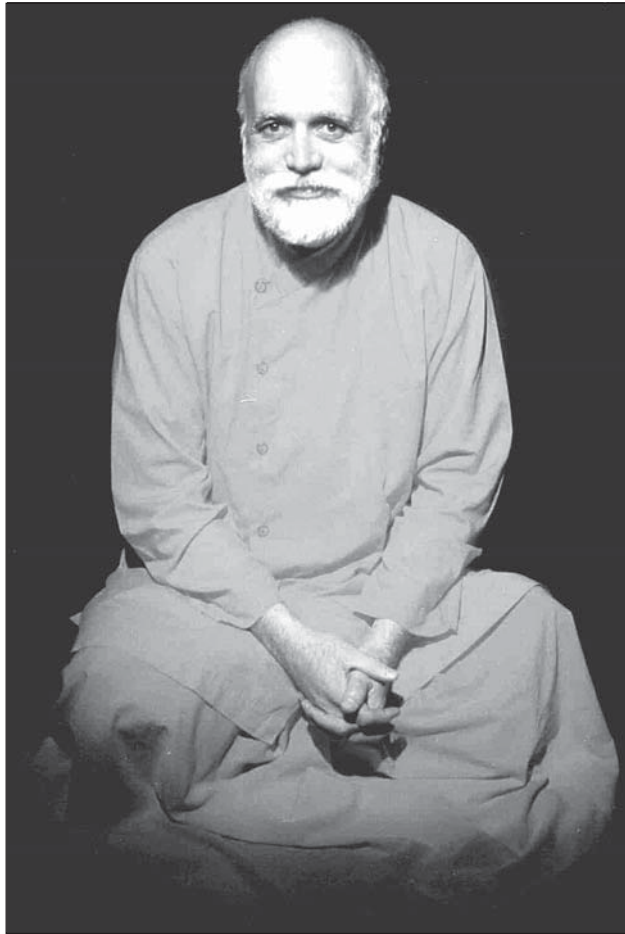


AN INTERVIEW WITH
ANANDA MARGA MONK
DADA PRANAKRSNANANDA:

A spiritual practice encompassing SOCIO-ECONOMIC theory based on COLLECTIVE WELFARE

by Gill Clark



DADA PRANAKRSNANANDA

To believe in a collective welfare, we must have an idea that we are all part of one. Greediness exists in every human being, but we need instead a rational distribution of resources.

Recently, INTOUCH had the pleasure of meeting Dada Pranakrsnananda, a meditation teacher from the Ananda Marga Yoga tradition, who is currently visiting New Zealand to give workshops on mantra meditation. We asked him to tell us something about his own personal background, as well as the philosophy of Ananda Marga, and its function in society today.

Born in Chicago and brought up in the Catholic faith, Dada recalls as a young child how he used to dress up in old curtains from the attic and pretend to be a monk. He was deeply religious and entered the seminary for a period, hoping to become a priest. Things didn't work out and he went instead to public school, discovered the more social side to life, and continued on to university in Colorado where he studied drama. Still torn between religious and social life, he attended Catholic university in Washington DC, and studied philosophy. It was then he realised that theory alone was not enough, and his urge to experience and question the meaning of life led him back to theatre and a more hands on approach, teaching black children in poor, inner city schools, feeding the homeless in soup kitchens, and having an active involvement with the anti-war movement, while also organising demonstrations of non-violent action for Biafra and similar causes.

Dada's search for knowledge and experience also took him to California in the late sixties. The conscious-

ness expansion movement was in full swing, enlivened by people such as Steven Gaskin, the LSD guru, Sufi Sam, the Zen philosopher D T Suzuki, and author and teacher Alan Watts. Dada absorbed it all, at the same time reading widely - astrology, Krishnamurti, Madame Blavatsky .

It was during this time he heard of Ananda Marga meditation, and was immediately drawn to it because it addressed both spiritual and material, or social, matters. This was the balance Dada had been looking for. He became vegetarian, began meditating three times a day, and spent time walking and climbing in the Big Sur area. He left California in 1970 and went to India to deepen his practice. While there, he decided to become a teacher, so he stayed on and trained in Benares, learning the social and spiritual philosophy of Ananda Marga meditation, along with some Sanskrit and Bengali.

For Dada, Ananda Marga provided the social and spiritual balance he had been seeking. A mantra meditation which stretched the mind and directed it to proper use of the body, this was an ideology with morality as its foundation. Everything in the universe is seen as a manifestation of divinity. "There are two layers," says Dada. "There is the withdrawing, focusing the mind, breathing, and sitting in mantra meditation, and then there is the meditation of 'ideation' - as we move through life and interact with people, plants, animals, we see everything as a meditation, and everything as part of the divine."

This key understanding is embodied in the mantra: **Baba nam kevalam**. Dada elaborates: "**Baba** means that divinity is the nearest and dearest entity for me so I want to have an intimacy with that divinity. **Baba** is a devotional term - it also means father - my spiritual father. **Nam** means everything in this universe which is an expression of god. **Kevalam** means I am going to direct all my physical, psychic and spiritual energy only toward one expression and that is the expression of divinity, **baba**, who is my most nearest and dearest. Basically, the mantra brings you into that idea."

Ananda Marga is considered an ide-

ology, explains Dada, but not in a political sense. The idea is god. But what is god? "Our definition is that god has no birth and no death, it has no distortion or blemish, there is no language which can describe it, there is no form that can contain it, it has no colour, it knows everything before it happens, it is consciousness and it is joy, bliss. So actually its a definition that doesn't define anything."

The study of divinity, then, is ideology. One needs to 'ideate' and this is done by means of using the mantra to focus on. The mantra has a sound made up of eight different syllables and these sounds come from the body - the psychic centres or chakras around which there are various tendencies - jealousy, anger, hate, joy etc.,. All these propensities are stimulated by a sound, forming the physical or acoustic base of the mantra.

Then there is the psychic aspect of the mantra, and this has an emotional aspect. Just as the word 'mother' denotes an emotional response, it has a heart and a mind aspect.

And finally, the spiritual aspect. "Our experience," says Dada, "is that the guru is a person who has achieved that state of oneness with divinity, and we are also to understand that we are no different. That's what meditation is about - to come to and identify with your essence which is divinity."

It is the guru's job to get us to that state, so he puts the power of his experience into the mantra and gives it to us. "It's like a battery - I take the mantra and it expresses in me, pulls out of me, that divinity."

The mantra then, works to stretch and expand the mind. In doing so, it pushes at the personal boundaries we all have around difficulties in our lives, until the boundaries break, and we reach a level of universal mind, which is the mind of the universe. This, says Dada, is what he teaches in meditation.

In Touch asked Dada how he would describe the function of Ananda Marga meditation in the current, troubled times we live in. He believes we are moving towards revolution, but not in the sense of past revolutions. "Revolution is not killing people. It is changing the way people think. If you create a psychic revolution, a

physical revolution is automatic."

Within every human being, explains Dada, there are two possibilities. There is a tendency for collective welfare, and a tendency for selfish pleasure. To believe in a collective welfare, we must have an idea that we are all part of one. Greediness exists in every human being, but we need instead a rational distribution of resources.

These human tendencies are linked in to the chakras. In brief, the base chakra is all about desire, the second chakra is all about survival, and the third chakra is about accumulation. The fourth chakra is about inclusion and family love. So when you get above the third chakra, you start moving into collective understanding, the idea that we are all one human family. At the fifth chakra you want to communicate that, you want to bring it from the inside out, through art, dancing, music or speaking. "When you get to here," says Dada, "it becomes a question of materialism or spirituality. What we need in this new age or time, and what Ananda Marga seeks, is a balance of both, which is what the sixth chakra does - brings the material and the spiritual world together."

Generally speaking, many western cultures have sophisticated infrastructures that cater to materialism while suffering from spiritual poverty, while many eastern cultures have a tremendous spiritual resource but the material world is neglected, largely because of the idea that the world is illusion.

The West then is busy representing mind in relationship to the physical world, while the East is busy representing mind in relationship to divinity. If we could bring these two things together then we would have harmony and balance, or, as Dada puts it, "when we do that we get a fire and that fire is devotion and that is the essence of spirituality."

Social change is very much at the base of Ananda Marga. In order to meditate we need a floor to sit on, we need food, clothing, shelter and medicine, and of course, education. Part of the Ananda Marga philosophy is that in order for that to be provided for everyone as a family, we have to control the resources. "Control of the

worlds resources now is in the hands of the G8, the WTO and a handful of people who are only interested if the line keeps going up on the stock markets. Whereas what we should be considering is how do we make the resources so that everyone in society can be physically fit, mentally strong and spiritually developed. I cannot practice spirituality if I do not have a material base."

Ananda Marga's social philosophy is thus based on the understanding that one of the necessary factors in the development of a healthy society is a proper socio-economic theory. People need to know how the resources of the world are to be utilized and allocated. They need a system of government which can meet the needs of all its members and reflect the socio-economic values which that society follows.

The other necessary factor for a healthy society is a proper spiritual

philosophy, which provides answers to humanity's fundamental questions. Ananda Marga philosophy explains the origin of the cosmos and the place of humans in this process, as well as the structure of the human mind, including its psychic and spiritual faculties.

These are the philosophies which Dada has quietly devoted his life to, allowing him a spiritual practice which offers a direct experience of divinity through meditation, while actively promoting the development of a socio-economic environment based on collective welfare, where change and revolution for every individual is possible.

"What I feel is that every human being wants happiness. They try in the first chakra, move to the second, then to the third and so on. As they evolve they understand that the way they are looking for happiness, or where, doesn't work. Once I understand I'm

not getting happiness from something, I change. The mantra will help that to happen. These are the things I teach in my classes, as well as how to deal with the residue of the past." 🌿

Dada Pranakrsnananda is currently in New Zealand and is offering a 6 session workshop on mantra meditation. He can be contacted at the Ananda Marga Meditation Center, 51 Sussex St., Grey Lynn, Auckland. Phone: (09) 376 2290.

Dada will also be offering a "Heart Circle" at the Waiwera Ashram (9 Waiwera Place, Waiwera) on October 18th: 10.30am. After lunch at 12pm, he will give a talk on 'The Ideation of Mantra Meditation'. All welcome, donation only. For more information phone Jenny (09) 827 8861.