

SOME PRECEPTS OF THE HOLY MOTHER (*)

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The Holy Mother is not an unknown personality today; her name has crossed the geographical boundaries of India and gone across the oceans. Her personality has already influenced a great many lives and still continues to do so. Her message is spreading and showering benediction on and solace to many a parched soul in the burning desert of this world. Her task of saving humanity began, we can say, even during the life-time of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna pleaded with her to aid him in his mission of saving humanity, which was forgetful of its true nature and was getting itself submerged in the quagmire of this world. After the passing away of the Master, the magnitude of her work increased, the limits of her sphere of action widened. The responsibility of the restitution of the world devolved on her. And this she silently did. Though she shunned all lime-light and preferred seclusion, she could not totally shut herself up for long. When was it possible to hide a fire under a bush? When was it possible to restrain the sweet mountain breeze from bringing its soothing effect to everyone? At first people began to come to her in trickles, but soon this stream gathered in strength and became a torrent. Even residing at her native village at Jayarambati, which was not easily accessible at that time, she could not stem the tide of the stream of devotees. People reached her there too. Later in her life, she actually longed for some respite but that was not vouchsafed to her. In disease and tribulations too, she had to fulfil the importunities of her disciples. This extensive influence of the Mother attracts one to know more about her personality. The intensive effect of her teachings sets one thinking to peep, probe and penetrate into those ambrosial words.

We shall take up a few of her precepts and try to understand their meaning, in the light of her life; for there is no other commentary more clear in its perspective and more precise in its definition on the exhortations of a great spiritual teacher than his or her own life. The precepts are corroborated, substantiated and exemplified in their lives. This is the main difference between a talker and a teacher: that the talker talks but never practises whereas the teacher practises and out of the fullness of his heart he speaks, not for the sake of speaking but out of compassion for seekers. They (the teachers) never advertise their greatness. They act as humble servants of humanity though commanding the respect of all. Their lives make them great not merely their precepts. Precepts we have in galore; books we have in abundance; instructors we have in plenty; but like the flame alone that lights another light, so it is

the life alone that influences, modulates and transforms another life.

The Holy Mother did not lecture, nor give discourses. But what has come down to us as her precepts, has been a collection from the diaries of disciples, instructions given by her to them who were genuine seekers, and will have a direct bearing on the life of the aspirants since they too may find themselves identically placed. They have an intimate connection with life as it is lived by the common people. Yet therein is embedded a profundity of thought that shall dazzle the imagination of the staunchest intellectual.

How to obtain peace of mind

Let us take first her last exhortation. She said, 'If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; this whole world is your own!' How many times have we not read this! How many times have we not talked of it to others! But have we understood the implications of this teaching in full. In this epitome is a grand essay which can unfurl the sails of our boat of life, regulate its direction, and at last land us safe in the haven of rest. This exhortation seems to be so simple, but let us try to put it into practice, then we shall understand how difficult it is! It is a job for a life-time. Nay, it may require several lifetimes.

Now, what is it that makes us find fault? First of all it is jealousy. Most people cannot suffer the affluence of others. They cannot bear to see anyone rising head and shoulders above themselves in any sphere of life, be it learning, wealth, activity or others. They try to pull him down to their level and in order to do that they try to pick holes in the other's armour, spread even false rumours. Man stoops to any means to bring discredit to a neighbour who is rising in the eyes of the people.

Secondly it is vanity that compels us to find fault. We have so many vanities. Vanities of health, wealth, learning, purity, piety, and a host of others. One possessing any one of these is likely to look down upon another less fortunate soul. He must find fault, otherwise how could he rise in the estimation of people. But the really pure and pious never look down upon anyone. It is the vain alone that try to make capital out of others' shortcomings.

Thirdly hatred and spite play a great part in finding faults, hatred for some wrong done, or imagined to have been done and the natural desire to wreak vengeance. Lastly there is the habit of fault-finding itself which if not rooted out at the very outset will grow into a banyan tree impossible of being destroyed afterwards. Therefore when one seeks to find fault with others one must understand that one has, one or the other of these defects in oneself. Mother therefore says: 'See your own faults.' She means more than that. The moment our mind thinks of another's defect we leave our mind open to its influence. Unconsciously we harp on

that subject and the mind gets clouded with that idea. Let us illustrate it by a parable of Sri Ramakrishna: 'There was once a Sannyasin, a holy man, who sat under a tree and taught the people. He drank milk and ate only fruit, and made endless "Pranayamas," and felt himself to be very holy. In the same village lived an evil woman. Everyday the Sannyasin went and warned her that her wickedness would lead her to hell. The woman, unable to change her method of life which was her only means of livelihood, was still much moved by the terrible future depicted by the Sannyasin. She wept and prayed to the Lord, begging Him to forgive her because she could not help herself. By and by both the holy man and the evil woman died. The angels came and bore her to heaven, while the demons claimed the soul of the Sannyasin. "Why is this!" he exclaimed, "have I not lived a most holy life, and preached holiness to everybody? Why should I be taken to hell while this wicked woman is taken to heaven? " "Because," answered the demons, "while she was forced to commit unholy acts, her mind was always fixed on the Lord and she sought deliverance, which has now come to her. But you, on the contrary, while you performed only holy acts, had your mind always fixed on the wickedness of others. You saw only sin, and thought only of sin, so now you have to go to that place where only sin is."¹ There is a tendency today to take these tales and parables lightly as mere fanciful stories. But if we do so, without understanding the moral intended to be conveyed by them, we do it at a great risk to our spiritual well-being.

Again, the psychologists are of the opinion that most of our impressions are coloured by the taints of our own minds. In their language, they tend to be subjective. To a great extent this seems to be correct. A story is told that once Duryodhana set out to find a virtuous man; travelling through all the known lands of the time he could not find a single good man. Dharmaraja, on the other hand, sought to find a wicked person but returned sadly disappointed. One who is virtuous finds virtue everywhere and one who is wicked sees wickedness everywhere.

There is a psychological angle also, from which we can view at this teaching. Patanjali, the great Indian psychologist, says that yoga (the way to union with God) is restraining all the modifications of the mind-stuff.² In other words it means to steady the mind like the flame of a lamp in a windless place; to calm the mind like the waters of a still lake. All teachers are agreed on this point that unless the mind is stilled there can be no clear vision of the Ultimate Reality. As it is, the very fact of our embodiment implies that we have come to work out some of the effects of our actions in the past incarnations. And these being somewhat good we have been born as human beings. So all the efforts should be directed to calm the mind and reach the goal. If, on the other hand, we are every moment of our wakeful existence throwing the mind into convulsions by thinking about the defects in others when will the mind be steadied? Rather it will add to our bad tendencies and sow the seeds for further involvement into this world.

There are two sides to this teaching: the prohibitive and the injunctive. 'Seeing our own faults' leads us to correct ourselves. It should not be construed to mean that we should brood over our sins. The Holy Mother and Sri Ramakrishna were strongly against such a negative attitude. They used to say that one who says constantly that he is a sinner, becomes a veritable sinner. The attitude they encouraged was: 'I have perpetrated many sins, but I shall commit them no more. Lord help me to perfect myself.' This is a positive approach to life.

Further, forgiveness and forbearance have more value than all remonstrations. The great ones were ever forgiving even to the most sinful. Jesus did not hesitate in accepting the loving services of a fallen woman who was penitent. He blessed her and absolved her of her sins.³ Buddha did not have any scruples to take his food in the house of a courtesan when it was offered with love, adoration, and faith. The life of the Holy Mother too bears testimony to several such incidents. Once, at Dakshineswar, while taking food to Sri Ramakrishna, a woman, of not pure character, requested the Holy Mother to grant her the privilege of carrying the food to the Master that day. Mother, though she knew about the character of the lady, handed over to her the plate of food. But later coming to the Master's room she found him sitting before the plate unable to partake anything of it. Mother understood the cause but appealed to him to somehow take the food that day. At this, Sri Ramakrishna asked the Mother to give her word that she would not send his food through anyone else in future. She replied, 'No, I cannot promise that; for if anyone wants something of me, I feel I must grant it. But anyway I shall try my best to carry your food myself.'

Another time Golap-Ma, a woman devotee, was scolding a maid-servant. When the Holy Mother asked her the reason for it, she said in a pique, 'What is the good of telling you, Mother? You cannot see the defects of others.' And what was the Mother's reply? 'Well Golap, there is no dearth of people to see faults of others. The world will not come to a stand-still if I am otherwise.' That was the Holy Mother. Every one was her own child and like a mother, she could not see the faults of her children. Nay, for a mother even the faults of her children are its ornaments. And these great ones could transmute those faults into merits. Swami Vivekananda in a hymn to Sri Ramakrishna sang, 'O Lord, Thou dispeller of illusion, Thy name, pure and auspicious, convertest sinfulness to purity.' Was it mere poetry? He observed the Master closely for more than five years and saw for himself many lives being thus converted. Later, even after the Master's passing away, he saw that merely the Master's name did this work of conversion; wondering at this phenomenon did he then spontaneously burst out into this strain.

A question may now be posed: how will then people come to know of their defects if they are not pointed out to them, since the majority of people are under the impression that what they are doing is right? This question can be answered if two conditions are fulfilled. First of all, we

must obtain the light for ourselves before bringing it to others, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say. Secondly we must ask ourselves whether we really, from the heart of our hearts, wish the well-being of the object of our criticism? Do we love him? If we get an affirmative answer for these questions then only we need take the trouble of pointing others' defects. Otherwise we will only, as already stated, increase our load of karma, add to our burden. Again it may be noted that the Holy Mother was not alone in stipulating this prohibition. Christ said: 'Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceivest not the beam that is in thine own eye?'⁴ Swami Vivekananda was categorical when he said, 'you cannot reform by condemnation.' Sri Ramakrishna saluted even the street-walker as the image of the Divine Mother. Many such instances can we come across if we look into the lives of other great teachers also.

How then to get rid of this disease of fault-finding? Remove the causes, says the physician, and the disease must leave. All these causes, such as jealousy, hatred, vanity should be washed off our minds. These wicked thoughts can be counteracted only by cultivating the opposite good thoughts such as love, sympathy and humility,⁵ says Patanjali. When jealousy arises in the mind curb it down by love, that is why the Holy Mother says: 'Learn to make the whole world your own.' These ideas of jealousy, hatred and the like are there because we think ourselves as separate from one another. 'Wherever you find duality there these ideas of seeing, etc., are bound to be,'⁶ says the Brhadaranyakopanisad. And in another place the same Upanisad says, 'As long as we see a second so long is there fear.'⁷ Unless we try to find unity, 'learn to make the world our own', these differences will be there. There are two ways of attaining unity or getting together. First is to recognize and feel that we are one big family, of which God is the father. Second is to realize or at least firmly be convinced that we are sparks of the same divinity or better still to accept that the Divine Being alone manifests in so many forms. All our Upanisads help us to attain such a conviction, such knowledge. The Katha Upanisad describes: 'As the one fire entering into the world shines in so many forms, so also this One, the Indwelling Spirit of all beings, resides in the hearts of all and yet is outside them all.'⁸ It is Brahman alone that has become everything. When this knowledge is put into practice we are 'learning to make the world our own.' And when we attain perfection in this knowledge, 'when one sees all beings in oneself and oneself in all beings, then one does not feel aversion for anything.'⁹ This is the acme of spiritual realization and this alone can bring us everlasting peace. This is the goal and in this realization alone the meaning of the words of the Holy Mother 'none is a stranger my child, this world is your own,' is fulfilled.

Religion and worldly afflictions

The Holy Mother said to a disciple: 'It is not a fact that you will never face dangers. Difficulties always come but they do not last for ever.

They pass away like water under a bridge.' This is possibly an answer to the problem that faces man. The puzzle how to get rid of dangers and difficulties: dangers such as old age, disease and death, difficulties such as poverty, bereavements and the like.

Man tries all other methods of overcoming them and then thinks God may help him. We see large concourse of people in temples, synagogues, and churches. Not all who go to these places want or seek God. Most of them want everything else but God. Some want wealth, others want their diseases to be cured and still others would want something else. Very few really and truly want God for His own sake. Sri Krishna has very aptly analysed these types of devotees in the Gita: 'Four types of people worship Me: the afflicted, the seeker, those with desires, and the wise. All these are good people. But the wise alone truly loves me. He is My own self.'¹⁰ Remembering God in any way does good. But one should not think, that because one has turned religious, because one believes in God, all one's difficulties will be removed and it will be a smooth sailing afterwards, that one will lead a happy life. Not at all. For what is life? It is existence. And existence can only be felt in a body. Body is a material thing, a combination of the five elements: space, air, water, fire and earth. Being a combination the body is subject to changes like growth, decay and death. All these changes are not pleasant. Again the same sensations may be pleasant today and unbearably pain-giving tomorrow. Take some common examples: On a hot day a cold bath will be very welcome but the same cold bath on a wintry night will be most undesirable. A good dish, when the body is in a healthy condition is beneficial to its growth but when it is in a diseased state the very same dish acts as poison. So also with all our enjoyments and miseries. They have origin and disappearance, and last only for a small duration of time. We have therefore to endure them, says Sri Krishna.¹¹ That is what the Holy Mother reiterates when she says, 'they do not last for ever.' It all goes to prove that as long as the body lasts pain and pleasure must be suffered. They are like the shadow of the body. You cannot jump away from the shadow. So an eternal happy life is a contradiction in terms like cold fire or hot ice. It may be a wonderful imagery as an ending to a fairy tale but in the sordid reality it has no place. This the Holy Mother wants us to know thoroughly and unmistakably.

What then is the use of taking to religion if it is not able to take us across the ocean of grief? The answer is, it cannot give you any temporary relief. For this there are other methods, in disease there are the medicines to cure, in poverty there is the charitable man to assist. One comes to religion when one wants the complete cessation of the miseries of the world. He does not expect that taking to religion he will be freed from all bodily discomforts. To him the body remains only as the instrument to cross over to the other shores of this samsara. He comes to know of his own Self, the Atman, and like the bridge, allows miseries and enjoyments to pass under him but not to overwhelm him. Sri

Ramakrishna cites the instance of the Pandava brothers as exemplars of true spiritual aspirants remaining unmoved and undeterred, in spite of all calamities. He describes, 'They did not lose their God-consciousness even once. Where can you find men like them, endowed with so much knowledge and devotion?' The Holy Mother too is insistent to drive home the point that religion is not the gateway to physical enjoyment nor it is the opium of the intellectuals; it is hard work but the fruit is true and solid as none other is.

Nothing outwardly changes in the holy man, he appears to suffer from bodily ailments like any ordinary person, but with this difference that while the latter grieves over the body and its afflictions, the former is indifferent to them. Again the holy man is not afraid of death. For him even the direst calamity is a messenger from the beloved. Ramaprasad, a great poet devotee of Bengal, realizing God as Divine Mother sang:

*'I have surrendered my soul at the fearless
feet of the Mother,
Am I afraid of Death any more?'*

and in the last line of the same song he says, 'Ready am I uttering "Victory to Durga" for the life's last journey.' By realizing God one goes beyond pain and pleasure which in reality are only of the body; the body consciousness is overcome.

God-realization the aim of life

'To realize God and to remain immersed in His contemplation is the aim of human life,' said the Holy Mother when she was asked as to what the aim of life was. God for many is an unknown entity, whereas the world is very tangible, very real. The mind is drawn to this world easily and naturally. How to direct this mind from the known world to the unknown God? And why should we do it? Because knowing the world we remain in the world but knowing God, realizing Him, we get out of it. Again the known world is elusive, deceptive and destructive. Observe the world, the boy of today grows into the youth of tomorrow and with his flaming youthful imagination what exquisite ideas of life does he not form! What vistas of vision does he not see! Everything is brilliant and everything is glorious before him. He stretches both his hands to gather those enchanting things. But before he is aware, before he has enjoyed his fill, before he has fulfilled his ambitions the noonday of youth is past; the slanting rays of the waning sun of youth have already hit his life. Soon the darkness of decrepitude and old age are on him. He cries for light, but wherefrom should he get it? He had strayed away from the path of light and preferred darkness. Soon he hears the hoarse laughter of approaching death. At this man trembles like an aspen leaf. He thinks: Is this all? What have I gained? Is this the end of all my planning? Where

have gone all those which I considered as my own? There they were till now. Yes, life passes away like a wink of the eye; the life-span of man compared to the endless time is a drop in the ocean. All, man considered as his, he has to leave behind at the call of death. The world thus successfully enchants, eludes, deceives and destroys man. Naciketa, though a boy, saw through the game of this world and would not be caught into its net. Boldly, therefore, does he say to Yama, 'O lord of death, these things you offer, viz., divine damsels, chariots, long life and wealth are of dubious value. Moreover they sap away the energy of the senses. Even the longest life that you can offer is naught compared to the eternity of time. Therefore keep these things to yourself.'¹² Naciketa further adds, 'Tell me what happens to man after death — the subject about which there is so much controversy but to know about which is imperative. Apart from this secret knowledge, Naciketa does not desire anything.'¹³ Here is the discrimination which the Holy Mother asked her disciples to practise so that they could realize God.

Japa and concentration of mind

Once an attendant was reading to the Holy Mother some of the letters written by the disciples. Many of them were complaints that they could not concentrate the mind. After some time she said in a rather animated voice, 'The mind will be steadied if one repeats the Name of God fifteen or twenty thousand times a day. It is truly so. I myself have experienced it. Let them practise it first; if they fail, let them complain. One should practise Japa with some devotion, but this is not done. They will not do anything, they will only complain, saying, "Why do I not succeed." Many of the religious seekers give up religion and turn agnostic when they find that a little effort does not help them to realize God. Realization is a far cry, if we but get a little real taste for the Name of God we would be blessed. But it is also true that the dawn of the day of God-vision is not far when once man has cultivated an intensive love for God. Even for getting this taste, concentration of the mind is imperative. And there is no other way to it than by intense practice. The words of the Holy Mother in this regard ring with the voice of authority as she herself spent almost the whole of her life in regular and continuous spiritual practices. The religious life therefore is not escapism as is thought of in some quarters nor is it meant for the weak. Here one is reminded of another exhortation of the Holy Mother, 'Youth is the time when intense efforts are to be made for realization of God!' The call comes to us like those of the ancient Rishis. Let us heed the voice and make our lives worthy.

¹ Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. VIII, Pages 17-18.

² Yoga sutras 1.2.

³ Cf. St. Luke 7. 37-50.

⁴ St. Luke 6.41.

⁵ Yoga sutras 2-33.

⁶ 2.4.14.

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- ⁷ 1.4.2.
⁸ 5-9.
⁹ Isa Up. 6.
¹⁰ 7.16; 7.18.
¹¹ Gita 2.14.
¹² Kathopanishad 1.26.
¹³ Ibid., 1.29.