

# Meditating on the Holy Mother

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**B**efore I begin to talk about my subject, I am reminded of what Sri Ramakrishna advised a Brahmo speaker one day when he sought the permission of the Great Master before he started speaking. The Master said: As long as you don't think that you are teaching somebody something, as long as you don't feel superior to them, rather you feel they as well as you will be helped, then you can speak.

Mine is not really going to be a lecture because when we start thinking, or meditating on the Holy Mother, what we feel is the union with each other, what we feel is that as the children of the Mother we are all here together. Talking about the Mother is a great joy. So that is the core of our meditation.

Meditation would mean that now we leave all external concerns, we leave the world as we know it, we remove the mundane realities from our mind and think only about the Mother as a child thinks. To the child mother is the only reality. All the senses of the child are focused on mother. We say, for meditation, we should withdraw our senses from all external objects. The senses tend to go outside. But we draw them within. That is meditation. But here the child is looking at the Mother and his senses are all directed outward, not directed towards the fragmented reality, towards distractions, but it is directed towards the Mother. So we can all be like that child for whom the mother's touch, her smile, her face, her leap—everything is the only reality. If we do

that then we are obviously meditating on the Mother.

We have a very dear, loving Mother, whom we call the Holy Mother, Ma Sarada. Again and again she assures us that she is the real Mother. That she is our Mother we have no doubt about it. And I am sure everybody has felt the touch of the Mother.

As teachers we give lectures which are intellectual. But I don't want to make it an intellectual discourse because I am sure I am not saying something which each of us has not experienced—experiencing mother in our lives. That brings the mind to one-pointed concentration automatically. We don't have to make an effort to close our eyes because the Mother pervades everything. We listen to the first two words of the song dedicated to the Holy Mother—'*prakritim paramām*'. Where Nature itself becomes the Mother, then where is it that She is not present? Which part of our life is not related to the Mother and which does not bring us to the meditation on the Mother?

No doubt, all of us have our rational, logical, materialistic existence. But the Mother's life and message make us feel that there is no distinction between the secular and what is known as the spiritual. That is a powerful core for meditation because you see this rustic, old woman cutting vegetables, which, in her eyes, is no different from meditation. When we go to Jayrambati and spend some time in solitude on that verandah in front of the Mother's room we get naturally absorbed and raised to a state like meditation. I feel just our love

and link with the Mother brings us to meditation. We really don't have to make an effort. The Mother comes to us effortlessly and takes us on her lap.

When we look at the picture of the Mother intently and with love, what do we notice? First we see the Mother's eyes. We can begin with this as the core of our meditation. What do we find there? We find an indescribable serenity, peace, and quietude—totally unstressed in a world today where we are talking about stress all the time! Here is a person who had adversities aplenty. There were difficulties in her life which we cannot imagine, leave alone experience them. But these difficulties couldn't rob her of that serenity. When I look at the Mother's eyes in the photograph I feel how very fortunate we are today because most people during her lifetime couldn't see her eyes as they remained most of the time veiled, especially when the devotees came to make pranams to her. We are blessed children because we are looking at her eyes.

Now, look at the Mother's posture. It is such a welcoming posture that readily endears itself to us. We feel like looking again and again at her. Having come to Kolkata now I see the Mother everywhere, but then, her core is inside the eyes.

Thirdly, look at the Mother's folded fingers and her strong arms. Yes, this is a kind of meditation that tells us that we are steadily going across the difficulties, which Mother described as the gifts of God. So we keep looking at the Mother's fingers held together. This is a powerful mode of meditation. Whenever the mind is upset you will find that the fingers keep moving as the mind and hands are closely linked to each other. But here is the Mother with her folded fingers. If we really want to meditate then here is the posture of the Mother.

Then, we have the pristine sari which

the Mother is wearing. The Mother has told us that even if the child plays in the mud she accepts the child, cleans the child and takes the child in her lap also. She says: I am as much the Mother of an evil child as of a virtuous one. Transgressions and mistakes are made by people. But I am not here to find fault. I am here to forgive. I am here to bring them closer to me.

Therefore, when we talk about the Mother's sari, it is a point of meditation because it reminds us that we have to be very careful about maintaining our own purity of mind if we want to sit on her lap. The Mother's lap is the most beautiful place on earth for the child. It is so relaxing, so comfortable, warm and easy. The Mother welcomes us there, but her apparel reminds us that we also need a little preparation for that.

### **Mother's life**

As we begin to meditate on the Mother we may start with her picture. But then, we have the Mother's life. If we begin to talk about the Mother's life, even her doing of simple things, a whole lifetime is not enough because the smallest of events of her life are powerful in their meditative or contemplative centrality.

No wonder, Sister Nivedita was so impressed by her. She found her to be an ideal woman bridging the past and the future. In fact, much of the future we find in the beautiful books which mention her, are today coming from the Western countries. You take up huge book talking about various things and you find in the index a brief reference of Sri Sarada Devi. Where has Mother gone? This happens because she was so self-effacing, so modest, so quiet and always veiled—not only physically, but also spiritually, because she never allowed her ecstasies and other external expressions of spirituality to be noticed by others.

When we look at her childhood we find that there is a quality or maturity, a quality of meditative temperament. We are told that she used to meditate in the quarrels of her friends. When she played, she made models of gods and goddesses. When she got married at the age of five, she started worshipping the feet of her husband whom she considered her god, as her chosen ideal throughout her life. You can imagine how her childhood experiences can keep our mind engaged, because meditating on the Mother implies that we are removing all the other responses for the time being and only talking about her and thinking about her.

There happened a strange incident. Once she came to Kamarpukur. She was then a teenage girl. She had come because Ramakrishna went home at that time from Dakshineswar. One day, when he was talking about God and God-realization to village women, little Sarada, who was present there, fell asleep. All the people were shocked. They said, Oh! my God, how can this girl sleep when such wonderful things are told by her husband! Wake her up! Sri Ramakrishna said, no, no, allow her to sleep because if she hears all these she will not continue to be in this world. So, you see Sri Ramakrishna recognized the great potential that the Mother had. As we think about some such divine play our meditation becomes stronger. To talk about the Mother, to think about the Mother, to contemplate on the Mother, to remember her all the time becomes like an addiction. But it is a very positive kind of addiction because it gives us great joy.

Now we move on to a slightly older Mother who comes to Dakshineswar to serve Sri Ramakrishna. Here her cooking, serving, and looking after the Master and his mother, her living in the unimaginably small room called 'Nahavat'—all these are points of meditation because they inspire a whole

thought current which is new. Today our thought current, I am sorry to say, is becoming very self-centred. 'Me and mine', 'Me and my own'—this is all we know. But here is a Mother who doesn't even think about herself, doesn't even mind anything if one doesn't even care to call her own. Why? Because she says that the whole world is her own. So when we meditate on the Mother, on her experiences, her interactions with others, we find that she is teaching us how to make everybody our own. And she imparts this lesson to us absolutely gracefully through her simple activities. One day she was making pan (betel leaf)—some very nice, filled with spices, and some very ordinary. Somebody thought she was perhaps making the special ones for Sri Ramakrishna, her own ideal, and husband, and the ordinary ones for others. When that person asked the question, the Mother said, O! he (Sri Ramakrishna) is my own, so I give him the ordinary ones. The special ones are for people whom I want to make my own. So when we sit and meditate on the Mother, we can imagine that the Mother is making an effort to make us her own. We do not have to make any effort.

I remember Swami Ranganathanandaji who was moulding us in our formative years. One day I asked him: Maharaj, How do you prepare yourself before you speak? He pointed out at the temple and said: There is the old man. I tell him, see old man, I am going to speak now. So I don't have to prepare. I don't have to do anything because there is the Mother who is looking after us.

In fact, what more meditation can we do when every minute of our life we realize it is the Mother's guiding hand which is constantly making us her own. Did we come by choice? Did we embrace the Ramakrishna Movement because we knew what it was? No. From birth we are in it—most of us. Of course, we came late, but we

are in it all the same. Maybe some of us are far away from it, but still they are in it because the Mother doesn't let us go; she is holding our hands firmly.

One day Sri Ramakrishna said to her: Give only a small amount of food to these boys at night because they have to meditate. But the Mother said: Don't worry, I shall look after their future. And she continued to give them a little more as she did previously. This was how she used to feed the Master also and gave him thick milk after boiling it for a long time. Was she thus deceiving all? No, she was doing good. Here we get a new definition of values, for here, it is the Mother who says that if you want to do something particularly good, do it without hesitation, brushing aside the opinions of the world. In her life, sometimes some of her actions were called into question. For instance, some people asked her, being the wife of a renunciate, how could she wear so much jewellery? The Mother immediately removed her ornaments. When the Master heard it, he was upset. So, the other devotees came and said: Mother, please put on your ornaments because you are for us the goddess of wealth, Goddess Lakshmi. We cannot see you without jewellery. So these sort of things were happening in Mother's life all the time. But did she react? She did not. Now we might think, oh! how can we think of the Mother? We are not just good enough. Ok. But the Mother has never asked us to be good enough; she is willing to accept as we are so long as our meditation transforms ourselves into a better 'I'. That is what she is looking for. And how to become better? That betterment comes when our mind focuses on the object-lessons of her life. Then comes her grace and what can be more purifying to ourselves than her grace?

Now let me concentrate on the words and qualities of the Mother. These also, for us, are powerful tools of meditation. If we

really want to meditate on her, then her words would keep ringing in our ears all the time. She says that the mind is everything. The mind has to be pure. She said, if we want faith, then we need to have a pure mind. Suppose we are constantly questioning and expressing our doubts, what will happen? If I go into a classroom, people say what is religion? Why do you talk about spirituality? These young twenty or twenty-two-year-olds have a crisis in their lives. The Mother says, when you have faith you can move ahead because everything cannot be rationalized although the mind has a rational faculty. But it has also an extra-rational faculty which is nourished by meditation.

Meditation is now becoming increasingly popular worldwide. People are saying, yes, meditation is a wonderful thing. But then, who is willing to do it? We meditate on different things—money, prosperity and so on. Harvard, a very well-known university is conducting now courses on happiness. Can you imagine? And these courses have the largest enrolment. Why? Because the courses are on happiness! But look, Sarada Devi, is giving us the course free of cost. We don't have to go to Harvard. We are here, doing that course. Therefore the Mother meets some of our thought currents. Faith builds up motivation. Faith gives us purity. She gives her own example. She does not talk like us and give a lecture. She only shows her actions. When she says purity is all, she says, she prayed to the moon that it should make her mind pure. She said: 'I prayed to God that even the moon has a spot; let my mind not have any.'

On another occasion she says: I prayed in Vrindavan that God should remove from me this habit of fault-finding. But what we do? Just the reverse. That is the natural tendency of the mind. The Mother says, the mind is like a wild elephant. It keeps going here and there. We cannot control it. But

then, love helps us attain this concentration. So, if we love the Mother, concentration, faith and purity come automatically. But it might not come in a minute. Mother says, patience and perseverance are required for achieving these qualities. We must somehow keep on trying uninterruptedly.

I remember one incident in this connection. A sadhu of the Ramakrishna Order had gone to Rishikesh for practising austerities. He was staying there for a pretty long time. But at one point he became restless as he had no vision of Sri Ramakrishna. So he wrote a letter to the Holy Mother expressing his disappointment. Mother read the letter and asked her attendant to give a reply to this effect: You are a sannyasin. Your duty is to call upon God, to do japa and meditation. What else will you do? Do you think the Master should go to Rishikesh because you are there? Continue your spiritual practice and you will get everything in the fullness of time.

So we have to have patience. Look at Mother. Somebody threw the *japa mālā* at her feet. Somebody said, 'I don't want this mantra. You take it back. It's useless.' But what did she do? She had great equanimity. She took all these crazy manners and impatience of her children in her stride. So, as we go on thinking about this wonderful aspect of the Mother, we will naturally feel encouraged to imbibe this quality in our lives. They say if you live with a person for a long time you become exactly like that person. So we are living with our beloved Mother, and slowly we are getting transformed. This transformation may not be visible to us at once, but it will come in due course. Holy Mother says, suppose you are asleep in a room and someone shifts you to another room, will you know this fact of being shifted then and there? No. But when you wake up you know you have been shifted. Imagine how simply our Mother

communicates with us! No huge words, no quotations from anywhere. She simply says, once you are awake you realize your evolution. Evolution is taking place every minute, whether you like it or not.

The Mother shows us how we should behave in an adverse situation and get over any conflict. I give an example. There was her crazy sister-in-law Surabala at Jayrambati who abused her at all times. If somebody says anything bad to us we immediately turn back and say ten more things which are perhaps worse. But the Mother didn't do it. One day the little girl Radhu, Surabala's daughter, whom she brought up, hit her with a brinjal. Imagine! But she didn't scold the girl. She just put the dust of her feet to the girl's head and prayed to Thakur: O Lord, please take no offence, for the child doesn't know what she did.

Sri Ramakrishna warned his nephew, Hridayram, more than once that if she got angry none could save him. But she never got angry in her life. She always showed us that conflict will always exist in the world but the resolution is within us. It is not in the external world. The Master, sometime before leaving his body, advised her to go to Kamarpukur and live on a dish of only rice and spinach if nothing else was available. She did this, often without salt. Today, when we sit with our plates full of food, tears come to our eyes. We think of the Mother who used to boil some greens with her rice, no salt, and eat them. But did she ever complain? Out of this she gave some to sadhus and other people, herself eating only a little. Such stories abound. We think all this. Indeed, we meditate. We cannot use the word 'think' anymore.

### **Secular meditation**

Today a very interesting term, secular meditation, is being used. Many psychologists are using such terms as

creative visualization and secular meditation. So even when you are boiling tea in your kitchen you can remember the Mother, that she used to cook endlessly. Even at night, devotees of the Master kept coming to Dakshineswar and the Mother had to cook something for them. So the Mother is there in the kitchen with you. You are not boiling tea alone. You feel the Mother is there with you.

We do not need real meditation all the time in the prayer hall with our eyes closed. We can meditate at every point of our life and activities. This is what the Mother has shown and spoken about everytime. She made the secular and the spiritual equal by spiritualizing the secular.

The Mother used to say the food you eat builds up your mind; if you want to make your mind pure, you are to have the right kind of food. But what we do usually? We think all negative thoughts while cooking. What is the result? The person who eats that food does not get any benefit at all. So imagine, food also needs careful meditation! The Mother used to say the amount of food, the kind of food, the way you cook and eat—all these are important. So she would sit with the Master, tell him many stories and feed him. She was not only the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, not only his wife, she also mothered him.

The Holy Mother was nevertheless very strong, particularly where her own convictions were concerned in spite of the fact that the Master was always for her the last word. There were many instances where the Mother gave her own opinion, not listening to the Master at all. All of you know the story of Sri Ramakrishna's reluctance to touch the meal carried by a lady of questionable character. The Mother herself was coming to the Master's room with the plate of food. But the lady requested Mother to give her the plate so

that she could take the food to the Master. Mother gave her the plate and she took it to the Master. The Master, however, couldn't touch the plate. Then the Mother came to the Master's room to see how he was eating. But he was not eating at all. He was visibly dissatisfied that the lady served him. He wanted Mother to promise that she wouldn't send the food through anybody in future. What did the Mother say? She said: Sorry I cannot promise that. The moment somebody calls me 'Mother' I cannot stop doing it, but I shall try to bring it myself.

The Master must have rejoiced and felt happy, because his aim was to reveal the Motherhood of God through Sarada Devi. All over the world you see God in the patriarchal form. But here is the Mother. When people come to India and make movies like 'India's Daughter', I feel very upset. I say, here is one daughter [Holy Mother] of India. Do you not want to know about her? You only want to know what is sensational! This attitude of the social media is wrong.

Once Holy Mother felt very much thrilled when she heard a piece of music on the gramophone. She was like a child. People again and again talk about her tinkling laughter. Only a person who has a very pure mind can have that kind of a laughter till the last minute of his/her life. She never said, O, I have become a Guru now, so I will stop laughing. Of course she was serious at times, but sometimes she was also jovial. Sometimes she played the role of a teacher; sometimes she was a learner. She thus played effortlessly all the roles as the situation demanded. When we think of her playing all these roles, we are actually meditating on her.

So however little our mind might be, whatever our little capability might be, the Mother has something to give to each of us. It is like the story of Sri Ramakrishna where

the mother cooks fish of different varieties, for each of the children has a different constitution. Often we look at each other and say—‘O, that person is so holy and I am so frivolous!’ But it doesn’t matter. The Mother has given me a role which is frivolous. Even through frivolity you can gradually attain purity, and inch towards betterment. Maybe, somebody else gets evolved through devotion. So there is no need to feel jealous, no need to feel that you also have to do that. You have to be yourself. If we keep this in mind our meditation becomes much easier. The Mother shows that if you are content with whatever you have, if you think that what you have is excellent, then you have nothing to strive for.

Very often we teach what is called ‘soft skills’. So we set our goals—a big job, or a good qualification and so on. Mother says, these are fine. She is not denying that the world exists. She is not saying that we have to become only spiritual all the time. She is saying whenever you are doing something, you have to give it as an offering to God. As you do that you make your job spiritual. So, as a teacher when I go to the class, the students become the replicas of God. I do not have to go to the temple to search for a God. Here, in my class, the living deities are sitting before me. This is what the Mother is constantly saying. She says that she keeps her mind on the relative plane only because of us, otherwise her mind would soar to the highest realm. So, as we have to do work for our survival here, we keep the mind here in this world, in our work, but the ultimate purpose is to hold on to the Mother. So, now we are holding on to the Mother with one hand; the thought of the Mother is always there wherever we are and whatever we do. People, who are writing books and articles about the Mother, people who are painting Mother, people who are writing beautiful songs on the Mother and singing them, they

are all meditating on the Mother in some form or the other. Meditation does not have a single form in this case. I do exactly what I want and that itself turns into a kind of meditation because in my mind I do not want anything else to come. This kind of a feeling usually comes to people like us not through lot of practice because practice we do very little, but out of a profound divine grace. Maybe after many births such a feeling comes to us that we are floating in the ocean of Mother’s bliss where the boat is the Mother, the wave is the Mother and the storm also is the Mother. We are no different. So we are there in it whether we like it or not. We are there in the ocean, but our dependence is on the Mother.

All the people who came from the West were much impressed by the Mother. It is because of them that we find her picture everywhere today. So either the picture, or the experience, or her words, or any activity associated with the Mother is for us meditative. Of course, meditation would imply that we analyse our minds. The mind is a strange instrument. Many of us don’t recognize our mind at all. We recognize our face and figure because there are mirrors. But there are no mirrors to see the mind. That is why we don’t really know who we are.

Many people in her lifetime thought, oh! she is only an ordinary village woman, uneducated, only the wife of a great saint. They took her that way and their mind remained at that level. But when we think of her as our own, because she assures us again and again, ‘I am your real mother, I am your own mother’, then we develop a different kind of relationship with her and that becomes the core of our contemplation. The mind is ordinarily always full of thoughts. But if we analyse the mind and find that all the files in the mind-computer are empty and

(Continued to page 43)