
Look, in order to pluck a rose one has to put one's hand into the midst of thorns. But if the rose is a person's aim and he has a keen desire to pluck it, he will not refrain from doing so for fear of being pricked. Moreover, the Great Mother arranges whatever is necessary for each one : She certainly knows the real need of every individual. If one has at least this much faith, there is no reason at all to feel distressed.

—Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi

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ĀNANDA VĀRTĀ

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

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So far as this body is concerned, nobody ever commits an offence against it and therefore there can be no question of asking this body's forgiveness. Nevertheless you will most certainly have to reap the fruit of what you have done. But this body does not feel even the faintest shadow of anger about it.

—Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi

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Sri Sri Ma's Utterances

(*Translated from Sri Gurupriya Devi's
Vol. VII in Bengali*)

A lawyer's wife asked Ma the following question :

“Ma, I can't keep my mind still ; on the other hand, as soon as I start taking God's name, all sorts of useless thoughts appear in my mind.”

Ma smiled and said, “Look, if you place a mirror in front of you and keep turning your head this way and that, then can you distinguish anything ? But if you keep your face still in front of the mirror, it is only then that you can discern what are the details of the mouth, the eyes, the nostrils, in fact all that is visible. They will all come out clearly in the glass.

But if you say you cannot find peace — where will you get peace ? If you eat raw food, you will suffer from indigestion. But if you cook it well, it is then that you will obtain satisfaction. Even in this case, you will possibly first prepare the vegetables, but that in itself is not sufficient. Although they have admittedly been cut into small pieces ; you will have to place them over a fire to boil them. Furthermore, you will have to add water, masala, etc. and cover the vessel over the fire before it can be properly cooked. Now if you remove the boiled vegetables from the fire you will be satisfied in eating them. It is not sufficient just

to place the dish over the fire, all the time you will have to watch to see if the fire is burning properly. If it does not, then you will have to add more fuel.”

Having said this, she started smiling sweetly.

* * *

At another time, she gave the following advice to the assembly gathered before her.

“Just as there are seeds inside the fruit, so also the seeds of desire and longing exist inside you. Just as the seeds inside the fruit can be destroyed by boiling it, so also can the seeds of intense longing be destroyed by dint of Sadhana and Bhajan.”

She keeps quiet for a while, and then resumes, “Open the kinks in your mind — you have to go far. All these are temporary dharamsalas, try to find out your permanent abode. When life departs from this body, only the body remains. Then who belongs to whom? It is all temporary — what is temporary must be destroyed.”

* * *

One day Didi was remonstrating with Ma that so many Ashrams were being built but no arrangements were being made to run them. Ma replied :—

“These are your Ashrams, you should know. What can be done to train up people? There is one such person who is over-looking everybody all the time. If you continue to behave properly, you will be all right. If you take the wrong path, you are bound to stumble. If you place your hands in a fire, will your hands not be burnt? He is

always watching over you to see that everything is all right, where can you run away? No one can escape from his close notice. Everything is working out all right, and will continue to do so."

* * *

Another day, a discussion arose between one's own initiative and what happens due to fate. Ma said :—

"See here, if you can once enter into a fast-flowing stream, then you will have no need for further effort to do anything. The current will take you along. But in order to get into that stream, you will have to utilise all the energy that you possess. Suppose you walk over a piece of ground to the banks of a river, then you swim in the river as far as you can, to enter the main stream. Once you enter the flow of the current then you have nothing further to do, nor should you have the strength to do anymore. The strong flow of the current will carry you along. That is why I always say — the strength you have acquired belongs to Him. Utilise it carefully to good purpose and try to enter the flow of the current once for all.

* * *

Following the trend of a discussion which arose at Vindhyachal Ma said :—

"Just as the body, while thinking deeply in a certain direction, seems to depart to another place, similarly when the proper knowledge of the soul within you gets purified and introspective, then this

unsullied feeling within the body can go elsewhere during action.

Just as when some liquid is boiled and poured out, steam arises from all of it, and is blown in whichever direction the wind is blowing, that is, it goes wherever it is driven along.

It may be that according to material sight, it may even remain unseen. But in the case of them who are able to allow their subtle spirit to pass from one place to another, this ethereal spirit can emerge from, as well as enter into, their being, and yet remain unseen. There are three different stages here. In one, the spirit emerges on its own. In the second case, although it moves on its own, its journey is sluggish, since pure and not so pure instincts are both dormant within it. In the third case, it can move freely towards whatever direction it needs, there is no question of desire or non-desire here.

Although only three cases are mentioned here, there may be infinite variations of all three.”

Ma continues in this vein.

“Again see here, just as it is said that when the Sadhaka attains his objective in his Sadhana, the body of the perfect being does not exist, that is, because there is no further duty to perform, the body is non-existent. It is also said that the body may continue to exist. In this case there may be a trace of duty remaining, but this does not lead to any further bondage.

Again, there is no question of anything remaining or otherwise because in such a state everything is possible.

The completely enlightened soul may suffer the consequences of his previous actions. Again, in such cases, there is no question of there being any consequences of previous actions — or Prarabdha.

Since the all-consuming fire of true knowledge can destroy everything, can it not destroy the consequences of Prarabdha ?

But in such cases everything that happens is true. Whatever one maintains from his point of view is true for him. But in his case it is immaterial whether he has a body or not, it is all the same.”

“God knows how to take care of those who have taken refuge in Him. Whenever help comes to you spontaneously from any direction, accept it as sent by God. In fact, everything that comes to us is God-given.

—Swami Ramdas

In Association with Sri Sri Ma Anandamayi

Sri Amulya Datta Gupta

(Translated from Bengali)

News had been received that Ma was arriving at Dhaka Ashram after 3½ years, and all of us thronged to the Ashram to behold her.

There is nobody wholly alien.

In a short time, the Ashram resounded with the advent of devotees. Sri Sri Ma laughed and exclaimed, "An Ashram is supposed to be maintained quietly, and people are supposed to come here to meditate."

Prafulla Babu's wife : It is you who gather a lot of people together and start a clamour.

Ma : I do not bring people here, nor do I create any row. I do not go anywhere. I remain quiet and exactly the same. Had I kept on rushing about, and creating a row, then this body would not remain any longer."

Ma kept silent for a while and Ma again said, laughing, "I do not go to alien people, I do not partake of other people's food. I do not converse with strangers. In reality there is no body who is a stranger. Even if you do anything separately, you do so as if it were your own consideration. When you go somewhere or converse with somebody, you

think of them as if they were your own kith and kin. Your behaviour towards others is familiar to the extent that you consider them as your own. Even if somebody were your enemy, you refer to him as your own enemy when you talk of him.

Is it possible to do good to the world in a united way?

In due course people started gathering. A retired Deputy Magistrate, Sri Manindra Chandra Dutta, came and did his pranams to Ma, who asked him :—

“Baba, are you all right ?”

Manindra Babu : How can I keep well ? I can only do so if people around me are well. What a terrible time are we passing through — there is no end to the misery and dangers faced by mankind.

Ma (smiling) : “Yes, Baba, times are indeed such. In the steamer on the way here, I heard people were dying through starvation. Some were even committing suicide after not being able to withstand any further hardship. You are only aware of a minute fraction of all the sorrows and tribulations faced by the world. All this is due to His Leela. He is clapping with both hands. It is He who is building, and it is He who is destroying. Again see here, God is looked upon as the Benefactor. What then is behind all this suffering and death ? There must be something beneficial behind all this but we are unable to understand it. It is difficult to comprehend God’s Leela. It is beyond our intelligence, that is why we must always depend

on Him. As long as we entertain hopes and desires, there is sorrow. When you renounce all this, you will find that there is no such thing as grief.”

“You have referred to the fact that you cannot keep well unless others round you are also well. Who is saying these words? Is it you? These are His own words. It is He who is speaking through your mouth. He is speaking this because He wishes to do something. Whatever people say singly or unitedly, always leads to a result. This pity that you are feeling for others will definitely produce good results.

Furthermore, when you think of everybody being good, this is not possible. The world is comprised of both good and evil. Is this not so, Baba? If somebody wants to do good somewhere to everybody, he cannot do so entirely. He can do something of course, but not completely. Similarly if somebody wants to destroy everybody, he cannot do so. But looked at from another view point, you might say that whether good or evil is taking place, this is being done in its entirety. If in doing good or evil even a single person is benefited, then this result is obtained in its entirety. Look, when you are working out a sum, the misplacement of a zero leads to confusion. In order to complete the sum correctly even the zero is required.

Of course, there are certain people who can, if they wish, completely cure the dangers confronting some place. But this takes place according to

God's will. It is He who removes the danger by influencing the Mahatmas in the right way.

I : I did not understand you correctly. You said, that when somebody wants to do good or evil to others, he cannot do so fully. Why cannot he do so ?

Ma : Due to lack of sufficient power.

I. You have also said, that in trying to do good or evil, even if a single person is benefitted, this is not done fully. How is this possible ?

Ma : You see, I have referred to the fact that if in working out a sum you misplace a single zero, the sum is incomplete. Because the whole is composed of particles. How can it be complete without certain parts ? Similarly, if in trying to do good to everybody even if a single person is benefitted, then this is necessary for the good of all. The others are not complete without the individual.

Charu Babu : Ma, is there such a state when one does not consider anybody as alien, when everybody becomes one's own friend, and this takes place in a universal manner ? In other words will there ever come a time when everybody in the world will become good, and there will be nothing evil left ?

Ma : Yes, there is such a state, and it will come. It exists because it will ultimately arrive. People do enter a certain stage in which it does not look upon others as strangers. Whatever he beholds, he sees as a reflection of his own self. Is there not such a Yuga as Satya Yuga ? Some people reach a certain stage in which he feels that Satya Yuga exists within himself. But whatever we understand

of this world, will always consist of good and evil. Good and evil will always appear to be confronted with the eternal battle between what belong to us and what belongs to others, because the world is continually in motion. Whatever you say is true in the circumstances as they can exist."

The question of Re-birth and original birth.

A certain gentleman asked the question "Is there such a thing as a re-birth?"

Ma : Yes — there is.

Gentleman : A man is usually reborn due to his previous Karma. But when he is being born for the first time, where is the question of his previous Karma ?

Ma : When God first created the world out of Himself, then He naturally considered what was happening, what will happen and what had already happened. Whatever you look upon as Karma, or the effects of Karma, is a part of that wish of His.

Gentleman : Whatever we accomplish is due to our own desire. Has God any desire ? Did he desire to start this creation ?

Ma : Yes, God also entertains His desires. This power resides naturally in Him. Do you not refer sometimes to this all-pervading power ? It is due to this supreme power that all creation, existence and destruction is taking place. When we speak of anything, we do so from a particular aspect ; that is why reference is made to the *first* creation. In actual fact, creation is without origin.

The Temples of South India

R. K. Banerjee

(Contd. from previous issue)

We left Tirupati accompanied by one of the senior Administrative Officers of Tirupati Temple and his friend, who were also keen to pay a visit to the Kalahasti Temple, which was our next destination, about 34 miles from the foot of the hills.

It was hot and dusty in the plains after the beautifully cool overnight stay at Tirupati, and we were rather late than we expected in arriving at the temple of Kalahasti at a time the sun was already high on the horizon. Nevertheless all arrangements had been made for our reception, and although the stones in the outer courtyard were practically too hot for naked feet, we proceeded quickly to see as much as we could, in the limited time available before the temple was shut down, of the extensive archaeology which exists inside the colossal walls of this mammoth temple.

This temple is dedicated to Shiva, who, if given his full title here, goes by the name of Sri Kalahastinath.

Sri—standing for Spider.

Kala—standing for Kalasaap, or the King Cobra, and

Hasti—standing for Elephant.

As mentioned before, these three are immortally entwined in the history of the devotion with which Shiva has been worshipped in these regions from times immemorial.

The Lingam is situated inside the original cave, hewn out of rock, round which the subsequent temple has been built in more historical times.

According to legend, the Swambhu Lingam in the cave was worshipped at night by a spider who used to weave an Umbrella on top of the Lingam, every night. This used to be removed by a huge King Cobra later during his worship of the Lingam, when the snake used to pile stone builders round the Lingam. These in turn would be removed in the course of the day by an elephant who used to clear all this encumbrance, and bathe the Lingam with water from its trunk. None of the three knew of the existence of the others, until the snake and the elephant met one day by chance, and were engaged in mortal combat which destroyed them both on the spot, to the salvation of their souls.

The temple, now standing well inside Andhra State, is a fine example of the massive architecture of the middle ages which prevailed in several dynasties in South India from Orissa to Tamilnad.

The site of the temple stands on the banks of a river flowing out to the sea near Madras, and heavy walls surround the temple like a fort to keep out intruders.

The halls are covered with magnificent specimens of stone sculpture which we did not have time to study or admire, but we did see a transpa-

rent Sphatic Lingam, which is said to have been installed there by the great Adi Sankaracharya himself. To prove his point the guide took a naked torch round the Lingam, and the light was clearly visible at the back of the Lingam from the front, through its body.

There are only a few Jyotirlingams like these in the main Shiva Temples of India, including Rameshwaram, Kedarnath, Somnath, etc.

The original Lingam in the sanctum sanctorum is kept well guarded, and not used for daily worship, as this is performed on a substitute Lingam in front of it. The unique sanctity of the original Shiva Lingam here is well illustrated by the following phenomenon which was pointed out by our guide.

We must have walked hundreds of yards of corridors after entering the main building to reach the sanctum sanctorum which, as mentioned before, is the original cave which may have been underground in the old days.

There are several Deepas permanently lighting up the interior of the cave whose light is steady as a rock, showing complete absence of air inside the cave, yet the flames of the two special deepas which are permanently placed in front of the main Lingam continually flicker around in a circle to show a constantly changing wind current only at that particular spot.

There is a beautiful image of the Goddess Parbati installed adjacent to the main sanctum sanctorum, and here the worshipping ritual is more impressive.

We were privileged to witness the midday arati of this temple before the inner gates were closed down for the afternoon until the evening worship.

By this time we were fairly tired, and when we came out into the open air, and were thinking of proceeding to the Dak Bungalow for lunch, we were by great good fortune requested to enter a small modern building which has been erected in the Courtyard between the temple and the main gates.

Herein we went through an experience which I would not have missed for the world.

I imagined that the temple authorities had been kind enough to let us enter this room for rest purposes, but no sooner had we sat down on the carpeted floor than the Administrative Officer put on a Tape Recorder, and quietly left the place to ourselves.

For the next 25 minutes we were regaled with the most complete and impressive account in chaste Hindi of the history of the temple, its origin, and actual recordings of morning and evening worships, which immediately took us back to the Holy Presence of Shiva and his consort, and enabled us to actually partake of ceremonies that must have remained unchanged through the centuries.

The record concluded with a beautiful rendering of the original Andhra and Sanskrit hymns compiled by famous devotees and bards, which served as a fitting climax and a grand finale to our pilgrimage of South Indian Temples, riding our hearts with a deep sense of peace and tranquility.

Before I conclude, I cannot help paying a tribute to the magnificent job being carried out by the Temple Administrative Officers in each of the well known temples that exist on every City of Southern India.

They are all Government controlled, but there is no sign of the red tape or official dome which could quite easily mar the feelings with which a devout pilgrim approaches these temples.

Comfortable accommodation is assured by the provision of State Guest Houses, and Pujas and Aratis are performed by the temple priests according to individual taste with as much devotion as if they were carrying out their own worship, and not only on behalf of pilgrims.

Great care is continually taken to keep the inside and outside of these temples clean and hygienic.

Pamphlets and allied literature are readily available to help the pilgrim to understand the history of each location, and the food and amenities provided for all classes of pilgrim generally call for very little criticism.

Finally, the unique system of tape recording as heard by us in the Kalahasti Temple is a fine example of using modern science to assist the pilgrim to attain his objective in as little time as possible, and I can only recommend that all these good measures are not only brought to the close attention of the temple authorities in Northern India, but that they are also adopted as speedily as possible in all renowned Temples such as the :

Jagannath Temple at Puri

or
 Vishwanath Temple at Banaras,
 or
 Kalighat Temple at Calcutta,
 or

The Temples of Mathura and Vrindaban.

The innate philosophy or theology behind these Temples and what they stood for in the past are by no means dead in modern times.

For instance, an ideal example can be seen today on the banks of the Ganges at Khardah, only 17 miles from Calcutta, on the Barrackpore Trunk Road. Here a Temple has been built and dedicated to Lakshmi and Narayana, modelled on the lines on the founder's Preceptor, who in turn derived his training from the followers of the great Ramanujam himself.

The founder is not only engaged in running a Charitable Hospital which he has built near the temple, but is also busy in translating into English and Bengali the unforgettable songs and slokas of famous South Indian Alwars, such as Sri Ondal, Sathkope Alwar (1000 songs), etc., and theological dissertation of famous Swamis such as Lokachari Swami, Jamunacharya Swami, and the great Ramanuja himself, whose Sri Bhashya has been included.

And so the Temples of South India live on and will live on for ever, as long as the spirit and devotion with which such Temples were built, and with which their inmates are still worshipped, remain true to their ancient culture and time honoured tradition.

My wife and I are humbly grateful that we were granted such a wonderful opportunity of taking part in this holy pilgrimage to so many places dedicated to worship God in His manifold manifestations, and that everything went off so smoothly in our travels across thousands of miles. We realise there are many other famous Temples, such as Chidambaram, Darasuram, Gangaikondacholapuram etc., which we are yet to see.

If these descriptions of our journeys inspire only a few of the readers to start out on similar expeditions to share our experiences in the temples of South India, then we shall feel ourselves amply compensated for putting our thoughts down on paper as a permanent record.

(Concluded)

“Peace will come to you on a day which is already known to the Lord, and then there will be no day or night such as you know on this earth, but perpetual light, splendour without end, peace that cannot be broken, calm that holds no fear.”

—The Imitation of Christ
Book 3 Chapter XLVII

In Her Net

by Barry Maybury

There had been the usual build-up of traffic on the autoroute the closer we got to Paris. The winter night was black and cold, but we were cosy in the car. Particularly Bernard, jammed on the back seat of the VW beetle with luggage and assorted packages !

The first Paris illuminated exit-sign loomed up. Blandine flipped down the right hand indicator and began her turnoff. 'It's the direction for eastern Paris' I said, 'ours is the next one'. She straightened the car, simultaneously indicating with the direction light what she was doing. Almost immediately the car shuddered as we were hit from behind left.

At first it didn't seem too important, and calmly I looked around to see what was happening. Then things happened quickly and terrifyingly. We were out of control and heading at 80 kms an hour towards the metal protective barrier which line the French autoroutes. In the dark I could make out the tops of tall trees beyond, indicating that there was a deep drop on the other side. My God, this is going to be a terrible accident I thought, we're going to go right over the top.

We crashed into the rail and it held. We were deflected off to the left and I saw the car that hit

us skid past facing back the other way and turning on its axis. The driver had his arms held aloft, telling us in the Gallic manner that he was blameless. He spun right around, and crashed into the barrier ahead of us.

We continued our forward momentum along the barrier and ploughed into his port side. It was for all the world like dodgem-cars, but life-size. Emotionally stunned, but with a surge of relief, I knew it was over and that we were safely through. Gingerly we emerged from our battered vehicles, we three and the driver of the other car. There were no recriminations, we were too relieved that we were all unscathed. Bernard had lost a small patch of hair on his crown, like a monk's tonsure, when his head had banged off the roof at some stage. Apart from that, nothing.

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I first became aware of Ma Anandamayi in November 1979. Her photograph was on the cover of 'Au-dela du moi' by Arnaud Desjardins. The author's dedication in the book read: To Srīma Anandamayi, in whose presence I finished this book, who led me to 'Swamiji', and to whom I owe faith and hope.

I had never heard of Her, and She was far from being the important element for me in the book.

That this book had come into my hands was one of the 'coincidences' that the spiritual seeker recognises as his destiny (often after the event).

I was coming back to Paris where I live from a convention in Cannes. At Nice airport I saw that the cover story of the shortly lived Figaro Sunday newspaper was devoted to Pope John-Paul II's visit to Ireland. As at that stage I was deeply involved in Irish life I bought the paper to see what they were saying about Ireland and the visit. On a back page of the paper there was a book review on 'Au-dela du Moi', highly favourable and quoting passages which immediately spoke to me.

Arnaud Desjardins was unknown to me. Soon after arriving to work in Paris in 1967 I had attended a film presentation and lecture of his at the Salle Pleyel, a large Paris concert hall. I was impressed by the film he showed on Zen buddhism in Japan, but much more so by the man himself. He seemed to have no fear in him, speaking simply, straightforwardly and with great authority. If I hadn't at that time been deeply involved in Transcendental Meditation I would quite possibly have tried to contact him.

I bought the book and knew immediately that it was important for me. In a practical, compelling, and often humorous way, it set out a path towards the ultimate Goal.

My companion, Blandine, was equally impressed by the book. One evening she came back to our apartment having purchased three other works by the same author. I plunged into them, and soon knew that I must try to meet Arnaud Desjardins and if possible go deeper into the teaching with him. This was not going to be easy, as he stated

in the prefaces to his various books that he was extremely limited in the number of people that he could handle personally in his ashram in Auvergne, a mountainous region in the centre of France.

One evening we dined with friends in a Paris restaurant, and when we mentioned the name of Arnaud Desjardins they told us that they had known him for many years. They said they would write to him on my behalf. Word came back some time later that I could visit the ashram on a suitable week-end.

That first direct contact with Arnaud was enormously enriching, and during a second week-end Blandine was able to accompany me. Subsequently we had the privilege of spending numerous week-ends at the ashram, absorbing at first hand the teachings which Arnaud had learnt at the feet of his guru, Swami Prajnanpad, and which he interprets so superbly for the western mind. But more than that, in his being he is living proof of the efficacy of the path he proposes.

In the lecture-hall of the ashram Arnaud has hung large black and white photographs of great spiritual beings with whom he has been in close contact during his own sadhana. One of these photographs is of Ma. For some reason I was not attracted by it.

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In April 1981 Blandine went to India where she stayed until the following July. Blandine is a medical doctor and had taken a 12 month sabbati-

cal to visit China and India at length. In China she had studied acupuncture, and now in India she wished to work as a helper in the community of Mother Teresa in Calcutta. She also had a strong desire to find Ma and have Her darshan.

Life for a young doctor in the various establishments of Mother Teresa in Calcutta is not easy, and Blandine went through an extremely difficult period there. She learned much about her own possibilities and shortcomings in this challenging environment.

While in Calcutta Blandine had discovered the address of Ma's Calcutta ashram, but for various reasons had never managed to visit it. She knew however that Ma was not in Calcutta.

After 3 months with the community of Mother Teresa Blandine decided to do a trip to Varanasi and Delhi with another young French 'co-worker', a nurse called Marie-Luce. (Marie-Luce subsequently became a sister in Mother Teresa's order). In Varanasi they wished to visit Mother Teresa's community, and in Delhi Blandine hoped to be able to trace the whereabouts of Ma.

Travelling by train they arrived in Varanasi and took a room in a simple hotel. The next day they set out early in the morning for Mother Teresa's Varanasi home where Marie-Luce wished to attend the 6 AM mass. The celebrating priest, they had heard, was a man of great spirituality, and the setting superb.

Armed with the address they took a motor rickshaw. It soon became apparent that the young

driver, although he knew the neighborhood, did not know the street. Time was passing, and they decided to part company with the rickshaw and strike out on their own.

Going in what they thought was the right general direction, they enquired of shop and stall keepers along narrow streets and passages. Suddenly they were at a ghat on the Ganges, in front of a temple. Blandine turned, and to her astonishment saw a plate announcing 'Shree Shree Anandamayī Ma Ashram'. Overcome with emotion she burst into tears. She hadn't found Ma. Ma had found her !

She went into the ashram and enquired about the whereabouts of Ma. Hearing that Delhi was her next stop, a brahmachari informed her that at the ashram there they would surely know where Ma was. He also knew the directions to Mother Teresa's home, where they arrived late but in time to participate in the Mass.

From Varanasi the journey continued by train to Delhi. There, Blandine learned that a bus leaving from near Connaught Circle would take her to the part of Delhi where the ashram is situated.

Alighting from the bus at the place indicated by the driver she tried to find the ashram but drew a complete blank. She struck out without having the slightest idea which direction she was going in. Nobody she spoke to knew where it was. Finally, after an hour of fruitless search, she arrived at a Post Office and uttered a sigh of relief. The address would surely be known here.

Alas, the person at the desk couldn't help and she was beginning to despair. Then someone else behind the counter said that there was a boy in the post office who knew the ashram and that he was present at that moment. Blandine was invited to go behind the scenes by a side door and was introduced to a young man who said that yes, he knew the ashram, and would personally pilot her there at once, on his bicycle. Off they set with Blandine riding the crossbar, to be delivered to the very gate of the ashram by this kind and helpful young man.

As at Varanasi Blandine was received with great courtesy, and was informed that Ma was at Dehradun. A visit of the ashram followed and after doing pranam to Ma's photograph, she returned to Delhi and made the necessary arrangements to go by coach to Dehradun.

Once in Dehradun she immediately went out to the ashram by motor rickshaw. Here she was quickly taken in hand by Swami Atmananda, that gentle, erudite and patient soul who was the guardian angel to so many European visitors to Ma. Atmananda told Blandine that she could come for Ma's darshan the next day at 6 PM. She then took a coach back to the town.

It was the month of June and hot. However, to be sure of being in time for the darshan Blandine for some reason decided that the safest way, where she would be in nobody's hands but her own, was to go by foot. She set out at 2 PM to be at the ashram in time for the darshan at 6 PM. Under the full heat of the sun she trudged that consi-

derable distance, arriving hot, tired but happy, well in advance of time. That day, and the three subsequent days, she had Ma's darshan. She also had the great privilege of a brief personal word with Ma, through the kindness of Atmananda. This meeting with Ma was a momentous and shattering experience for her.

Back in Paris, via her letters, I had the vicarious pleasure of sharing these enriching experiences.

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After Blandine's return from India we again started our visits to 'Le Bost', Arnaud's ashram in the Auvergne. It is situated some 400 kms south of Paris and often people who had not gone by car would seek lifts back to Paris from those who had.

After the week-end 5-7 March 1982 we were not surprised when one of the ashramites, a well-built, olive skinned man in his middle to late 30's, unknown to us, asked whether we could give him a lift as far as Montlucon where he would take the train to Paris. He introduced himself as Bernard Pernel. Bernard was finishing a 2 week's stay at the ashram, and as tradition demanded, we first of all drove him around to the rear of the building where the ashramites and Arnaud and Denise Desjardins were waiting to wish him farewell. We then left the ashram, drove east through St Gervais-en-Auvergne to the main highway heading north, and headed for Montlucon for Bernard, and Paris for us.

