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FRONT COVER

Tamara Thiebaux, "Trinity," watercolour, 22" x 15", 1993.

BACK COVER

Tamara Thiebaux, "Crone," watercolour, 30" x 11", 1993.

Tamara is a self-taught artist and has illustrated three published children's books. She likes to work in watercolour, as well as ink, and fabric, the latter of which she uses to make dolls—very big (nine feet) or very small (two inches). Tamara creates from a sense of celebration of life, inspiring fresh perspectives, and challenging social conditionings. She currently lives in Hortonville, outside Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

Experiencing Mother Meera

by Christopher Ross

Sept visiteurs ont été impressionnés par la visite de Mère Meera, la réincarnation indienne de la Vierge Marie, qui vit présentement en Allemagne.

What struck me initially about Mother Meera was her seeming vulnerability. She appeared small, even frail. Her breathing appeared too strong for her body. Apart from her breathing she sat perfectly still as she looked at each person.

Mother Meera is described by herself and many of those who have met her as an incarnation of the divine mother. She was born Kamala Reddy in Chandepalle, Andhra Pradesh, India, on December 26, 1960. Her family was not particularly religious. Nevertheless, at the age of three, she would "go to 'Different Lights' when she was in need of comfort," and by the age of six, she enjoyed extensive periods of *samadhi*, a profound meditative state. According to spiritual biographers Christene and Jeff Cox, however, "She had no living guru, read no religious philosophy, and followed no special discipline" (qtd. in Matausek 13).

In 1972 her uncle, Mr. Balgur Venkat Reddy, returned to Chandapelle and met his 12-year-old niece. Utterly convinced of Kamala's specialness, he negotiated with her parents that he should look after her at the Sri Aurobindo's *ashram*, or retreat centre, in Pondicherry. He introduced her to the world as Mother Meera.

Between the ages of 14 and 18, Mother Meera reported meeting with many "great souls" and previous incarnations of divinity, merging with many of these beings, and absorbing their power. At the age of 18 her visions of the supreme deity, whom

she called Paratman, became most important. She referred to Paratman using masculine adjectives and pronouns, calling him "the Supreme." In June 1979, Paratman gave her the special responsibility of bringing

down his "Paratman light" to the earth.

From the age of 17 Mother Meera began receiving pilgrims at Sri Aurobindo's *ashram*. In order to avoid tensions among those devoted to Sri Aurobindo, Mother

Meera, her uncle Mr. Reddy, and Adilakshmi (the long-time middle-aged female companion to Mother Meera) left the *ashram* in 1979 to visit Canada, Switzerland, and Germany. In Germany Mr. Reddy became seriously ill. They settled in the village of Thalheim, near Frankfurt, where Mr. Reddy could receive dialysis. Though he died in 1985, Mother Meera, now 33 years old, and Adilakshmi still live in Thalheim where people visit to receive her *darshan*, the blessing derived from being in the presence of a divine or self-realized being. She works in silence.

The following reported experiences are from seven visitors to Mother Meera who were either directly interviewed or who responded in writing to a request to describe their experience of her. Mary, a 46-year-old psychotherapist from Hamilton, Ontario, described how she first learned of Mother Meera:

*I was visiting my friend Paula in Toronto. She was reading the book *Answers About Mother Meera*. While flipping through the book I encountered Mother Meera's face and in that encounter felt such a loving presence enfold me that I wept for ten minutes.*

For me, a middle-aged psychotherapist and academic psychologist of religion, it was unusual simply to go with my feeling that Mother Meera was someone special. I heard about her in a seminar on mysticism during my sabbatical year at the University of Kent. Furthermore I found it remarkably easy to trust my intuition that an opportunity would come for me to visit her in Germany before returning to Canada. My chance came in June 1995.

Mother Meera gives *darshan* (blessing) four days a week, by appointment, in a large room in her home. I arrived at the designated meeting place to find a gathering of healthy looking people. Soon there were over a hundred folk; we were then split into two parties and taken to the meditation hall. Once there, Adilakshmi directed me to sit in the second row, but by the wall, so that my excessive height would not obscure others' view. Promptly at seven o'clock every one stood up, and then a small sari-clad woman flowed across the room toward the only armchair in the hall. The hall held about 160 people. She sat down on the low armchair and leaned slightly forward. Adilakshmi sat immediately to her left in a position from which to survey the room. An official-looking blue-suited German sat down in the front row on the other side, also well positioned for vigilance.

On this first night my seat afforded a slightly oblique face-on view of Mother Meera. What struck me initially about Mother Meera was her seeming vulnerability. She appeared small, even frail. Her breathing appeared too strong for her body. Apart from her breathing she sat perfectly still as she looked at each person, absorbing her/him into her consciousness. Mother Meera makes a strong first impression. Paula, a Toronto writer in her forties, described her entrance: "This tiny little being,

floating ... seemingly in a trance already." Vanessa, 48, former probation officer from London, England, wrote:

From Mother Meera's first entrance, my eyes were transfixed and I felt very stirred in watching her, as she worked on those who came before her. The experience was quite unlike my expectations and I found tears welling up right from the start....

Denise, an occupational therapist and artist from Fairfield Iowa, remarked: "I was in awe. She was so delicate, tiny but intense and powerful."

At my own visit, I soon learned the format of the next two and one-quarter hours. Someone got up from one of the chairs, went to the front, and sat in or knelt by the "waiting" chair just two feet from Mother Meera. As each person came before her, she moved her hands to grasp their head firmly between her fingers. The position of her hands varied slightly from person to person, sometimes touching toward the side of the head, sometimes toward the temple. After this brief *pranam*, or bowing before the divine spirit embodied within a holy person, Mother Meera dropped her hands, and the individual sat up facing her. Mother Meera simply looked at the person for about 20 seconds. After this brief period she conspicuously dropped her eyes, and the person rose and returned to the seat. Mother Meera repeated this for all 160 or so people in the room.

I was impressed by her stamina. She remained still throughout the two hours. I now realize that I had previously noticed her breathing because everything else about her was so absolutely still!

There was no set order for individuals to present for *pranam* and

darshan, and the process of choosing when to present brought up personal issues for many. Vanessa commented:

It was at least one hour before I felt able to move into the aisle to receive darshan and my heart was racing.... I found impure thoughts rise up, as if to challenge, [and] test, the purity and love of the one before me.

As for me, I waited for my own inner prompting to move me toward the "waiting" chair. I noticed mild fear and I went through many procrastinations. Finally after 50 minutes I went up. I bowed low, wondering where to place my hands in relation to her petite feet. She touched me, firm finger tips at my brow and temples. I was aware of not feeling anything very different, except for being handled by someone capable of clear and deliberate movements. I felt physically awkward, unsure whether I should be resting my buttocks on my calves rather than holding something of a monkey pose. Then, through a barely perceptible gesture, I anticipated the release of her fingers.

In the pranam I positioned myself awkwardly and felt strong hands pull my head forward—this was not the light touch of a frail, unworldly Indian woman! And then came the truly extraordinary moment. Her hands fell away and I knelt back and looked into her eyes. My emotional level had of course already been... heightened, but what happened next was again totally unexpected. I experienced such a power, a force (which on reflection I interpreted as Light), pouring through her that it was almost unbearable.... I broke down in profusely flowing tears. [At first] I imagined a personal encounter but later felt it [to be] the exact opposite—totally impersonal, Mother Meera acting as an empty vessel or channel for that Paratman Light which she has told us she is bringing down to earth as his willing "coworker." My tears continued in some degree for the remainder of the session....

Denise recalled a similarly deep encounter with a core self:

"My emotional level had already been heightened, but what happened next was totally unexpected. I experienced such a power (which on reflection I interpreted as Light), pouring through her that I broke down in profusely flowing tears."

I sat up. I saw her looking at me, as if she had always been looking at me from the beginning of time. There was a white gray smokiness around her face. Now I could see only her two brown eyes. And that was it. She lowered her eyes.

Vanessa clearly described that transition from bending in *pranam* and straightening to receive *darshan*:

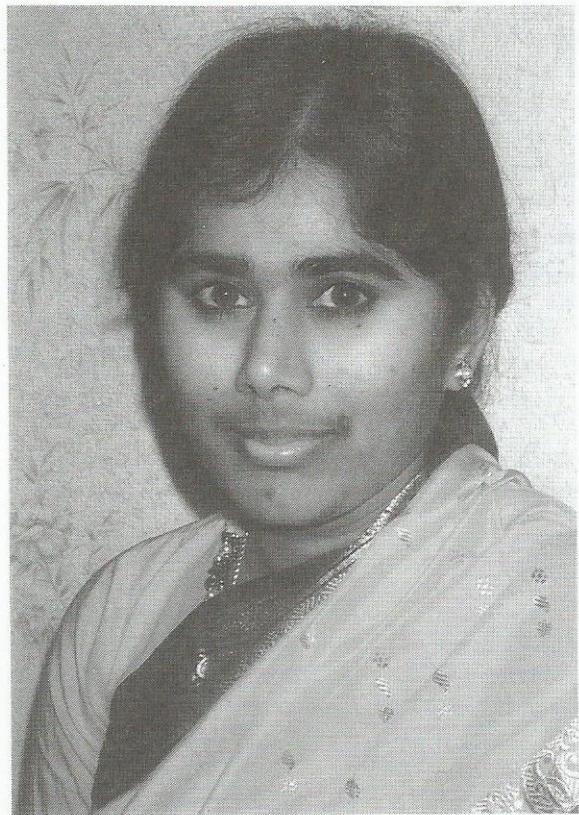
I felt her gaze embrace all of me, as if she was looking directly at my Higher Self, knew my past lives, knew my lessons in this life and just held me in reverence and love. It was as if I felt her say, "Love yourself as I love you."

The initial meeting with Mother Meera sometimes triggered negative

feelings. Jantina, 51, a Dutch women from Hilversum, recounted:

I was nervous and insecure, almost as if this was the Last Judgement and Mother Meera would see, in one glimpse, all of my shortcomings and inadequacies. I was overcome with shame! When she touched my head, I felt cold fingertips at my temples and I noticed how cold her feet were. It all felt "inhuman." When I looked in her eyes, my gaze would not stop at her eyeballs. On the contrary, I was able to look beyond. Her eyes were as transparent as spring water.

Following my own first *darshan*, I walked back to my seat. My head was swimming. There seemed to be energy circulating in my head. With my eyes now closed I experienced swirling moving light. I had been meditating for 18 years using Transcendental Meditation. In this approach the eyes are closed. Since visiting Mother Meera, I have experienced the benefits of meditating with my eyes open.



Mother Meera

But that evening in the meditation hall with Mother Meera was the first time I had the same deep meditative experience whether my eyes were open or closed. When the atmosphere of the locale is sufficiently saturated with spiritual power, it may be unnecessary to cut down external physical stimuli by closing the eyes.

Denise reported remarkable experiences immediately upon arising from *darshan*:

I got up, my heart beating more rapidly. I was not sure I'd be able to walk back to my seat. Once there, I closed my eyes and experienced nothing short of total bliss. I was very alert, mind still, very exhilarated and light in my heart, as if filled with her love—divine—unafraid.

summarized

From my seat, I was fascinated to see the uniqueness of each individual's encounter with Mother Meera. The person's life seemed summed up in the gaze as each faced her. Mother Meera seemed to give herself completely to the next new encounter. For she seemed to increase the depth of her breathing in the first few seconds of contact with each new person. Her attention was unwavering. I do not recollect her blinking once in over two hours.

At nine-fifteen, there being no one in the "waiting" chair, Mother Meera got up and, followed by Adilakshmi, moved swiftly across the room and through the doorway into the private part of the house. She was gone.

In some rare interviews with Andrew Harvey and the Coxes, Mother Meera described what she was doing during *pranam* and *darshan*. She said that there are white threads running from the toes to the head. These are important for an individual's spiritual development, for it is along them that the Paratman Light travels. Progress occurs when this light can travel further up the body. Mother Meera takes someone's head in order to undo knots that block the upward flow of the Paratman Light. Mother Meera also

revealed what she is engaged in during *darshan*:

I am looking at every corner of your being. I am looking at everything within you to see where I can help, where I can give healing and power. At the same time, I am giving Light to every part of your being. I am opening every part of yourself to the Light. When you are open you feel and see this clearly. (Mother Meera 74)

Her depiction of a thorough-going search during *darshan* fitted the reports of many receivers, both their repeated feeling of being contacted at a deep level of themselves and those variations in people's experience, in which some felt in touch with the pain in themselves, while others felt loved and valued. However, whether the experience was of joy or sorrow, there was a sense of a powerful supportive presence. More significantly this sense of presence seems to last.

Finally, during another *darshan*, two days later, I tried once more to glimpse Mother Meera in eye contact with other visitors. The expression on the faces of the visitors indicated that they were more open than ever before. The aliveness of their spirit accompanied revelation of their suffering as well. For some men it seemed that their spirit was shining through a long held attitude of defiance, bypassing their just-below-the-surface habitual anger. For some women their spirit shone past what seemed to be layers of humiliation that had sat too long upon their flattened cheeks. Other women and men (there were three times as many women as men) just beamed excitement, as if their eyes were saying: "Hello! I am so excited to be here." By the end of the brief encounter, almost all the eyes seemed to be saying: "Thank you, Mother Meera. I feel love right now."

This was my first visit to Mother Meera. I was prepared for the unexpected, but not totally prepared. A property of the transcendent when it rubs up against the customary life of

the ego is the experience of abruptness and of space, as an open attitude permits the challenging of deeply embedded assumptions. And mine have been challenged.

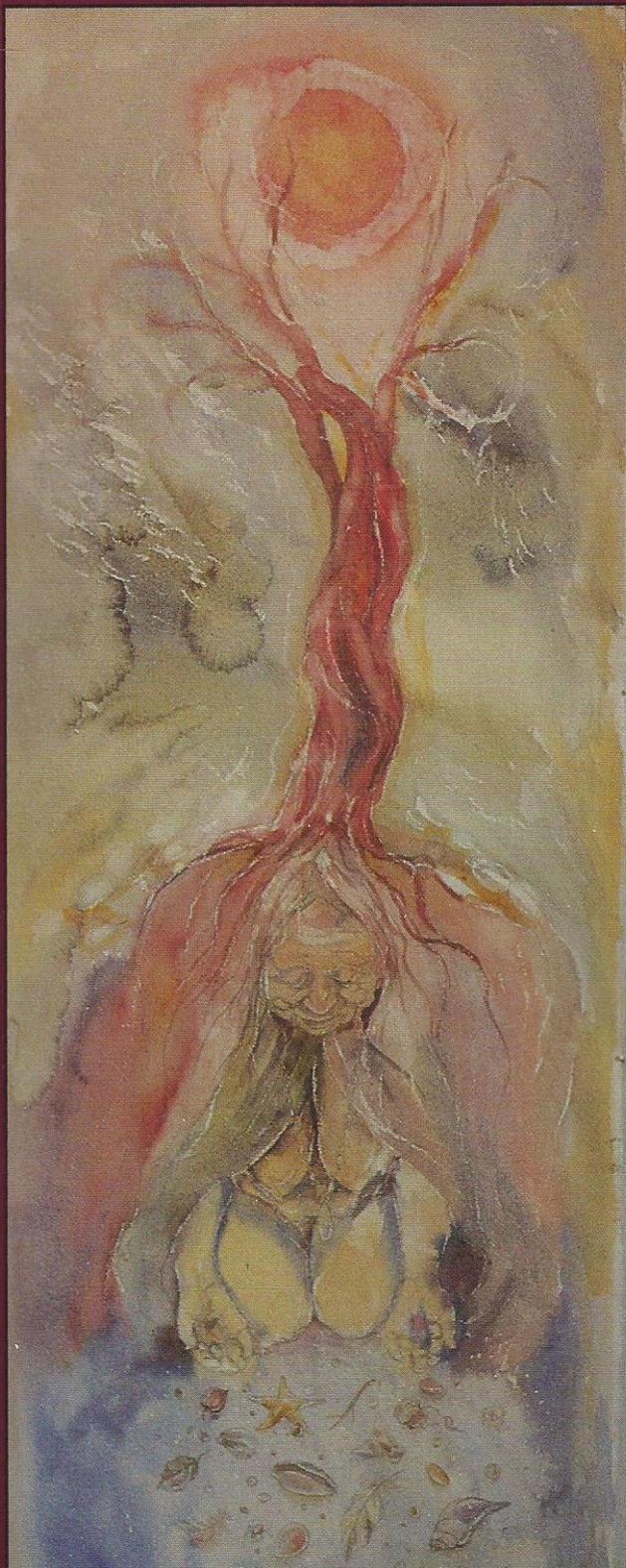
This paper was presented at the Centre for Feminist Research's "Conference on Female Spirituality: A Celebration of Worshippers, Goddesses, Priestesses, and Female Saints," held at York University in March 1996. Funding assistance from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for the presentation and publication of this paper is gratefully acknowledged.

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