

## *The world needs mothering*

■ MA JAYA SATI BHAGAVATI

Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati is an improbable Guru. Born into a poor Jewish family in Brooklyn, Ma Jaya made friends with the homeless who lived under the boardwalk of Coney Island. They taught her that there are no "throw-away" people. That spirit of caring for others is the life force that fuels Ma Jaya and Kashi Ashram, a center she founded in Sebastian, Florida, in 1976. Through this center, Ma Jaya and her volunteers provide food, friendship, and love to care center residents and people living with HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening illnesses, including foster children with chronic illnesses. They also sustain an orphanage in Uganda.

As a highly respected world spiritual leader, Ma Jaya is a trustee in the Governing Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions and is the founder of World Tibet Day. The Dalai Lama and Bishop Desmond Tutu have praised her work and admire Kashi's mission to "awaken a profound awareness about one's spiritual self and the issues that face the world today . . . an awakened soul is a catalyst that can change the world." And, to Ma Jaya, these aren't just words; they are her words in action.

In her essay, Ma Jaya reveals the importance of serving and reaching out to humanity. The world is full of people in need. It is when we are in tune with Spirit that we realize the magnitude of the need and how we must address it.

There are many ways of serving. One way we serve is through prayer, but how long can we keep our hands together? At some point, our hands have to touch someone, because so many have a fevered head that needs the cool touch of one who serves. Service is part of humanity's original nature. The Great Force, the magnetic field that calls us to serve, is not outside of us, but deep within our heart. It's a pattern we take with us from lifetime to lifetime. When we don't use it, it accumulates and it puts a lot of pressure on the human heart. It creates a feeling of emptiness. If we do not give to another human being, that which must be given away stagnates. The heart of life is that which we can give to another human being.

By giving of *yourself* to another human being, you release certain vibrations inside yourself. You become the Great Mother, because you are using that which must be used in honor of humanity. Service is not about religion. My God, it's not even about spirituality. One and one equals two. If the child is hungry, the mother feeds it. It's that simple. If the child is cold, the mother covers him or her. Male or female, when you serve, you become the Mother.

We have 900 children in my orphanage in Uganda. It is run by a magnificent priest, Father Centurio. This man literally takes abandoned children off the streets. There is so much horror there. There are starving people in America, but in Uganda, you have grandmas and you have grandchildren. The mothers and fathers are gone. A whole generation got wiped out because of AIDS or civil war. I had to do more than just watch it on TV and talk about it.

People come to Kashi Ashram from all over the world and ask why we don't burn out. The answer is simple. We drink as we pour; we pour as we drink. We keep moving the current of service (*seva*) through our own selves and bring it out into the world. Serving also brings great joy. But you don't think about that in the moment. In the moment, you don't think, "Well this is making me happy!" You think, "I got a smile out of that kid. I got a twinkle in the eye of that child who is fighting AIDS or cancer." And you say, "Thank you, God, for letting me do this." I wish there wasn't all this pain in the world, but each of us has the ability to make life a little bit better for someone else. You don't have to do what I do. You know when you have a big heart, something must fill it up. Caring is so deep in your heart that it must come out. It can be anything. Giving compliments to people is a form of service. When I see a beautiful woman or a handsome man, I'll stop and tell them.

Give away what you want the most for yourself. When I go into hospitals or into a county home, the first thing I tell myself is: "Okay, Ma, you're in that bed. What do you want in this moment?" Most people are afraid of the sick. Most people are afraid to touch a homeless person. You don't have to touch them, but there's never a reason not to smile. I learned that as a very young girl when my Mom was dying in a charity ward in Coney Island Hospital in Brooklyn. On her deathbed, my Mom would tell me to go around the ward and make people laugh. I was eight or nine years old at the time, and I did what my Mother told me. I ran around the ward and made everybody laugh. When I told her what I had done, she said, "Who

did you touch with your own hand?" I said, "Nobody, Mom, nobody, but I made them all laugh." She said, "Now you go and you hug and you touch." I said, "But Mommy, they stink." And my Mom said, "So do I." That was my first lesson in total service and giving everything I have of myself. And I never tire. I cry a lot, but I never tire.

There are Native American Indian tribes that do not have a word for "me." They only have a word for "we." The earth is in great need of mothering. All one has to do to become the mother is to recognize that "we" is more important than "me." Women are coming to the forefront of the battle for humanity's needs, but this is the moment for all of us to remember that one does not have to have breasts filled with milk or a womb that once was full to be a mother; one only has to have a mother's heart. When one embraces the spirit of the mother, then there is no difference between a man's heart and a woman's heart. The earth needs nourishment. A feminine touch must be felt or this great, great Mother Earth is doomed. All of us must share the responsibility of alleviating the suffering that is occurring on this planet that is also so abundant. Anybody can get involved. Tell yourself, "I'll give a week; I'll give a day. I'll give an hour, or perhaps I'll just talk to somebody as a hotline volunteer." It's not about money, although money is desperately needed. As I said before, it's about what you are willing to give of yourself.

You're in prison if you don't take care of another human being. How much time do we need to sit in prayer to take care of ourselves? I teach a sacred yoga called Kali Natha Yoga that

is going out all over the world. It combines movement with prayer and worship. It allows for a feeling of health, vitality, and deep inner peace. But it comes right down to this: when there are people who are hurt and you are someone who is capable of stopping that hurt, you have to take responsibility. It's not that God doesn't answer prayers. She, the Mother, looks down upon us all and says, "Take care of my children."



### *for reflection*

*Ma Jaya Sati Bhagavati's expression of spiritual living is the path of service. She knows that giving of yourself, in any way that is applicable in the moment, actually serves to enrich you. And, as Ma Jaya says, serving does not mean sacrificing. When you sacrifice, you are actually cut off from the Spirit. If you feel as though you are sacrificing, it means that you aren't taking time to nourish yourself. You feel deprived rather than fulfilled.*

*Have you ever served another with no thought of reward, or expectations and found a feeling of profound grace in the moment?*

*Opportunities for serving are all around us. Sometimes it's as simple as a gentle smile, a pat on the back, or a loving thought. Even a seemingly small gesture of kindness is enough to free another from fear and desperation. Try it wherever you are. Smile at the supermarket checkout cashier, for example. Or smile at the people around you while you're waiting in line at the movies. Ask your waitress whether she's having a good day.*

*Being in the service Spirit is easy. It's allowing your original nature to flow through you.*