we offered *Pranāma*. Rest assured she has seen you and given Her blessings.
- (ii) When we are awaiting our turn for MA's *darśana*, indulging in loose talk with our neighbours is highly disrespectful to the *Mahapurusa* for whose *darśana* we have joined the crowd. We should remain all attention to MA.

Question : Can Guru Kripā either soften or completely wash off *prārabdha* ?

Answer : *Bhagavat Kripā, Iṣṭa Kripā, Guru Kripā* are there all the time. But, these are effective only when there is *Ātma Kripā*.

Observation : It should be noted that MA did not answer the question asked. After prolonged deliberation, it dawned on me that the reason for this was that I was not entitled (अधिकारी) to ask this question. The question has significance when a *Sādhaka* has reached or is about to reach the stage of *Mokṣa* or release from *Karma Bandhana* and the cycle of births and deaths and wonders why the body is still continuing to function. The

answer is that the body falls away only when *prārabdha* is exhausted and there is no carry over of *bhoga* resulting from actions in previous lives. For me, who was until then a mere toddler, still struggling with the initial steps on the path of *Sādhanā*, the question was of academic value only. Therefore MA indicated that for me it was important first, to establish myself on the path of *Sādhanā* through *Ātma Kripā*, my own effort in staying firm on the right path by observing Guru's instructions strictly and diligently.

DEAR GODDESS

Elwood Decker

This earth is a School
To learn or Thy Rule
Our soul is of Thee
In Whom we are Free

Below and Above
We learn Thou Art Love
For all Equally
Such Love sets us Free .

We shall come and go
Until Thee we Know
Though we love our class
From it we must pass
Be it soon or late
We must Graduate

DEVOTED TO SRI SRI ANANDAMAYI MA

R. Rattan Singh

It was a strange meeting. Yet it was not really strange if we believe in the all-pervasive presence of Universal Mother. Strange, perhaps, are the ways in which the presence reveals Itself.

It was at the blessed home of one of Her great devotees in the U. S. A., that I happened to visit and stay for a few days. A whiff of the eastern wind seemed to dilute some of the air of a very western environment, and the lady of the house so charmingly let it mingle about her. Particularly so in a little room made holy by the meditation done, and the holy pictures and the little things kept in veneration of God. There were also photos of Sri Ma, insence and Her touch of blessing on the rosaries and dry flowers. Far away from Her physical presence, Her spiritual "pull" was so strong that it moved me completely and lifted my soul to the beauties of Her beautitude and benevolence.

I felt Ma's very presence here.

Like plants that bloom and in course of time shed their seeds to germinate and fill the place with verdant growth and the fragrance of flowers, the fortunate ones who have had Ma's darśana or Her vision, overflow with Her Grace and spread the joy, the ānanda of Her Being far and near. And

thus we meet, not knowing how and when, to fulfill Her benign call.

We felt the warmth of the rays of Her radiance here.

I met Elwood and Ann Decken. They are Mother's devotees who have never been in Her physical presence, yet have Ma's spiritual presence permeate their every thought and action. They are a perfect example of the germination of Mother Love, sprouted thousands of miles away, the seed borne by the winds of the spirit blown strong by the forces of Karma.

When I asked the question, "How did you come to know about Ma?" He looked at me intently, perhaps surprised and puzzled. To be asked such a question was almost an incredibility. Really, how could one blessed by Ma ask another devotee such a question? I felt so ignorant and unworthy. Instantly it dawned on me that I was far, far short of any understanding of the path of Truth. I was animated by Ann and Elwood and was eager to share our experiences of Ma. Something in Elwood's personality prompted in me a deep respect for him and I asked if I could address him as 'father' in the manner we are accustomed to show reverence in our culture. He brought a large album to show us.

The album contained pictures of Ma from Her early days to some of Her latest ones. One was of a large group taken in the Shabagh Gardens. I tried to recognize familiar faces but couldn't. Some had poems that he had composed in praise

of Ma. A few photos were very rare ones, indeed they would be because he had taken such pains to collect them or reproduce them from every possible source. I could have looked at them over and over again, but time was short. He told us of many cherished incidents and showed us some drawings by a little girl on the subject of God. With moist eyes with love for Ma, Ann told of the vision she had of Ma when she placed her feet on Ma's slippers. Arpita, another devotee had come with them. She and her husband had visited Ma in India and they hope to go there again, some day.

Before leaving, Elwood showed us a large picture of Ma and said that it was for me. I was overjoyed.

For a long time I had been trying to get a large photo of Ma. I made many attempts, but every time I failed to get a good picture. The last time I gave a coloured reel to a friend to take photos of Ma at the Birthday celebrations at Ramtirtha Ashram at Dehra Dun ; I found they too were not clear enough to enlarge. I was so disappointed as I got them a year later when I came to the United States. But Ma has Her own ways of fulfilling Her devotees' wishes. Ma chose Elwood to give me a large photo of Her. It was such a surprise. I was most fortunate to have a photo of Ma made by the same devoted hands that have *sādhanā* for Ma pulsate in every touch, in every movement of his deft fingers. In this gift is Ma's blessing. And little did I know that the *prasāda* from Ma that I

had brought, had to be shared by Her beloved devotees, so far in space, yet so close in spirit.

Later Elwood and Ann wrote to me. I have great pleasure in giving extracts from the letter for our readers to know something of great devotees in distant lands and their devotion for Ma. It is a long answer (to my question that I had inadvertently asked) interpreted by episodes of a lifetime spent on the path of Truth, Yet, Elwood said he couldn't pinpoint any single incident that he could say pressed the switch of the Light. His whole life unfolded itself with Ma's radiance.

He looks back with meaning, to his young days when a psychic friend said, "I see a woman dressed in white hovering over you, protecting you." Other incidents are no less propitious, such as his visits to Hindu temples, his devotion to Mother Kali, reading Paramahansa Yogananda's autobiography, and even earlier in his childhood when he experienced bliss at the moment when he was miraculously saved from drowning in an abandoned reservoir. When he read about Sri Ramakrishna, it made him long to cry for God. He also remembers vividly the after effects of watching Uday Shankar and Simki dance in San Francisco in the 20's.

A fellow artist once gave him two photographs of sculptures. One, representing Lord Siva as Nataraja, was most beautiful. The other of Kali was frightening. As a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna's beneficent, blissful Mother Kali, he was not satisfied with a Starved ascetic. So he prayed to Mother Kali to give him a beautiful image of

Herself. When he saw a coloured photograph of Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma he knew at once Mother Kali had answered his prayers. He copied the picture in colour, because the book was out of print. It was a frontpiece in an early publication called "Mother" by Devotees.

He reminisced on the dominant influences on his religious thoughts, of Sri Ramakrishna and Nyogen Senzakes Zen, both somewhat reconciled by Sri Ramana Maharshi. But still he was unable to say how far memory could go, "no, not yet.....at present I really cannot say how I first came to learn about Ma. It concerns me more to learn how to better respond and abide in Ma's Grace wherein all we children sooner or later merge In Oneness".

Eastern philosophy deeply impressed him and he listened to many great Swamis and learned speakers and searched for a way to express his love for God. He wanted something original and first hand. For him nothing could be more original than his love of art as a form of *sādhanā*. He was attracted to abstraction by which fresh combinations of principles provided a first hand subject, not an imitation of something already existing in Nature.

'I was impressed by a teacher of California School of Arts, Rudolf Schaeffer, who said, "Beauty is the balance of unity and variety rhythmically related in expression". Here I found an inexhaustible principle to follow that left me freer and freer.....though the way to its successful expression may lead through much observation of the qualities and rhythms of the already existing things created in

Nature, for our education—not imitation. Nature also creates shortcuts through man for man.' (In this idea I find so much of Ma's teachings, that God's Truth can be realised on endless paths, to each one's way). He says, 'One can learn more about colour from 60 different wheels than from 60 million flower gardens. Size or power per se does not count as much in Art or Religion, as quality. The invisible factors are more important than the visible'. How very true. 'In the creation of a piece of art, the unity of the work has been enriched by emotional freedom and spontaneous differences in detail that somehow contribute to the overall effect. The carefully planned design of the main masses is plainly there, but you *know* it was *Something* superior to caterpillar intellect that *inspired* the result. For me this is the elementary example of Art in *Sādhanā*.'

'Can I rightly call it meeting with Ma abstractly? For those of us who are inclined to believe in an innermost Power that surely guides our mental faculties when we try to use them rightly...it really doesn't matter what Name of Form anyone else attributes to It. I believe this Supreme Universal Power is incarnate on earth in the Form of Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma. She does not always wait until we do what is right to let us know She is with us.'

'Nevertheless, our duty on earth is to remember as constantly as we can to attune ourselves to Her inherently original, beneficent *kheyāla* for each of us and do as She inspires, so that finally there will be no separateness for any of us. If we are artists,

it will happen in art, or whatever we are, it will happen there, It is only in our experience that we discover the degree of authenticity of our attitudes and if necessary, change our attitudes for the better. Prayer can not only change effects but also attitudes. It is another way to meet Ma.

Anne loves Ma too, and together they share a feeling of Her closeness. Elwood had planned to conduct seminars and hold exhibitions and give lectures in various colleges, But after realizing Ma was here on earth, instead of making a better movie that he had eagerly planned, he made a couple of albums of still photographs of Beloved Ma. Anne was so wonderful about it, she said, "I'll be glad when you care more about God than about art".

Such rare devotion for Mother inspires in me a desire to lift myself above the mundane existence of living. Jai Ma, Jai Ma.

"When thinking, think of Him, When working, do His service. Pilgrims must keep on advancing on their journey. To spend one's days practising the presence of God means to progress on the pilgrim's path."

—SRI ANANDAMAYI MA

AMERICAN DEVOTEES GREET SRI SRI MA IN THEIR HEARTS

Elwood Decker

Thou Bringest Beauty's Bliss
With Thy Sweet Loveliness
Destroying all sorrow
Today and tomorrow

While Saving from the past
Only Ideals that Last
Raising Their Quality
To Thy Infinity

With Independence
In Thy Transcendence
Free from contention
Of sense conception
Freedom from *all* bondage
From youth as well as age.

"It is natural for human beings to cry. If you cry for worldly things, it only increases your attachment to them, and more and more impurity accumulates. But by crying for God, all impurity is washed away".

—SRI SRI MA

WITH MA AT PURI IN MAY-JUNE, 1979

R. K. Banerjee

After Ma's hurricane tour visits to Hyderabad, Bangalore, Madras with all the pomp and ceremony of the birthday celebrations, it was natural for Ma to seek quiet sanctuary in Her tiny and salubrious Ashram at Puri, where She had last attended the *Rathayātra* (car festival) in 1965. I had had the good fortune to be present on that memorable occasion.

The South Indian cyclone in May played havoc with train schedules, so that Ma and Her party arrived over 36 hours late at Bhuvaneshwar on May 20th midnight. Ma had spent hardly eight hours in Madras at the earnest request of the Governor of Tamil Nadu and it was the Governor of Orissa who was her host at Bhuvaneshwar for a few hours. With a party of over sixty Ma arrived in Puri on the 21st afternoon by car. I had reached Puri the same morning.

Ma walked slowly down the paved, sloping corridor to the Ashram entrance. She sat down on a chair in the front courtyard, which had been decorated in simple style, and local girls welcomed Her by blowing conch shells, singing, and performing *ārati*. Quickly the crowd grew out of proportion to the space available, and Ma was not given rest for an hour. In due course the multitude

was slowly dispersed through combined efforts and Ma was enabled to escape to the back courtyard. Surrounded by high walls it has a gateway with an uninterrupted view of the sea beyond. There Ma stood for some considerable time enjoying the pure, ozone-laden sea breeze. At night She was taken in a chair to Her room on the first floor and She never came down until June 27th, the day of Her departure for, Jamshedpur en route to Kashi, having a brief darśana of Sri Jagannatha Deva on Her way to the station.

To enable Ma to have as much rest as possible, official *darśana* was restricted to 6-30—7-30 p.m. in the hall upstairs. This meant shepherding continuous queues up the staircase and past Ma's dais. But as Ma almost instantaneously appeared restored to Her normal radiant self and entirely relaxed in the invigorating sea-air, devotees were not debarred from paying their obeisance between 10 and 12 midday.

Ma's party included about 40 Samnyāsīs, Brahmachāris and Brahmachāriṇīs of our Ashram, for most of whom accommodation was provided in the premises of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha nearby. However, as Ma's stay was extended again and again, there was ever more scarcity of space especially during the *Snāna Yātrā* (bathing ceremony) on June 10th and the Car Festival on June 26th.

Visitors started flocking from Calcutta and elsewhere for short and long stays. The Raja of Gondal and his brother, the Rajkumar and his

wife were constant and devoted visitors. Sri Saradindu Niogi, in spite of failing health, paid a flying visit. Sri Jagannat Roy and his wife arrived ; they had not so far been able to approach Ma after the tragic death of their eldest daughter. Justice S. R. Das Gupta and his wife remained in Puri for an indefinite stay in spite of the difficulty of finding accommodation during the seasonal rush. The late Shantimoy Banerjee's family came to pay their respects to Ma after the recent demise of the head of their family. Ma extolled the virtues of the departed in Her inimitable manner. Ma's brother with his wife and party arrived from their South Indian pilgrimage. As his health appeared considerably impaired, he and his wife remained behind at Ma's request while the rest of the party left after a few days.

The Ashram quickly settled down to the usual routine of *satsanga*, four times daily, namely *Usha Kirtana* at dawn, *Gītā*, *Chandi*, *Upanishad pāṭha* and talks by Swami Sachidananda on the *Bhāgavata* from 10—11-30 a.m. *stotra pāṭha* and *Rāmāyaṇa* in the afternoon and *kirtana* by chhabi Banerji and others in the evenings. All this took place in the spacious back-courtyard over which a conopy had been hoisted to keep out sunshine and rain, yet leaving the sea breeze free to enter the windows of Ma's room and the hall.

Gradually Ma increased Her activities. On May 29th, there was a musical programme in Her presence from 5-30—8 p.m., in which local artists participated. It was greatly enjoyed by devotees

and casual visitors alike. At Ma's requests Chhabi Banerjee's melodious kirtanaa, in which everybody joined, was the last item.

The weather was hot and humid, but Ma seemed to take everything in Her stride, and obviously liked the simple, regular life in the limited space of the Ashram on the seashore. As in Kan-khal the surrounding area is covered entirely with other Ashrams and abodes for peacefully retired bhaktas and *vānaprasthas*.

On the 22nd morning the Governor paid Ma a visit. Ma was keenly aware of the Ashram's needs and even put spare apartments in the Government House at Swami Paramananda's disposal. However, devotees and ashramites alike were reluctant to stay at such a distance and lose the spiritual atmosphere of the Ashram and its surroundings. The famous Haridas Math, Gaudiya Math, Thakur Sitaram Omkarnatha's Ashram, Bharat Seva Sangha and others were within walking distance from our Ashram.

Brahmachāris from Sri Sitaram Omkarnathaji's Ashram regularly performed Sankirtana in our front courtyard. One afternoon, all senior sādhus of Haridas Math, led by their Mahanta, paid their respects at Ma's feet and set quietly in Her presence for nearly an hour. On the morning of June 1st the Ashram girls performed Ma's puja on the occasion of *Saṣṭhi*. Mataji's benedictory glance was directed towards the entire assembly for almost an hour while we all basked in complete bliss in utter silence.

Professor Sher Singh, a Central Govt. Minister of Education, paid his respects to Mataji on the 1st afternoon. His Holiness Swami Chidananda, Head of the Divine Life Society at Rishikesh, for three days held a religious convocation at the local S. C. S. College. He used to visit Ma every afternoon with his entourage and I was privileged to play *kartal* (cymbals) during his short but stirring kirtanas. Swami Chidanandaji, although a senior Mahāmandaleswara, never hesitated to prostrate before Ma. His striking simplicity and noble bearing endeared him to all. He was accompanied by the Paramahansa of a nearby monastery and a couple of his disciples well versed in religious music.

On June 2nd Pandit Dinesh Chandra Shastri came with Chaitanya Ma, a *sādhikā* notably versed in Gopal worship. Shastriji had met Ma already in 1927 in Dacca. We had good fortune of listening to a conversation between Ma and him for over an hour. That evening the last rites were performed for a dead body on the sea-shore, between our Ashram and the adjacent crematorium, in full view of Ma's windows. She gazed steadily towards the burning pyre and would not allow the windows to be closed in spite of stray fumes entering the room. I was to understand the significance of all this 48 hours later.

On June 3rd, Pandit Shastri was again present at the morning satsanga. Ma was in a mood to relate stories. The first dealt with the history of an earthen pitcher, with the great variety of suffering

it had to undergo until it was finally ready to be filled with Gangajal for Puja to be performed. The second story described how fate will have its way in spite of all efforts to escape it. Then Ma gave an example of how, on rare occasions, destiny can be averted by God's grace. She told how

- young Ramlal was on the point of death at the Kishenpur Ashram several years ago. His desperate parents had given up all hope and prayed to Ma. The boy's life was saved and he has grown into a fine young man.

In the afternoon Mataji described before Swami Chidanandaji the gist of the celebrations during Sri Muktananda Giriji's centenary at Kankhal a couple of years ago. In the evening, during the public darśana, a three years old child was brought to Ma's feet. The child was unable to eat anything and appeared to be doomed to die. The mother had tried all known medical treatment in vain and was now advised to seek remedy in divine healing through Ma. Ma prescribed a diet which had effected a cure in a similar case several years ago. On June 4th, the Governor paid another visit to Ma and was closetted with Her from 10 to 11 a. m. That evening an extraordinary incident took place. Swami Chidanandaji was unable to come, but the Paramahansa arrived at 5 p. m. with his disciples to sing Kālīkirtana to Ma. Some of the songs were his own compositions set to Ramprasāda's tunes. I was playing the cymbals in accompaniment. Ma had reclined comfortably on Her dais, when suddenly at 5-30, She sat up abruptly and said :

"It is fitting that you should sing these devotional songs, for "he" was fond of them ; but now start singing "Hare Krishna"! Ma glanced pointedly at me, so I at once began to sing the *Mahamantra* as best I could. Within seconds, Swami Paramanandaji arrived in a hurry and said to Ma : "We have brought "him" by car to the sand beyond the back gate leading to the seashore, so that you can see "him" from your window".

Ma at once requested me to go downstairs and continue to sing "Hare Krishna" near the newly arrived "visitor". This was none other than the 14 years old son of Smritikana, the eldest daughter of Sri Ashutosh Banerjee, a cousin of Gurupriya Didi. After a long illness the boy had died the previous night at Kharagpur. His body had been brought by taxi to Puri by his parents for Ma's final benediction.

I was particularly fortunate in finding Santosh Bhattacharya, an experienced Kirtana singer, beside me on my way downstairs and asked him to assist me in singing the holy Name. I started circling slowly round the body while singing the *Mahamantra*. Soon Ma asked me to sit down so, facing Her, with my back to the sea, I sat next to the body and Santosh and I continued to sing until 6-35 p. m.

Under Ma's instruction, Beenadi and Nirmalji, two senior Ashramites arrived to dress the body in clean clothes and anoint it with sandalwood paste. Garlands and flowers were sent for from jaganathji's temple.

Meanwhile the father was arranging for the cremation at the ghat adjacent to our Ashram, while the boy's mother knelt beside me on the sands praying in silent grief for the peace of her son's soul. As 6-50 p. m. a strange incident took place within a few seconds. A crowd of devotees and outsiders had gathered near us in the falling dusk, when suddenly two fierce, snarling dogs rushed past me between the legs of the spectators, brushing my body in their rough passage. I saw clearly that the leading black, repulsive looking beast was quickly overhauled in its run towards the exposed feet of the body, by a nobler looking brown dog, which snarled ferociously with bared fangs, and eventually drove the black dog away. The whole thing was over in a flash, but Santosh had risen in alarm.

To me it seemed that the black dog was the personification of *Yamadūta* (messenger of *Yama*, the god of death), and the brown dog, of *Viṣṇudūta* (messenger of Lord Viṣṇu) who had, supported by Ma's holy presence and the Lord's name, succeeded in preventing any mischief being done to the body of the departed soul on its transit to the bosom of the Almighty.

A few minutes later, Mataji asked Km. Chhabi Banerji to relieve me, as I was leaving puri the same night. Feeling unfit in my present state to approach Ma, I entered the rear courtyard, prostrated in *pranāma* and loudly asked Ma's permission to depart to Calcutta. Equally loudly Ma fared me well on the journey and by the time I had asked

Ganga water to be sprinkled on me, Ma had sent Udasji down with fruit *prasāda* for me.

I had just sufficient time to go to my Panda's house, bath, change clothes, pack and partake of Sri Jagannathji's *prasāda*, before taking a rikshaw to the station. There, Santosh and Tapas met me and briefly related what had transpired after my departure.

I could not sleep for a long time that night marvelling at the amazing way in which Ma had reproduced Paurāṇic conditions—e.g. the story of Ajamil's death—through the might of Her power, even in the rampant Kaliyuga in 1979 !

Glory be to Ma on earth and to God in high heaven.

“To weep and lament over the loss of a loved person, at times interferes with the spiritual progress of the deceased. One comes across other stories of a similar kind. It is man's duty to remain steady and calm under all circumstances, and to pray only for the welfare of the soul.”

—Sri Sri MA

THE ENLIGHTENED ONE

M. P. Jain

One who knows is the awareness,
The limitless ocean of bliss,
The perennial flow of consciousness,
And he knows he is, he is.

Cutting all the knots with this earth
Rising above mind's domain
In the realm of reality he takes birth
Leaving behind pleasure and pain.

The body remains, embodiment goes
Perfect identity with Self is established,
Nay, he himself becomes the Self
As his mind and ego are extinguished.

A true seer of all the passing show,
Ever remaining above life's vicissitudes
He bestows peace and joy on all
Who come under the glow of his beatitude.

Once for all, time and space he transcends,
The condenser thus himself becomes the Main ;
A unique mystic light his presence sheds,
Always abiding in the Self, the Self remains.

PRAYER : ITS SIGNIFICANCE AND VARIETIES

Acharya Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyaya*

[Letter dated 24th October 1940 addressed by S. C. M. to Shitikantha Jha of Sodepur as revised again by the writer and split into five letters.]

Letter No. 1.

You have tried to explain at considerable length the position you take upon the question of prayer. Thus you write (Bengali text which translated runs as follows) :

“It is only when the weak man in extreme agony or distress feels himself quite helpless that he does send up his prayers for urgent help. It is known that whenever a man with a sorrowful heart has sent up his prayers to the Lord to free him from various *achit* (worldly) troubles and tribulations of body and mind, He has listened and has answered, and it can be said that He always listens to and answers such prayers.”

This represents one aspect of your case and the first with which I shall deal here. Your point is

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—Editor's note

that if a *jīva* (individually) suffers from *achit* troubles and tribulations and if such a *Jīva* ardently, wholeheartedly prays to the Lord for relief, He always responds. To this point of your case I have nothing more to say except that although I may fully agree with you here, I must add that I differ from you as regards the way in which you may construe or interpret my answer. I must therefore explain myself at some detailed length. First of all, if you agree that the object of the *Jīva's* prayer as well as of the Lord, is to free the *Jīva* from all *achit* troubles and tribulations, how could you hope that the Lord will respond by providing the praying *jīva* with *achit* (material) entities, whose possession in the very nature of things will be a perpetual source of trouble and suffering however temporarily they may serve your purpose well. The point for us to remember always is that the possession of *achit* entities and enjoyment thereof by the *jīva* in a spirit of attachment (*Vide Gītā* II, 62-63 and V, 22) are bound to end in spiritual disaster.

Therefore while the Lord is bound to listen to the *jīva's* heart-rending prayers, He cannot at the same time add to the *jīva's* permanent miseries by providing him with *achit* things. Here is a real dilemma which has got to be solved. My solution is as follows: However much the *jīva*, under pressure of *achit* suffering, may invoke the mercy of the Lord to provide him with particular *achit* material objects of which he may stand in immediate or urgent need, the Lord would not *ordinarily* listen to his prayers. But He would do it, if indeed his

suffering had been so extreme in the matter in question that he had utterly lost faith in external worldly aids and had in the process learnt to look upon the Lord as his only Protector and Saviour. Therefore in respect of the matter in question the *jīva* must have reached a state of utter exhaustion of efforts, of utter self-abnegation and self-abasement, but this, not in a vague general sort of way, but absolutely and literally from the very depths of his heart. Then only the *jīva* may be said to have reached out his hands to the Lord and shed all his ingrained sense of dependence on personal self (ingrained because, begotten of his sense of personal doership or *kartā*-ship) and so recognised the Lord as the only *kartā* (actor). This is called the state of *Ārta*—the deeply distressed. If however he has some *Śubha prārabdha* i.e. good meritorious past karma to his credit, he may get over it without being required to arrive at the stage of utter exhaustion which is known as *ārti*—the state of an *ārta* i.e. of one whose distress is of such extreme character that he has utterly lost all hope of any relief from all outside aids, and who therefore does look up to the Lord as his only Rope for the time being. If he does not come under this last-mentioned category, but has some *punya* (merit) i.e. *Subha prārabdha* (good karma) to his credit, the Lord as I have said, will provide him with what he wants by reason of his having earned it as a matter of past karmik merit.

Your view of the matter may be summed up as follows : Because the Lord is omnipotent, therefore

the *jīva's* appeal to Him for *achit* objects of which he stands in sore need is bound to be granted, provided only that the *jīva* sends up his appeal whole-heartedly. But you seem to forget that the Lord loves the *jīva* more than the *jīva* loves himself; and therefore it is not for the Lord to minister to the *jīva's* wants in a way that would do him spiritual evil or injury. Secondly you seem to take it for granted that what the *jīva* prays for should be granted, because in the *jīva's* view it appears to be highly desirable or needful for him. But the truth of the matter is that the *jīva* being fettered, i.e. being a person with serious limitations of knowledge, cannot and does not know what is truly and ultimately for his best. Therefore one must not run away with the idea that because suffering is unpleasant for the time being, it is by itself a downright evil, in case the Lord chooses in His Providence to visit the *jīva* with it. Thirdly and lastly, you seem to take for granted that *achit* suffering is bestowed on us by way of punishment or penalty for a wrong done by us. But the truth is that such suffering is only a spiritual antidote to the wrong that has been committed, because it helps us to wipe out past evil *prārabdha Samskāras* (tendencies) left on the wrong-doer's *chitta* (consciousness) as on a gramophone record. For, unless these *Samskāras* or impressions left on the *chitta* or the sub-conscious mind of past pleasurable activities or the reverse are wiped out, the *chitta* remains clouded or darkened with *achit* forces, i.e. does not attain to or recover its purity. This purity

of the *chitta* is comparable to the dazzling purity of a mirror which has hitherto remained soiled or obscured by dirt. When these *Samskāras* are wiped out, the radiance of the *Chit*-self penetrates the hitherto dark covers of the *chitta* and illumines it with the light of truth and *jñāna*. It may here be further noted that if and when the *chitta* recovers its utter purity and brightness, it becomes fit to receive the Divine Image reflected on it. (I explained this important point in my Bengali letter to Śarat of which you have kept a copy. In that letter I have established this position and quoted the necessary scriptural authorities). Now if this be the truth, namely, that the *chitta* must be freed from *achit* dirt begotten of past *achit* experiences, known as *Samskāras* which are lodged in it in order that the Divine Image may be reflected in the *chitta*, what follows? It follows that if the Lord goes on providing His *jīva*-child with *achit* entities, whenever such *jīvas* whole-heartedly pray for them, then there is no chance for the *jīva* to get freed from the shackles of *achit samskāras* (worldly tendencies).

(To be continued)

Someone asked Mataji : "Have you seen God ?"

Mataji replied without the slightest hesitation : "Why indeed, He is always visible. Yet again, who sees whom since all are He ? In every truth, nothing exists apart from God."

GLIMPSES OF MA IN CALCUTTA

Anil Ganguli

(continued from the last issue)

Ma's lightning visit in 1973 was a poor consolation for the devotees of Calcutta. In response to their earnest prayer for a longer stay Ma spent about a fortnight in this city in February/March, 1974 not in Agarpara this time, but in South Calcutta. Sasadhar Bhattacharya, formerly Secretary of the Ekdalia Ashram, was chiefly instrumental in choosing the site for the *Bhāgavata Saptaha* in Jodhpur Park. Ma stayed in a newly constructed abode in the garden attached to Pratibha Kumar Kundu's residence.

Professor Narayan Goswami of the University of Calcutta, a descendant of the family of Sri Nityananda Prabhu, chanted and explained the *Bhāgavata* with emotional fervour. Besides, discourses were given by eminent professors such as Professor Tripurari Chakravarty, Dr. Gaurinath Sastri and Dr. Govinda Gopal Mukherjee. Dr. Mahanamavrata Brahmachari made a deep impression on the audience by his inspiring lectures on Sri Krishna.

There was a tremendous rush of people in the pandal every day, but no disorder. Everybody seemed to be satisfied because there was no bar to *darśana* of Ma. For hours people were fortunate enough to see Her, though from a distance. Again, unless admitted through Ma's *kheyāla*, nobody got

an opportunity to satisfy his or her special claim to priority over others in the matter of private interviews. Everyone was happy. It was indeed a pleasure to see thousands of men, women and children, each with a smiling face. The organisers, including the members of the host's family, set an example of self-denial by not availing themselves of the opportunity of private interviews, except in discharge of urgent duty in the service of Ma. Ma was brimming over with energy and overflowing with benevolence in showering Her benediction. She was fully occupied somehow or other from early morning till late at night. Notwithstanding so much strain, She looked hale and hearty and younger by at least twenty years. Ma's prolonged stay in South Calcutta was a boon for thousands of persons and She was pleased to visit a number of people suffering from illness and old age and to give them peace and strength of mind. Lastly, Ma's sojourn in Calcutta on this occasion is memorable for initiation of hundreds of persons for whose benefit a specified period was set apart.

The devotees of Calcutta were fortunate enough to have Ma in their midst again in the summer of 1975—this time for 3 weeks, a comparatively long period for Ma to stay anywhere at a stretch. The occasion was momentous—Ma's eightieth birth anniversary. And great was the enthusiasm of Her 'children' in Calcutta, enriched and emboldened by their recent experience of the successful *Bhāgavata Saptaha* at Jodhpur Park.

A pandal of enormous size was erected in the

Ashram to accommodate thousands. It was indeed a piece of art in the sense interpreted by a philosopher-artist : "Art is a collaboration between God and the artist, and the less the artist does the better." The devotion, imagination and ingenuity revealed in the decoration of the dais and the auditorium, and in the selection and arrangement of pictures and mottoes displayed on the walls and pillars proved that in this case art was not merely a hobby or pasttime or profession but a priesthood in a spirit of self-effacement.

The daily programme of *Utsava* of ten days, commencing from May 20th, included items suitable for minds belonging to different cultural and spiritual levels. To start with, there was, early in the morning, *Rāsa līlā* by the famous Har Govinda's party of Vrindaban, depicting well-known stories from Krishna's life and replete with popular songs which captured the imagination of the audience. Then followed serious discourses on religious subjects. Among the *Mahātmās* who participated in the *satsanga* were Sri Vishnu Ashramji Maharaj of Suktal, Maha Mandaleswar Prakashanandaji Maharaj of Jagatguru Ashram, Hardwar, Sri Girdhari Narayan Puri, Mahanta of Nirvani Akhara, Kankhal and Sri Jogesh Brahmachariji of Calcutta. Talks on religious and cultural subjects were also given by many other speakers including Professor Tripurari Chakravarty, Dr. Gaurinath Shastri, Dr. Roma Chowdhuri and Professor Narayan Goswami. A galaxy of Pandits, including Sri Hari Narayan Vedatirtha, performed

Maha Vishnu Yajña for the well-being of all, in the *Yajñasālā* near the temple of the Ashram. Wonderful was their chanting of the vedic hymns in chorus. Recital of the *Chāṇḍī* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* was also among the regular features of the daily programme. One evening the organisation for children known as C. L. T. enacted scenes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* with consummate artistic skill. Another evening a group of artistes played a drama depicting the *līlā* of Thakur Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Invariably, the evening session included a highly attractive feature—songs of some of the best musical artistes of Calcutta such as Sukhendu Goswami, Siddheswar Mukherjee and Chhabi Banerjee. One evening the artist of artists—Ma Anandamayi—took an active part in the music for an unexpectedly long period. She began singing at 10 p.m. and went on with one *kirtana* after another and remained in the pandal till 2 a.m.

The surroundings were most favourable. Thus, the Ashram, with its temples and tradition, has a sanctity all its own and sublime is the holy Ganga with her unceasing tides of ebb and flow and its riot of colours at sunrise and sunset. The daily programme was ennobling and the presence of the Mahātmās inspiring. Moreover, the organisers and volunteers, all devoted to Ma, had one common objective—to make the celebration worthy of being dedicated to Ma. Above all, there were continuous spiritual vibrations emanating from Ma. No wonder, the eightieth *Janmotsava* in Agarpara was a grand success.

A memorable event which considerably added to the value of Ma's sojourn in Calcutta on this occasion was the meeting between Ma and Thakur Sitaramdas Onkarnath, the renowned spiritual master having thousands of disciples all over India. What was indeed remarkable, but indescribable, was the prolonged communion between the two Beings in perfect silence which had a profound influence on all present.

The *Janmotsava* continued till the 29th of May and was followed by *Nāmayajña*, which concluded after sunset on the 30th. As a lasting token of their devotion to Ma, the devotees of Calcutta published a special Souvenir Volume for Ma's eightieth Birthday, partly in Bengali and partly in English, containing valuable information about Ma's life and teaching and some beautiful photographs.

After the *Janmotsava* was over Ma spent another ten days in different localities in and near Calcutta. During this period She was pleased to visit the houses of many devotees, showering blessings on sick and ailing persons and on spiritual aspirants who needed assistance and encouragement. Ma left Calcutta on the 10th of June 1975. Thereafter, She gave us a surprise visit in August, 1976, for a short period, stopping at different places including Agarpara and the garden house of Bibhuti Chakravarti at Bhasagram. On this occasion *Janmastami* and *Nandotsava* were celebrated with eclat. Among the visitors were Siddhartha Sankar Roy, formerly Chief Minister, West Bengal and Deva Kanta

Barua, formerly President, Indian National Congress.

After Ma's lightning visit in 1976 two years rolled by without any indication of Ma's *kheyāla* to come to Calcutta. Her health was not at par and the crowd in Calcutta, usually unmanagable, was a formidable fact which had to be carefully considered by us. In May, 1978, R. K. Banerjee, President of the local Committee of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha, led a deputation to Ma, then in Kankhal, with a prayer for Her pleasure to come to Agarpara at any time convenient to Her. But Ma's previously fixed appointments stood in our way and it did not appear to be Ma's *kheyāla* to give us any hope of a visit in the near future. Anyway, we had the satisfaction that at least our submission had been placed before Ma.

We went on looking forward to the unknown date on which we might again have Ma in our midst. On the 24th of August, 1978, there was a rumour that Ma had come to Calcutta. The news, hardly believable, was eventually confirmed and it transpired that when Ma had alighted from the train in the morning there had hardly been anybody to receive Her at the Howrah Railway station. Ma's sojourn at Agarpara on this occasion was very short but it was crowded with important programmes. Thus, *Janmastami* was observed on the 26th of August and *Nandotsava* the next day, and on the 28th Ma opened the three-roomed block overlooking the Ganga, recently built in memory of Sm. Janhavi Devi, the mother of Dr. Gunen.

Roy, President, Shree Shree Anandamayee Charitable Society.

In no time the news of Ma's advent spread like wild fire and naturally devotees flocked to the Ashram by the thousand. We had not got the slightest indication that Ma could be expected in Calcutta notwithstanding so many calls on Her time elsewhere ; and so no previous arrangement had been made for the protection of Ma's body from the mobbing crowd. In the circumstances, the organisers had only two alternatives to choose from—to try to ensure Ma's comfort by adopting strict measures against indiscipline or to oblige as many as possible of the frenzied claimants for *darśana*, *praṇāma* and private interview. A sense of duty prompted them to choose the first alternative even at the risk of losing their popularity. Arrangements were made for Ma to remain in a Veranda on the roof behind iron bars. And volunteers, fully alive to their duty to Ma, rose to the occasion while dealing with persons who claimed to be above rules. Inevitably, there was discontent and resentment in some quarters. Unfortunately, some genuine devotees were deprived of an opportunity for *darśana* even from a distance because they were endowed with a sense of discipline and many of them lacked the muscular strength and nervous energy necessary to elbow their way ahead towards Ma through the impenetrable crowds waiting on the stair-case, veranda, and in the garden.

Some sincere devotees, thus frustrated, mentally

submitted to Ma their heart-felt prayer for better luck next time. One devotee—Bibhuti Chakravarti—had fondly cherished the hope of being Ma's host on the occasion of Kali Puja in 1977 in his garden house at Bhasa, but somehow or other that hope of his could not be fulfilled. Undaunted, he kept on making preparations "still nursing the unconquerable hope" that Ma would some day grace Bhasa by Her august presence.

The earnest yearning of these devotees did not go in vain. After a lapse of only two months—on the 29th of October, 1978—Ma came to Bhasa. Naturally the joy of Her host knew no bounds. He got his well earned reward. *Kali Puja* and *Annakūt* were celebrated in his garden house. The devotees of Calcutta in general also got an opportunity for *darśana* at Bhasa. Ma seemed to be abundantly generous in bestowing Her grace on every single person, so that the flow of mercy that radiated from Her Being bathed all who came within Her orbit during the four days and three nights of Her visit.*

During Ma's sojourns in Agarpara, from time to time, thousands have come to the Ashram for Her *darśana*. Among the visitors there were many Westerners, including journalists, tourists and genuine seekers after Truth and Ma was revealed to each according to his or her approach,

Sri Daya Mata, President, Self-realisation Fellowship, U. S. A., had Ma's first *darśana* at

* *Kalipuja and Annakut at Bhasa* by R. K. Banerjee *Ananda Varta*
Vol. XXVI No. 1, p. 48.

Agarpara in 1959. Although the head of a World-wide religious organisation, she seemed humility and self-effacement personified. "February 12, 1959", she observes in an article published in the *Ānanda Vārtā*, 'was a wonderful day in my life, for on it I met a holy personage, the joy-permeated Anandamayi Ma...As my eyes first beheld the blessed Mother, it seemed that a great dart of love went out from Her and struck my heart, leaving me transfixed. I remained in that state for some moments, eyes locked on the Mother, feeling great waves of love surging within me'.*

Sri Daya Mata's experience at the feet of Ma on a subsequent occasion has also been recorded by her in the same article : "The mother had invited our group to see her at the home of a devotee. We went there and sat in front of her, meditating. I found, in Her holy and loving presence, that my consciousness became immediately withdrawn, centred upon the Beloved Mother. On this occasion, as I sat on the lawn, absorbed within, suddenly I felt a tremendous spiritual experience in my spine, centering at the heart *chakra*. A feeling enveloped me of great, expanding peace, spiritual fulfilment and oneness with the Universal Mother. It seemed, too, that my heart would burst with the great surgings of love that flowed through it, the sweetness of which flooded my eyes with streaming tears". At the time of parting Ma removed from her neck a string of small rudraksha beads. "She

* *Ananda Varta*, VII 3/130.

put them about my neck", continues Daya Mata "and said with great tenderness 'this daughter of yours ever lives in your heart.'" On one occasion, Daya Mata told Ma, "You have captured my heart". Like a tiny child Ma replied, "And I won't give it back !"

Melita Maschmann, a German novelist, some of whose books have been translated into several languages, was fortunate enough to have a taste of Ma's love, as recorded by her in her diary in words as follows :—

"Agarpara, January 1964.

One morning on the roof of the Ashram. I struggled with my *śārī* at which the wind was tugging. Mataji stood in the sun enjoying the vigour of the storm. Suddenly our eyes met. Her look had an expression of all-embracing love. It rested on me for a long time. But while feeling held by it, I simultaneously felt that it also encompassed the trees behind me, the village, the clouds and the thief who was walking down the road with a stolen kid. Strangely, I did not feel that I received any less of the love that was lavished on the trees, the village and the thief. On the contrary I felt more loved because of it. In Mataji love reached up to the horizon. —Something of this I had felt at my first *darśana* of Mataji. But then I did not know anything of Her actual realisation of *Advaita Vedanta*. It is not that Mataji has adopted

a philosophical doctrine which She found convincing and translated into behaviour; rather the final mysterious Truth expresses itself and takes shape in Her life, as it has manifested again and again in this country in special human beings. About eleven hundred years ago it was formulated into the doctrine of *Advaita Vedanta* by an Enlightened-one, Shri Sankaracharya”.*

Another well-known Westerner—Arthur Koestler—who visited Agarpara Ashram some time in the late fifties, seems to have approached Ma from a different angle of vision. It appears from his book entitled *“The Lotus and the Robot”* that immediately before *darśana* of Ma in Her room, in the Ashram, this eminent writer had to wait for twenty minutes in the assembly hall, in the company of about fifty, all engaged in meditation, including two sisters from Los Angeles. “I was unable”, he says, “to enter into the spirit of the silence and wondered why.” In answer to his question as to whether She approved of what had been written about Her, claiming that She was of divine origin, Ma said: “Everybody sees in me what he likes”. Koestler’s impression at the first *darśana* was that Ma was “restless.” Visitors with a responsive mind invariably see in Her an embodiment of poise and peacefulness. While sitting in the assembly hall before

* *Ānanda Vārtā*, XV/5/244. Melita Maschmann’s book about her impressions of Ma, entitled: “Der Tiger sing Kirtana” has been described by Prof. Dr. Alexander Lepski of California State University as a spiritual masterpiece”.

and after the *darśana*, this learned author's mind kept on wandering, with meticulous care, over things of the surface—"the ugliness of the bare room with its dirty and peeling plaster-walls" and "the bed with its greyish creased sheet". He says: "I felt no magic coming from Ananda's person and no particular emotion." It may be noted that one who comes to Ma for magic is usually bound to be disappointed; and one who expects emotion from Ma is supposed first of all to explore his own mind for a search within and not to suffer his attention to be diverted away from Ma towards trifles and trivialities not worth noticing.

Ma's visits to Calcutta are few and far between. But every visit, however short, has invariably electrified the atmosphere and attracted new devotees and admirers. A notable phase of Ma's recent visits to Calcutta is the *dīkṣā* (initiation) of hundreds of persons under Ma's inspiration and direct supervision.

"*Dīkṣā*" is initiation into the spiritual life. Usually *dīkṣā* is given by a Guru (spiritual guide) to his disciple by whispering into the latter's ear some *biḥja mantra* (a sound-symbol of great potency) representing the *Iṣṭa*, suitable for a particular individual. And what is *Iṣṭa*? *Iṣṭa* (literally meaning 'Beloved') is the deity chosen by the Guru as the particular aspect of the Divine with which the disciple will have to be in perfect communion, ultimately leading to communion with the One Supreme. "There are", Ma once observed, "various kinds of initiation: by *mantra*, by touch, by a

look, by instruction' *** The Guru helps the disciple's self-purification by removing the dark forces which usually blind the latter's eyes.

What is the significance of initiation ? Ma has answered this question in simple words : "You want to call somebody you can see, but you don't know his name ; so you somehow or other try to attract his attention by beckoning or calling out, using any words which occur to you. He comes over and says, 'Were you calling me ? My name is such and such'. Similarly God Himself in the role of the spiritual preceptor (Guru) discloses His Name to the pilgrim wandering in search of a guide. After initiation, random efforts are over for the pupil (śiṣya). He has touched the lifeline which will lead him to the goal. In the ultimate analysis, the disciple realizes that he is One with the Name and the Guru. And how can it be otherwise ? He alone can impart the gift of this Name and none but He Himself can sustain the knowledge of His Name."

Is the Guru indispensable ? To this question Ma has given to different persons different answers which are apparently contradictory. Normally Ma advises devotees to look for a Guru, and generally She lays emphasis on the importance of the Guru in the disciple's spiritual progress. She teaches that the Guru should be looked upon as God's representative and the Guru's instructions should be followed without questioning. Again, one day Ma told somebody that one who incessantly repeats the Name of God can attain everything—peace and

deliverance. Thereupon Amulya Dutta Gupta, who was present, asked Ma whether a Guru was at all necessary for one who had taken refuge in the Name of God. To this Ma gave a lengthy reply the gist of which is as follows :—

“Very well, if you think you can do without a Guru, that’s nothing wrong. Go on taking the Name of God on your own, that will suffice. But many spiritual aspirants relying on their own power, sometimes get fatigued and despondent and then they feel the need of a Guru for help for onward march. Normally men cannot move forward without a support and hence the need of a Guru. Not that it is not possible to invoke God without taking recourse to a Guru”.*

Once a questioner asked : “Is Self-realization subject to the powers of the Guru or does it occur independently ?” Ma’s answer is illuminating :

“First of all, it must be made clear that it is the action of the Guru’s power which induces the functioning of will-power ; in other words, this will-power may be said to be derived from the power of the Guru. Thus it is but the One Himself who manifest in both, the Guru’s power and will-power. Who or what is that One Self ? All that is manifest is He, and no other. Why then should the path of self-dependence, (*puruṣakāra*) be classed separately ? Of course, it may be differentiated from the rest, but one must understand that it is based on the working of the Inner Guru. There are

* *Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi Prasanga* by Amulya Dutta Gupta, Vol. I, pp. 4—5.

seekers after Truth who are bent upon proceeding without a Guru, because along their line of approach emphasis is laid on self-dependence, on reliance on one's own effort. If one goes to the root of the matter, it will be seen that, in the case of a person who does *sādhana*, prompted by intense aspiration and relying on his own strength, the Supreme Being reveals Himself in a special way through the intensity of that self-exertion. This being so, is there any justification, from any point of view, for the raising of objections against such self-reliance? All that can be said or questioned in this respect lies within the confines of human thinking, which is limited. Yet, a state exists where everything is possible.

“Thus the line of approach through dependence on one's own strength and capacity is, like all other approaches, but a functioning of the One Power. Without doubt, this Guru-power can operate in a special way through self-reliance, so that there will be no need for any outer teaching. While some aspirants may depend on outer teaching, why should not others be able to receive guidance from within, without the aid of the spoken word? Why should not this be possible, since even the dense veil of human ignorance can be destroyed? In such cases the Guru's teaching has done its work from within.”*

* *Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma* (1961)—Translated and compiled by Atmananda. pp. 106-107.

Thus, it appears that a human Guru is not indispensable but a *Sad Guru* is, as clarified by Ma. as follows :—

“By virtue of the *Guru's* power everything becomes possible ; therefore seek a *Guru*. Meanwhile, since all names are His Name, all forms His Form, select one of them and keep it with you as your constant companion. At the same time He is also nameless and formless ; for the Supreme it is possible to be everything and yet nothing. So long as you have not found a *Guru*, adhere to the name or form of Him that appeals to you most, and ceaselessly pray that He may reveal Himself to you as the *Sadguru*. In very truth the *Guru* dwells within, and unless you discover the Inner *Guru*, nothing can be achieved. If you feel no desire to turn to God, bind yourself by a daily routine of *sādhana*, as school children do, whose duty it is to follow a fixed time-table.”*

Hundreds of men and women have got initiation during Ma's recent visits to Calcutta. Who is their *Guru* ? The *Sad Guru*, the Inner *Guru*.

“He who is your *Guru* is the *Guru* of the whole world and the One who is the *Guru* of the whole world is your *Guru*. Strictly avoid the company of those who awaken doubt in your own *Guru*.”

—Sri Sri MA.

* Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma (1961). —Translated and compiled by Atmananda, p. 14.

MĀTRI LĪLĀ

September—December 1979.

First of all an interesting incident that was left out in the last Mātri Līlā : When Mataji stayed in Kankhal on the occasion of Śivarātri from February 21st—26th, two Bishops and a clergyman of the Old Catholic Church in the U.S.A. had come to India specially to meet Mataji. They came daily for Her darśana and also had private talks with Her. The clergyman told us that as a child he used to get high fevers which ought to have been fatal. But each time he would have a vision of a beautiful lady all in white who made him well. Some-one recently showed him a picture of Mataji and he recognized in Her the 'lady' who had cured him. He was naturally most anxious to meet Her. At last his desire was fulfilled last February.

* * *

Mataji reached Kankhal on September 9th, and remained for nearly a whole month. For the first few days She had a fairly quiet time, giving *darśana* twice daily, mostly on Her veranda and occasionally in the hall. By and by more and more devotees gathered from all over India and a few from the West until the number became spectacular when Durga Puja started on September 27th. One evening Mataji sat in the hall and related to Mahantaji Sri Girdhar Narayan Puri that when Brahmachari Panu was at Kedarnath in August, he found to

his utter surprise that an elaborate Pūjā was performed in the Mandir on Jhulan Pūrṇimā at midnight. On inquiring why a Krishna festival was being celebrated in a Siva Temple, he was told that Siva's advent took place at midnight on Jhulan Pūrṇimā which fell on a Monday. Mataji then commented : This body is ignorant of the Śāstras, but *dīkṣā* came at midnight on Jhulan Pūrṇimā, a constellation which is sacred to both Kṛṣṇa and Śiva.

Throughout Mataji's sojourn, 108 Hanuman *chālisas* and *ārati* were performed every morning in the hall. From September 27th to October 1st, Durgā Pūjā was celebrated most beautifully and solemnly. Mataji was present throughout on Her seat by the side of the image. Sri Virendra Saksena and his mother had arranged for the festival. Everything was done in great style. Elaborate pūjās were also offered at the Daksaswar Hanuman Mandir, at Didima's Samādhi Mandir and at the shrine of Sri Adī-Sankaracharya.

On Mahalaya day a new cottage for the doctor and on Durga Aṣṭamī the new Charitable Dispensary on the road opposite the hall were ceremonially opened, both in Mataji's presence. On Ṣaṣṭi morning Mataji followed an urgent invitation to Sivananda Ashram, Rishikesh. Every afternoon Sri Brahmachari Ganguli delivered very interesting discourses on the Devi Mahatmya. On Vijaya Daśamī day Mataji sang to Mā Durgā, improvising many new invocations in new modulations.

A large number of devotees had come from great distances. Everyone was eager for Mataji's indivi-

dual attention, to offer pūjā and gifts and Ma was untiring, attending to every single person as only She can. After the pūjā She would sit under a tree near Her cottage and people lined up for *pranāma*. A veritable Goddess of Plenty, Mataji distributed fruit, sweets, clothes, etc with full hands. Everyone felt abundantly blessed.

Mataji remained in Kankhal for Lakshmi Pūjā celebrated in the fullmoon night on October 5th. Again She sang for a short while.

On October 7th morning Mataji left by car for Delhi arriving at 3 p.m. at the residence of Sri Vir Saksena where a tent had been kept ready for Her. She was welcomed with *pūjā* and *ārati* and then had an hour's rest in complete solitude before boarding the train to Baroda at 4-30 p.m. From there Mataji proceeded by car to Bhimpura on the 8th morning. In our beautiful Ashram on the bank of the Narmada Mataji could enjoy a few restful days. Only a handful of local people came for the daily evening *darśana*, and towards the end of Her stay devotees from Baroda would arrive.

On October 17th morning Ma motored via Baroda to Nadiad where Samyam Vrata had been held last year¹ at the invitation of the Mahanta, Sri Narayan Dasji Maharaj. The Mahanta was overjoyed at Mataji's visit. She and Her party were entertained to their midday meal but he himself was fasting. Only when Mataji insisted he partook of something. Before driving to Ahmedabad at 4-30 p.m., Mataji visited the Samadhi Mandir of Sri

1. See Ānanda Vārtā, April 1979, p. 127-130.

Sant Ram, the Adiguru of the Ashram. She spent one night in Ahmedabad at Sri Nambhai's residence and left for Gondal on Oct. 18th at 6 a.m. The Maharaja had come to Ahmedabad the previous night and himself drove Ma in his car. At Gondal Mataji was given a royal welcome. Last year Durga Pūjā² had been celebrated there and in 1976, Samyam Vrata³. On Oct. 20th, Divali night, Kali Pūjā was celebrated with due solemnity and splendour to the accompaniment of sweet songs by Chhabi Banerji and others. Mataji remained present all night. A very large crowd collected for the occasion. The following day Annakut was observed, when 108 different items of food were, as every year, offered to Goddess Annapūrṇā. Those who were to cook had fallen ill, but in spite of difficulties everything was accomplished to perfection by Ma's grace as usual. Ma visited Swami Narayan Temple and Ashapura Devi, the family deity of the Maharaja.

On October 24th, at 6 a.m. accompanied by the Maharaja and the Maharani, Mataji left Gondal by car, and halted at Rajkot where She visited Rāstriyashālā. Sri Purushottambhai, Gandhiji's nephew, took Ma to the room where Gandhiji had fasted and then to the large prayer hall where satsanga was held. During mauna Ma's *dhyāna* mantra was played which was relayed by the Rajkot Radio Station. From there Mataji motored to Baroda. On the way Her whole party stopped at a

2. See Ānanda Vārtā, April 1979, p. 123-126.

3. See Ānanda Vārtā, Jan. 1977, p. 76-77.

farm for lunch. Ma sat under a mangotree, ate and washed there and walked round the tree thrice, touching it and uttering 'Nārāyaṇa' three times. She related two or three incidents of how She had sat under a mangotree and the tree had died shortly after. The caretaker of the farm was called and asked to specially look after the tree and build a platform round it. From all this Ma's companions surmised that an advanced soul must have taken on the shape of the tree and Mataji had come there to give Her blessing.

At 5 p.m. Mataji reached Baroda and from there took the train directly to Kurukshetra. On October 25th the train stopped in Delhi for one hour. A large crowd of devotees came and had Ma's darśana in the train which arrived in Kurukshetra at about 3 p.m. A jeep with floral decorations with a throne and umbrella in Kumbha Mela style was ready waiting at the Rly. Station and Ma was taken in procession with Br. Udas and Bhaskarananda sitting by Her side, accompanied by a band which played all the way to the Ashram of Mahamandaleswara Sri Ganeshanandaji, where the 30th Samyam Mahavrata was observed from October 28th to November 4th at the invitation of Sri G. L. Nanda.

Samyam Vrata is always a very special experience for all who take part. Most of the Mahatmas who usually grace the occasion and enlighten the congregation by their spirited discourses were present and Mataji, as always sat for hours on the dais during the collective meditation, as well as for the

talks. Every evening Mataji replied to questions and also sang for a short time. The attendance was not as large as last year in Gujerat, but the hall was packed to capacity and there was no room for outsiders.

On November 3rd at night *Nāma-yajña* was started ending on the 4th after sunset when Ma sang "*Dhare lao*" as a fitting climax. Most vratis left on the 5th but Ma agreed to stay on and give darśana to the local people who had hardly been able to sit in Ma's presence during the preceding week.

Ma left on Nov. 7th by car for Hoshiarpur, where She spent one night. Before boarding the train at Jullundur, She halted at the Savitri Devi Ashram for a few hours where the devotees of Jullundur were waiting for Her. Ma was to proceed directly to Naimiṣāranya for a rest but a number of old devotees had fallen ill at Varanasi, so She first spent a weekened there, before going to Naimiṣāranya.

An old devotee Sm. Indumati Chowdhury who had been quite well at Kurukshetra, fell ill and just before Ma was getting ready to leave Naimiṣāranya for Vrindaban on November 16th morning, Indudī passed away peacefully with Ma's blessed hand on her chest while she breathed her last. Mataji waited for 1½ hours until the body had been cremated. Ever-compassionate Ma sent an ashramite to Calcutta with a letter for Indudī's son who is a professor there.

On November 17th Mataji alighted in Vrindaban. A Bhāgavata Saptaha was held there in great style from 20th to 28th November, arranged by a Gujrati devotee. The famous Pandit Krishna Sen Sastri was the speaker. Mataji descended to the hall on the first day, but the next day Mataji's health did not allow Her to leave Her room. However She attended when Sri Kṛṣṇa's birth was related and celebrated.

Quite some time ago Mataji had agreed to grace a large religious gathering to be held from December 1st to 3rd at the Sri Lakshmi Narayana Mandir, Modinagar. Swami Paramananda and others begged Her to cancel Her visit because of Her poor health, but Mataji would not hear of it. She said: "They are calling me with their hearts, I am going." She thus motored to Delhi on Nov. 30th, halted at our Ashram for a short while and paid a flying visit to the Maharaja of Tehri, who had recently had a heart attack, and from there proceeded to Modinagar. There is a special set of rooms for Mataji in the premises of the Mandir where Ma put up.

Ma also kept Her word and motored for one day to Biharghat, the new Ashram of Sri Vishnu-āshram Maharaj of Suktal, hundred miles from Modinagar. From there Mataji went to Delhi on December 5th. Ma had suffered from high fever in Vrindaban. Her health improved gradually as She was having plenty of rest. There was no public *darśana* but visitors who had come from great dis-

tances were allowed to see Ma and do *praṇāma* from a distance.

On December 11th Mataji boarded the train to Baroda. Before leaving Mataji talked animatedly about the "murtis" of diseases-that had recently paid Her visits. Saraswati Pūjā is to be held on January 22nd in Ahmedabad and Sivarātri on February 14th in Poona. Until then it is hoped that Mataji will take complete rest in a quiet place and recoup Her health in seclusion. 108 Hanuman Chalisas were performed daily in Delhi as well as in other Ashrams. We are all praying fervently for Ma's *kheyāla* to become quite well and strong soon. Whether Mataji gives *darśana* or not, Her very presence on this strife torn earth is an immeasurable blessing of a magnitude which can neither be expressed in words nor comprehended by the mind. Mataji has often declared that Her body does not thrive on what is commonly called food. It is nourished by the purity and sincerity of our aspiration, by our dedication to the search of God or Truth, by the constant remembrance of God, by our contemplation of THAT which IS.

OBITUARY

Sri S. N. Sopory, Vice President of Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha left his body on October 28th in Bombay. He had come in contact with Mataji nearly fifty years ago and was one of the most sincere devotees. Associated with the Sangha from its inception he was loved and respected by all. He used to carry Ma's message to everyone with whom he came in touch. By his death the Sangha has sustained a grievous loss difficult to fill. It was his well-deserved good luck to have Ma's darśana on Her way to Gujerat a few days before his passing, which happened on the auspicious day on which the Samyam Mahavrata started at Kurukshetra.

* * *

Sir Padampad Singhania left his mortal coils after prolonged ill-health in Kanpur.

A deeply religious man, he had several years ago built a beautiful, spacious Ashrhm for Mataji near Rādhakrishna Mandir at Kanpur, where Mataji and Her party used to stay for a few weeks every winter, when Sir Padampad arranged for the choicest satsanga on a gigantic scale. A number of times when he was seriously ill, Mataji paid flying visits to Sir Padampad. She also went to Kanpur in November to bless the patient for the last time.

* * *

Sri Sisir Kumar Guha passed away in our

Varanasi Ashram shortly before Mataji alighted there suddenly on November 9th. He was one of the earliest brahmacharis associated with Ma in the 1930^s. Later he got married but after a few years again joined our Ashram. When his health deteriorated he was transferred from Agarpara to Varanasi at Mataji's request. Thus he ended his earthly existence in the Muktikshetra of Kashi just after the Samyam Mahavrata.

* * *

Dr. Girin Mitra breathed his last also at Kashi shortly after Mataji gave him darśana in November. He had been associated with Ma already before She left East Bengal for good. Many years ago Mataji once stayed in seclusion in his village home in Akna, Bihar. His whole family are devoted to Her. After retiring from military service, Girinda lived in our Varanasi Ashram and then for many years in the Puri Ashram of which he was the founder-secretary. Due to failing health in extreme old age he left for his home in Bihar and finally stayed in Varanasi with his daughter who had for many years dedicated her life to the service of our Kanyapeeth.

* * *

Sri Saradindu Niyogi passed away on Nov. 23rd also in the Muktikshetra of Varanasi. He had been greatly devoted to Mataji for many years. A well-known lawyer with a flourishing practice in Delhi and Calcutta, Binuda was ever anxious to serve activities connected with Ma. By her grace he had a wonderful revelation at Sri Jagannath Dhām. It

was there that he had his last darśana of Ma during Her sojourn in Puri last June, when his health was already precarious.

* * *

Within one month we have thus lost five sincere friends and co-workers whose memory we shall always cherish. Our only consolation is that all of them died in old age under auspicious circumstances and with Mataji's blessings.

We offer our heartfelt condolence to their bereaved families. May these ardent devotees rest in eternal peace and bliss at the feet of the Lord.

“Everything happens according to one's *Karma*. It was your *Karma* to serve your son for a few years, and his *Karma* to accept your service. When it was over, God took him away. It is all God's play. Some flowers fall off without bearing fruit. Similarly the child was given to you by God for a time. This is the way of the world. There is bound to be loss and bereavement.”

—Anandamayi Ma