

CLOSE ENCOUNTER

A rare Fragrance



IN HER LATE 50S, GURUMATHA
AMMA, A WIFE AND MOTHER,
IS ALSO A SPIRITUAL GURU TO
THOUSANDS OF DEVOTEES.
THE AUTHOR MEETS HER IN
HER VERDANT ASHRAM,
SREEDHARA SREE GUDDA,
IN BANGALORE

by Purnima Coontoor

I have always wondered why most spiritual leaders of today are male, with only a few like Mata Amritanandamayi to represent the other half of the population – strange for a country that has always celebrated the divine feminine. Osho has often said that a woman can evolve much faster, easily and naturally, for she carries the microcosm of the cosmic womb within her, which makes her more receptive. I am convinced that women from all walks of life are conditioned by years of male domination, quietly living enlightened lives in their homes and offices, bringing the quality of their evolved state into their affairs. However, if women would come to the forefront of the spiritual revolution, they would not only serve humanity, but also help break gender-based stereotypes, and empower women on all fronts.

It was with much gratification that I came across Gurumatha Amma in her abode in Bangalore. She is a wife and mother in her late 50s who is also a spiritual guru to thousands of devotees. I beg her forgiveness for labelling her a female guru, for she says that a guru is a principle to begin with, a

quality and an essence, and has nothing to do with gender or the physical plane at all. “You first establish connection with your guru at the spiritual level, next you come down to the emotional level, and then the mental level. Relationship on the physical plane is immaterial,” she says, standing the entire theory on its head. Wife of a practising criminal lawyer and mother to a married daughter and a son working in the US, Gurumatha Amma, as she is lovingly referred to by her disciples, dismisses all queries regarding her poorvashrama with disdain. “I have left my previous life behind, why are you interested in it?” she asks. The only way to her heart is to enter Sreedhara Sree Gudda, previously a little barren hillock she lovingly converted into a verdant ashram, with an attitude of total surrender. Having adopted the late Sridhara Swami as her manasa guru, she has now established a centre for self-realisation at her temple/ashram where she initiates devotees from various backgrounds to steer them back to their goal – atma sakshatkara. Ask her how it came about, and she says, such things are not planned, they just happen.

At Sreedhara Sree Gudda, Amma introduces people to the alchemy of transforming rituals leading to self-realisation, bringing back ancient Vedic practices into relevance. All external actions should purify the mind and body, she says, and create an atmosphere conducive to self-inquiry through silence and meditation. She thus teaches people what she lightheartedly refers to as interior decoration, to make people beautiful inside by elevating their consciousness. “If you want to learn ‘how’ to live, come to me; there are no answers to the ‘whys’ of life,” she says.

To this end, Gurumatha presides over a nine-day course called Jeevana Dharma Yoga for beginners and a residential course of three-and-a-half days

called Jeevana Darshana thereafter. Vedic teachings are imparted in the Vyasa Veda Peetha at the premises. She holds satsangs on Sunday mornings and special days, to remind her disciples of their life’s purpose. Apart from participating in these events, people who have the maturity and courage to undergo real transformation are always welcome at her ashram, to meditate among the plants and trees planted by Amma herself, and benefit from the atmosphere rich in cosmic vibrations. The premises and its facilities are also available with prior notification, for conducting spiritual and health retreats, and workshops for holistic



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development. Gurumatha Amma observes silence for 48 days prior to Guru Purnima every year, during which she pens down her thoughts inspired by gurus down the ages themselves. These form the basis of her teachings, which are imparted in her workshops and world tours, also available as publications. Here are her views about the two most important aspects of spiritual life – guru and dhyana.

Who is a guru?

A guru is not a person at all – it is the positive, eternal force behind everything; it is the reason for one’s very existence, an omnipresent energy.

Guru is a Sanskrit word, which means ‘that which expels darkness’. However, in meditation, one can come up with a hundred thousand meanings for this beautiful word, for Sanskrit is a divine language whose every letter vibrates with the different chakras of the human body. In gross terms, light dispels darkness; at a subtle level, the guru is the inner self-knowledge that dispels ignorance. That energy which re-establishes contact with yourself is your guru. Everyone’s personal guru is the atma, the principle that eternally directs and protects the incarnated being. At an external level, one who helps you on your inner journey can be a guru – it could be your own wife or anybody else. It is immaterial whether the guru is external or internal; the important thing is to surrender the ego. An external guru gently points you in the right direction, not just as a signboard, but also by travelling with you along your journey and taking you to the very entrance of the temple of the soul – but you have to enter the temple yourself.

For a disciple, guru is the incarnation of God. For him, his sadguru becomes personal, and the jagadguru becomes universal. One has to totally surrender and plug into the power point of the guru to understand the glory of the relationship. Once initiated into a mantra by the guru, the mantra itself becomes the guru for a disciple who has surrendered. The guru’s being derives power from a disciple. Just as Ramakrishna Paramahansa found fulfilment in a disciple like Vivekananda, a guru is always seeking the meaning for his existence through the perfect disciple. The guru’s work is to remove ego, and destroy falsity from the very existence of the disciple. For this, the disciple has to have a womb-like receptivity to the guru, should become part of the guru, breathe along with the guru and grow in the guru’s womb of knowledge. It

“Worship happens in meditation”

*Excerpts from Gurumatha Amma’s talk at the UN on September 8, 2006,
on Meditation for Holistic Health and Self-Realisation*

Meditation is a state of mind. It reflects the mind in a state of eternal bliss, and transcends the known states of wakefulness, sleep and dreams. It is a state, which only a few can experience. Although it is the most natural state of man, he should be equipped with the discretion to experience the joy of it, which is total awareness of body and mind. Under this state, the mind achieves complete equilibrium, and frees itself from the humdrum of daily life and the cycles of karma. Self-awareness and self-introspection are the functions in which one should continuously indulge to achieve this state. In a state of eternal awareness, the mind can differentiate between the real and the unreal, the perpetual from the fleeting.

Instincts have an impact on the body, triggering chemical reactions, which drive man toward action (karma), vitiating the body and leading to diseases. In contrast, by meditation, one can achieve a number of tangible benefits. In meditation, the mind is silenced and actions are suspended. Meditation rectifies the anomalies in breathing, fine tunes the heartbeat, and

propels the body into a healthier state. Happiness, peace and good health are the natural effects of practising meditation. But it is not something to be practised for a day, nor is it tied to traditions and conventions. It rarely needs an aid – even mantras fail to yield results if one is not acquainted with the conditions to achieve the exalted state.

A healthy mind is always inward looking. A mind which is unconcerned about the affairs of the world but repulsed by the process of self-enquiry is not healthy either. A meditative mind deals with worldly affairs in a detached manner.

Recognising and appreciating the eternal beauty and power of nature, both external and internal, is worship. The feeling and experiencing an innate quality of yours in your meditation is God. Worship happens in meditation; it begins and ends in you. It is spontaneous and cannot be achieved with the intellect. Devotion is the outcome of this worship, in which you are both the God and the devotee.

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is not easy to become a disciple – a lot of preparation is needed to surrender to a guru.

A real guru says ‘come to me to learn, not to study’. One who comes to study comes with his mind, one who comes to learn comes with his whole being. Wisdom flowers only in innocence, not in knowledge. So, a guru welcomes ignorant persons too, as long as they have innocence as well. Everyone has intelligence, but the guru invokes the wisdom in you, just as Lord Krishna did in Arjuna. In today’s society, I find that teachers, leaders, and

bosses have no gurutwa left in them. Everyone operates from a space of ignorance, competition and arrogance; all deeds are reactionary in nature. There is no devotion in action, passion in action; there is only activity for the sake of activity. This is not dharma at all.

We need to come back to the gurushishya parampara to bring back the passion and devotion in action. Whoever stands for this will automatically become a guru.

What is dhyana?

Dhyana is not a specific act, it is not

a doing but a happening. If you want to grow flowers in your garden, you have to sow the seed and create a situation to aid the process, and the flowering happens. If you want to cook rice, a lot of preparation is needed, but the cooking happens by itself. Likewise, meditation is a happening. Sitting in a specific posture in a specific garb in a corner, facing east, lighting a lamp and reciting the same mantra at the same time every day – this has nothing to do with meditation. Meditation is against automation – it cannot be a habit or a practice.

Meditation is a technique to bypass the body and mind to reach the goal of self-realisation. But dhyana itself is not the goal. The map cannot be the destination. Any mantra or worship or meditation is a vehicle to transcend the body and mind, and transcendence is necessary because at this level the experience of bliss is not possible. In the beginning, it seems an effort, but when you start enjoying the process itself, everything becomes meditation. Our own body and mind are the basic obstacles to this, as we are slaves to them instead of being their master. This is an utterly disgusting state to be in, for we are blessed with intelligence to come out of it – that is what Lord Krishna commands Arjuna to do when the latter laments that he cannot let go of attachment. The Lord calls Arjuna a coward who cannot use his innate intelligence to come out of ignorance. So it is easier for the intelligent to meditate – ‘dhi’ is a prerequisite to dhyana.

Meditation is emptying the mind of memories of the past and imaginations of the future. It is playing with the mind, witnessing the mind, exploring its qualities and contents, transcending it, and finally abiding peacefully and completely in the present moment. ☯

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