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CHAPTER III

Selected Discourses

The following are selections from Śrī Ānandamayī Mā's replies to oral questions, recorded at meetings of large and small groups. The recorder of the discussions, Brahmacāri Kamal Bhattacharjee, well-known as "Kamalda" to all devotees and visitors of Ānandamayī Mā, first met Mātājī in Dacca in 1926, and kept in touch with her ever since. In 1942 he joined the Vārāṇasi *āśram* and became one of its most devoted and prominent workers. Gifted with a keen intelligence and a great thirst for real knowledge, he conceived the intense desire to record Mātājī's exact words, since he was convinced that they emerged spontaneously from depths to which ordinary human beings have no access. Notwithstanding his numerous duties as the Joint Secretary of the Shree Shree Anandamayee Sangha and the manager of the Vārāṇasi *āśram*, etc., as soon as he got to know that Mātājī was replying to questions, he would at once leave the work in hand, and hasten to the spot where the discussion took place. In his eagerness to preserve Mātājī's utterances in their original purity and with the greatest possible precision, he soon developed a technique of his own. In the stillness of night he used to make fair copies of his records, pondering over the profound significance of what he had heard and written down. Often the dawn would remind him that he had spent the best part of the night in this delightful meditation. If, for some reason, he was prevented from recording a part of the conversation, he felt it as an acute personal loss. But on many such occasions, he would later, to his great delight, hear Mātājī explain the same point to someone else, thereby elucidating the part of the conversation he had missed.

Mātājī speaks of that which is beyond the experience of the ordinary individual and can, at best, be only hinted at by words. It is therefore not surprising that her language should not conform to either literary or colloquial Bengali. She has given new meanings to many familiar expressions and sometimes coined new words with an etymology of her own. Her way of expression is as original as it is relevant, and is intensely alive and plastic, often condensed and pithy, with every unnecessary word left out. In certain cases, when stating very profound truths, her language becomes cryptic. The dissimilarity of the Bengali idiom to that of English is a well-known fact. No adequate words exist in English for many Bengali terms. In some cases two or three Bengali words have had to be rendered by an entire clause or sentence. No pains have been spared to translate as precisely as possible every one of the utterances, as recorded. At the same time, it has been the ambition of the translator as much as possible to preserve, together with the exact meaning of the words, their rhythm and beauty, the inspiration they carry, and the matchless, intangible quality that pervades Mātājī's every expression—her words, her songs, her smile, and her gestures.

Concerning the value of religious and philosophical discourses, Mātājī said:

By listening repeatedly to discussions and discourses on topics of this kind, the path to first-hand knowledge of what has been heard gradually opens out. You know, it is as when water uninterruptedly dripping on a stone finally makes a hole in it, and then a flood may

suddenly surge through, which will bring enlightenment.

Be it the perusal of Sacred Texts, listening to religious discourses, engaging in *kīrtana*—God must be the alpha and omega of whatever is done. When reading, read about Him, when talking, talk of Him, and when singing, sing His praises. These three practices are intrinsically the same; but because people respond differently, the same is expressed in three different ways to suit each person's temperament and capacity for assimilation. Essentially there is only He and He alone, although everyone has his own individual path that leads to Him. What is the right path for each depends on his personal predilection, based on the specific character of his inner qualifications.

Take for instance the study of *Vedānta*. Some seekers become completely drowned in it. Just as others may so lose themselves in *kīrtana* as to fall into a trance, a student of *Vedānta* may become wholly absorbed in his texts, even more so than the one who gets carried away by *kīrtana*. According to one's specific line of approach, one will be able to achieve full concentration through the study of a particular Scripture, or by some other means.

First comes listening, then reflection, and last of all the translation into action of what has been heard and pondered over. This is why one has first of all to listen, so that later on each may be able to select *Vedānta* or *kīrtana* or whatever else be in his own line.

Have you never come across people making light of *kīrtana*, saying: "What is there to be gained by it?" Nevertheless, after listening to it for some length of time, they actually develop a liking for it. Therefore one must listen before one can reflect, and then later, what has been heard and reflected upon will take shape in action suited to the person concerned. To listen to discourses on God or Truth is certainly beneficial, provided one does not allow oneself to be moved by a spirit of fault-finding or disparagement, should there be differences of outlook to one's own. To find fault with others creates obstacles for everyone all around: for him who criticizes, for him who is blamed, as well as for those who listen to the criticism. Whereas, what is said in a spirit of appreciation is fruitful to everybody. For only where there is no question of regarding anything as inferior or blameworthy (*asat*) can one call it *satsaṅga*.[1]

Who is known as a *vaiṣṇava*? One who sees Viṣṇu everywhere. And as a *śākta*? One who beholds the Great Mother and nothing save Her. In truth, all the various ways of thought spring from one common source—who then is to be blamed, who to be reviled or suppressed? All are equal in essence.

> Thou art Mother, Thou art Father,
> Thou art Friend and Thou art Master,
> Truly, Thou art all in all.
> Every name is Thy Name,
> Every quality Thy Quality,
> Every form Thy Form indeed.

Yet He is also where no forms exist, as pure unmanifested Being—all depends on one's avenue of approach.

For this reason, no matter what path anyone may choose it is THAT. *Vedānta* actually means the end of difference and non-difference.[2] While engaging in *sādhanā* one must concentrate in a single direction; but after it has been completed, what comes then? The cessation of difference, distinction, and disagreement. Differences do indeed exist on the path, but how can there be a difference of goal?

[1] A play upon words: *Sat* means true Being, the Good; *satsaṅga* the company of the good, and also a religious gathering. *Asat*, the opposite of *sat*, means non-being, wrong, evil. Therefore to find fault (*asat*) in a religious meeting (*satsaṅga*) is a contradiction in terms.

[2] *Vedānta*: end or culmination of Vedic wisdom. Mātājī here plays upon words: *Veda*, and *bheda* (difference). In Bengali the letters B and V sound alike. "*Anta*" means "end."

A member of a well-known Indian family, who had distinguished herself by devoting her life to social service, came for Mātājī's *darśana* and asked:

Does the capacity to meditate come by practice in this life, or is it an aptitude acquired in former births?

Mātājī: It may be the result of either of the two, or of both combined. Meditation should be practiced every day of one's life. Look, what is there in this world? Absolutely nothing that is lasting; therefore direct your longing towards the Eternal. Pray that the work done through you, His instrument, may be pure. In every action remember Him. The purer your thinking, the finer will be your work. In this world you get a thing, and by tomorrow it may be gone. This is why your life should be spent in a spirit of service; feel that the Lord is accepting services from you in whatever you do. If you desire peace you must cherish the thought of Him.

Question: *When will there be peace on earth?*

Mātājī: Well, you know what the present state of affairs is; things are happening as they are destined to be.

Question: *When will this state of unrest come to an end?*

Mātājī: *Jagat* (world) means ceaseless movement, and obviously there can be no rest in movement. How could there be peace in perpetual coming and going? Peace reigns where no coming exists and no going, no melting and no burning. Reverse your course, advance towards Him—then there will be hope of peace.

By your *japa* and meditation those who are close to you will also benefit through the helpful influence of your presence. In order to develop a taste for meditation you have to make a deliberate and sustained effort, just as children have to be made to sit and study, be it by persuasion or coercion. By taking medicine or having injections a patient may get well; even if you do not feel inclined to meditate, conquer your reluctance and make an attempt. The habit of countless lives is pulling you in the opposite direction and making it difficult for you—persevere in spite of it! By your tenacity you will gain strength and be molded; that is to say, you will develop the capability to do *sādhanā*. Make up your mind that however arduous the task, it will have to be accomplished. Recognition and fame last for a short time only, they do not accompany you when you leave this world. If your thought does not naturally turn towards the Eternal, fix it there by an effort of will. Some severe blow of fate will drive you towards God. This will be but an expression of His mercy; however painful, it is by such blows that one learns one's lesson.

A Government Official and his wife had come for Mātājī's *darśana*. They were meeting her for

the first time. To a question of theirs, Mātājī replied:

If you say you have no faith, you should try to establish yourself in the conviction that you have no faith. Where "no" is, "yes" is potentially there as well. Who can claim to be beyond negation and affirmation? To have faith is imperative. The natural impulse to have faith in something, which is deep-rooted in man, develops into faith in God. This is why human birth is such a great boon. It cannot be said that no one has faith. Everyone surely believes in something or other.

There are two kinds of pilgrims on life's journey: the one, like a tourist, is keen on sightseeing, wandering from place to place, flitting from one experience to another for the fun of it. The other treads the path that is consistent with man's true being and leads to his real home, to Self-knowledge. Sorrow will of a certainty be encountered on the journey undertaken for the sake of sight-seeing and enjoyment. So long as one's real home has not been found, suffering is inevitable. The sense of separateness is the root-cause of misery, because it is founded on error, on the conception of duality.

A man's belief is greatly influenced by his environment; therefore he should choose the company of the holy and wise. Belief means to believe in one's Self, disbelief to mistake the non-Self for one's Self.

There are instances of Self-realization occurring by the grace of God, whereas at other times it can be seen that He awakens in some a feverish yearning after Truth. In the first case attainment comes spontaneously, in the second it is brought about by trials. But all is wrought solely by His mercy.

An eternal relationship exists between God and man. But in His play it is sometimes there and sometimes severed, or rather appears to be severed; it is not really so, for the relationship is eternal. Again, seen from another side, there is no such thing as relationship. Someone who came to meet this body, said: "I am a newcomer to you." He got the reply: "Ever new and ever old indeed!"

The light of the world comes and goes, it is unstable. The light that is eternal can never be extinguished. By this light you behold the outer light and everything in the universe; it is only because It shines ever within you that you can perceive the outer light. Whatever appears to you in the universe is due solely to that great light within you, and only because the supreme knowledge of the essence of things lies hidden in the depths of your being is it possible for you to acquire knowledge of any kind.

Inquirer: *It is all in God's hands.*

Mātājī: Everything is in God's hands, and you are His tool to be used by Him as He pleases. Try to grasp the significance of "all is His," and you will immediately feel free from all burdens. What will be the result of your surrender to Him? None will seem alien, all will be your very own, your Self.

Either melt by devotion the sense of separateness, or burn it by knowledge—for what is it that melts or burns? Only that which by its nature can be melted or burnt; namely the idea that something other than your Self exists. What will happen then? You come to know your Self.

By virtue of the *guru*'s power everything becomes possible; therefore seek a *guru.* Meanwhile, since all names are His Name, all forms His Form, select one of them and keep it with you as your constant companion. At the same time He is also nameless and formless; for the Supreme it is possible to be everything and yet nothing. So long as you have not found a *guru,* adhere to the name or form of Him that appeals to you most, and ceaselessly pray that He may reveal Himself to you as the *Sadguru*.[3] In very truth the *guru* dwells within, and unless you discover the inner *guru*, nothing can be achieved. If you feel no desire to turn to God, bind yourself by a daily routine of *sādhanā,* as

[3] The perfect *guru* who shows the way to the knowledge of Reality.

school children do, whose duty it is to follow a fixed time-table.

When prayer does not spontaneously flow from your heart, ask yourself: "Why do I find pleasure in the fleeting things of this world?" If you crave for some outer thing or feel specially attracted to a person, you should pause and say to yourself: "Look out, you are being fascinated by the glamour of this!" Is there a place where God is not? Family life, which is the *āśrama* (life stage) of the householder, can also take you in His direction, provided it is accepted as an *āśrama*. Lived in this spirit, it helps man to progress towards Self-realization. Nevertheless, if you hanker after anything such as name, fame, or position, God will bestow it on you, but you will not feel satisfied. The kingdom of God is a whole, and unless you are admitted to the whole of it you cannot remain content. He grants you just a little, only to keep your discontent alive, for without discontent there can be no progress. You, a scion of the Immortal, can never become reconciled to the realm of death, neither does God allow you to remain in it. He Himself kindles the sense of want in you by granting you a small thing, only to whet your appetite for a greater one. This is His method by which He urges you on. The traveler on this path finds it difficult and feels troubled, but one who has eyes to see can clearly perceive that the pilgrim is advancing. The distress that is experienced burns to ashes all pleasure derived from worldly things. This is what is called *tapasyā*.[4] What obstructs one on the spiritual path bears within itself seeds of future suffering. Yet the heartache, the anguish over the effects of these obstructions, are the beginning of an awakening to consciousness.

A young girl was talking to Mātājī. She said:

When I sit down to meditate I do not intend to contemplate any form, but how is it possible to meditate on the formless? I have noticed that at times, when I try to meditate, images of deities come floating before my mind.

Mātājī: Whatever image arises in your mind, that you should contemplate; just observe in what shape God will manifest Himself to you. The same form does not suit every person. For some Rāma may be most helpful, for some Śiva, for others Pārvatī, and again for others the formless. He certainly is formless; but at the same time, watch in what particular form He may appear to you in order to show you the way. Consequently, whichever of His forms comes into your mind, that you should contemplate in all its minute details.

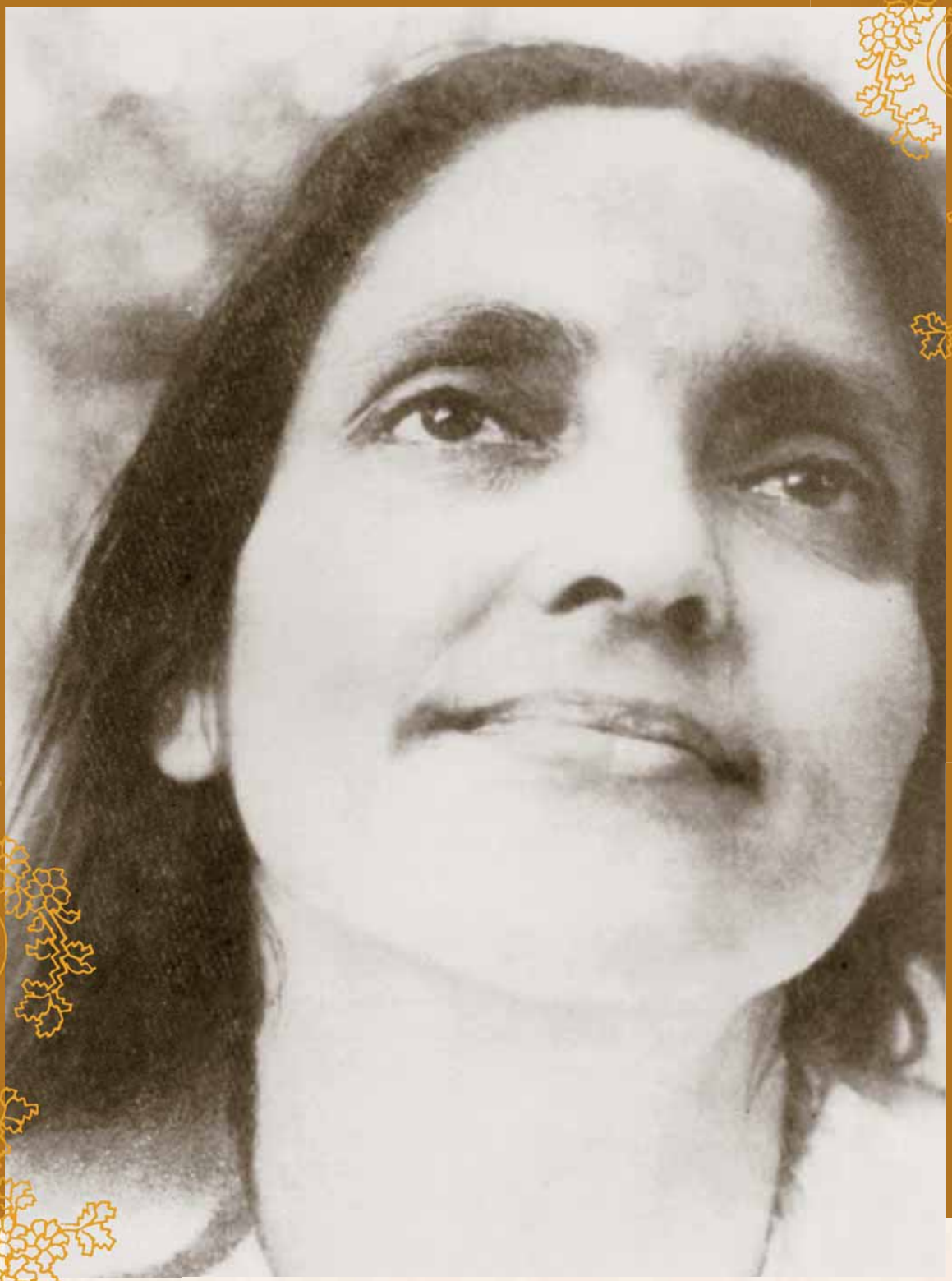
Proceed as follows: When sitting down to meditate, first of all contemplate the form of a deity; then, imagining Him to be enthroned on His seat, bow down before Him and do *japa*. When you have concluded the *japa* bow down once more and, having enshrined Him in your heart, leave your seat. This, in short, may be your practice if you are not able to meditate on the *Brahman*.

Be ever convinced that at all times and without exception He will do and is doing what is best for you. Reflect thus: In order to aid me, He has revealed Himself to me in this particular guise. He is with form as well as without; the entire universe is within Him and pervaded by Him. This is why it is said: "The *Sadguru* is the World-teacher and the World-teacher the *Sadguru*."

In reply to a question concerning the way of reaching *samādhi*, Mātājī said:

Mātājī: It is for the *guru* to point out the method; he will show you the way to understanding and instruct you in your *sādhanā*. It is for you to keep on practicing it faithfully. But the fruit comes spontaneously in the form of

[4] Hardships undergone with the definite object of attaining to the spiritual.



Self-revelation. The power to make you grasp the Ungraspable duly manifests itself through the *guru*. Where the question "How am I to proceed?" arises, fulfillment has obviously not yet been reached. Therefore, never relax your efforts until there is enlightenment. Let no gaps

interrupt your attempt, for a gap will produce an eddy, whereas your striving must be continuous like the flowing of oil, it must be sustained, constant, an unbroken stream.

That you have no control over the body's need of food and sleep does not matter; your aim should be not to allow any interval in the performance of your *sādhanā*. Do you not see that whatever you require in the way of food and sleep, each at its own appointed hour, is without exception an ever-recurring need? In exactly the same manner must you aspire at uninterruptedness where the search after Truth is concerned. Once the mind, in the course of its movement, has felt the touch of the Indivisible—if only you can grasp that moment!—in that supreme moment all moments are contained, and when you have captured it, all moments will be yours.

Take, for example, the moments of confluence at dawn, midday, and dusk, in which the power inherent in the contact-point, where coming and going meet, becomes revealed. What you call "electric discharge" is nothing but the union of two opposites—thus does the Supreme Being flash forth at the moment of conjunction. Actually IT is present at every single moment, but you miss it all the time. Yet this is what you have to seize; it can be done at the point of juncture where the opposites fuse into one. Nobody is able to predict when for any particular individual this fateful moment will reveal itself; therefore keep on striving ceaselessly.

Which exactly is that great moment depends for each one upon his particular line of approach. This is why, for some disciples, the *guru* fixes special times for *sādhanā*, such as dawn, dusk, midday, and midnight; these are the four periods usually prescribed. It is the duty of the disciple to carry out conscientiously the *guru*'s orders, which vary according to the temperament and predisposition of the aspirant. The same method does not suit everyone. What is important for you is the moment at which you will enter the current that is the movement of your true being, the going forth, in other words, the great pilgrimage.

Within the twenty-four hours of the day, some time must be definitely dedicated to God. Resolve, if possible, to engage regularly in *japa* of a particular name or *mantra* while sitting in a special posture, and gradually add to the time or the number of repetitions. Fix the rate and the interval at which you will increase, say fortnightly or weekly. In this way try to bind yourself to the quest of God; wherever you may be, take refuge in Him, let Him be your goal. When by virtue of this endeavor you become deeply immersed in that current and devote ever more time to it, you will be transformed and your appetite for sense enjoyment will grow feeble; thus you will reap the fruit of your accumulated efforts. You may also come to feel that the body is liable to depart at any time, that death may arrive at any moment.

Who can tell at what moment the flame of illumination will blaze forth? For this reason, continue your efforts steadily without flagging. Gradually you will get more and more deeply absorbed in Him—He and He alone will preoccupy your thoughts and feelings. For the mind ever seeks that which gives it proper sustenance, and this cannot be provided by anything save the Supreme Being Himself. Then you will be carried away by the current that leads to your Self. You will discover that the more you delight in the inner life, the less you feel drawn to external things. In consequence the mind becomes so well nourished with the right kind of food, that at any moment the realization of its identity with the Self may occur.

There are instances when one loses consciousness while sitting in meditation. Some people have found themselves swooning away, as it were, intoxicated with joy, remaining in this condition for quite a long time. On emerging they claim to have experienced some sort of divine bliss. But this is certainly not realization. A stage does exist in meditation where intense

joy is felt, where one is as if submerged in it. But what is it that gets submerged? The mind of course. At a certain level and under certain circumstances this experience may prove an obstacle. If repeated time and again, one may stagnate at its particular level and thereby be prevented from getting a taste of the Essence.

In the event of an experience of anything pertaining to ultimate Reality or to the Self, one does not say: "Where have I been? I did not know anything for the time being." There can be no such thing as "not knowing." One must be fully conscious, wide awake. To fall into a stupor or into yogic sleep will not take one anywhere.

After genuine contemplation (*dhyāna*) worldly pleasures become unalluring, dull, entirely savorless. What does *vairāgya* (detachment) signify? When every single object of the world kindles, as it were, the fire of renunciation, so as to make one recoil as from a shock, then there is inward and outward awakening. This, however, does not mean that *vairāgya* implies aversion or contempt for anything of the world—it simply is unacceptable, the body refuses it. Neither dislike nor anger will arise. When *vairāgya* becomes a living inspiration, one begins to discriminate as to the true nature of the world, until finally, with the glowing certainty of direct perception, the knowledge of its illusoriness arises. Each and everything belonging to the world seems to burn; one cannot touch it. This also is a state that may ensue at a particular time.

At present, what you enjoy does not impress you as being short-lived, rather does it appear to make you happy. But to the extent that the spirit of detachment is roused, the relish of such pleasures will die down, for are they not fleeting? In other words, death will die. Now that you are advancing towards that which is beyond time, the semblance of happiness brought about by mundane things is being consumed. As a result, the question "What actually is this world?" will arise. So long as the world seems enjoyable to you, such a query does not present itself. Since you are progressing towards that which transcends time, all that belongs to time will begin to appear to you in its true light.

Question: *At times we feel that sense objects really exist, at other times that they are merely ideas. Why does one and the same thing appear so different on different occasions?*

Mātājī: Because you are in the grip of time. You have not yet reached the state where everything is perceived as the Self alone,[5] have you? Herein lies the solution of the whole problem. To feel as you do is good, since your feeling is related to the supreme quest; for nothing is ever wasted. What you have realized even for a second will, at some time or other, bear fruit. Thus, the knowledge of the real character of each element (*tattva*)[6] and the knowledge what water, air, the sky, etc. are, and hence what creation is, will flash into your consciousness one by one—just like buds bursting open. Flowers and fruit come into existence only because they are potentially contained in the tree. Therefore you should aim at realizing the one supreme element (*tattva*) that will throw light on all elements.

You asked about sense objects: an object of sense is that which contains poison,[7] is full of harm, and drags man towards death. But freedom from the world of sense objects—where no trace of poison remains—means immortality.

Inquirer: *One is pulled in two directions, towards God as well as towards sense enjoyment—this causes anguish.*

Mātājī: You have a desire to give up, but you cannot let go; such is your problem. Let that desire awaken in your heart—its stirring signifies that the time is coming when you will be able to give up.

[5] A play upon words: *samaya* and *svamayī* sound alike. *Samaya*, time; *svamayī*, "permeated by Self."

[6] Literally "that-ness" or "essence." The *tattva*s are the primary elements or categories of universal manifestation.

[7] A play on words: *Viṣaya* means "sense object," *viṣ* "poison," *hai* "is."

You obtain a coveted object, but still you are dissatisfied; and if you fail to get it, you are also disappointed. The disillusionment you experience at the fulfillment of your wish is wholesome; but the torment of the unfulfilled

hankering after the things you could not secure, drives you towards that which is of death, towards misery.

Question: *And the anguish of not having found, the anguish of the absence of God? I have no wish for sense pleasures, but they come to me. I am compelled to experience them.*

Mātājī: Ah, but the anguish of not having found God is salutary. What you have eaten will leave a taste in your mouth. You wear ornaments because you wish to, and so you have to bear their weight. Yet this weight is fated to fall off, for it is something that cannot last, can it?

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