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1. On causing a **Change in others**

M. Mother, when we see something wrong in the other person, how can we make him change that?

G.G.: It is a great fallacy to believe that by trying you can change a person. This never happens. It can be done through the example of your own life. It can never, or very seldom, be achieved through effort, talk, contradiction and the like. The change will occur when the Time of god comes. If you change your own self and become a living example to the person you wish to change, if you become his ideal and are seen to be happy, then it will happen. To pray for somebody is quite right – but we must not try to change him. This is only in the Hand of God. God has a Plan for everyone's life. For *all* human beings. We are free, but what we don't know is that *He knows* what we shall do. *For He knows all*. God knows every single step of our life, to the last moment. We do not. And, dear M., if we tried more to unite our self with god then we wouldn't need to do anything. Because we would automatically become an example to those we wished to see walking His Way. It is natural, though, for you, so young and with all this love god has put into your heart, to fail to understand, at least in the beginning, to feel disappointed and to say: *"What a situation! All this effort and no results yet"*? But did it ever cross your mind that God says the same thing about us? *"I pardoned so many times. I showed forbearance so many times. ... And still..."* ... The next step should be Prayer. Just as the beginning was Prayer. Without judging the other person ... Once, after I had understood that Prayer is everything, I saw two very angry boys fighting in the street. I refrained from intervening, as I would have done in days past. Instead, I put at once into practice what I believed in. I turned aside and said: "Lord, put thy Peace between these two". By the time I turned to look at them again, they were laughing and playing ... That was an answer from god. Know that, dear M. Our peace and serenity, our own way of living, indicate how much we believe. This is why a person may teach us the best lesson, but if we see that he is troubled, restless and faltering, we cannot have faith in what he tells us. If, therefore, we wish to help our fellow men, the purpose of our life should be to get as close as we possibly can to the example: the Lord.

2. on what **Changes** with the Rasyon

X: Gerondissa, you have been always close to people and have always loved them. Did you feel this relation change at all when you became a Nun?

G.G.: At first I was terrified! I thought that everyone would go away, that those disliking the Rasyon would say: "Let us keep our distance" ... On the contrary, from the moment I put on the rasyon, people have been coming, asking for advice and even following it. This is by the Grace of God. Indeed! Besides, do you know what even non-Christians told me – including Indian monks wearing orange-colored robes? "Now that you have returned to India as a Nun, you are our true sister?" (Because when I went there for the first time, I was a laywoman). That's how they felt. They were Monastics and I was a Monastic too.

**On Changing course**

GG: Occasionally something occurs and stops what we think is our course. But if God allows it to happen, then it means that it had to be so. Now this is the great secret: We must realize that whatever happens is by the Hand of God. We must first submit to God and then to people. And we should not wish for anything or desire anything . We should have neither needs nor yearnings. When you free yourself from these, it doesn't make any difference where you are. It will be just as perfect everywhere.

## On Changing one's Mind

N: Gerondissa, you sometimes say that Ancient Greek motto: '*a change of mind is characteristic of a wise man*'. What does this mean? That we can change our decisions all the time?

GG: I don't believe so. A person who does this will finally reach an impasse and will be like "a sounding cymbal", turning here and there to the end of his life, without taking a decision – which is what God wants us to do. He tells us: "If you want, follow Me"... I may change my mind on some occasions: when, for example, I am asked for opinion and I give it on the spur of the moment without thinking. Then I come back to the matter and say, "Oh, how foolish! What I said is not right", as a deeper thought, the one that is from God, has come up. So, I tell you: "No, my child, I was wrong." This is not only an act of humility, but also the right thing to do. Otherwise, you stick to a wrong idea, because you don't want to change your mind. In this case, of course, they may tell you: "But you said so! Why do change it now?" Now I say a different thing, because I have a different knowledge. I have understood what is right. I realized my error on that point. I have the humility to acknowledge it and tell you "I changed my mind." This, dear N., is the meaning of "a change of mind is characteristic of a wise man."

Nun: ...And not to wish for one thing today and for another tomorrow...

## On Charity

G. G.: Once a company of young men and women came to see me. In the course of the conversation, one of the young men (who was earning a lot of money from his job) said: "If Jesus Christ were to appear this moment, I, for one, would be scared to death!" I asked him: "Why all this fear, instead of falling at His feet and feeling joy?" He answered, "Because I do nothing of what I should." "Like what for instance?" "well, giving alms, doing kindnesses. What's more, I experience some professional rivalries"... I said, "Make a start. Begin with something from the Old Testament. Give 10% of your earning and then a part of your conscience will be at rest." He was pleased, greatly pleased ... After a few days he sent me a message: "The 10% is ready. Where do we give it?" "To so and so a family, I replied. A month later he sent money again. Since then, however, he disappeared. Do you see how difficult it is to give even a mere 10%? Because if you have a thousand drachmas, you gladly give a hundred. But if you have a million, you find it hard to give 100,000 drachmas ... And if you have two or three millions ... then you'd rather forget it! That's too bad! I remember in older days, when I was still a laywoman practicing physiotherapy in Athens, one of the persons I treated was a multimillionaire. Since his wife was a friend of mine, I refused payment. One day, while I was massaging his neck, he said: "You know, Christ never spoke against the rich ... all this is just priest talk!" "Of course," I answered, "He never did. All He said was that the rich will find it hard to enter the Kingdom of Heaven!" After that, he let me know through his wife that he was discontinuing the treatment. He was the loser, though for I was charging him no fee. ... Another gentleman, also an industrialist, who came to see me a few years ago, told me: "I am thinking of retiring, but what is to be done, then? Five hundred people who work for us expect me to provide their daily bread." "And you,"

I said, “expect from them your bread and much more than your bread” ... I cannot understand why people do not understand! I cannot possibly understand that! Anyhow, it is very difficult to convince anyone who doesn't have in him to give... Once, a lady friend asked someone with a very high income for a contribution, but his answer was: “I don't need anyone to suggest it. I give of my own free will.” Probably what he wanted to say was, “Don't meddle in my affairs. I know what I'm doing.” What great pride! On the other hand, he who has it in him gives before he is asked to. Let me tell you another story. Many years ago, I was to go on a ten-day Pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and I thought how nice it would be if I could take with me a small sum of money for the Hegumen of the Monastery (note: she means Father Theodosios of the Monastery at Bethany) ... But how? Was I to visit them that time empty-handed? At noon I went for lunch at a restaurant and at a given moment I got up to fetch myself a glass of water. While I was filling my glass, a gentleman came near me and said: “Excuse me, Sister. I am a <dedicated> person (a single lay person living in the world like a monastic, dedicated to God) and have vowed to give a sum out of my salary, for charitable purposes, on the first day of each month (it was the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, the feast day of the Sts Anargyroi – Unmercenary Saints, Doctors). Would you accept my small contribution to your charity work?” “Please,” I said, “let us sit at the table and I will explain ... You see, sir, I have made a vow never to take money. If you wish, you may send it to the Monastery in the Holy Land where I will go shortly. But, please, let them have your address so that they may send you a receipt.” “Couldn't I do it without giving particulars?” “No, I'm sorry. ”So he wrote his home address, put something in an envelop and said: “You know, I am due to retire in two-years time and then I too will follow God's way” ... “Goodbye.” The envelop contained 500 drachmas, and I thought <that's a good start> Another 6,000 followed! You see? All it takes is to think of it. One can easily recognize a Miracle of God, if it take some material form ... I knew a lady who had been very wealthy in Russia. Today, she is 80 years old, in poor health, almost deaf and nearly blind. She was a musician, and, as she loves music she very much wished to have a small transistor radio. I thought to myself: <Just imagine, with a small radio she would be quite happy now. How nice it would be if I could find one.> That day was the 26<sup>th</sup> of May. In about ten days I received a letter from a friend in the U.S.A. dated May 26. She wrote, “I enclose ten dollars and shall be very glad if you use them to help someone”. The equivalent was exactly 300 drachmas. I went into a shop and said, “Please, can I have the cheapest transistor radio on sale”? “Well, you will find the cheapest at so and so for 150 Drs., but it will not last. I have a Japanese one at the price of 350 Drs. But I'll let you have it for 220 Drs.” It was a beautiful red-and-gold set that could receive all stations. And what a loud-speaker it had ... more than fit for someone hard of hearing. Two days later I took it to her. That's how things are done. Let me give you another instance. A lady wrote to me from Northern Macedonia, stating her tragic lack of money and the urgent need of assistance in which she found herself. Two days later, I received a telephone call from another lady with whom I had visited the Holy Land. While there, she had strained her ankle and I had accompanied her to the Hospital for an X-ray examination. She rang up to tell me that her leg was fine now, and that she wanted to contribute a certain amount which I could use as I judged best. I said, “Here's the address of Mrs. So-and-so. Send it to her”. In a few days the other lady wrote to let me know that, “An unknown lady sent me one thousand drachmas! It feels as if I hit the jackpot”! You can easily understand what a thousand drachmas mean to those who expect a mere hundred. I just

remembered another remarkable incident. Someone wrote to me from India that his daughter had finished her high school education and would like, if possible, to study philosophy in the U.S.A. I started thinking on who could offer her accommodation in the U.S.A., and in my prayer the people who had put me up in Texas came to my mind. Every year this family extended hospitality to a youth from another nation. I wrote to them, and the matter was settled. That's how everything is done!

## 6. on **Children**<sup>1</sup>

K.: Mother, I would like to ask you about the child, this new human being.

G.G.: A child is just that, a human being, nothing else. Personally, I never felt that a child was a child, or that I should treat it differently than I would a grown up person. From a very early age, a child is very happy if you consider it a friend. One of my friends has a two year old girl who simply won't call me "Mother Gavriilia". To her, I am just "Gavrilia", even when she speaks to me on the telephone. Because she feels me close to her. Have you understood? That's how it is. We must also remember something else: A child belongs neither to the father or the mother. It belongs to God! Someone said that a child is under the guardianship of its parents. It is not really theirs. And, in my humble opinion, they do not have the right to make the child follow their pattern, or model its life as they wish. "My child, I want you to become this or that". Who are you, Mister? Who are you? From my experience with children from all parts of the world, from all walks of life, rich or poor, I came to the conclusion that all children are the same until their parents set up certain marries for them. Do you understand that?

Once, I happened to go out with the child of a very wealthy lady. While walking down a narrow street, a poor boy came near us. As I was about to give him something, the child I was accompanying protested, "No please, don't give anything. Don't give him anything. Mummy told me that he is a bad boy and this is why he is a beggar". Now, please tell me. When a mother dares say to her little boy something like that about a fellow human being, does she or doesn't she distort his soul? If left alone, the child is ready to love the other one. He cannot understand anything else. I remember when I was in India, at a Leper Colony, the two young children of the couple who ran it (not: Baba Amte and his wife) had never seen other children, since all the lepers were grown up persons. The first day they went to school – they were then six and seven years old – they refuse to be brought home. They were sobbing their hearts out and saying, "We don't want to leave. We want to stay here because the others are like us. We don't want to go back home". All that because a child feels that it belongs to a different world – the World of Children. Irrespective of who or what the child is...

K.: So, fathers and mothers are simply the guardians of their children. Therefore, they should respect greatly the tutelage God has entrusted them with...

G.G.: Yes. They should also respect the personality of the child. A boy is born to them and when he grows up he may wish to become a builder. So? Are they going to say "no"? Are they going to force him to become a lawyer?

K.: The problem is with the father and mother... It is not the child's problem.

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<sup>1</sup> K. Panoutsopoulou, Athens, 1985

G.G.: Certainly not. But what will this forced change cause to the child? He will suffer. You can see how much we have <progressed> on that, in our days. Now, when children reach adolescence, they rebel and go away. And then ...

K.: But this may lead to anarchy...

G.G.: Not only that. The youngsters may go astray, because one bad thing leads to another. While trying to get free, they meet with worse forms of slavery – like drugs perhaps, or gangs.

K.: How are they to know God if they are not taught at home or somewhere else?

G.G.: They do not need to be taught with words, when the parents live in harmony; when they love God; when they do not tell their children to go to church alone while they stay at home. These children will go to church until they are 12 or 13 years old and then they will say to their parents, “Why don’t you go? Now I don’t feel like going either”. This happens all the time. Or again, the father and the mother are quarrelsome, they lose their temper, they have hard feelings. Yet they say to their child, “Don’t raise your voice. Don’t get angry”. And so on. Now do tell me, what’s all that? I remember that once I went to a Teacher’s Training college. As the Professor was talking to us about gentleness, placidity and the like, a sudden draught of air made a shutter bang repeatedly. He jumped up and started shouting very angrily at the student sitting next to the window, “You fool, why don’t you fasten that shutter? The noise is getting on our nerves”. That while he was giving a lecture on being calm, on not losing one’s temper etc. Was I to attend another lecture by that Professor again? Certainly not.

K.: In other words, the most important is ...

G.G.: Example. Nothing else. Our example, silence and love. This is what I have learned by experience and it applies both to children and grownup people – particularly to the grownups.

## 7. the Church<sup>2</sup>

Fr. G.: A few days ago, when I said to Gerondissa Gavrilia, “I do not dare ask... I know how tired you are; how many persons you see in your cell. I would like to ask you to come to our little church on of these evenings, but I cannot decide”... her answer was, “Oh, no. Do not decide; do ask me and I will come”!

G.G.: Indeed, this is the greatest joy for me. It is wonderful to be among so many people who love God as intensely as I do. Then something tremendous takes place; a sort of energy emanating from the Saints and angels and these devoted people. Such a gathering is like one of the greatest events. This is what the Church is! This is the Church!

## 8. on the Cross<sup>3</sup>

G.G.: We believe what the Gospel says: First, that God does not let anyone be tempted more than he can endure. Second, That Christ Himself endures with us. I hear some people say, “Ah! She bears such a Cross’. But the Cross is not carried by her. He who carried His Own Cross bears it within her soul. As for ourselves, we only bear small “Crosses”.

## 9. on the Love that is on the Cross<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> St. Andreas, Patission, Athens, 15-2-88

<sup>3</sup> G. Meneopoulou, Athens, 1970-80

<sup>4</sup> Athens, 18-4-85

G.G.: The Cross is the symbol of self-sacrifice for others. That's how it is. Yet, he who loves and gives his own self to help others, does not feel this is self-sacrifice. When Love is given, it is not given by man. It is the Love of God that flows through the heart of the giver. He doesn't feel it as a "sacrifice", because he is not aware of it. He feels it as his natural condition – without any change in his own life or health. On the contrary, he is in a state of permanent joy, for he is at the same time both giver and receiver of Divine Love and Power. Christ has shown us this with His Life, His Teaching, His Crucifixion and His Resurrection. This is why true love is always on the Cross; but, at the same time, it rejoices in the Light of the Resurrection.

G. ... And does it always stay on the Cross?

G.G.: Always. Yet, man cannot stay on the Cross without Love. Because Love has within itself the seed of sacrifice. We cannot possibly love unless we are willing to give. Isn't it so? And when sacrifice is carried to the end, it becomes a Cross. Occasionally, the persons to whom you give your love may not appreciate it, and then you are left alone with God. Still, God has His Own, and He will always send them to you. The moment you approach the way of living He wants you to follow, immediately God's people will start coming to you. Well, what can I say, I am really astonished at this. In the old days, I had to choose my friend. I was wondering, "Will this person suit my way of living, care for the things I care for"? And so on. Today, I have no need of such thoughts. I know that anyone who comes to wish me "Good Morning" is sent by God – as if he were the personification of an angel. God select whom He will send.