

“Meeting My Mother”

A Story of Healing Thru My First Meetings with 'Ammachi'

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For many years, since about 1974 -- around the age of 16 -- I had been engaged in spiritual practices and reading about the lives of Eastern saints and spiritual masters. I was initiated into the meditation practices and the "Kriya Yoga" technique of Self-Realization Fellowship, and I frequently practiced the repetition of a mantra and studied the application of various spiritual affirmations, all with the purpose of seeking "the light" and regaining the awareness of God constantly in my life.

Throughout most of my years of spiritual practice, I equated God with this "light." He was present for me in consciousness as a crystalline quality of transcendent stillness, untouched by any manner of mental or material "forms"...the space in meditation where the breath wanted to stop, and the all-fulfilled mind became powerfully drawn to a singular ecstatic point of focus. To experience anything other than this state of consciousness, as was my opinion for most of the years of my spiritual practices, meant that I was seeing something somewhat less pure and not the ultimate experience. I practiced bringing this meditative state into the world using a mantra I received internally through my intuition: namely, "Krishna," on the inward breath, "Om," on the outward breath. After years of repeating it, within just a few repetitions of the mantra, the world would start transforming into a sparkling, luminous experience -- where all the objects within my vision would take on an aura of the divine. The name "Krishna" changed for me from being merely a reference to a great historical person, into the actual experience of the transcendent Father Principle behind all creation.

This was, however, a best-case scenario... Most of the time, despite my struggling spiritual efforts, I confronted darkness and negativity around almost every corner. I begged and cried for God in the midst of the un-godliness I believed I saw in the world of people and Western material society. For years I was so sensitive to the energy in my environment that I avoided most people and places and become very reclusive and -- admittedly -- almost always depressed. After doing spiritual practices and working hard to achieve a "high" state of consciousness and the desired sensation of light in my being, I could not even sit in a chair where someone had been sitting in a negative mood, nor would I even shake hands with anyone for fear that I would absorb hard-to-release negative energy. I was a very pitiable and poor example of what a so-called "spiritually aware" person was supposed to look like. The dichotomy in my life between light and dark, between God and not God, was palpably present for me all through each and every day. I explored many paths and methods to try to hold my vision of the light -- trying consistently to see all things as divine -- but I only met with temporary success, for surely another instance would come where my judgmental mind or someone else's apparent negativity would result in a falling-out from this state of grace.

For 17 years, this battle raged on with only gradual and slow progress, until a major turning point in my life came. It was 1992, and a great saint was visiting the San Francisco bay area. Her name was Mata Amritananda Mayi, or for short, as we know her in the West, "Amma" or "Ammachi" (The Holy Mother). She was believed by many to be one of the world's most pure spiritual luminaries of our time, a self-realized master who was egoless and lived her life as an example to us of unconditional divine love. I had received her blessings at a few of her programs during her previous 1990 and 1991 World Tour visits to the bay area, and I had been most impressed. All programs were free to the public, and she embraced and received everyone with what appeared to be inexhaustible divine motherly love and spiritual energy.

I decided I had had enough confusion (Yogananda's term was "spiritual indigestion") from the many paths I had studied and was trying to integrate. I practiced Self-Realization Fellowship meditation and Kriya Yoga techniques, attended Siddha Yoga intensives, used the teachings of Guru Ram Das, Master Da Free John, and the Course in Miracles as the main foundation of my philosophy, and sung Hare Krishna and Sai Baba bhajans to a picture of Sathya Sai Baba which occupied the center of my altar (as a testament to my unconfirmed belief that he might be my Guru). So it was within this muddle of spiritual practices that I decided to once again go and visit the Holy Mother during her summer programs of 1992.

Quite unexpectedly, 2 weeks prior to seeing her, I had had a very vivid dream -- set in India -- in which I had posed a very key question to Amma. So, during her first San Francisco Bay area program, when my turn came up for receiving a blessing from her, I felt inspired to pose the same question I had asked her in the dream... now in waking reality, I had full faith that her reply would reflect only the absolute divine truth, so with all my courage mustered I finally asked, "Amma... Who is my Guru?"

After engaging me with her sparkling eyes, and mischievously asking me a few questions about myself I knew she already knew the answers to, she ultimately replied with a smile, "Son, I will take care of you."

So is how began what was to become one of the greatest transformational periods of my life... I had finally found my Guru after almost 20 years of consciously longing for a spiritual master! I had tried and mysteriously failed on three occasions in the past to travel to India, so with baited breath I decided to ask her the next most important question in my heart, "Would Amma give permission for me to work as a doctor at her ashram in India?"

She said, "Oh I don't think you will like it there..." with a grim theatrical frown on her face, "but if you wish, you can come for a period of time. After this you will know first-hand what our life is like there, and if you decide you like it, you may stay."

I was awestruck and teary-eyed. My long awaited dream of being accepted by a spiritual master and some day moving to India was now within reach, it was only a matter of my ultimate decision to choose what my future would be! To make a long story short, after attending as many programs on Ammachi's 1992 U.S. summer tour as my work schedule would permit, I made arrangements for another doctor to take over my practice, and in mid-September I left for my first two and a half months stay in India.

In the weeks before departing for India, I had several people tell me that they foresaw my having a very unique experience there, one which would profoundly impact the course of my life. Well, the entire visit turned out to be one miraculously powerful experience after another. Hardly a day went by where I did not find myself repeatedly moved to tears by the divine grace which was so markedly present in the opportunity to perform service work at Amma's ashram. The constant incredible synchronicities and miracles that occurred in the presence of the spiritual master gave palpable evidence of this grace which powerfully guided my learning day by day to surrender more and more to God.

I am moved, especially, to describe one particularly profound experience. I suspect strongly that it was the one foreseen by several of my intuitive friends, which was to have significantly altered the course of my spiritual understanding. As a preface, however, I wish to state that great teachers such as Ammachi place little importance on the mystical experiences of devotees, emphasizing much more the greater miracle of the steady transformation of our ego-centered minds dissolving ultimately into selfless love. With this considered, I have decided only to share this experience because it was integral to my process of transformation towards realizing a more all-embracing love and greater spiritual understanding in my life.

It was approximately one month after my arrival in India, and I was struggling to try to more consistently repeat a new mantra (given to me by Amma, the year before) while being engaged in all of my work at the ashram. It was a mantra invoking the Divine Mother, and I was having a very hard time with an uncomfortable darkness and constant burning feeling it brought up in me. So I sought Amma's counsel in hopes that she would compassionately see my predicament and allow me to change back to repeating my previous "Krishna-Om" mantra, which felt wonderful after all the years I had been practicing it, and could lift me into a state of divine bliss almost effortlessly. Amma's reply was in a loving tone, but her answer was very disappointing to me: she suggested I continue with the mantra that was given by her, and that I not use my old mantra at all. I left very heavy hearted. Why was I not supposed to repeat a mantra that so easily lifted me up into 'God' and divine bliss? Why did this Divine Mother mantra have such a burning and heavy quality for me? What was the difference if I invoked Krishna or Divine Mother, both were names of God?



This heaviness of heart led to a frank depression, which continued through the day and into our evening program of group devotional singing. Amma usually joined these programs each night at the ashram, and inspired everyone with the magnitude of her heart-rending calls to God, which she fervently cried-out while singing songs with us. During a devotional song to Krishna, she would repeatedly cry out for him, calling him by one of his many endearing names -- "Krishna!", "Shyama!", "Chitta-chora!", "Kanna!". It lifted me up when I heard these names, because of the many years of chanting my mantra, and the divine vision Krishna's name almost immediately conferred upon me. However, when it came to singing a devotional song for the Divine Mother, and Amma crying out one of Her many names, such as "Ma...Ma...Ma..!", "Kali...Kali...Kali!", or "Radhe...Radhe!", I couldn't feel any semblance of God or light, what-so-ever. The vibration of these names, to me, just didn't feel like God. I was in an extremely troubled mood, rehashing over and over in my mind that I couldn't understand why, if the name Krishna moved me so much, that I couldn't continue with his mantra. During the next song to the Divine Mother, I concentrated inwardly on trying to feel, "who is Ma?", as Amma called out her name, let me feel into the vibration of "Ma", "Amma, if you are taking Krishna away from me, show me who this Ma is!"

At that moment I felt a kind of hollow 'pop' at the base of my spine, and I was immediately flooded with an incredible ocean of ecstatic vibratory energy, rising up through my spine and thrilling every atom of my being with the cosmic sound "Ommmmmm". To my inner vision, the temple, all people, and all things around me were pervaded and empowered by this tremendous sea of conscious, deeply embracing, loving energy. I knew as if for the first time in all eternity, I had finally found my Mother...the Mother I had always been searching for!

For three days, I wandered in a semi-altered state of consciousness. Everywhere I looked, I could tune into the sacred sound OM coming from animate and inanimate objects around the ashram. My perspective on God shifted from nearly 20 years of seeing him only as the transcendent light and stillness of the formless absolute -- the 'Divine Father' principle -- to knowing God also as the deep vibrant rich loving energy of all forms (sometimes even appearing dark, to my perception)

-- the 'Divine Mother' principle. Whereas, when I had felt "negative" energy before, it was often incompatible with my staying centered in the light and Divine Father consciousness, now I was able to offer this negative energy up to the Divine Mother, who would easily embrace and absorb it, without breaking my communion with my new deeper and more whole vision and understanding of 'God'.

Over the years my Divine Mother mantra finally lost its heavy quality and it has worked to continue to purify me more and more, opening up a whole new experience of God that I had previously never truly seen: the God that is imminent in all things of the world, not just transcendent above the world. Meeting my dearest guru Ammachi, and having been given the gift of this experience, was the dawning of a new period of growth and transformation for me. After all the years of spiritual practices dedicated to reaching the light, now I began my equally challenging journey of learning how to embrace and release the darkness that still remained within me.