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Please note that the tapes in the Harvard Divinity School Andover Library Archive are not necessarily numbered chronologically and that this collection includes only tapes in which Shri Ma is speaking.

INTRODUCTION

India has been the home of saints and sages since time immemorial. Each century has been marked by the existence of extraordinary beings who have attracted followers on the path of God-realization. The earthly life of the crown jewel of Hindu spirituality, Shri Anandamayi Ma, spanned most of the 20th century (1896-1982). Thousands of people from India and many other countries, from simple villagers to heads of state, were transformed by Ma's luminous Presence. Although She was said to be illiterate and never wrote a book, spiritual Truth and inspiration sprang from Her lips every time She spoke. Her Presence transformed people's hearts and lives and this transformation continues even forty years after Her passing. Although I never had the blessing of meeting Ma in person, I can testify that since I first encountered Her Presence through reading Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* in 1971, my life has never been the same.

During the early years of Ma's life, Her *vani* (words) were recorded in personal journals by Her close devotees and were later published in Bengali, Hindi, English, and many other languages. Ma's words are considered to be gold, full of the Light of Her Perfect Being, and contain maps for how to traverse the material world and gain an experience of Ultimate Reality. Ma's discourses and conversations were witnessed by countless people all over India, each of whom remembered Her words according to their own capacity.

In 1960, something extraordinary happened in Ma's community. Vishuddha Di, one of Ma's "girls," or *brahmacharinis* (celibate nuns who served Ma), took on a new role in the ashram. Born in Assam in 1936 to a family devoted to Ma, Vishuddha and her family had moved to live close to Ma's Kanyapeeth, or girl's school, in Varanasi when she was ten years old. In her memoir, *My Mother Anandamayi*, she narrates the many magical childhood experiences she had with Ma. But her memoir also tells us that the following happened in 1960:

A devotee sent a four-track Akai tape recorder from abroad. Panuda asked me to operate it. I never operated a machine before, but somehow managed to operate it after going through the literature of the machine. Dadabhai recommended keeping the machine with me. It was very heavy still I used to carry it in a bag on my shoulder and moved around Ma recording Her sayings and songs off and on. One day in Varanasi ashram we gathered in Ma's room on the first floor. Ma was talking about Her sadhana leela [the play of Her Spiritual practices] in Her own kheyal [according to Her Divine Will]. I kept the machine under Ma's cot and sitting near Her was recording. The mike was hidden in my hand so no one could make out that I was recording. I was scared that if Ma sees the machine She might stop talking. After a long time Ma bent down to ask me whether I was recording or not. At once I switched off the mike with a smile. Some people forbade me to record lest Ma's mood of talking will vanish. Ma said, "When this body talks, how much enters in your ears, how much goes in the machine and how much floats away in the air, everything is clear in my kheyal [Divine Will]."¹

This was one of several times that Ma made it clear to Vishuddha Di that it was Her *Khayaal* (Divine Will) that Her words be recorded. Thus, from 1960 until 1981, a year before Ma left this world, Vishuddha Di and possibly some of Ma's other "girls" recorded over fifty conversations between Ma and those magnetically pulled to Her Presence. We might contemplate that somehow the Divine Plan brought about the recording of these particular words of Ma for posterity.

In 1973 a young seeker from Oklahoma named Gadadhar (Gary Empie) moved into Ma's ashram in Kankhal. In service to Ma, Gadadhar began to collect all the tape recordings of Ma's *satsangs* (literally "gatherings in the Truth"; spiritual gatherings), as part of his mission to collect materials to document Ma's life. Yet, Gadadhar died of infectious hepatitis in 1982, just five months before his beloved Ma left Her body. With his parents in attendance, Ma blessed his ashes to be submerged in the Ganga, which had been his wish. His

1 Vishuddha, *My Mother Anandamayee* (Varanasi: Shree Shree Ma Anandamayee Kanyapeeth, 2007), p. 115.

parents went on to donate Gadadhar's archive of Ma's tapes, photos, and books to Harvard Divinity School in their son's name. In 1985, Harvard Divinity School celebrated the gift that was to become the Anandamayi Ma Archive with a public reception at which I delivered a talk on Ma.

Meanwhile, an American devotee of Ma, Markell Brooks, hired a *pundit* from California, Satya Pal Sharma, to translate the Hindi portions of the *satsangs* into English. Since Shri Sharma did not speak Bengali, he left those sections of the *satsangs* untranslated. Just before the Harvard Divinity School reception, Ms. Brooks donated 48 English transcripts to the Anandamayi Ma Archive and generously gifted me with copies of those same transcripts. In 2015, I showed the box of *satsang* transcripts to my friend and fellow Ma devotee, Swami Gurusharanananda. He encouraged me to re-edit them, get the Bengali sections translated, and move toward publishing them as a book so that Her immortal words might inspire people around the world.

So, in the fall of 2017, with the invaluable help of Jaya Sanyal Bandyopadhyaya, a young devotee of Ma's who grew up in a Bengali family descended from Ma's younger brother, I began to listen to the tapes of Ma's *satsangs* recorded between the years of 1960 and 1981. For five days a week over a six-month period, Jaya and I sat in the Reading Room at the Andover Library at Harvard Divinity School and listened to Ma interacting with Her devotees, comparing what we heard with what was written in the original transcripts of the translations that Shri Satya Pal Sharma had completed from 1985 to 1986. We began each day with the *Pranam Mantras* from Ma's ashram in Kankhal, the hallowed place where Her body was interred and Her *samaadhi* shrine established in 1982.

In these *satsangs*, Ma is mainly speaking in question-and-answer style to gatherings of people that include both close devotees as well as people new to the spiritual path. She is speaking mostly Hindi colored with Bengali, and we tried to ensure that everything was translated correctly and flowed well in English. In addition, Jaya was able to translate the Bengali passages that had yet to be translated. After Jaya and I completed our work on the transcripts, Swami Gurusharanananda, who holds a PhD in Sanskrit and Indian

philosophy, traveled to Boston from India to check that all the Sanskrit words were properly identified and translated.

This collection of *satsangs* with Ma represent much of what She spoke and taught through the last two decades of Her life. As such, it is a treasure trove of Ma's teachings. We experience Her dialogues with so many kinds of people, as She tailored Her advice to the particular needs of the person to whom She is speaking. We also experience the breadth and depth of Her teachings—teachings springing from Her state of Oneness with the Absolute.

So, when it came time for me to choose a title for this book, I wanted it to reflect the preciousness of this collection of Ma's words, in essence Her gospel, which literally means "good news." I was reminded of an important book on the teachings of a great 19th century Indian mystic, Shri Ramakrishna, published in English in 1942, entitled *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. During the last four years of the life of Ramakrishna (1836-1886), his accomplished disciple, Mahendranath Gupta, kept a journal of every interaction he had with his master and later published his journal in Bengali as *Shri Shri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (The Nectar of Sri Ramakrishna's Words). By 1942, the book had been translated into English by Swami Nikhilananda, a renowned scholar and disciple of Ramakrishna's wife, Sarada Devi. Nikhilananda decided to rename the book *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, to reflect the power of the words and the teachings of his master, thinking perhaps of the fact that the gospels of the Christian Bible have inspired and sustained people for 2,000 years.

Thus, this collection of the spoken words of Shri Anandamayi Ma came to be called *The Gospel of Shri Anandamayi Ma: Conversations with the Divine Mother*. Imagine now that you are sitting at the feet of the Divine Mother, listening to the pearls that are Her words, strung on the thread that is *Brahman*, or Ultimate Reality. May people for years to come benefit from the transmission of Ma's extraordinary state and Her teachings through these words spoken in intimate settings over two decades. Jai Ma!

MA'S TEACHINGS AS REFLECTED IN THESE SATSANGS

God Is One: There is No Second

What does entering into one's own True Being (*svarupa*) signify? To realize what IS: that He, the Self-Effulgent One is all-pervading, present in all shapes, states of mind, and modes of existence. There speech, words have no place. For can Essential Form (*svarupa*) or formlessness (*arupa*) be described in any language? He and He alone IS.²

Having spent the past five years immersing myself in Ma's words as recorded in these 48 *satsangs*, or gatherings in the Truth, I have come to a single conclusion. Despite Ma's glorious inclusiveness and acceptance of all paths to God, in the end She is pointing us to the Truth of the non-dual path of Advaita Vedanta, which She articulates as *Ekam Brahma Dvitiya Naasti* (God is One; there is no second). Ma repeats this Sanskrit aphorism from the *Brahma Sutras* over fifty times in these *satsangs*, a testimony to its centrality in Her teaching. In this case, *Brahma* is the nominative singular of *Brahman*, or Ultimate Reality. *Ekam* is One, *Dvitiya* is "second" (though Ma pronounces it as *Dvitiyo*, as a Bengali would), and *Naasti* is "there is no." So, Ultimate Reality, or God, is only One and can never be two. Ma is saying again and again that our supreme duty is to realize this Oneness as our True Nature and to see through the illusion of duality. Although God can appear as the formless or as the world of form, the difference between them is no more than the difference between water and ice. Our suffering will end when we turn within, disidentify with our separate self, and identify with the Self of All. God, then, appears in form as a personal god only in order to take the seeker to Ultimate Reality, which is *Brahman*.

Another evidence of the primacy of non-duality as the foundation of Ma's teachings is Her choosing to tell the charming story, "Where

2 Anandamayi Ma, *Matri Vani*, Volume 1 (Kankhal: Shree Shree Anandamayi Sangha, 2010), Verse 158.

Is God Not?"; five or six times during these *satsangs*. In this story, with which She delights devotees as She plays all the parts, only a humble farmer is able to answer four ultimate questions posed by the king, the first and foremost being, "Where is God?" The farmer's simple yet profound answer is, "Where is God not?"

One of my favorite conversations in the *satsangs* occurs in Tape 8 in which Ma is talking to a devotee who is having great difficulty grasping the Truth that each of us is God in disguise as an individual. The man is trying to get Ma to answer a somewhat trivial question about Sita's fate in the *Ramayana*. Ma persists in telling him first that he is Sita and next that he is Rama, both God on earth. No matter how many times Ma raises the conversation to the ultimate level that addresses who the questioner really is, he refuses to be convinced of his True Nature. The crowd witnessing this conversation is in an uproar of laughter, perhaps thinking him a fool for trying to drag Ma down to the level of the intellect. When I find myself judging this stubborn devotee, I must admit to my own resistance to fully accepting my true identity as the Eternal Self.

Even though Ma repeatedly speaks of the goal of realizing Ultimate Reality, She also states again and again that there is no one path to the Supreme. She acknowledges that each person has their own inclinations and that any one path, even the sublime path of *Jnana Yoga* (the Yoga of Attaining the Absolute through Knowledge), may not be for everyone. She encourages the many devotees who are drawn to the path of *Bhakti Yoga* (the Yoga of Devotion), giving them explicit instructions on how to practice *japa*, or *mantra* repetition, or how to perform their morning worship. She Herself models great devotion at ceremonies of worship of particular forms of God. Yet, Ma continuously brings us back to the goal of spiritual life: abandoning our concept of a separate existence and seeing ourselves as God playing hide and seek with Himself. Thankfully, as Ma says again and again, the One who has created the *aavarana* (veil of ignorance) has given us the tools to pierce and remove it.

The Five Components of *Saadhana* (Spiritual Practice)

Throughout this book, you will hear Ma extolling the five components of *saadhana* (spiritual practice): *puja* (worship), *paath* (the recitation of scripture, such as the *Bhagavad Gita* or the *Hanuman Chaleesa*),

japa (repetition of *mantra*), *kirtan* (devotional chanting), and *satsang* (gathering in the Truth or keeping the company of other devotees of God). This formula for a *saadhana* that prepares a seeker for God-realization is a fairly conventional one, but Ma places particular emphasis on the final component, *satsang*, or gathering in the Truth. In the above-mentioned story, “Where is God Not?”, after someone asks how a simple farmer could answer ultimate questions that baffled even the greatest *mahatmas*, or great beings, Ma seems delighted to deliver the punchline, “Because he attended *satsang*!”

The Special Importance of Repeating the Divine Name

Throughout the *satsangs*, Ma gives special importance to repeating the Name of God, whether as *japa*, silent repetition of the *mantra*, or in *kirtan*, devotional singing of the Divine Name, as preparation for ultimately attaining the One, God. She asks us to “keep our mouths sweet” by repetition of the Name. Through *japa*, *kirtan*, and other devotional practices, the seeker grows in *bhakti*, or devotion, until the seeker has an intimate relationship with God. Once immersed in God’s Divine Presence, through the grace of the *guru*, the seeker finally comes to the realization that He alone exists.

The Meaning of *Sanyam* and the *Sanyam Saptaah*

Although Anandamayi Ma showed little interest in institutions established in Her Name—schools, hospitals, even ashrams—She showed a particular commitment to and enthusiasm for the annual *Sanyam Saptaah*, the Seven-Day Retreat of Self-Restraint, first instituted in 1952. Ma’s *Khetyaal*, or Divine Will, was that devotees would gather for seven days in which they would leave the world behind and practice *sanyam* (self-discipline or self-restraint). This self-restraint took the form of fasting with the exception of one meal a day, and refraining from gossiping, smoking, drinking tea, coffee, or alcohol, and engaging in sexual activity. Wherever the retreat was held, participants, however wealthy and prominent in the world, lived a simple life, devoid of comforts. The programs for each day consisted of talks by *mahatmas*, or great souls, *kirtans*, meditation, and at least a one-hour *satsang* with Ma in which She would answer questions.

Sixteen of the 48 *satsangs* included in this book took place during

a *Sanyam Saptaah*. During these *satsangs*, Ma often refers to the importance of taking the inspiration participants have received from these retreats home with them and instituting a day of *sanyam*, or self-restraint, at least one day a month, if not once a week, in their own homes. She refers to these days committed to self-restraint and spiritual practice as the only alms She begs for from Her devotees. It is clear that Ma considers these days of *sanyam* as the foundation for spiritual progress, especially for householders who can become distracted by the demands of daily life in the world. Ma points out over and over again that renunciation, or *vairagya*, is an inner state, not a matter of wearing an orange robe and calling oneself a *sannyasin*, or renunciate. She often advocates a return to the life of the *rishis*, householder/practitioners who looked upon their wives as Mahalakshmi, their children as Lord Krishna or Kumari, and treated all as Divine. She speaks of the contrast between a person who lives in a hut, but inwardly craves for worldly pleasures, and a person who lives in a house, but has the attitude of a yogi living in a forest hut.

Expansion of the *aham* to the *Abam* and the Journey from the self to the Self

Ma often speaks of the spiritual path as the expansion of the individual "I am," or *aham*, into the Divine "I Am," or *Abam*. Through the practices that have been prescribed by one's *guru*, Ma says that one can develop from a person identified with their limited, ego-centric, personal self to the unlimited, eternal, formless Divine, or God, the Great I Am.

In the same way, Ma often speaks of the journey from the small individual self, *aatmaa* in Sanskrit, to the Great Self of All, or *Aatmaa*. Through spiritual practice, the veil of ignorance, or *aavarana*, which is associated with the small self, conditioned through lifetimes of personal experiences to believe it is a separate person, is pierced to reveal one's True Nature as the One, the Self or *Aatmaa*.

Karna vs. Hona

Throughout these *satsangs*, Ma speaks of the difference between "doing" things and things "occurring" or "happening" on their own. She contrasts the verb "*karna*," to do or to perform, with the verb "*hona*," to be, to occur, or to happen. For example, She might be

talking about *sannyasa*, or renunciation, and She will say that in the beginning the renunciate might perform outer renunciation, but that true *sannyasa* will not be accomplished until there is inner renunciation “occurring” or “happening” spontaneously. The same is true for *japa*, or repetition of the *mantra*, says Ma. In the beginning, *japa* is mechanical. The seeker is reciting the Name of God by rote, without becoming One with it and merging with its qualities. Only through committed *saadhana*, or spiritual practice, will the *mantra* finally “happen” or “occur” on its own. She illustrates this level of “*hona*” of the *mantra* by telling the story, “The Guest Who Recites the *Mantra* in His Sleep.” In this story, a couple invites a stranger to stay overnight in their house. In the middle of the night, the husband hears someone repeating the *Mahaamantra* (a famous *Vaisnava mantra*). He looks in vain everywhere to see where the sound is coming from. Ultimately, he discovers that the sound is coming from the guest, who is automatically repeating the *mantra* in his sleep. The husband and wife ask the obviously spiritually realized guest to become their *guru*.

Ma’s *Khetyaal* and Ma’s *Leela*

Two words that come up frequently in reference to Ma are *khetyaal* and *leela*. The word *khetyaal* is one of the most intriguing, enigmatic, yet revealing of words used by Ma and those close to Her to capture the place from which Her actions in the world arose. We commonly translate it as “Divine Will,” but scholars and devotees alike have written extensively about its meaning. “*Leela*” is a Sanskrit word common to the *Vaisnava* tradition of Lord Krishna that refers to the movement of the Divine as Consciousness in the manifest world as a “play.”

Richard Lannoy, in his magnificent photo essay on Ma, *Anandamayi: Her Life and Wisdom*, begins his discussion of these two words with a quote from Ma Herself:

One day in Bajitpur, I had as usual gone to the pond near the house where we lived for my daily bath. While pouring water over my head, the *khetyaal* came to me, “How would it be to play the role of the *saadhaka* [spiritual aspirant]?” and so the *leela* began.³

3 Richard Lannoy, *Anandamayi: Her Life and Wisdom* (Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1996), p. 31.

Lannoy goes on to quote the definition of *kheyaal* from the prominent scholar and devotee of Ma, Gopinath Kaviraj:

Ordinarily it means a sudden and unexpected psychic emergence, be it desire, will, attention, memory or even knowledge, without any adequate causal antecedent behind to account for its origin. There is an element of spontaneity in the act. It might thus seem to be analogous to the playful vagaries and caprices of an eccentric and non-purposeful mentality. Maraji has borrowed it and used it in her own sense, enriching it with her own associations. In [Ma's] case, her *kheyaal* appears to have taken shape from the needs of her "companions." [And since her "companions" include all sentient beings, it could take her to places that none of her close devotees expected.] Once expressed, it was seen that a concatenation (a series of interconnected events unlikely to occur again) of events led to its fulfilment. The term "*leela*" most commonly associated with the lively frolics of *kheyaala leela* means "sportive play," particularly sacred play, or endlessly variegated play, the manifestation of the Supreme Being.⁴

The body of literature on Ma's activities in the world are replete with examples of Her unpredictable Divine *Kheyaal*. One of the best resources on the subject is Anil Ganguli's booklet, *Anandamayi Ma's Inscrutable Kheyaal*, available online at <https://www.anandamayi.org/>.

Ma's Inclusiveness: All Paths Lead to God

In this book you will find many examples of Ma's favorite aphorism: "There are many paths to the top of the mountain." Ma sincerely honored all religions and all spiritual paths and was prepared to counsel any seeker on any path. But more fundamentally, this aphorism is another way of articulating the multiplicity of the world of form (*Saguna Brahman*) as it manifests the One (*Nirguna Brahman* or Formless Ultimate Reality). Just as there is no difference between ice and water, there is no difference between form and essence. Everything in the manifest world is an expression of the One that is the goal of our spiritual life. Thus, Ma was always pointing to the "transcendent

4 Richard Lannoy, *Anandamayi: Her Life and Wisdom* (Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1996), p. 32.

unity of all religions,” as Richard Lannoy expresses it in his book, *Anandamayi: Her Life and Wisdom*.⁵

“Return Ticket”

One of the phrases that Ma spoke in English and that often punctuates Her talks is “return ticket.” To get to the root of suffering, according to Ma, a seeker must end his or her alienation from the One, must end his or her sense of separateness. To succeed on the path to God-realization and attain one’s True Nature, then, one has to drop the ego and let go of all worldly desires. If, however, at the time of death, the seeker still has desires or earthly attachments, he or she will receive a “return ticket” and return to live another life. Ma’s tone when She uses these words is often quite light, as if to chide, “You don’t want to return to suffer again, do you?”

“As You Play, So You Will Hear”

Ma frequently repeats the unique aphorism, “As you play, so you will hear.” This seems to be Ma’s way of expressing that She as a Divine Instrument provides answers that reflect the state of the questioner. Often someone will ask Ma a question and She will answer only with this aphorism, indicating that Her *Kheyaal*, or Divine Will, is not “played” properly to even elicit a response. Ma’s extraordinary Austrian devotee, Atmananda, remarks when talking about Ma as the Divine Instrument, “The wonder is that it responds even to silent playing!”⁶ In other words, in some cases, a person might only be thinking of a question and Ma will speak on that subject without being asked.

Skill in Means

When speaking of the Buddha, people often describe him as possessing “skill in means,” meaning that he had the ability to direct the perfect teaching for a particular person to that person. Atmananda writes, in the Preface to *Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma*:

5 Richard Lannoy, *Anandamayi: Her Life and Wisdom* (Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1996), p. 25.

6 Anandamayi Ma, *Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma*, translated by Atmananda (Calcutta: Shree Shree Anandamayee Charitable Society, 1982), p. iii

It has been said of Her that She has the right word, at the right time, in the right manner, for every seeker after Truth, be he a believer in any faith or an agnostic, an intellectual or an artist, a scholar or an illiterate, a beginner or highly advanced on the path. Just as the earth provides for each plant the substance necessary for its growth, even so does Sri Anandamayi Ma guide every aspirant, according to his uniqueness and his need at any particular moment. Her replies are not mind-made.

She has often declared unequivocally that She does not talk to 'another.' For Her, everything is the One Supreme Being, who manifests in infinite diversity, yet at the same time is beyond expression and limitation, formless, immutable, inconceivable. In That there is no room for distinctions, although on our level they do exist. Questions are asked from the standpoint of the individual, but the true answer lies beyond the ego-mind where no separation, no divergence of opinion exists, and Sri Ma gives it expression.⁷

“This Body Is But a Little Girl”

Throughout this book you will hear Ma referring to Herself as “this body” or in the third person as “she.” This practice seems to reflect Ma’s complete identification as *Purna Brahma Naraayana* (the Absolute), rather than as a human being. Furthermore, when in the presence of *mahatmas*, or great beings, and *pundits*, or scholars, Ma always refers to Herself as “this little child” or “this little girl.” Identifying Herself in this way is usually considered to be a sign of Ma’s humility. However, it seems to me that Ma as Ultimate Reality is beyond polarities of old and young, parent and child, pride and humility. Where there is a vision of only One and no second, humility cannot even arise. Perhaps Ma’s speaking of Herself in this way is more of a demonstration of “skill in means.” Clearly Ma was incapable of attachment to any ordinary human shape, yet, in identifying Herself as a little child, She elevates the *mahatmas* and *pundits* around Her while disarming them at the same time. Humility is widely considered a mark of greatness in the Indian spiritual

7 Anandamayi Ma, *Words of Sri Anandamayi Ma*, translated by Armananda (Calcutta: Shree Shree Anandamayee Charitable Society, 1982), p. i

world. Yet, anyone in Ma's Presence, experiencing Her vastness and brilliance, must have been taken aback by Ma's insistence that She knows nothing and is just their "little daughter." It may actually have had the paradoxical effect of serving as proof of Her greatness.

Longing for God

According to Ma, the primary quality of a seeker who will succeed on the spiritual path is an intense longing for God. Possessing the right *bhaava*, or pure, ecstatic devotional attitude, says Ma, is the foremost ingredient in the attainment of the Divine. In *Sad Vani*, Ma is quoted as saying,

Do you want deliverance from the bonds of the world? Then, weeping profusely, you will have to cry out from the bottom of your heart, 'Deliver me, great Mother of the World, deliver me!' To obtain Her grace you will have to shed tears much more abundantly than when you desire things of the world. When by the flood of your tears the inner and the outer have fused into One, you will find Her whom you sought with such anguish, nearer than the nearest, the very breath of life, the very core of every heart.⁸

May we aspire to such longing so that we, too, will be delivered!
Jai Ma!

8 Anandamayi Ma, *Sad Vani: A Collection of the Teaching of Shri Anandamayi Ma*, as reported by Bhaiji (JC Roy) (Calcutta: Shree Shree Anandamaye Charitable Society, 1973), Aphorism 87.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Language and Translation

Throughout these *satsangs* that took place between 1960 and 1981, Ma was primarily speaking Hindi, punctuated with Sanskrit. Occasionally, however, She would switch to Her mother tongue of Bengali. Even more occasionally, She would speak an English word. For example, as already mentioned, when speaking about the inevitability of a soul's having to come back to another lifetime on earth if they had not exhausted their karma from previous lives and become realized, Ma would say that they had received a "return ticket." She consistently used the English word "line" to refer to spiritual lineage or line of approach. Ma also frequently used the English word "time" and the English word "packet." The words Ma spoke in English on the *satsang* tapes have quotation marks around them.

I have chosen to put most of the Sanskrit that Ma spoke into Sanskrit transliteration, rather than presume to assign them a single English meaning. Those words are transliterated and presented in italic font with English definitions following in parentheses. You will see that the definitions vary according to context. Ma uses a few Sanskrit words repeatedly. Rather than repeating the definitions many times, those important words are defined here. In the text, the following words will appear in italic without the definitions:

guru or *Guru*—lit., a spiritual master who brings a disciple out of the darkness into the light; the personal *guru* is one who guides a seeker on the path to Self-Realization, while the universal *Guru* is One with God and guides the seeker from within

satsang—lit. in the company of the Truth; a gathering in which people are receiving and contemplating teachings from a master

darshan—seeing and being seen by the Divine, either a representation of a god or goddess or a holy person

mahatma—great soul, for example, Mahatma Gandhi

mantra—sacred Sanskrit syllables to be recited that evoke a

manifestation of the Divine and, in fact, are considered One with the Divine that is being named

japa—the repetition of *mantra*

karma—action; the sum of a person’s actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences

pundit—a teacher in any specialized field related to Hindu philosophy or ethics

yoga—although people in the West are familiar with the word *yoga*, it is usually associated with *hatha yoga*, or the *yoga* of physical *asanas*, or postures. Ma’s use of the word is much broader and connotes union with Absolute Reality through various types of *yoga* practice: *Kriyaa Yoga* (the Yoga of Combining One’s Actions with God), *Raaja Yoga* (the Yoga of Meditation), *Bhakti Yoga* (the Yoga of Devotion), etc.

kirtan—devotional singing of the Names of God in call and response

There is one word that is commonly used in English—ashram, or spiritual community—that has no italics and no definition in this book. However, the Sanskrit word *aashramaa* will appear in italics with the definition, “stage of life.”

Determining how to transliterate the non-English words and phrases in these *satsangs* has been daunting, as Ma and her devotees are speaking a combination of Hindi, Bengali, and Sanskrit. For ease of reading, I have chosen a hybrid phonetic model for Hindi, Sanskrit, and Bengali, focusing in particular on distinguishing between the single “a” and the double “a.” The “a” sounds like the “u” in “but,” while the “aa” sounds like “baa.”

For example,

नारायण *Naaraayana*

ध्यानं *dhyaanam*

भाव *bhaava*

In some cases, the long “i” sound at the end of words has been shown with a simple “i” rather than “ee.”

For example,

कुण्डलिनी *kundalini* (not *kundalinee*)
ब्रह्मचारी *brahmachaari* (not *brahmachaaree*)

Place names occur in their anglicized forms without distinguishing vowels as do contemporary Hindu figures, such as Ramakrishna.

The translation and transliteration process for this book has been multi-staged. It began in 1985 when Satya Pal Sharma was hired to listen to the tapes of Ma's *satsangs*, transcribe them in Hindi, then translate them into English. Nearly thirty years later, my collaborator, Jaya Sanyal Bandyopadhaya, and I listened to the original 48 tapes at the Andover Library, correcting and editing Mr. Sharma's translations, and adding translations for the Sanskrit words as well as Bengali translations for the Bengali sections that Mr. Sharma had been unable to translate. In 2018, Swami Gurusharanananda traveled to Boston to check the Sanskrit definitions in the book. I offer my deepest apologies if, despite our efforts, there are words spoken by Ma that have not been transliterated and/or translated properly to reflect either their correct meaning or Ma's Divine intention.

Just as Ma Spoke It

When I first encountered these *satsangs* as transcripts, there were a variety of subjects about which Ma was speaking. Certain questions were asked over and over and answered by Ma, always according to the state of the questioner. Some conversations were somewhat fragmentary, due perhaps to defects in the original tape or someone forgetting to turn on the tape recorder. From the beginning, there was the question of whether to edit out repetitions and seemingly mundane or fragmentary conversations. Ultimately, I decided that it was not up to me to shape this book in any substantial way, so I made the decision to leave all the transcribed material in chronological order, including some incomplete sentences, twilight language (esoteric, coded language spoken by Ma in deep *samaadhi*), and even small talk. There are many beautiful books on Ma's teachings with select, important quotes (see the Bibliography in Appendix A), but I felt that the best way to honor Ma was for this book to be a complete collection of everything that had been recorded on the tapes collected by Gadadhar. These transcripts

are Ma's gift to us and there is so much to learn from everything Ma spoke during these 48 *satsangs*.

In that spirit, I decided to include all repetitions that Ma spoke in the recorded *satsangs*, thinking that, if She said something two or three times in a row, the situation demanded it for emphasis. Again, it seemed important to honor Ma's every word. This respect for every word applies to stories as well. Throughout the *satsangs*, Ma tells almost twenty different stories, but She repeats some of them four or five times. It seems important to notice which stories She emphasized as part of Her teachings and how they changed in the telling, depending upon the context. Appendix B includes a listing of the stories.

Ma's Word Play

Richard Lannoy aptly refers to the way Ma uses words as "dazzling word play."⁹ Ma frequently used puns with either Hindi, Bengali, or Sanskrit words to emphasize a point She was making. Bengali, Ma's mother tongue, in particular, is a language ripe with opportunities for punning. However, it is well-known that it can be very difficult to convert a pun from one language to another, so I apologize if I have not been able to fully capture both Ma's humor or Her teaching intention with any of these puns.

The Gender of God

Throughout this book Ma uses different pronouns to refer to God or Ultimate Reality. In general, when the word for God has been translated as He, Ma could be meaning "He" or "She." Often Ma actually refers to God as "She." Furthermore, Ma often used the word "*Vah*" or "That" to refer to the Absolute and sometimes "*Bhagavaan*," meaning God or Lord. Lest the reader get the impression that Ma saw God as masculine, I have selected a paragraph from Tape 22 that demonstrates the variety of words that Ma used to signify God, the Absolute or Ultimate reality—some masculine, some feminine and some neutral:

9 Richard Lannoy, *Anandamayi: Her Life and Wisdom* (Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1996), p. 22.


Take the support of the Name and the form that will enable you to attain *Hamko* (Him). He has given you the name and the form that is not immortal, but after giving that name and form to you, that very Immortal has entered into you. *Bhagavaan* (God who possesses all positive attributes) has entered into everybody. Hold onto It. If you like the path of Name, adopt it. If you like the path of form, follow it. Take the support of whatever Name and form you like. If you want to tread the path of *karma*, action and work, go on that path. Do work. Practicing this line of action, you should be so perfect that there should be no difference between *karma* and *akarma* (action and inaction). What is action? Who is there in the form of action? *Bhagavaan* alone. Nobody else. *Vah* (That) is *Nityakriyaa* (in the form of Eternal Action). That is why He is called *Shakti* (the Divine, feminine Power). They call Him *Shakti* and *Mahaashakti*. Why? *Bhagavaan* is the one who is present in the *shakti* (power) of action. *Bhagavaan* is always there because *Vah* (That) is the *Nitya Shakti* (Eternal Power). When you do work you develop contact with that Eternal Power existing in that work. Once you reach that power through that work, contact that Eternal Power, you will see Him only in that action and then He, who is in the form of action, cannot help but manifest Himself to you. Therefore, you should try to contact that *Aadyashakti* (Original Divine Power) and *Mahaashakti* (Great Divine Power). Once you contact that Power you will see that there is nothing else in anything. It is *Vah* (That) and *Vah* alone. You will achieve Him.

It seems best for us to hold a view of Ma as beyond concepts, as beyond duality. Her use of pronouns in Her *satsangs* when referring to God reflects Her establishment in a reality beyond Name and form. It seems that, according to Ma, no one Name or pronoun for God should be taken as having more weight than any other.

The Tape Recordings of These Satsangs

As mentioned previously, the tapes of these *satsangs* reside at Harvard Divinity School's Andover Library in the Anandamayi Ma Archive. A few years ago, Harvard digitized these recordings and made them available online. In Appendix C, you will find the links to digital recordings of each of the 48 *satsangs* in this book.

If you imagine a tape recorder from the 60s or 70s, you can

imagine that whoever was recording Ma's *satsang* on a particular day had the task of turning the recorder on and off when the *satsang* was interrupted by something (chanting, mealtimes, private conversations, etc.). Such breaks in the recorded conversations between Ma and devotees are represented in this book with . In addition, breaks that occurred when a tape had to be turned over are represented by the words, "Side B."

If you decide to listen to the corresponding digital version of a particular *satsang* on Harvard's Andover Library website, either because you speak Hindi or because you simply want to listen to Ma's speaking voice, these indications of breaks will help you to keep up with the transcription of that particular tape.

Ma's Laughter and the Joyful Tone of these Satsangs

Even if you do not understand Hindi or Bengali, I highly recommend that you listen to some of the corresponding digital recordings of these tape transcriptions. If you read Ma's words without hearing Her speak them, you will miss the lively, joyful tone of these *satsangs*. I have inserted brackets that indicate the moments when Ma is laughing and when the audience joins Her in laughter. It is important to remember that Anandamayi Ma means, "The Bliss-Filled Mother" or even the "Joy-Filled Mother," and that these spiritual talks, however profound, were also full of teasing and playfulness. Ma's Divine laughter was often called *attahasi* or "the laughter of thunder" because of its power to uplift and awaken. Many devotees have described the power of Ma's laughter to uplift and transform one's consciousness. On the other hand, there are moments in listening to the tapes when you can feel the seriousness in Ma's voice, Her insistence that the person She is speaking to as well as the wider audience understand what She is saying. I have also included comments in brackets to point to these moments of seriousness that are part of Her Divine *Leela*, or Play of Consciousness.

Limited Commentary

The original transcripts of Ma's *satsangs* as translated by Shri Satya Pal Sharma included Shri Sharma's extensive commentary on Ma's words. I have chosen to keep commentary to a minimum, including

it only when I felt that the reader could benefit from an expanded definition or a few lines of context. This commentary is indicated by Ed: within parentheses.

***Guhya Prashna* (The Secret Question)**

There is a secret question that I invite you to consider as you read through these *satsangs* with Ma: Who is Ma? This was the question I asked devotees of Ma when I interviewed them for my first book on Ma, *Mother of Bliss: Anandamayi Ma (1896-1982)*, and I received as many different answers as there were devotees—the Divine Mother, *Brahman* (Ultimate Reality), an *avatar* (Divine incarnation), *Purushottama* (the Supreme Being), my Mother, and so on. As you read these conversations between Ma and Her devotees, you might receive insights into who Ma is for you. Although She cannot be defined in or confined by words, She can be powerfully felt in the heart.

Ma Reaches Out Through Time

As mentioned above, one thing that becomes clear in reading these *satsangs* is that Ma offers different answers to different questioners, exhibiting immaculate skill in means. It is also clear that Ma was able reach multiple attendees of these *satsangs* at one time. We can imagine that Her words, spoken between forty and sixty years ago, are targeting us, the readers of this book, with as much skill and precision as they targeted Her live audiences so many years ago. From the perspective of Enlightened Awareness, there is no time. May we discover Ma's message reaching out to us from the Timeless and may our spiritual life be inspired and enriched by it! Jai Ma!

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The Divine Light that is Anandamayi Ma, the Absolute that took form and graced this world for 86 years, only to return to *Akbanda* (the Formless Whole), from where She guides us to return to our True Home, the One, Undivided, Absolute Reality. Jai Ma!