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Living

"Heaven is within us"

Kamlendra Kanwar



Mata Amritanandamayi, affectionately called Amma, was born Sudhamani in an anonymous fishing village in Kerala, in 1953. Though ill-treated in her own home, her kind heart won her many friends, and devotees. Their numbers only increased and when Amma turned fifty in September last year, thousands from across the world congregated in Kochi, showcasing their solidarity for her cause. Today, the Mata Amritanandamayi Math, her ashram, has over 300 centres in India, and more than 25 across the world. The Math's welfare schemes include building orphanages, women's shelters, hospices, providing education, setting up environment projects, and rehabilitating prostitutes among others but the "hugging saint" says there's a lot more to be done. "My wish is that there should be no huts in India," says Amma of one of her hopes for the future.

Amma you give darshan to and shower your love and compassion on thousands every day, sometimes right through the night without rest. What gives you this boundless energy? Is it the power of spirituality?

An ordinary person is like an electric post. A true spiritual person is a tapasvi who can become like a transformer which can generate infinite amount of electricity. Whenever I look at the people, and when I see their sufferings and their pain, I forget myself. I am not like an ordinary battery that dies away after being used for some time. I am like a constantly charging battery, connected to the power source.

How can a wandering mind purify his thoughts and inculcate the necessary attribute of faith in a guru?

The first and foremost quality is jigyasa or longing. If one is a Nobel prize winner and he or she wants to learn to play the flute, then the person concerned would have to sit at the feet of a flute master. The person should have the attitude of a beginner. The basic quality is the awareness of the goal.

If we focus on one name, be it Rama or Krishna or some other

name or mantra, we can avoid all unnecessary thoughts. Everything depends on the intensity of feelings for the goal. When you tame the mind, immense energy will be generated. It is difficult to gain mastery of the mind. When we want to gain something or achieve something the mind gets automatically focused.

As normal human beings our awareness level is very low. A regular routine, a disciplined mind, or a time table is necessary to awaken that awareness within. Suppose we want to attend an interview at 7 'O' clock we will set an alarm at 4 'O' clock and we wake up. On normal days we get up only at 8 'O' clock, but on that particular day we have to be there at 7 'O' clock. The alarm helps us to create that awareness. Slowly we will be able to gain mastery over the mind. We need these basic rules and regulations, just like we need a time table for a child attending primary school.

For me there is no creator and creations. Like the ocean and the waves, they are all one and the same. God is in the people or in the world, and the world is in the people. It is love that transforms into worship. Even nature is part of God. That is why we have temples even for insignificant creatures such as lizards, trees and poisonous snakes. We have 'Mattu Pongal', we worship the sun. We need the ox for cultivation. It is a form of thanksgiving to the entire creation as that is the power that sustains life.

What is your message to those who indulge in all kinds of wrongdoings, including corruption and immorality and then practise bhakthi to cleanse themselves?

Such people have intellectual knowledge, but are not focussed in the heart. They don't have the right understanding, or attitude. Purity in action is true devotion. If that is not there, it is like keeping milk in a dirty vessel. The milk will turn rancid.

Cleansing must happen in the lowest and highest level. Without proper discipline, nothing will work in our society. For example, in Singapore, if you spit or litter they fine you 100 dollars. So people don't spit or litter. But in our engineering colleges we tried to advise students about the need to not waste food. There was no change. Then we slapped a fine on students who waste food. It worked. Likewise, if they cannot be awakened by themselves, we have to create awareness through strict rules and discipline.

Our understanding of spirituality is all wrong. Only through good deeds will one get God's grace. People think they can bribe God. There are three types of people: prakrithi, vikrithi and sanskrithi. The first — prakrithi — are those who don't care about anybody and consider others as of no consequence. Whatever they get, they eat it up. The second type — Vikrithi — eat what they get and also grab from others. And the third share whatever they have. We have to train the first category of people to become the third category.

Whatever we take from the world, it will diminish as time passes. But our capacities, which we have within, will not diminish if we have the right attitude. As far as our ashram is concerned, there is no support from any community or political party. We have to serve the society. These children, if they get 5 paise, they return it to society as 1,000 rupees. If people think on these lines, we can change the world.

Do you believe in karma and rebirth? Can an honest and determined person change his destiny?

Definitely. An honest person who does good with determination can certainly come out of the cycle of birth and death. But it also depends on various other aspects like God's grace. Without God's grace, no action is complete. Even if our actions are correct, it still can go wrong if others go incorrect. Like what happens in accidents. True realisation is also needed. Just by reading books, one will not get knowledge. One must

truly experience the truth.

Likewise, people should be aware of the nature of world. Like a person who visits a place where firecrackers are being exploded. If you are aware, you will not get a shock. Otherwise, you will. Likewise, if you are aware of the nature of the constantly changing work, everything becomes a celebration. Life is like a pendulum of a clock. When it goes to one end, it is not going to stop there. In fact, it is gathering momentum to go back to the other end.

We need to observe certain rules and regulations. We should have that spiritual element in our life. It is like adding pure water to saline water. If you keep on adding pure water to saline water, gradually the saline water gets purified and becomes pure. Likewise, if you have any shortcomings or negative factors, when you add that spiritual element, your shortcomings will get cured in due course. That is why we should have some precautionary measures so that negativity will not affect us. Yesterday can never become today. You have to live in the present world so that one can be happy.

What do you think of the mixing of politics with religion in our kind of electoral politics?

If the politician understands the real principle of spirituality, it is good. In olden times, kings were more receptive. Gurus used to advise them on various matters, including administration, and it worked. Both religion and politics is necessary for human beings. They need to be blended properly. If politicians understand the essential principles of spirituality in a deeper way, it helps. The essence of religion is spirituality.

Both politicians and religious leaders do not understand the real essence of spirituality. They commit mistakes and support each other. In the past the kings were wiser. People don't know what politicians are doing. Where there is true experience, there is no division. Where there is division, there is no true experience.

People who have experienced truth don't have any division. Unfortunately, people who rule our country don't have any real experience. Otherwise, they should seek the advice of a true satguru or a true master. Those who rule should think that they don't need another term and rule by certain principles. But then, how many people have that attitude?

Where is the country heading? Are the youth on the right track?

Most youngsters want to go to the US. I don't blame them. We are not able to give them jobs according to their education. Thus we lose all the smart and intelligent people. We must create more opportunities for them. We need to inculcate spiritual faith in them. Even as young buds they are being infested by insects. They are the fragrance of the future. To preserve that future education is very important. We must create tremendous understanding and awareness among the younger generation. Otherwise things will become worse. We have declared war against terrorism. Diseases like AIDS are also like terrorists. We must find ways to prevent them by creating awareness. We must become more alert as otherwise our country's future is in danger.

Will India and Pakistan ever resolve their differences and learn to live in harmony in our lifetime?

May God help us. We must put in enough effort but the final decision is in God's hands. If these two countries unite, if they become one and if they go beyond all differences then this country will become heaven.

You have set up hospitals, colleges, orphanages and environment projects. What are your goals for the next 10 years?

I flow like a river. I do not plan anything. However I would very much like to do something for the prostitutes and I am very sad at their plight. I want to do something for waste management, an effective waste management system particularly in the bus stops and public toilets and also create awareness about our nature and to support nature.

My wish is that there should be no huts in India. People should have at least one good meal a day. Not only India, I am also concerned about countries like Africa. I happened to visit Kenya recently. I am willing to build houses for the homeless there too. They were going to offer some money to me. I told them to buy the land, I'll build the houses.

You've done so much for women. You think so deeply for them. What can we do to make their life better?

Men should also think about it properly. When women want to come forward to do good things, men should make way for them to come forward. Women are the ones who give birth to men so they must have more patience. That's the only way to bring proper harmony in society. When I was a child and some guests came to our house, my mother would tell me not to come out of the room till they had left. Women were not allowed to speak loudly, or run. They were told to walk very gently.

By pushing women down in society, and not helping them grow and offer their talents to society, we have made them bonsai trees. Neither can birds nestle in their branches nor is the wood of any use. In the same way women are being seen as objects not as human beings. I am not a feminist. I am only pointing out the wrong ways in which our society is functioning.

There is a change in women now. However that change hasn't taken place in men. Men still cling to the old concepts. Men have to wake up now. In countries like the US, in 1 lakh married couple not even 10 continue to live together. Whereas in our country in thousand couples only 10 get divorced. But if the situation continues then the same thing will happen in our country also. If that happens then it will be like an earthquake.

As far as European countries are concerned, it is part of their culture. They live alone, get married and again live alone. Because of this reason they are mentally depressed people. The same thing can happen here also if we are not careful. Because when we look at it in that light, values are very important.

One last word. Are you in communion with God all the time. Is there a God in heaven or on earth?

For me all humans are Gods and God is everywhere. Both up in the clouds and on earth. But there is no God sitting up above on a golden throne. He resides in everything. I see God even in a small ant. And heaven is within us.

