

In The Service of Love, Part XIX

## AMMA'S LOVE IS FOR ALL

*Bri. Gayatri*

When the Ashram was first forming, Amma had thousands of devotees – but very few fully-surrendered disciples. Of course, the number of Her disciples has grown dramatically over the years, well into the hundreds now; but in the early days there were so few of us that, to some extent, I think we all sometimes made the mistake of believing that Amma belonged exclusively to us. In those days, the disciples were a bit like newly hatched chicks in the nest of the mother bird: we depended on Amma for everything, and received

enormous amounts of Her Love and intimate attention. Thus it was easy for us to begin thinking that Amma was ours, and ours alone.

Since I was Amma's only female disciple in the early days, it was especially easy for me to fall into this kind of thinking. 'After all,' a voice would whisper in my mind, 'hadn't I been doing virtually all of Amma's personal service for almost two years, and also sleeping next to Her at night? Why shouldn't I think of Her as my own?' Of course, I realized that Amma was the Divine Mother, the Source of all Love, who loved all





beings equally and belonged equally to all. I knew that She was the Universal Self, the Self within all beings; and intellectually I understood Her teaching that it was to Her all-pervading form, that supreme divine Principle, that we should be attached. Clearly, it was logically impossible for one person to 'own' Her.

Yet my heart cared nothing for such platitudes – I wanted Amma all to myself, forever.

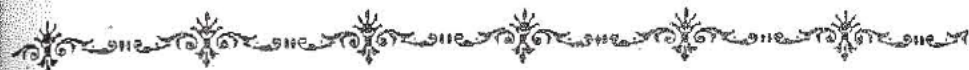
This is why the arrival of Rukmini, a second female disciple, had been such a painful shock for me. The worst part of it was that I secretly felt Rukmini was more naturally inclined to spirituality than I; she seemed to have an inborn purity and innocence which I felt sure I'd never be able to match. It made me furiously jealous.

So, although I had successfully tolerated Rukmini's presence in the Ashram for over a month, I was still not inwardly willing to accept the fact that I had to share Amma with this new young prodigy. There was a fierce, unspoken competition between Rukmini and I regarding who got to spend more time with Amma; and a large portion of my mental energy each day went into anxiously wondering where Amma and Rukmini were, and if they were alone together. Naturally, I realized this was a foolish use of my energies,

but my feelings were so strong that the thoughts were impossible to control.

Amma was, of course, fully aware of the situation, and was carefully monitoring my behavior. One of Her teachings was that even a small pocket of selfishness left unchallenged could eventually grow to become a major obstacle on the spiritual path. For this reason, and because She knew how much I wanted to become a pure instrument of God's Love, Amma was ever relentless in confronting my negative tendencies.

About five weeks after Rukmini had arrived, I was once again forced to leave Amma's presence due to my monthly period. However, this time there was an improvement in the situation: a tiny 'seclusion hut' had recently been built on the Ashram grounds specifically to enable me to stay on the Ashram property during those dreaded three days each month. From where I lay on the floor of the little hut, I could clearly hear Amma talking and laughing with the other disciples in the darshan hut. It was easy for me to visualize the whole scene. I even heard Amma starting to give the pre-lunch *prasadam* to everyone, as was Her custom in those days. (She would call each one up individually, make a ball of curried rice and put it in each one's mouth



with Her own hand. It was a very special, intimate blessing, something I hated to miss.) Although it was a comfort to be closer, at the same time the closeness made it more painful to be excluded. I heard Her calling the names one by one: 'Balu' (now Swami Amritaswarupananda), 'Unni', 'Srikumar', 'Nealu', 'Madhu'... and finally, the name I dreaded – 'Rukmini.' I shuddered to hear Rukmini and Amma laughing together... it made me feel sick with jealousy.

Trying to comfort myself, I distractedly ate the lunch which had previously been brought; but it just made me feel worse. I was aching to hear my own name called, to hear Amma say, "Take some *prasadam* over to Gayatri"... but it was not to happen. I waited and waited, but the longed for knock at the door never came. After half an hour had passed, I began feeling so jealous and humiliated that I just couldn't keep still any longer. I got up and walked out of the little hut and over to the riverside, where I sat down by the water. I was feeling more dejected and rejected with each passing minute. Finally, when it seemed like my mind was completely possessed by misery, I decided that if Amma felt I wasn't worthy to receive Her *prasadam*, then I didn't want any food in my stomach at all. So I stuck

my finger down my throat, and vomited my entire lunch into the river!

Poor, miserable Gayatri. After ten more minutes of wallowing in self-pity, by Amma's Grace a tiny ray of light began to shine within my mind. I thought, "Well, why not just try to accept the situation?" I remembered the advice that Amma had once given to a brahmachari who believed that Amma was showering more love on someone else. She had said, "Son, don't feel sad. If you think that Amma is behaving differently towards the various disciples, then try believe that Amma is giving each one what he needs. If you believe instead that Amma has greater love for one than for another, you will be finding fault with Amma, and this will cause you to fall."

Slowly walking back to the little hut, I reflected how thoroughly I had neglected that advice in the present situation. I began to consider that not being given any *prasadam* might not necessarily be a rejection from Amma after all, but merely a test. That made me feel a bit better – although if it were a test, I'd certainly failed!

As I approached the hut, I was startled to see Amma walking towards me from the other side of the Ashram. I felt so ashamed I could hardly face Her. I prostrated fully before Her, laying my face in the sand. Amma sat



down beside me in the sand, and began lovingly stroking my back with Her hand. Hesitantly, I sat up; Amma, radiating compassion and forgiveness, started gently wiping the sand from my face. Tears began rolling down my cheeks. "Amma", I asked, "Why am I such a fool? Why am I still so impatient?" I tried to hold back my sobs, but was unsuccessful. "I give in to foolish weakness so easily! Isn't it a terrible sin to behave that way after serving You for so long?" Amma brought my head to rest on Her shoulder, but my lament continued unabated. "Amma, I don't think I was so impatient and impulsive before I came here. Am I really progressing, or just going backwards?" I began to cry uncontrollably.

Amma embraced me tenderly, saying "Darling daughter, darling daughter...", rocking me back and forth until my sobbing had begun to ease. "No, daughter", She said, "you have not been going backwards. These are the deep rooted vasanas beginning to surface, tendencies which have been in you for ages. Until we begin to cleanse our mind, we will not be aware of them. Daughter, when we first sweep a floor, a lot of dirt comes off. We may then think the floor is clean. But when we wash it again with water, much more dirt comes off. Like this, when we first begin doing *sadhana*

we may think we are quite pure; but after doing dedicated *sadhana* for a longer period, we may begin observing weaknesses and wrong tendencies in ourselves that we had not seen before. The fact is, previously we were so immersed in them that we were not even aware they were in us."

I was not yet fully pacified. "But Amma", I said, "isn't the Ashram supposed to be an abode of peace? Why am I always getting so agitated?"

Amma laughed gently. "Of course, daughter, the Ashram is a place where inner peace is being cultivated. But the process of gaining inner peace may be very turbulent sometimes. Actually, the Ashram is more like a 'Kurukshetra' (sacred battle field), where we do battle against the enemies within ourselves.

"Living with the other disciples provides the perfect situation for us to work out our vasanas. The Ashramites are a little like rough pebbles being rolled together in a polishing machine. As the rough surfaces rub against each other, the pebbles gradually become smooth and shiny.

"Discrimination and patience are essential if we are to be successful in this battle. Love must express itself in the form of patience and kindness. One who does not have patience will not have kindness either. Only

through patience can the unruly antics of the mind be overcome.

"Daughter, you should not feel jealous of Rukmini, or look so intently at her faults. Amma looks upon Rukmini as a small child. You are her elder sister. Since she is younger, Amma treats her differently. Amma loves you both equally."

Giving me a final kiss on the head, Amma rose and walked back towards the main hut. I sat for a few more minutes in the sand, soaking in Her words and the blessing She had given.

Finally I rose to my feet, and headed towards my little hut. When I went through the doorway, I was startled to see a covered plate sitting on the mat. I hesitantly lifted the lid and discovered... a ball of curried rice! Amma's *prasadam*.

Realizing how foolishly I'd acted,

and sensing Amma's undying Love nonetheless, I once again burst into tears. They didn't last more than a couple of minutes, though. (I didn't want to wait any longer before eating that *prasadam*!)

As time went by and more people began joining the Ashram, I gradually began to realize deep in my heart that Amma belonged not just to us, but to the entire world. I saw that the special love and affection She had shown to Her earliest disciples was equally available to each and every one who comes to Her.

Indeed, Amma's Love truly does belong equally to all. It is Infinite, unconditional and unchanging, shining like an eternal Sun to all beings in the Universe. It is the essence of God; and the entrance to God. May that Love be victorious within us all. ❀

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