



**IN YOUR HEART—
IS MY ABODE**

**Life and Teachings
of
SRI MA ANANDAMAYI**



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Just as all rivers merge into the ocean so all trends of thought come to rest in Ma. Just as the ocean neither increases nor decreases with the waters of the rivers, so does Ma remain the same under all circumstances. Nothing disturbs her serenity. She is as immeasurable as the ocean.Nobody has recognised Ma for what she is.

—Sri Sri 108 Swami Triveni Puriji Maharaj



SRI MA ANANDAMAYI

[APRIL 30, 1896 — AUGUST 27, 1982]

Sri Ma Anandamayi today is widely recognized as a personality of great spiritual eminence. She was born a hundred years ago and she suffered death at the age of 86; these limitations, however, cannot be said to have conditioned her utter freedom to be just herself under all circumstances. She was the embodiment of a joyous self-sufficiency which enraptured the hearts of all who came near her. The mysterious aloofness of her personality was totally beyond human understanding and yet it was so tempered by her compassionate love for all living creatures that she seemed closer than the most indulgent friend ever could be. She was the Teacher whose guidance was sought by the learned as well as the simple, the old and also children, people from alien cultures or from traditional backgrounds. Although she travelled incessantly, it was seen that she was at home everywhere and no one was a stranger to her.

Throughout the length and breadth of India and also beyond its shores people found her to be, as if the personification of their own inner vision of the Adored One, who is most dear to their hearts. In Dhaka where she first gained recognition, She was known as "*Manush Kali*", that is, the 'living Kali'.

Kali is the presiding Deity of Bengal so that was quite understandable. When she moved out of Bengal and visited other provinces, her presence elicited the same type of response, even at her first appearance. On the shores of the Holy Narmada, she was greeted as "Devi Narmada". In Madurai she was hailed as the "Goddess Minakshi" by surging crowds who waited hours for a glimpse of her. In the Punjab she was given the same place of honour as the Holy Granth Sahab. In Vrindaban, the much respected Mahatma, Sri Haribabaji Maharaj saw in her his adored Deity, the Lord Gauranga. The Sindhi devotees of Sri Udiyababaji Maharaj paid her homage as the visible form of their deity Jhoolal. One Muslim devotee used to see a vision of her with a Taj on her head during his meditations. A Christian devotee remarked quite spontaneously, "Now we have a Face to put on God". The simple highland women of Almora would say to her, "Now that we have you with us, we do not need to visit the Temple".

One visitor, an Irish journalist, frankly asked her, "Am I right to believe that you are God?" Sri Ma answered, "There is nothing save He alone; everyone and everything is but a form of God. In your person also everything is but a form of God. In your person also He has come here to give *darśana*". He persisted, "Why are you in this world?" "In this world?" Sri Ma answered, "I am not anywhere. I am myself reposing within myself".

During the same conversation the Irishman said, "I am a Christian." Sri Ma answered, "So am I, a Christian, a Muslim, anything you like".

In general Sri Ma's inimitable smile disarmed all questions regarding her identity. She once answered a devotee's query in these words: "What a childish question to ask; People have various visions of gods and goddesses (in me) according to their own predilections. What I was before, I am now, and shall be hereafter. I am also whatever you or anybody may think I am.....why don't you look at it this way: the yearnings (of seekers after Truth) have brought about this body. All of you have wanted it and so you have found it. That is all you need to know."

Richard Lannoy, a devotee of many years standing has summarised Sri Ma's ways of being with us in a very telling phrase: "Yet there is a strangeness, a particularity, an indefinable quality which comes so near the limits of the definably human as to make an adjective like 'human' quite inadequate when applied to her case, and 'divine' paltry. It is widely accepted that She was, simply, unique.....*She was, throughout Her life, the acme of effortless perfection*".

Sri Ma Anandamayi was born in a small village called Kheora, in what is now Bangladesh, on April 30, 1896. She was born into a pious, prestigious but non-affluent brahmin house-hold. Her given name was Nirmala Sundari Devi. It is translated as 'Immaculate Beauty', which seemed appropriate as the infant grew up to be a lovely child. Little Nirmala, a blithe and happy child spent her childhood in agreeable village surroundings. She was a favourite with everyone - ready to fetch and carry and to render whatever service she was capable of to anyone who asked for it. The entire village, consisting mainly of Muslim families, extended to her a love and affection which has endured through the years. Even now the Muslim population of Kheora refer to her as "Our own Ma".

Sri Ma's father was a devout Vaishnava. He was well-known for his beautiful rendering of devotional songs; his melodious voice never failed to touch the hearts of his audience. In fact he was sometimes compared to Ramprasad, the saintly bard of Bengal, who it is believed had invoked the presence of Śakti by his inspired singing. Sri Ma's mother was a gentle woman of upright nature totally dedicated to the welfare of her family. That she was not just like countless such others became evident as the years went by. Many will remember her as the ochre-robed Swami Muktananda Giri who accompanied Sri Ma on her travels.

Sri Ma was barely thirteen when she was married to Sri Ramani Mohan Chakravarty of Atpara. Their family had a tradition of *Śakti-upāsanā*. As a childbride Sri Ma was received into the family of Ramani Mohan's eldest brother Sri Revati Mohan and his wife Pramoda Devi. She remained with them for nearly four years while Ramani Mohan was in Atpara and in Dhaka. From a carefree childhood in her parents' home she was catapulted into a demanding situation of considerable physical hard work in an atmosphere of restrictive discipline. She cooked, cleaned, fetched water, took care of the children and served her sister-in-law in every way possible. Hard work is the lot of village women not only in India but all over the world. What sets Sri Ma apart from all such girls placed in similar situations is the fact of her total adequacy and a little extra, as it were. She remained uniformly cheerful, good-humoured, and more than willing to shoulder other people's burdens. Nothing was a chore to her. Her serene and equable temper was never disrupted by thoughtlessness or unfair treatment at the hands of the elders. Actually Sri Ma's untroubled happy disposition caused her new family some anxiety; it could only mean a simple mind. In her childhood also she had invoked this fear in her parents' thoughts-perhaps the little girl was just a little below

par, not to be at all mischievous and naughty like other children? It took many years for Sri Ma's close companions to realize that she was ever established in her oft - repeated Vānī : *Jo ho jaye* : 'Whatever comes to pass, let it be'. It took time for discerning people to understand that Sri Ma was obedient but not biddable or suggestible. Her boundless compassion overflowed in concern for whoever came within the orbit of her ministrations: family, neighbours, servants as well as animals and plants felt the magic touch of this innate interest in their welfare. She also had a very ready and impish sense of humour which always took note of the foibles of her companions and gave her and perhaps a friend much quiet enjoyment, but being without malice she never made fun of anyone. She always had the aura of perfectibility all around her but somehow it never overwhelmed her companions. On the contrary; by her gentle ways and ready smile she endeared herself to everyone who came in touch with her.

At the age of 18, Sri Ma by the mutual consent of both families came to Ashtagram to stay with her husband at his place of work. In later years Sri Ma used to refer to her husband by the name 'Bholanath' so we shall use this title for him in this account. At the time of her coming to Ashtagram her mother had

told her that she should give the same respect and obedience to her husband as she had given to her father. It has been noted that throughout her life Sri Ma was very mindful of her mother's gentle behests. Bholanathji met with a friendly but deferential treatment, which was very endearing. The mantle of a responsible guardian incharge of a precious treasure descended on his shoulders as it were. It may be stated at once that he wore this mantle with circumspection and competence all his life, till his death in 1938.

Much has been written regarding the purity and perfect celibacy of Sri Ma and Bholanathji's married life. These words are rather inadequate because it would be much better to say that such questions never arose where they were concerned. Bholanathji obviously bore the impact of a beautiful young wife who was ready to obey his slightest bidding with an exemplary calmness of spirit. Their neighbours and close friends do not report that he was not perfectly contented as he was.

Bajitpur : From Ashtagram, Bholanathji came to Bajitpur on a transfer. The township of Bajitpur has acquired special significance for the devotees of Sri Ma as the place where she went through the various processes of intensive *sādhana*. How this came about may be best related in her own words:

"One day in Bajitpur I had as usual gone to the pond near the house where we lived, for my daily bath. While pouring the water over my head, the *kheyāla* came to me, 'how would it be to play the role of a *sadhaka*? and so the *lilā* began." These two words used so constantly' with reference to Sri Ma, perhaps need to be explained a little. *Kheyāla* may be best explained by the words 'a spontaneous thought', distinct from an act of will or a wish for some desired end. It generally came into being perhaps taking shape out of the needs of her companions. Once expressed it was seen that a concatenation of events led to its fulfillment. Sometime *kheyāla* could be invoked by repeated requests or deflected also. Sri Ma seemed equally agreeable toward any of the results accruing from her *kheyāla*. *Lilā* could be translated as "sportive play" - an activity which is an end in itself.

With Sri Ma, *Kheyāla* was simultaneous with spontaneous action in relation to it. In the evening she again swept out her room and its precincts. She ignited incense and made a circumambulation round the cottage with the burner in her hand. She took care of Bholanathji's needs on his return from work, even to the detail of preparing a *hookka* for his afterdinner smoke. After Bholanathji had settled down, she asked his permission to engage in a little *sādhana*.

This, he readily granted. So Sri Ma sat on the floor in a corner of their room and orally began to repeat the word 'Hari, Hari, Hari'..., for no better reason than that she had learnt to sing this Name from her father in her childhood.

Bholanathji saw her becoming gradually absorbed in a world of inner joy. After a few days of this routine, he saw her assuming some Yogic postures or *asanas*. The first of these was probably the *siddhāsana*. Bholanathji knew of course that she had no previous knowledge of Yoga or Yogic *āsanas*; they were happening to her. He said one day, "Why do you say 'Hari'? we are not Vaishnavas". Sri Ma asked, "Shall I then say Śiva, Śiva?" Bholanathji was satisfied.

The change of Name had no effect on the *kriyas* of *sādhana*. Sri Ma has said that she contemplated no visual forms when she repeated the words. The sound was all in all. The syllables were like the resonance being struck off an all-pervasive beat. Her body was as if in tune with the universal rhythm of that power which undergirds all that exists. Her body became as if an instrument for the play of this cosmic music. She seemed to become one with the sound of the letters that she uttered; her limbs, her entire body moved rhythmically as if in vibrant dance-forms of an extra-ordinary choreography directed by an inner

Power. Sometimes she lay for many hours absolutely still and totally absorbed in an inner bliss. At such times her body emanated a radiance which was visible to onlookers.

Bholanathji watched her enthralled, never doubting the genuineness of the manifestations; he was even able to brush aside adverse comments from some of the neighbours who failed to understand that they were witnessing the unfolding of the magnetic personality of Sri Ma who had the *kheyāla* to reveal herself in the role of a *sādhaka*.

Sri Ma lived the life of a pilgrim on the path of spiritual endeavour for nearly six years; during this time she initiated herself and proceeded thereafter in a more systematic manner. Bholanathji realized that he was in the presence of a very special embodiment of Divine Power. He himself accepted the much coveted initiation from Sri Ma within the first year of this manifestation. Thereafter their relationship acquired a new dimension - that of Guru and disciple, although Sri Ma never changed in her attitude of complete obedience and deference to Bholanathji's wishes.

Referring to this period of her life, Sri Ma has said, "*Sāadhanā* by which man endeavours to attain self-realization are of endless variety, and each variety has innumerable aspects. All these revealed themselves to me as a part of myself". In later years

she had occasion to talk about her experiences in select gatherings of ascetics, scholars or other *jijñāsus* (seekers of Truth). The Pandits have marvelled at her knowledge of all tenets of faith, in all their doctrinal details. Sri Ma has said that even so she has not talked about one thousandth part of all that was revealed to her during her years of intensive *sāadhanā*. Sometime in 1922 she became *maunam*, that is silent. This silence came as a mark of the fulfillment of *sāadhanā*. After the period of *maunam*, she began to converse with visitors on religious topics.

From Bajitpur Sri Ma and Bholanath came to Dhaka on April 10, 1924. Bholanath became the Manager of the Shahbagh Gardens, a part of the Estates of the Nawabzadi Pyari Bano. Many of the people who had known them in Ashtagram and Bajitpur had relations in Dhaka. The rumour gained ground that the young housewife in the Shahbagh Gardens was gifted with great spiritual powers. Visitors came out of curiosity and stayed to become life-long devotees.

In accordance with the orthodox customs of those times Sri Ma kept herself veiled in public. If Bholanathji asked her to speak to anyone, she would do so but not otherwise. Women, of course, were always free to visit and soon there was a crowd

round her. The men continued to be at a disadvantage because they were mindful of public opinion, but here Bholanathji played an important role. Soon he began to be looked up to as Baba Bholanath, a person commanding respect in his own right. Under his aegis, the swelling crowds assumed the shape of an ever increasing but close-knit family.

Among the early devotees were Sri Jyotish Chandra Roy, who came to be known as 'Bhaiji', in this circle; Sri Shashanka Mohan Mukherji (later Swami Akhandanandaji) and his daughter Adarini Devi, known to all devotees as Gurupriya Devi or Didi, Sri Nishikanta Mitra, Sri Pran Gopal Mukherjee, Sri Niranjana Roy, Sri Baul Chandra Basak (Bholanathji's life long friend) and many many others. Sri Ma's parents were invited by Bholanath to come and stay at Shahbagh. They came to be known as Didima (Mother's mother) and Dadamashai (Mother's father). From them the devotees of Dhaka heard about Sri Ma's childhood days. Bholanathji's sisters and brothers with their families also came together in Dhaka after many years. One sister remarked, "After our father's death we had become rather scattered; now *Badhuthā-kurāṇi* (a term of endearment for a brother's wife) making it possible for us to come together as a family again".

In Dhaka, Sri Ma lived amidst an atmosphere of the miraculous. Her healing touch was sought by strangers from far and near. She was seen in ecstatic states of *samādhi* and *mahābhāva* during *kīrtans*. An eye-witness account of a *mahābhāva* on the occasion of a *kīrtan* is described in these words :

"At one moment Sri Ma was sitting like one of us. The next moment she had changed completely. Her body was swaying rhythmically. Her sari's border fell back from over her head. Her eyes were closed and the entire body swayed to the rhythm of the *kīrtana*. With her body still swaying, she stood up or rather was, as if drawn upwards on her foot. It looked as if Sri Ma had left her body which had become an instrument in the hands of an invisible power. It was obvious to all of us that there was no will motivating her actions. Sri Ma was evidently quite oblivious of her surroundings. She circled round the room as if wafted along by the wind. Occasionally, her body would start falling to the ground, but before it completed the movement it would regain its upright position, just like a windblown leaf which flutters toward the ground and then is uplifted and blown forward by a fresh gust of wind."

Sri Ma moved in this manner with the *kīrtan* party for a few moments. After such *bhāvas* she

would lie in a *samādhi* for many hours. It was always Bholanathji who decided when to try and rouse her. She had this *kheyāla* of obeying him, so when he called her repeatedly, she would somehow open her eyes and say, "You want me to get up?" in lisping and slurred tones. At this time he would ask the women to rub her hands and feet gently and keep talking to her and make her answer some questions. In this way slowly Sri Ma would be drawn back to the ordinary world. Didi Gurupriya writes in wonder, "It amazed me that Sri Ma so naturally entered into a state of God-intoxication, a state which is coveted by *sadhakas* of all time. No, not God-intoxication, her state could not be called that, I do not know how to describe a state which was at once sublime and yet normal".

This interplay of the dimensions of normalcy and transcendence was a constant and inalienable feature of Sri Ma's behaviour. Sometimes it was likened to a sudden play of lightning in the skies. One description is, "It was like simultaneously experiencing sunlight and moon light. Before one could be dazzled and overwhelmed by the rays of the sun, one would be soothed and reassured by the gentle moonbeams".

These states were frequent and visible to all at this time but they had happened in her childhood and while she was with Revati Mohan's family as well.

They had not been understood by her companions of those times and been dismissed as some mild kind of fits which would pass away as she grew older. Sri Ma's overall deportment was so radiant and cheerful that it was easy to discount a few signs of sudden withdrawals into an inner world of mystery.

The halcyon period of happy gatherings round Sri Ma was rather short lived. Sri Ma set out on her travels in 1927. Baba Bholanath liked to visit places of pilgrimages. They travelled quite extensively. The devotees of Dhaka gradually got accustomed to Sri Ma's frequent absences. It became clear that Sri Ma had the *kheyāla* to leave Dhaka. The devotees had built a small Ashram for her but Sri Ma's *kheyāla* to move out proved too strong. Accompanied by Bholanath and Bhaiji Sri Ma left Dhaka on June 2, 1932.

Travelling in a haphazard way she happened to arrive at Dehra Dun. From here they found their way to Raipur a remote village in the interior. They took up their abode in the dilapidated Siva temple a little way from the village. This was the beginning of a new way of life for two of them. Bholanathji devoted himself to his *sadhana* wholeheartedly. Bhaiji tried his hand at rendering such services which so far he had received from his own servants. To sweep and clean, wash clothes, cook primitive kind of food was

hard work for him. Sometimes Sri Ma helped him out but in general she wandered around alone or sat surrounded by the village women.

When she returned to Dehra Dun she and Bhaiji stayed at the Manohar temple in Ananda Chowk. Bholanathji spent almost 3 years in Uttarkashi in doing his own *tapasyā*. In Dehra Dun she came in touch with all the Kashmiri families who resided nearby. Sri Hari Ram Joshi became a devotee and a great admirer of Bhaiji. He was a man of strong convictions; moreover he had the courage of his convictions. Having given his allegiance to Sri Ma, he tried his best to bring all his friends to her feet. He was instrumental in introducing Sm. Kamala Nehru to Sri Ma. This proved to be a meeting which led to other ties being forged with other people from far and near. Sm. Kamala Nehru's one-pointed devotion to Sri Ma was remarkable in its depth and strength. She carried her memories to Switzerland and so influenced some of her friends, that they came to India to see Sri Ma. Mahatma Gandhi came to know a lot about Sri Ma from Kamalaji. He was so impressed by all that he heard that he sent his trusted right-hand man Sri Jammalal Bajaj to Sri Ma. He in his turn became so dedicated a devotee that Sri Ma had the *kheyāla* to travel to Wardha after his unexpected death and so met Gandhiji himself. In later years Sri Jawaharlal Nehru and Indiraji came to Sri Ma drawn to her inevitably by their memories of the last days of Kamalaji.

The Raja Saheb of Solan met Sri Ma around this time. He became one of the foremost devotees and was known to all as 'Jogibhai'. Dehra Dun became another Dhaka. The tradition of joyous gatherings spread to other towns such as Delhi, Meerut, Lucknow, Solan and Simla. At Simla the festival of Hari-kirtan under the aegis of the Hari Sabha received a new lease of life in Sri Ma's presence and by Bholanathji's enthusiastic participation. Bholanathji had rejoined Sri Ma on coming down from Uttarkashi. He had been introduced to the new devotees and accepted whole-heartedly as 'Pitaji' (father).

The swelling tides of the happy crowd unknown to themselves were facing two crises: Bhaiji passed away in Almora in August, 1937 and Bholanathji himself left his sorrowing family of devotees in May, 1938 in Kishenpur Ashram. The passing away of Bholanathji resulted in a new understanding of Sri Ma and her ways. Sri Ma had been a very devoted wife and she had tirelessly rendered personal service to him whenever he had been ill. During his last illness she was constantly at his bedside. He died with her hand on his head and breathing the word *ānanda*. It was felt that he was giving expression to his own state of *ānanda* and peace.

Most of the devotees had thought that Sri Ma would be distraught but they were amazed to see that there were no signs of grief. She remained as serene as always. She noted their reaction and said gently, "Do you start to wail and cry if a person goes to another room in the house? This death is inevitably connected with this life. In the sphere of Immortality, where is the question of death and loss? Nobody is lost to me". Sri Ma's followers began to understand a little of the meaning of her total detachment and yet an over-flowing compassion for her people.

As the years passed the enigma of her personality deepened; from the very moment of her birth she had been fully self-conscious; when she engaged in *sādhana*, everything was revealed to her by her own *kheyāla*. She was practically an illiterate village girl but when she began to teach she spoke in the language of erudite scholars, never making the slightest mistake in her logical presentation of a thesis. She seemed fully aware of all doctrinal differences, never confusing one with the other in her conversations with the learned *pandits*; yet she had not been initiated into any particular religious order or trained by any yogic instructor. She had not encountered any Guru who could have exerted any influence on her life. In fact she had never retired from the world to become a recluse, neither did she

withdraw herself from her kith and kin. She had not performed *sadhana* as it is generally understood in the tradition, yet she could speak with authority on all aspects of the life of a religious quest for enlightenment. Such are the facts why the word 'unique' is applied for describing her.

Sri Ma continued to move around in her own style of unstructured itineraries. She did not always choose her companions. It was a motley crowd which surrounded her. Many times it so happened that many in her entourage did not speak the same language. People from different provinces, different walks of life, mingled together in happy throngs. It was experienced that Sri Ma would accept invitations for religious functions. So the devotees would arrange for Bhagavat Saptaha, Durga Puja, Chandipath etc. in their towns. They would pray for her presence at these functions. Wherever Sri Ma stayed, it immediately became the centre for a gathering of thousands. Sri Ma in her compassionate regard for the organisers moved out as soon as things began to get out of hand. There was no central management in Sri Ma's vicinity; whoever was able, took charge for as long as he could. Matters arranged themselves as it were. It is difficult to describe the sheer impromptu nature of management which took place near Sri Ma. Unless one has experienced it for

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oneself, it is not possible to credit the utter fortuitous nature of a concurrence of events which seemed to fulfill Sri Ma's *kheyāla* regarding her travels, companions or at times her places of retreat.

In all the major cities, Sri Ma visited frequently, the devotees got together to construct one Ashram after another, but it did not serve the purpose of restricting her movements or providing her with some comforts while she stayed in one place because as often as not she would not visit the Ashram at all but go to some place else.

In 1940 Sri Ma came in close touch with Sri Prabhu Dattaji Maharaj of Jhunsi, a mahatma of considerable renown. He invited her to join in their council of sadhus at Jhunsi in 1944. Here other Mahatmas came to know her, notably Sri Haribabaji Maharaj, Sri Chakrapaniji and Sri Sharananandaji. So far the Sadhu Samaj had avoided her because she happened to be in the form of a woman. Sri Prabhu Dattaji broke down this artificial barrier. Thereafter Haribabaji Maharaj gave her the highest honour possible. The heads of other monastic orders recognized in her the quintessence of the Upanishadic tradition and accepted her word as Śāstra itself.

At Sri Ma's *kheyala* a great Savitri Yajña was started at Varanasi in the newly built Ashram on

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January 14, 1947. The *saṁkalpa* was for "The Good of Mankind". There was great tension in the country just before Independence in August of the same year. Notwithstanding all these negative factors the *yajña* proceeded unhindered and came to a spectacular conclusion on January 14, 1950. A great concourse of renowned Mahatmas graced the occasion. It was attended by princes, artists of repute, political personalities, and the ordinary mass of people. In Sri Ma's presence all functions took on an extra-ordinary glamour. This *yajña* solemn and grand in itself was overwhelming in its impact on the participants.

The most attractive function under Sri Ma's aegis turned out to be the Samyam Saptaha, Week of Abstinence. Sri Ma often spoke on the importance of observing restraints in one's way of life at least once a month, if not once a week. Sri Jogibhai, the President of the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha suggested that a *saptaha* of samyam be arranged in Sri Ma's vicinity so that all devotees could assemble for this purpose. The first such week was organised in Varanasi Ashram in 1952. The participants would observe total fast on the first and last days. In between a menu of very simple meals once a day was drawn up by Sri Ma herself. Under her guidance the programme for the whole day was sketched like this:

After personal daily puja etc., all participants would gather in the Central Hall for listening to scriptural discourses, *kīrtans* and meditation. Doors would be closed so that there would be no disturbances. After a short break during the afternoon for food and a little rest, the *vratis* (participants) would assemble for the evening session and so on.

The popularity of this function was phenomenal. The whole Ashram geared up to it. Mahatmas came from far and near. People heard rare scriptures and listened to good music. The best part of the day was at 9.30 P. M. when Sri Ma answered questions from the audience. The whole day passed by like a flash in looking forward to this half hour of *matṛ satsang*. The participants were amazed that they could live like ascetics for a week so effortlessly.

The best way to understand Sri Ma is not to compare her with any of the luminaries in our spiritual skies. The recognition that she gained in her own life time was just by her presence. This is what Swami Chinmayananda said about her in Bangalore (June, 1978) 'When the sun shines nobody needs to demonstrate the sunshine'. The harmony of opposites was the underlying theme of her way of life. Amidst the splendour and magnificence which seemed inevitable wherever she was, she lived like an ascetic. Throughout her life she was a very small

eater. Apart from the months of abstention from food which happened periodically, she followed other rigourisms. For many years she used to eat on alternate days. When remonstrated Sri Ma would say, "It is not necessary to eat at all to preserve the body. I eat only because a semblance of normal behaviour must be kept up so that you should not feel uncomfortable with me." The intake of food was not related to any of her illnesses. Actually she was in perfect health when she was not eating anything. Illnesses came and went following a rhythm of their own.

In her time she met with nearly all the political dignitaries who rose to power after Independence. They did not talk about state affairs with her. She only spoke about God and the religious aspirations of man.

Some devotees in praise of her all-encompassing message sometimes say that she welcomed all faiths as true paths to God. This could be an understatement. The fact was that Sri Ma saw no differences which had to be cemented; to her, indeed, was the One only. The same may be said about her treatment of women. She recognised no inferiority or superiority. She demanded (if such a word can be used for her) the same high quality of asceticism from the *brah.nacharis* as well as *brahmacharinis* of

the Ashram. Purity of speech, action and thoughts was ever the ideal which she set forth for all travellers on the path to God-realization.

Sri Ma when speaking with modern young people, showed herself to be fully aware of the trends of the times; even so, her interlocutors could never make her accede to their demands for compromises. She with great humour and understanding could always bring them around to accepting her request to begin the search for Him who is hidden in the cave of the heart. It could be said that for all devotees, the following text expresses their sentiments regarding Sri Ma:

*bhidyatehṛdayagranthischidyante sarvasaṁśayāḥ
kshīyante cāśya karmāṇi tasmin dr̥ṣṭe parāvare*

The knot of the heart is penetrated, all doubts are resolved.

All bondages are destroyed on seeing Him who is here and beyond.

—Mundakopanisad, II. 2.8

In retrospect it now seems that Sri Ma started the process of withdrawing herself much ahead of time. She became increasingly unavailable because it was said she was not well. All her devotees knew that illness happened to her because it was not her *kheyāla* to deny them access to her. Many times she

had said, "Why do you feel so antagonistic to illnesses? They also come to this body like you do. Do I tell you to go away?" Acceding to the prayers of her companions Sri Ma had been seen many times also, to perform certain Yogic *kriyās* to get rid of her ailments. In the late seventies and in 1981 she did not have the *kheyāla* to respond to any kind of prayers for her recovery. She went about fulfilling her various engagements. She did not look ill but as beautiful and serene as ever; but definitely the mass of devotees got used to the idea of not getting her *darśana* as easily as always. For all practical purposes she had withdrawn herself from public audiences apart from a few exceptions. Her last *kheyāla* seemed to have been for the performance of the *Ati Rudra Yajña* at Kankhal. This was the greatest of the Vedic *Yajñas*. Under Sri Ma's guidance it was celebrated with such splendour and scrupulous adherence to every detail of scriptural injunctions that the savants said— Sri Ma had initiated the Satya Yuga in the Iron Age of Kali.

In the last days Sri Ma was serene, but uncharacteristically seemed to be removing herself beyond the prayers of people around her. Ordinarily she always gave the greatest heed to the words of the Mahatmas, but now to all prayers for her own recovery, she would smile and say, "There is no

kheyāla". Sri Jagadguru Sankaracharya of Shringeri, Sarada Peetham, wanted to invite her to Shringeri on the occasion of the Annual Durga Puja and urged that she should get rid of her illness speedily. She replied in her usual gentle tones, "This body has no illness, Pitaji. It is being recalled toward the Unmanifest. Whatever you see happening now is conducive toward that event". At the moment of bidding him farewell next day (July 2nd) she again reiterated her inability to accede to his wishes, saying, "As the Atma, I shall ever abide with you".

Sri Ma, in other ways weaned her devotees from her physical presence. She did not answer letters but the correspondents felt her presence in their hearts and their questions answered. She did not attend any of the functions which were being performed with the usual circumspection at their proper times in the Ashram. She had stopped taking food for many months. The attending girls could give her a few drops of water only at odd moments. Sri Ma spent her last days at Kishenpur Ashram. She made no farewells apart from saying "*Sivāya namaḥ*" on the night of the 25th; this mantra is indicative of the final dissolution of worldly bondages. She became Unmanifest on Friday evening of August 27th, 1982 around 8 P.M.

Kankhal at the foothill of the Himalayas is holy land. All monastic orders have their Head Quarters at Hardwar. By a consensus of opinion the entire body of the Mahatmas came together to assume charge of Sri Ma's physical remains. The highest honour was given to her; a procession of thousands escorted the vehicle carrying her body from Dehra Dun to Kankhal. The Mahanirvani Akhada arranged for the last rites of samadhi. As Sri Ma had said she did belong to everybody and so everybody participated in bidding farewell to the human body which had sustained their beloved Ma for 86 years.

Sri Ma came at a time when India as well as the world passed through many crises. She remained as one of the people throughout, imparting hope and solace and upholding the ageold ideals of our tradition through overwhelming impacts of alien influences. She fully understood the existential implications of the present age of technology and by her way of being in the world put it in a correct perspective for those who wished to see beyond it. That God is as much present in the world given over to scientific research as in the age of mythology, we may say is the "Message" conveyed by her sojourn on earth.

We think the soil of Bharatvarsha is holy. Once in a while we see in India, not merely a teacher or

just a saint but an exemplar of the way of life which is the quintessence of her spirit. India cherishes a coming together of heaven and earth, a commingling of the timeless order and the order of time; a meeting of horizons of the eternal yearning in man and the descent of Grace. Once in a while such a dream is realized. We find a Teacher, a Jagadguru, who not only awakens the longing for the quest for Truth but enkindles and sustains faith in its ultimate fulfillment.

Sri Ma will ever remain with us in the form of the immortal words, the dearest of which are — "Ma is (I am) here, what is there to worry about ?" (*Ma āchhen, kiser cīnta?*)

Vasanta Panchami, 1995

Bithika Mukerji

31 George Town, Allahabad.

A HUNDRED RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS

What is dharma ? Those actions which are conducive for attaining to Him who is desirable for everyone. This is also the natural way of life. Sorrows are due to unnatural ways, so that is adharma.

—Sri Sri Ma Anandamāyi

Life and Teachings of Sri Ma Anandamayi

1. To talk of God alone is worthwhile; all else is in vain and leads to pain.
2. Live with God.
3. The only indispensable duty for human beings is to abide in God-remembrance.
4. The moment that has passed returns not. Time must be used well. Only when spent in the effort to know "Who am I ?" has it been used well.
5. If one is to attain to the Eternal, it is helpful to look for that in everyone and everything. The search after Truth is man's duty, so that he may advance towards Immortality.
6. You are yourself the self-evident *ātmā*; seeking, finding is all in you.
7. I know only the Name; the Name alone suffices.
8. Bear in mind that God's Name is He Himself; let it be your inseparable companion. Try your utmost never to be without Him. The more intense and continuous your effort to dwell in His presence, the greater the likelihood of your growing joyful and serene.

9. The intense desire for God-realization is itself the way to it.
10. In the whole universe, in all states of being, in all forms is He. All Names are His names. All shapes His shapes, all qualities His qualities and all modes of existence are truly His.
11. Sorrow and happiness arise out of convictions and doubts; if you wish to go beyond (the syndrome of convictions and doubts) seek Him, take refuge at His feet. If you wish for overcoming, For Him alone be your yearning!
12. How much more time will you spend at a wayside inn ? Don't you want to go home ? How exquisite it all is.....One is in his own self, the wanderer, the exile, the home coming and the home.....oneself is all that exists....
13. An eternal relationship exists between God and man, but in His Play (*līlā*) it is sometimes there and sometimes severed; or rather appears to be severed. It is not really so, for the relationship is eternal. As such you may begin from anywhere.

14. Sri Ma : Strive for Immortality.
Question : It is difficult to know which is the true path ?
Sri Ma : If you sit with all doors and windows closed, how can you see the path ? Open the door and step out, the path will become visible. Once on the way, you will meet other wayfarers, who will advise and guide you as to the path. Your job is to muster whatever strength you have to get underway—thereafter help is assured.
15. Question : Ma, why do you waste your time with us ? We have no appetite for this way of life.
Sri Ma : How right you are; but you will agree that a state of 'no appetite' is a state of ill health ? (Laughter) Well, then, health may be regained by proper diet and medicines. Proper diet is *satsang*—seek the company of devout people, read good books; and medicine is regular *japa*. Whether you like it or not give a little time to a daily routine of doing some *nama-japa* (repetition of God's Name); you will see that gradually your 'appetite' will awaken and function normally !

16. Worship is not a ritual, it is an attitude, an experience.
17. Question : People say Brahman is unknown, so why try ?
Sri Ma : If I ask you to describe this flower you will say, it is red, it is a rose and so on and on, but never will you be able to express fully all that this flower is. So all things are known and unknown, manifest and unmanifest, both. It is what it is.
18. Form and formless; with qualities and without qualities. Such is He. You cannot exhaustively enumerate the qualities of even ordinary things. One must go beyond all this. The language of going, coming also is not apt. It is self-revealing. The ocean and tides. Below the waves the water is still and deep. You will say that even below the water there are currents. Be it so. That is not fragmenting the ocean. There are so many ways of indicating the One underlying Reality. Yet no matter how much one says, it seems everything has been left unsaid.

19. Question : Ma, is a vision of God possible in these days ?
Sri Ma : Why in these days ? It has always been possible.
Question : I mean, directly with our eyes ?
Sri Ma : A vision as clear as daylight. It is His nature; if you call out to Him, He will appear. The human soul is called *jīvātmā* and not *paramātmā*. The *jīva* moves in a closed circle of birth and death. In a stagnant pool germs of life thrive and develop into living beings. After a cleansing process the same water becomes pure. So *jīvātmā* is in reality *paramātmā*. The doubt that God is not in you is what makes you a *jīva* (creature). It is a false screen, remove it and God will stand revealed in His Glory !
20. The way to God-realization is straight and simple indeed. The mantra the Guru communicates is certainly the most excellent one. How wonderful is God's dispensation ! When the power transmitted to you by the Guru begins to function, karma ceases to bear fruit. If you enter a fire, is it possible that it will not burn you ?

Life and Teachings of Sri Ma Anandamayi

21. Question : Is it necessary to go to a Guru ?
Sri Ma : Yes. It is true that one can teach oneself, but when the Teacher gives directions, lessons become easier.
22. Question : Why should the Guru be taken as God ?
Sri Ma : He alone is, that is why Guru is God. Who but God can teach about Himself ? If you think of your Guru as a man then he is not Guru and if he is Guru, he is not a man. If you look upon Siva as a stone, then He is not Siva but a stone. A veil prevents you from realizing Truth. This veil is removed by the grace of the Guru.
23. The Guru is revealed from within. An earnest quest results in revelation. He comes in the guise of the Guru to reveal Himself.
24. Just as a university education requires the guidance of a Professor, so is *Brahmavidyā* dependent on *Guruvākya*.
25. The Guru has infinite forms, infinite ways of revealing Himself and also infinite ways in which He may remain undisclosed. The Guru, the Beloved, the Mantra are one only. He Himself, in Himself.

Life and Teachings of Sri Ma Anandamayi

26. Question : Why are there so many religions in the world if there is the One only ?
Sri Ma : He is Infinite. There is an infinite variety of conceptions of Him and an endless variety of paths to Him. He is everything, every kind of belief and also the disbelief of the atheist. Your belief in non-belief is also a belief. He is in all forms and He is formless.
27. Question : Which is the best path to the knowledge of the self ?
Sri Ma : All paths are good. It depends on a man's *sanskāras*, his conditioning, the tendencies he has brought even from previous births. Just as one can travel to the same place by plane, by train or by car, so also there are different lines of approach for different types of people.
28. Question : Are all paths of the same merit ?
Sri Ma : Every dispensation of Truth is a unique event. Not one may be compared with another. The Infinite has infinite ways of revealing itself. Why should anyone be called upon to say : "It is thus and thus only ?" Although strictly speaking, such a creed is also readily allowable because every perspective is true—where after all is the

scope for rejection within the entirety of Truth ? Moreover, distinct brotherhoods are necessary for one-pointed progress towards the goal. A brotherhood lends vigour and support to flagging spirits: it is a source of hope and sustenance. It is a good idea to belong to one brotherhood, a *sampradāya*, and follow its guidance for enlightenment. God is ever merciful. If you walk one step toward Him, He will come ten steps toward you. In fact He is ever with you. Your effort is necessary because ordinarily you use your will toward achieving of goals in the world, so the same will could also be harnessed toward carrying you out of the world.

29. Question : Is it necessary to renounce the world ?

Sri Ma : No, why ? Where is the place where God is not ? The natural way of life itself could be transformed into the spiritual way of life. In fact there is nothing which can be 'other' to God; so properly speaking, to live in the world is to be on way to self-realization. Since this perspective has been lost to us we perforce speak in the language of 'otherness to God'. To realize one's self means to discover that there is naught else except God, God alone is and all else is God only.

30. Question : We often hear you say, 'Think of God only', but surely God is unthinkable and formless. What can be thought of must have a name and form; therefore it cannot be God.

Sri Ma : Yes, without doubt, He is beyond thought, forms or description and yet I say, "Think of Him"; why ? Since you are identified with the ego, since you think you are the doer, since you say, 'I can do this and that', and since you get angry, feel pride and greed and so on, therefore you have to apply your I-ness to the thought of Him. True, He is formless, nameless, immutable, unfathomable. All the same He comes to you in the form of *Śabda-Brahma* (Names) and *Avatāra* (Incarnations). These also are He Himself and consequently, if you abide by His Name and contemplate His Form, the veil which is your "I" will wear off and then He who is beyond form and thought, will shine forth.

31. Question : Can one benefit spiritually by action in the world ?

Sri Ma : Yes, doing work for its own sake, engaging in *karmayoga*. As long as a desire to distinguish one-self is lurking, it is *karmabhoga* (working for one's own

satisfaction). One does the work and enjoys its fruits because of the sense of prestige it brings. Whereas by relinquishing the fruit it becomes *karmayoga*.

32. Action is necessary in order to remove the veil of ignorance. Using to the full the intelligence He has given you, proceed on your way. His Grace is without motive or cause. Why He has not as yet shown His mercy to you He knows best. Verily, all is His and He does according to His Will. Where there is motive, there is the desire for fulfilment and the enjoyment of the fruit. "I have acted therefore I have reaped the fruit". The fruit is what ? The action is one's own and thus consequences are equally one's own. So I tell you to be 'a Manager' in your house and not the owner !
33. Do service with the conviction that while serving, whomsoever it may be, you are serving the *One* who alone exists.
34. At all times keep your mind immersed in the thought of God so that there may be no possibility of straying onto a path that leads to misery.
35. The more one thinks of one's Beloved (*Iṣṭa*) the firmer will one's faith in Him grow. Do

not allow the mind to wander here and there but endeavour to make it one-pointed. Why should there be fear or anxiety ? If one remains anchored in fearlessness, how can the question of fear arise at all ?

36. Question by an European young girl :
How can I get rid of this fear ?

Sri Ma : Fear of what ?

Question : I don't know. Just a terrible fear.

Sri Ma : Are you a Christian ?

Girl : Yes.

Sri Ma : So fill your heart and mind with the presence of Christ in you that there cannot be any room for fear.

37. Visitor : Ma, I have no spiritual aspirations, I am happy as I am.

Sri Ma : That is good; We also are talking of happiness. If you have found the secret of it why do you make this statement ? (Instead of being in that state for all to see). Perhaps there is a touch of doubt somewhere ? (Sri Ma smiles. The visitor laughs also and acknowledges that it is so).

Sri Ma : To be with God is true happiness.

38. I say unto you engage in *nama japa* everyday. Whichever of the Names or Mantras is acceptable to you. Keep a count. When you finish a lakh (1,00,000) make a note and then start on another series. Who knows when the rhythm of this "*lakkha*" (a lakh) will bring you on to realize that "*Lakkha*" (Goal)*. If a man can perform four and a half *koti* (4,50,000,00) of japa, he, it is said by the *śāstras*, may get rid of the burden of all previous karma. He fulfills his destiny as man in the world. When completed, the japa is to be dedicated at the feet of the Lord.
39. To a group of children :
Sri Ma : Will you have me as a friend ?
Children : Yes;
Sri Ma : Will you then remember this friend's words to you ?
The children nod their heads, a little doubtfully.

*. A play upon the Bengali pronunciation of the two words *lakshya* and *laksha* (1,00,000). In Bengali they sound similar.

Sri Ma : I shall tell you only five things to remember :

- One : Always speak the truth,
Two : Obey your parents and teachers,
Three : Study as much as is expected of you,
Four : Pray to God every morning that He should make you a good boy/girl. If during the day you have done something untoward, then at night when going to bed, tell Him you are sorry and you will not let it happen again.
Five : If the above four are done, then you may be a little naughty if you like!
- The children laugh with her and repeat the fivepoint programme to learn it by heart.
40. Be like a child who never grows up : The only reason why the child-like state does not last is 'desire'.
41. Question : Why does not the Mother look to her child ?
Sri Ma : She does always; but not until the faith that whatever the Mother does is the best for Her child awakens in you, can you find the Mother !

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42. You may try to remove 'this body' (the Mother) from your minds, but 'this body' did never depart, does not depart and never will it depart. All those who have loved 'this body' cannot forget it even if they try to do so. 'This body' remains in their memory and will ever abide so.
43. You are asking if the thoughts of every one of you reaches 'this body' ? Yes! Yes! Yes!
44. You are asking if I love you ? I say unto you, that unless I loved you, you could not love me; verily, you cannot love me as much as I love each one of you.
45. I am always with you. It is you who do not want to see me. What can I do ?
46. God is ever merciful. His Grace flows perpetually free and uncaused. Keep your vessel right side up so that it may become full.
47. One day there was a discussion that people come to Sri Ma and are made replete with her *ḥṛī* (Grace). Some fill up an urn, some take it away in small jars and some hold it in cups. There is one who has nothing but his hands; he tries to hold as much as he can; but when

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he goes away, he finds it has all seeped away and he has nothing!

Sri Ma (smiling) : Not entirely, at least his hands are wet, aren't they ?

48. Question : I am attending satsangs for the last 30 years. I have not attained anything.

Sri Ma: You have been physically present. Did you meditate or act upon what you heard?

Question : Cannot the Mahatmas give us something out of their store of plenty ?

Sri Ma : Oh you want to enjoy an inheritance (laughter). God has given you so many talents which you use for your own ends in the world. You have forgotten that you are of the nature of *ātmā*, Freedom. How about that? Begin your quest, become a manager and not the head of your world. Even a little time spent in God remembrance will lead you to real efforts. Do not waste time, start today!

49. Do not enter into a barter system with God. Do not be a trader or a merchant: 'So many tears have I shed for you but I get nothing in return'. He is your own, the very breath of your life, your innermost Self.

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50. Tell yourself always: yes, His Grace is everywhere. I am inundated by it, and then truly you will see, it is so.
51. To be emptied of all worries—this verily is the supreme meditation.
52. Sorrow ? Whose sorrow ? Who causes sorrow to whom ? He abides in Himself. When you happen to bite your tongue with your teeth, is it remarkable ? It is all in Himself alone.
53. The way of the world is like what you are experiencing. To be born into it is to suffer pain and happiness. If you wish to go beyond them, then take refuge at His feet.
54. Whatever God decrees is for your good. Doesn't the doctor hurt you in order to make you well ? God also cleanses you before taking you in His arms. He is saying, : 'Give me all your uncleanness—take in return this unsullied Immortal Life. He sends you sorrows, it is true, but only to awaken in you the yearning. He Himself accepts your burden of sorrows, the tears of your eyes.
55. Suffering is inevitable till you find solace at the Feet of God.
56. He is the antidote for sorrow. Try constantly to call upon Him, to meditate on Him, to pray

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- to Him. He is the Good, He is Peace and He is the Blissful, the Life of your life, the *Ātmā*.
57. In the world of action, as well as religious endeavour, the main stay is patience.
58. Tragic hardship is suffered by man alone. Be brave, face it with courage and fortitude. 'It is His doing' believing this, take shelter under His protection.
59. (I understand) Your feeling of desolation; (you are) surrounded by dark clouds of impending calamity. It is natural that your mind would be gripped by tense fear. How to find a way out ? For those who are desperate, the only source of relief is God. Do not lose hope. Have complete trust in Him, inspite of everything. If you have fallen to the ground, use it as a spring board to raise yourself up again; for it is man's duty to exert himself no matter what happens. Misfortune must not be looked upon as disaster. It would be a sin to do so, for who sends the misfortune ? What He does is unfailingly beneficial. Under no circumstances, however adverse, should man accept defeat.
60. Pray for the capacity to endure. Nothing happens that is not an expression of God's Grace: Verily all is His Grace. Anchored in

patience, bearing everything, abide by His Name and live joyously.

61. It is the will of the Almighty that prevails at all times, such verily is the law of creation. 'World' means a ceaseless round of sorrows, a little happiness, and affliction; to experience this, man is born. Do you not see that the world is nothing but this in infinite variety ?
62. Such is the nature of the world. Girded with fortitude, like a hero you must try to calm yourself. There simply is no hope of peace save in the contemplation of God. Let this be your firm conviction. It is man's duty under all circumstances to seek refuge in Him, by virtue of whose Law all things are wrought.
63. Put your trust in Him. You do not know if by a bearable misfortune He is not clearing your path of a greater calamity.
64. The world is a world of duality and therefore a source of pain. If one is out for worldly achievements, suffering is inevitable. Do you know what it is like ? It is like purposely striking an already existing sore, so that pain is doubled. To move toward God is, on the other hand, like soothing unguent on the

sore. There is no other mode of appeasing suffering.

65. To a couple who had recently lost a child:
Sri Ma: 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. Sometimes great saints have to be born for a while to live out their remaining karma in a suitable atmosphere. When it is over, God takes him away. It is all God's *Lilā*. Some flowers fall off without bearing fruit. This is the way of the world. There is bound to be loss and bereavement.

The inconsolable father asked: From whence should one derive the strength to bear such losses ?

Sri Ma: Remember that the *Ātmā* of the child and your own *Ātmā* are one. The *Ātmā* was neither born, nor does it die, it eternally is, only the body falls away. Endeavour not to be attached to the body and to cry for it. Cry for God alone, if cry you must. Remember Him, repeat His Holy Name. Occupy yourself with reading scriptures, these will comfort you, your grief will

become much lighter. Let your life be a life of dedication. The household itself can be an ashram. Grievances come in order to remind you to turn your mind to look upon them as God's Blessing.

66. A bereaved lady : Ma, I had forgotten about the loss of my daughter while you were here. Now that you are going away, I shall be submerged in sorrow as before.

Sri Ma laid her hands upon the lady's heart and said with great compassion; No, it will not overwhelm you again if you think of God and repeat His Holy Name constantly.

67. To a lady whose husband is in jail as a political prisoner (under British rule) :

Sri Ma: Nowadays you are worrying about your husband day and night because you are his wife. Before you married him, he was a stranger to you and you had no occasion to think about him. Similarly one must first of all establish a relationship with God by means of worshipping any one of His Forms which may capture one's heart. This bond of familiarity will grow in intensity and fill you with thoughts of God Himself. Through this husband (*pati*) happiness comes to you as

well as sorrow. But from that Lord (*Pati*), Bliss alone. However, your husband also is a form of that Supreme One, so if you can think of him as such, you will be thinking constantly of God Himself. All are His Forms. He alone is.

68. It is natural to be upset by bereavement. Sometimes it seems to us that He who is the Supreme Beloved of all is our enemy. Nevertheless, whatever He decrees, will have to be endured. Dear mother, listen to the request of this little daughter of yours: in these days of affliction and distress, call out to God and cry for Him. It is but He who comes to man in the guise of a brother or husband. Only by invoking Him can peace be found.

69. To attempt to summon the spirit of the departed is not good. Very often some other being responds and the ordinary individual is not in a position to distinguish between genuine manifestation and fake. Therefore, it is harmful. Do not let your mind be occupied with any such matter. On the level of the self you are united with your daughter. In this world, happiness invariably alternates with

sorrow. Bear in mind that as the Ātmā she is with you—within you. This is the truth, not fancy. Birth and death happen in fulfilment of Divine Will. In all shapes and conditions there is but He alone.

70. Question : People say everything is decided by one's fate. Is it possible to circumvent this fate by suitable action ?

Sri Ma : Everything is possible with God's mercy. If He is Gracious then what cannot be achieved in a moment ?

71. Question from a lady : Ma, I want self-realization and that quickly too; I have been searching for it so long and now I am getting on in years.

Sri Ma: Self-realization is not in time.

Question : Anyway, before I die I must attain it. Please tell me how ?

Sri Ma : You must be still as much as possible and meditate in solitude. Instead, you have taken on yourself so much work which obliges you to give your attention to worldly affairs.

Question : But I do not want to withdraw from the world. Why can't I realize here and now, in the midst of my worldly activities. ?

Sri Ma shook her head saying : It can't be done. Look at it this way—when you wish to write a letter you don't do it in public. You take your pen and paper and sit by yourself. Once it is written you may read it out to others. Once the Self is realized the question whether to live in the world or in seclusion does not arise. But while you are striving for it, you must be by yourself.

72. Question from a housewife : Ma, it is difficult, to give myself time for *nāma-japa* or meditation. No sooner do I sit still, then a dozen things happen which require my attention.

Sri Ma smiled in understanding. She said, "Suppose you stand at the seashore wishing to go into the water. Can you wait until all the waves have subsided ?"

73. To an ascetic : Stay quietly in one place and practice *sadhana* as a sincere and earnest aspirant. First of all fill your own emptiness; then this treasure you accumulate will of its

- own accord seek an outlet and thus communicate itself to others.
74. One may say-what harm can there be in doing *kirtan*, *japa*, meditation etc. together with others ? But to feel the attraction of company constitutes an obstacle. This will naturally bring about unsteadiness. Moreover if a desire lurks or arises in one, to be the head or leader of the congregation, it is also harmful. This holds good in the case of both men and women.
75. Question : Ma, the other day you asked me to do *Gayatri-japa*. Why ?
- Sri Ma : I see there is the sacred thread on your shoulder. If you are asked to identify yourself you will say : 'I am a brahmin'. So the *kriya* of a brahmin should also be maintained. You do not need to think of whys and wherefores. Just like watering the roots of a plant, do a little *japa* everyday. Who knows that the plant may revive, you may feel the urge for doing your *kriya* earnestly.
- Question : But I cannot obey the rules of diet etc.
- Sri Ma : You don't need to. Just remember the Mantra. This is what I say, now it is up to you.

76. It is the fault of the parents that their children give up the *Gayatri Mantra* although they have received the sacred thread. The parents do not teach them the importance of spiritual values. The children are taught that worldly education is necessary but not that they have some duty toward religious aspirations also.
77. Question by a young European lady :
Shall I ever find peace and happiness ?
- Sri Ma : Peace and happiness are found on the path to God, never in the world, where one gets a little happiness which is invariably followed by its shadow-sorrow.
- The young lady (after a long conversation) :
I shall never forget what you have told me.
- Sri Ma : Forget ? That is not enough. You must meditate atleast for five minutes daily along the lines prescribed by your own religion, and do not forget this friend (pointing to herself) !
78. To remain calm and at peace under all circumstances is man's duty. To form a bad opinion of a person just because one has heard some gossip about him is wrong. Hostility, condemnation, abusive language.

ill-feeling and so forth even if kept concealed within one's mind will and must fall back on oneself. Nobody should ever harm himself by harbouring such thoughts and feelings.

79. Question : Who is called a mother ? What are the characteristics of a mother ?

Sri Ma: Nobody is called a mother. A mother is just a mother. Those who become her children know what she is like.

80. Question from a Sadhu : Ma, should we observe the caste-system ?

Sri Ma : People behave according to their own predilections. What do you think about it ?

Sadhu : I think one should observe the rules.

Sri Ma : Then it is right for you to do so.

Sadhu : I travel with groups of ascetics, they do not observe any rules. I get into difficulties.

Sri Ma : What are you ?

Sadhu : I am a *brahmachari*.

Sri Ma : Then you should follow the rules and regulations related to your state. Maintain

your own individuality. Let the ascetics do as they wish.

81. Question : It is said that God is all-in-all. Nothing happens unless He wills it so. So why should we be blamed for our sins ?

Sri Ma : All is He alone. Good and evil are also He Himself. He enjoys the good that He does and He Himself suffers the consequences of the evil deeds. I see you as He who is saying that He is suffering. He is happy. He is in misery. Such is His play, *lilā* from time immemorial.

Question : What's the use of all this striving ?

Sri Ma : There is a lot of use. A child while studying doesn't understand how much knowledge he is acquiring. When he gets passmarks then he feels happy. Similarly when the time comes you will know how much progress you have made. Continue to live in God-remembrance.

82. That which is pleasant (*preyas*) is apparently good; that which is desirable good (*śreyas*) is apparently difficult and unpleasant. It is necessary to convert the good into the pleasing.

83. Question : If a man turns to religion in his old age, will he be able to maintain a calmness of spirit at the time of his death ?

Sri Ma : Innumerable predilections determine a man's way of life, so nothing can be said with regard to man's last hours. This body says, anything at all is possible, so a narrowing of the vision is uncalled for. It is possible that exalted ideals may uplift a man from higher to higher stages. The target should be ever high. One should think when a ray of light has brightened the inner life, is it not possible that full illumination will also happen ? Doubts and weakened efforts are natural but he should not indulge in them. Be steadfast in your effort. You will see that God's Grace makes everything possible at any time.

84. Question : Is it right to pray to God for all kinds of things ?

Sri Ma : If pray you must for things of the world then pray to Him, but the most excellent prayer is for God Himself.

85. It is best not to practice yogic *kriyās* without proper guidance. Easy and natural ways are

safe and sufficient for the purpose of meditation and God-remembrance.

86. Question : The Ramayana says that to pronounce the name of 'Rāma' even once only is sufficient for purifying oneself of all sins. We are all the time making the skies ring with our loud *kīrtana* of Rama nama, but gain nothing ! How is this ?

Sri Ma : Just because you 'make the skies ring with your loud *kirtanas*' !

Question : I don't understand ?

Sri Ma : We engage in repeated *Kīrtanas*, in the hope that in time 'the once only' will happen !

87. The essential thing is to keep trying. Make an effort, help will come.

88. Question : Is it necessary to obey rules of eating separately; does it not add to narrowness ?

Sri Ma: For a *sādhaka* rules are necessary. His aura is affected by the close proximity of different types. Think of an operation theatre. How much effort is required to prevail against infection. However, if the *sādhaka*

has attained 'immunity', if he is replete with divine *śakti*, then he may choose to do as he will.

89. Question : How to attain a state of union ?

Sri Ma : (smilingly) Are you aware of a state of separation ? Seriously speaking, the very thought, "How may I unite with Him", "What shall I do to know Him" will show you the way toward achieving your goal.

90. Question : Ma, we do understand what is required of us, but can't do anything.

Sri Ma : Pitaji, there is no understanding, otherwise it would reveal itself in action.

Question : How then to understand ?

Sri Ma : Faith. Act in accordance with words of your Guru; the Grace of God (Guru) will achieve everything for you.

91. A lady : Such a crowd; Ma, you never get a moment's respite; you never are tired or irritated, but always so joyful !

Sri Ma : Well mother, in your own house there are a number of people. Do you not converse with them ? You move your own limbs, you do not feel tired, do you ?

92. One Kazi Saheb* : I have not come to hear anything from you. I wish to say something to you, which is : Battle has been joined. Please grant that I may win; Sometimes I feel depleted of arms and ammunitions for the fight. Will you keep your *kheyāla* on me ?

Sri Ma smilingly, So be it, Pitaji.

On her return journey, Sri Ma said to a mutual friend in the car, "Kazi Saheb Pitaji started by asking me not to say anything, so I did not do so. Now when you go back tell Pitaji, 'Whoever engages in a battle for attaining to Him, is sustained by God Himself. He himself will provide the wherewithall, so there is absolutely no cause for stressful thoughts.'

93. On being told by Jamini Babu that the thorny bushes near Sri Ma's room in Shahbagh (1944) had turned into shrubs of sandalwood,

Sri Ma : See how wonderful is God's creation. Animals, birds, human beings, trees, plants, insects all are responsive to atmosphere but differently. The capacity to

*. During Sri Ma's visit to a village in East Pakistan.

imbibe or reject is not uniform. As for example, a hundred people are listening to a discourse, there are highly educated among them, also. Some are learning deeply from the discourse, others remain untouched; here the question of education does not arise. Understanding depends upon inner *samskāras*, predilections. Similarly in the realms of animals or vegetation. Do not trivialize them as non-intelligent. He Himself is in all forms of this creation.

94. Question : If Sri Ma has found peace, why does she keep wandering about ?

Sri Ma answering directly : Pitaji, if I stayed in one place, the same question could arise, could it not ? Pitaji, don't you know, I am a very restless little girl. I cannot stay in one place. This is one answer. From another point of view, I may say, it is you who see me travelling. In reality I do not move at all. When you are in your own house, do you sit in one corner of it ? Similarly, I also walk around in my own house. I don't go anywhere. I am always at rest in my own home.

95. Question : Ma, what do you think of all these new people coming to see you almost daily ?

Sri Ma : Nobody is new. They are all familiar to me.

96. Question : If I say, I have no faith in things spiritual ?

Sri Ma : Where 'no' is, 'yes' is potentially there also. Who can claim to be beyond negation and affirmation ? To have faith is imperative, A man's belief is greatly influenced by his environment; therefore choose the company of the holy and the wise. Belief means to believe in one's own Self; disbelief means to mistake the non-self for one's self.

97. The Supreme duty of man is to undertake the quest for his true being, whether one takes the path of devotion, Where the 'I' is lost in the 'Thou' or the path of self-inquiry, in search of the true 'I' it is He alone who is found in the Thou as well as in the 'I'.

98. Message sent at the request of Dr. T.M.P. Mahadevan to the Opening Session of the All Faiths Conference in Bangalore. (1955) :
"O Thou, Immortal Self !
Be Thou a pilgrim on the way to Immortality,
(away from the path of mortality)

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O Immortal Self, O Immortal Wayfarer, abide
Thou ever in Thine own self."

99. A group of ladies who have come to see Sri
Ma off on one of her journeys :
Ma, please say, you belong to us !
Sri Ma (laughing) I belong everywhere and to
everybody !

100. Wherever you are you should live in the
company of that which is of the nature of
Peace. I say to you, keep in mind always,
God; God alone is Peace. Relentless,
onepointed perseverance brings about the
change in perspective which will establish
you in Peace.

Peace can be attained anywhere in the
world or away from it. You say that I have
found Peace and should distribute it to
others. I say unto you that I am a little child
and you are my parents. All unmarried people
and children are my friends. Accept me as
such and give me a place in your hearts. By
saying 'Mother', you keep me at a distance.
Mothers have to be revered and respected.
But a little girl needs to be loved and looked
after and is dear to the heart of everyone. So
this is my only request to you to make a place
for me in your hearts !