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No. 9

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the Goal is reached.

TEACHINGS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA*

श्रीरामकृष्णोपदेशावलिः ।*

SWAMI RAMAKRISHNANANDA

यथा स्पर्शमणि स्पृष्ट्वा लोहः काञ्चनतां गतः ।
स्थापितो यत्र कुत्रापि विकृति नैव गच्छति ॥ १ ॥

तथा सद्गुरुसंसर्गाद् यदा निर्मलतां व्रजेत् ।
शुभान्वितो जनः कोऽपि न पुनः किल्बिषी भवेत् ॥ २ ॥

1 & 2. Once iron is transformed into gold by the touch of the philosopher's stone, it does not change its nature again wherever it is kept. Similarly, once a fortunate person attains purity by coming in contact with a spiritually qualified teacher, his mind never becomes polluted again under any circumstances.

यथा स्पर्शमणेः स्पर्शात् तरवारोह्ययोमयः ।
हिरण्यत्वमासाद्य न तु रूपं त्यजेत्स्वकम् ॥ ३ ॥

तथापि पूर्ववन् नान्यद्विसितुं क्षमते त्वसौ ।
तथा हरिपदस्पर्शात् कश्चित् पुण्यवतां वरः ॥ ४ ॥

निर्मलत्वं समासाद्य पूर्वदेहं समाश्रयेत् ।
तथाप्यसौ पुनर्नेह गच्छेद्द्वै रिपुवश्यताम् ॥ ५ ॥

3-5. Just as an iron sword converted into gold by the touch of the philosopher's stone, does not change its original form, but is not able to cause harm to others as before ; in the same way, some best amongst good men, after being blessed by the touch of the holy feet of the Lord, continues to remain in the same body, but is never overcome by inimical evil tendencies.

* See *Vidyodaya* (a critical Sanskrit monthly journal), Ed. Hrishikesh Sastri, Bhatpara (24-Parganas, West Bengal) : The Oriental Nobility Institute, January 1897, pp. 11-16. The versified Sanskrit rendering is by Swami Ramakrishnananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The English translation is ours.

BRAIN, CONSCIOUSNESS AND SUPERCONSCIOUS EXPERIENCE—I

(EDITORIAL)

It was a common belief at one time that Western science is antagonistic to religion, as it has solely a material aim in view. The reason for such a belief was no doubt the hostile attitude of science towards religion in general and Christianity in particular. Till the first half of the current century, the Catholic Church and certain Protestant sects very fanatically prevented their followers from accepting or appreciating some theories of science. One well-known victim of such die-hard fanaticism was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest of France, who had to suffer from various types of atrocities of the Church, including banishment, for his accepting the theories of natural science and trying to apply them to religion. It was Swami Vivekananda who for the first time observed that there cannot be anything in science which is really antagonistic to religion, rather the theories of science can only help to strengthen the foundation of religion. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Swamiji proclaimed in one of his lectures : 'We want today that bright sun of intellectuality joined with the heart of Buddha, . . . This union will give us the highest philosophy. Science and religion will meet and shake hands.'¹

If we study the trend of the modern scientists, we find that Swamiji's words are coming true. After reading works like the *Tao of Physics* by Dr. Fritjof Capra, an eminent physicist at present associated with Berkeley University, and others who are making efforts for harmonizing the theories of science with those of religion, one begins

to feel that after a fruitless struggle to rub out religion from the face of the earth, science has now extended her hand towards religion for a friendly handshake. And the following words of the late Pope Paul VI addressed to the learned scientists of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences on the occasion of their Study Week (September 28 to October 4, 1964), will prove that after centuries of reservation, the Church too has stretched her hand towards science for a warm handshake. The Pope's memorable words are: 'The Church does not fear the progress of science. She undertakes willingly a dialogue with the created world and applauds the wonderful discoveries that scientists are making in that world. Every true scientist is for her a friend, and no branch of learning is shunned by her.'² This is really a unique and friendly gesture of the Church towards science, thereby making the prophecy of Swami Vivekananda true.

Swamiji, on the other hand, had offered his hand for a warm handshake long before; for in his lectures, especially on Rāja-Yoga, we find him explaining the theories of Yoga in the light of the findings of medical science as known in those days. His novel method of explaining Yoga had interested psychologists like William James, electricians like Nikola Tesla and other prominent scientists of the day. Some well-known doctors of those days even studied his *Rāja-Yoga* critically to see whether his knowledge of medical science was up to date or not, and it is known that Swamiji stood their test. In his lecture on 'The

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati : Advaita Ashrama, (hereafter *Complete Works*), II, 1971, p. 140.

2. *Brain and Conscious Experience*, ed. John C. Eccles, New York : Springer-Verlag Inc., 1966, (hereafter *Brain*), p. xx.

Importance of Psychology' Swamiji has shown how the knowledge of Western psychology can help a spiritual aspirant in controlling his mind and in having the superconscious experience fo God-realization. During the course of this lecture Swamiji stressed the importance of psychology in the following words :

It is the science of psychology that teaches us to hold in check the wild gyrations of the mind, place it under the control of the will, and thus free ourselves from its tyrannous mandates. Psychology is therefore the science of sciences, without which all sciences and all other knowledge are worthless.

The mind uncontrolled and unguided will drag us down, for ever—rend us, kill us ; and the mind controlled and guided will save us, free us. So it must be controlled, and psychology teaches us how to do it. . . .

Deep, deep within, is the soul, the essential man, the Ātman. Turn the mind inward and become united to that ; . . .³

Although Western psychology does not deal directly with mind control, it surely aims to add to 'man's rapidly growing happiness and quick relief from pain'; and the various theories of the psychologists invented for this purpose will also be found useful for attaining control of the mind. Furthermore, it can help to explain some hitherto unknown psychic phenomena like clairvoyance, telepathy, physiology of meditation, etc., in a scientific way. Needless to say, the fast-progressing modern Yoga psychology will some day find out easier methods for controlling the mind, and thus be of great help to spiritual aspirants. The Editorial places before the readers some such findings of the Western as well as Hindu psychology which will prove helpful for spiritual life-building.

*Physiological Basis of Mental Life:*⁴

All psychologists believe that there is a close relation between the body and the mind. Unlike Hindu psychologists, the Western psychologists study the nature and function of the mind as mediated through the body. For this purpose, the study of the nervous system forms a fundamental aspect of their study. Mind is intimately connected with the body through the nervous system. It is therefore essential to have some information about it. The subject is no doubt very vast, and it will not be possible to give all the details here. For that the readers are requested to consult books on this subject, some of which have been mentioned below in footnote number four.

The nervous system of the vertebrates has been divided into two main groups for the convenience of study ; namely, (1) the central nervous system, and (2) the peripheral nervous system. The former is further divided into two subgroups—the brain and its components, and the spinal cord. The latter has been divided into four subgroups; namely, the cranial nerves, the spinal nerves, the sensory and motor fibres, and the autonomic nervous system.

THE BRAIN

The brain is nothing but the greatly enlarged anterior portion of the central

4. References :

- (i) P. N. Bhattacharya, *A Text Book of Psychology*, Calcutta : A. Mukherjee & Co., 1965 ;
- (ii) *Grey's Anatomy*, eds. Roger Warwick and Peter Williams, London : Longmans, 1973 ;
- (iii) M. A. Wenger & others, *Physiological Psychology*, New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1956 ;
- (iv) *Brain* ;
- (v) F. L. Ruch, *Psychology and Life*, Bombay : D. B. Taraporewala Sons & Co. Pvt. Ltd, 1970 ;
- (vi) Nigel Calder, *The Mind of Man*, London : B.B.C., 1970 ;
- (vii) William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Dover Publications, I, 1950.

3. *Complete Works*, VI, 1972, pp. 30, 31.

nervous system enclosed within the cranial cavity of the skull and covered by membranes called meninges. Within the brain are the cavities known as ventricles which contain the cerebrospinal fluid. The brain is divided into two major parts, namely, the cerebral hemispheres (telencephalon) and the brainstem. The former include the cerebral cortex and basal ganglia, and the latter is further divided into the diencephalon (thalamus and hypothalamus), mesencephalon (midbrain), metencephalon (pons and cerebellum), and the myelencephalon (medulla oblongata). The cerebellum lies behind the medulla and pons.

Although not very beautiful to look at, this lump of tissue is very intricate in its mechanism and very powerful in action. It is a million times more complex than the most powerful computers manufactured so far. Moreover, it is conscious of itself, and is the main organ from which man's thoughts, feelings, willing and creative actions, which form the essence of human life, originate. In short, it is the organ of the mind of man.

The brain consists of billions of cells, of which those involved in the mental processes are called neurons. They are of various sizes and have many complicated interconnections. Other types of cells are called glia or glue cells. This great mass of cells, though bewildering for those who want to trace their organization and interlinks, has a definite pattern of its own.

Hans Berger was the first person to detect the electrical properties of the brain with the aid of the electroencephalogram (EEG); and a year later Otto Loewi discovered that certain chemicals are involved in the nerve actions. Thus the brain is a sort of electro-chemical machine.

Localization of Functions in the Brain :

The cerebrum is the centre of higher mental processes which controls volition,

thought, reasoning and even the higher emotions of man. Three kinds of centres are located in the cerebrum. The first is the Motor Area, which is most definitely localized and extends slightly into the frontal lobe of the cerebrum, in front of the Fissure of Rolando. This controls the movements of the major organs from the toes to eyelids. The second is the Sensory Area which controls the tactile and visual sensations; and the third type are called Association Areas which are localized in four different parts of the cerebrum.

Thus the cerebrum has three main types of functions. Firstly, it is the main centre of the mind, intelligence, ego, and all higher mental processes. Secondly, the cerebral cortex controls the sensory and conative processes. Even the motor sensations connected with speech, writing and reading are centred in it. Thirdly, it regulates the movements of different parts of the body. In short, all the cognitive, affective and conative mental processes are controlled by the different parts of the cerebrum. Although different functions are localized in different parts of the cerebrum, it is observed that if one of the parts gets injured, its function is taken up by the neighbouring part. This information is enough to show that the brain is the chief centre of man's relative life.

The Spinal Cord :

The spinal cord lies safely enclosed within the vertebral canal of the backbone, extending from the foramen magnum at the base of the skull to the lower end of the first or second vertebra of the lumbar section. Below, the spinal cord tapers in a cone called the conus medullaris, after which a slender non-nervous filament, the filum terminale, runs downwards and attaches to the coccyx. The spinal cord, with its white and grey matter, is divided into three columns—anterior, posterior and lateral. The nerves of these three columns

are clustered together to form the ascending and the descending tracts which are ultimately connected with the brain, after crossing each other in the medulla oblongata. This mutual crossing of the nerve clusters in the region of the lower brain is called 'Decussation of Pyramids'.

A cross-section of the spinal cord shows the centrally placed grey matter surrounded by white matter. The grey matter contains nerve cells, nerve fibres, dendrites and the terminal branches, arranged in the form of the letter H. In the centre there is a canal known as the central canal of the spinal cord, which traverses the entire length of the spinal cord and is continued upwards through the lower part of the medulla oblongata and opens into the fourth ventricle of the brain. At the lower end, it goes for a short distance into the filum terminale. In the lower part of the conus medullaris, it exhibits a fusiform dilation called the terminal ventricle, a cross-section of which shows a triangular shape. The central canal is filled with cerebrospinal fluid, which continues in the ventricles of the brain.

The Autonomic Nervous System :

Leaving apart the details of other nervous systems, it would be worthwhile to study the autonomic nervous system as it governs the emotional reactions. It is connected with the spinal cord at one end and with the visceral organs like the stomach, heart, lungs, intestines, sex organs, urinary bladder, etc. at the other; and governs the function of the glands and the mouth muscles. As the centres of this nervous system are largely located in the hind brain rather than the cerebral cortex, it is known as the autonomic nervous system. It is made up of sets of reflex arcs and appears to function irrespective of the command from the brain. The cerebral cortex, which governs the cognitive, affective and conative functions of the mind, has hardly any control over it. For instance,

if a man wants his heart to stop, or his endocrine glands to stop functioning, they do not. But Swami Vivekananda said that a Yogī can bring the autonomic nervous system under the control of his will by practice.

The Neuron :

The neurons or nerve cells have long or short extensions called nerve fibres varying in their length from a fraction of a millimetre to a metre or more depending upon the largeness of the animal. Many fibres generally form the large nerves found outside the central nervous system and the fibre tracts inside. At the end of the fibre tracts, the individual fibres separate and ramify, either to supply muscles or the sense organs or to contact other nerve cells. When a neuron is stimulated, a nervous impulse is produced, which is nothing but an energy change in the neuron. Thus a stimulus is a change in the constitution of the nervous tissue caused by sufficient excitation. Physiologists are of the opinion that the nervous impulse is partly electrical, partly chemical and partly thermal in its nature. A nervous action is therefore called a nerve-current or a nervous impulse as it causes electro-chemical waves in the nerves.

The Synapse : The nervous impulse travels in the reflex arc from a receptor sense organ to an effector muscle or gland at least through two neurons. These two neurons must have a point where they should meet in order to form a reflex arc. The junction of the last end of the first neuron to the first end of another is called the 'synapse'. The synapse is not a firm physical joint between two nerve cells. At a synapse, a nerve-fibre ending swells to form a small, often buttonlike structure covered with the cell membrane; it contains large numbers of small vesicles. If the nerve channel is not in use, the synaptic connections may degenerate.

Nerve-currents run in through the sense organs, and while provoking reflexes in the lower centres, they arouse ideas in the hemispheres of the brain, which either allow the reflexes, check them, or even substitute for them.

Reflex Action: A response to a stimulus may be learnt or unlearnt. For instance : After seeing a beautiful burning flame, a child who does not know about its burning property would go to catch it ; but once the child's fingers are burnt, it learns about its nature, and after seeing the flame again, it would never venture to catch it. The child's first experience was an outcome of an unlearnt reflex, while the second experience is due to its learning. The first experience has given rise to a new nerve channel in its brain, which checked it from putting its hand into fire the second time. This is how the hemispheres become educated. A reflex action is an unconscious, immediate and uniform response to a stimulus exciting the peripheral extremity of a sense organ. The reflexes may be centred in the spinal cord, hind brain, or the cerebral cortex. Our lives are regulated by all these three types of reflexes.

Swami Vivekananda—the Pioneer of Modern Yoga Psychology :

The rough idea of the nervous system given above will enable the lay readers to follow the forthcoming topic, and they will be able to appreciate how Swamiji applied this knowledge of Western physiology and psychology to explain Rāja-Yoga to his Western audiences. We can say that Swamiji was the first amongst Yogīs to be fascinated by the knowledge of Western psychology and physiology, and who applied it to give a novel interpretation of Yoga. It will not be out of place if some of his interpretations are quoted here in brief. Those who are interested in the

details may study his works on Rāja-Yoga. The following passages from his *Rāja-Yoga* will surely prove that Swamiji was a genius and a pioneer of the modern Yoga Psychology :

The Nervous System is Mind-made : In the chapter on 'The Psychic Prana' Swamiji said :

All the sensations and motions of the body are being sent into the brain, and sent out of it, through these wires of nerve fibres. The columns of sensory and motor fibres in the spinal cord are the Idā and Pingalā of the Yogīs. They are the main channels through which the afferent and efferent currents travel. . . . If you can make the [nerve-] current pass through the Susumna, the [central] canal in the middle of the spinal column, you have solved the problem. The mind has made this network of the nervous system and has to break it. . . .⁵

While explaining the importance of Āsana (posture), Swamiji told the same thing :

Nerve-currents will have to be displaced and given a new channel. New sorts of vibrations will begin, the whole constitution will be remodelled, as it were. But the main part of the activity will lie along the spinal column, so that the one thing necessary for the posture is to hold the spinal column free, sitting erect, holding the three parts—the chest, neck and head—in a straight line.⁶

While talking about Prāṇāyāma, Swamiji pointed out how it helps in regulating the nerve currents :

Another point from physiology we must remember, that the centre which regulates the respiratory system, the breathing system, has a sort of controlling action over the system of nerve-currents.

5. Swami Vivekananda, *Raja-Yoga*, Mayavati : Advaita Ashrama, 1970, (hereafter *Raja-Yoga*), pp. 57-58.

6. *Raja-Yoga*, p. 20.

... In the first place, from rhythmical breathing comes a tendency of all the molecules in the body to move in the same direction. When mind changes into will, the nerve-currents change into a motion similar to electricity, because the nerves have been proved to show polarity under the action of electric currents. This shows that when the will is transformed into the nerve-currents, it is changed into something, like electricity. When all the motions of the body have become perfectly rhythmical, the body has, as it were, become a gigantic battery of will. This tremendous will is exactly what the Yogī wants. This is, therefore, a physiological explanation of the breathing exercise. ... The aim of Prāṇāyāma here is to rouse the coiled-up power in the Mūlādhāra, called Kuṇḍalinī.⁷

Again, while explaining the thirty-fourth aphorism of the first chapter of Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtras*, Swamiji deliberates :

Now these later Yogīs consider that there are three main currents of this Prāṇa in the human body. One they call Idā, another Piṅgalā, and the third Suṣumnā. Piṅgalā, according to them, is on the right side of the spinal column, and the Idā on the left, and in the middle of the spinal column is the Suṣumnā, an empty channel.⁸ Idā and Piṅgalā, according to them, are the currents working in every man, and through these currents, we are performing all the functions of life. Suṣumnā is present in all, as a possibility; but it works only in the Yogī. You must remember that Yoga changes the body. As you go on practising, your body changes; it is not the same body that you had before the practice. That is very rational, and can be explained, because, every new thought that we have must make, as it were, a new channel through the brain, and that explains the tremendous conservatism of

7. *Raja-Yoga*, pp. 55-56.

8. According to the recent researches, this canal is not empty, but contains the cerebrospinal fluid and some other ingredients. Perhaps in those days it was thought to be empty.

human nature. Human nature likes to run through the ruts that are already there because it is easy. If we think, just for example's sake, that the mind is like a needle, and the brain substance a soft lump before it, then each thought that we have makes a street as it were, in the brain, and this street would close up, but for the grey matter which comes and makes a lining to keep it separate. If there were no grey matter, there would be no memory, because memory means going over these old streets, retracing a thought as it were. Now perhaps you have marked that when one talks on subjects in which one takes a few ideas that are familiar to everyone, and combines and recombines them, it is easy to follow because these channels are present in everyone's brain, and it is only necessary to recur to them. But whenever a new subject comes, new channels have to be made, so it is not understood readily. And that is why the brain ... refuses unconsciously to be acted upon by new ideas. It resists. ... The more thoughtful the man, the more complicated will be the streets in his brain, and the more easily he will take to new ideas, and understand them.⁹

And while explaining the twelfth aphorism of the second chapter of Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtras* Swamiji makes a novel comment which reads :

What we call mind is very much the same as electricity. It is clear that this nerve fluid has some amount of electricity, because it is polarised, and it answers all electrical directions. ... When the soul is acting through these channels, we say a man is living, and when these cease to work, a man is said to be dead.¹⁰

All these interpretations of Swamiji quoted above show that although Western psychology aims to make human life more happy and less miserable, its observations can also be utilized to uplift a man spiritu-

9. *Raja-Yoga*, pp. 151-53.

10. *Raja-Yoga*, p. 182.

ally. For instance: Western psychology tells us that the nerve channels are formed by the network of connections between the nerve fibres and that the synapses once formed can be disconnected automatically by disuse of the same nerve channel. This knowledge can help to assure one that bad habits can only be overcome by the disuse of those channels and by directing the nerve-current through newly formed higher channels. The disciplines like dispassion (*vairāgya*), controlling desires (*śama*) and the gross sense organs (*dama*), bearing of afflictions (*titikṣā*), thinking of contrary thoughts (*pratipakṣabhāvanam*), humility (*amānitva*), non-injury (*ahiṃsā*), forbearance (*kṣānti*), absence of ego (*anahankāra*) etc. will result in closing some streets in the brain for ever; whereas disciplines like discrimination (*viveka*), faith in the guru and the scriptures (*śraddhā*), constant concentration of the mind on God (*samādhāna*), hearing (*śravaṇa*), reflection (*manana*), meditation (*nididhyāsana*), etc. will help in opening new channels in the higher cortex of the

brain, and will thus gradually raise the aspirant's life from the conscious level to the superconscious experience. This is the underlying principle behind all the spiritual disciplines.

Today, man is deeply rooted in the experience of the conscious plane, and his mind is wholly responsible for it. His spiritual evolution, therefore, entirely depends upon the proper training of his mind. Spiritual life is not only deeply psychological, but to build it up is a great science as well. For that, the knowledge of psychology alone can help—be it Indian or Western. The experience of our conscious life today, as it has been seen, depends upon channelizing the mind through the *Iḍā* and the *Piṅgalā*, and if anyone succeeds in channelizing the same through the *Suṣumnā* by practising Yogic disciplines and thus waking the *Kuṇḍalinī*, he will be able to have the superconscious experience in *Nirvikalpa Samādhi*.

(To be continued)

PRACTICE OF RELIGION*

SRIMAT SWAMI VIRESWARANANDAJI MAHARAJ

Generally we do not have a clear idea about religion. We think that what we normally do—observing some rituals, going to the temple or observing some fast, etc.—constitutes religion. Besides this, there are many superstitions and popular customs which have come into our daily life, and have also become part of our religion. Swami Vivekananda in his 'Mat-

ter for Serious Thought' says: 'There is the towering temple of the Eternal Hindu Religion, and how many ways of approaching it! And what can you not find there? From the Absolute Brahman of the Vedāntin down to Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Śakti, Uncle Sun, the rat-riding Gaṇeśa, and the minor deities such as Saṣṭhī and Mākāl, and so forth—which is lacking there? ... Millions and millions of people are rushing towards the temple. I, too, had a curiosity to see and join in the rush. But what was this that met my eyes when I reached the spot! Nobody was going inside the tem-

* The substance of the talk delivered by Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, at Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Nagpur, on 7 February 1978.

ple ! By the side of the door, there was a standing figure, with fifty heads, a hundred arms, two hundred bellies and five hundred legs, and everyone was rolling at the feet of that. I asked one for the reason and got the reply : "Those deities that you see in the interior, it is worship enough for them to make a short prostration, or throw in a few flowers from a distance. But the real worship must be offered to him who is at the gate ; ... " Then I asked again, "Well, what is the name of this God of gods?" "He is named Popular Custom"—came the reply.¹

Swami Vivekananda tells us that all this is not religion. Religion is realization. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya also says, 'One may go on a pilgrimage to Gangasagara (mouth of the Ganga) or observe austerities or give wealth in charity, yet by these (alone), without knowledge, liberation cannot be attained even in a hundred lives.'²

As a boy, Swamiji (then Naren) wanted realization, and so he went on asking great religious people whether they had seen God. Nobody gave him a reply in the affirmative except Sri Ramakrishna, who said, 'Yes, I have seen God and I talk with Him as I talk with you.' Modern science wants proof based on direct experience to accept anything. The scientists could not accept or believe in God because there was no proof for His existence. Sri Ramakrishna's direct experience of God is the proof of God's existence, and the scientific world got the answer from Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda has defined religion in his book *Rāja-Yoga*. He says: 'Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control,

or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are secondary details.'³ These are not of primary importance. Manifestation of Divinity is of primary importance. Freedom is of primary importance.

And be free from what? Be free from bondage. What is bondage? The bondage is ignorance, which hides the truth. '*Ajñānenāvṛtam jñānam tena muhyanti jantavaḥ*—knowledge is covered by ignorance ; by this are beings deluded.'⁴ So ignorance is the cause of delusion. We have forgotten due to our ignorance that we are essentially divine, that we are ever free. When ignorance is removed by knowledge, we become free. We should remember that all religions are true. Sri Ramakrishna, by his own realization, has established this truth that all religions lead to the same goal. Different religions are like different paths leading to the same goal. All religions are true because we find in every religion one or more of these four paths prescribed for attaining Freedom—either devotion (Bhakti) or work (Karma) or knowledge (Jñāna) or meditation (Yoga). For example, in Christianity and Islam it is devotion that is stressed. Through devotion one can realize God. Buddhism lays stress on philosophy and meditation. In this way, there are different religions prescribing one or more of these four paths. 'Truth is one, though sages may call it differently.'⁵

Now in the *Gītā* we find that Śrī Kṛṣṇa gives instructions to Arjuna on 'yoga', the path of meditation. Arjuna tells Śrī Kṛṣṇa, "The path of meditation that you have prescribed is not practical, because the mind is very restless."⁶ Śrī Kṛṣṇa in reply does

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, (hereafter *Complete Works*), VI, 1972, pp. 194-95.

2. Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, 'Carpatapañjarikāstotram', 17.

3. *Complete Works*, I, 1972, p. 124.

4. *Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā* (hereafter *Gītā*), V. 15.

5. *Ṛg-Veda-Samhitā*, I. 164. 46.

6. *Gītā*, VI. 33.

not say anything against Arjuna's argument. He accepts it. Yes, it is very hard to control the mind. Even a person like Arjuna who had won several battles and who could defeat several great heroes, found that he was not able to control his mind. His mind was stronger than he. So he says, 'It is impossible to control the mind.' Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, 'No doubt the mind is restless and difficult to restrain, but by *abhyāsa* (practice) and *vairāgya* (dispassion) you can control it.'⁷ These are the two ways he prescribed for controlling the mind. If you practice meditation and *vairāgya* regularly, it may be possible for you to control your mind. What is *abhyāsa*? *Abhyāsa* is practising meditation daily at a prescribed time. Suppose you have a fixed time for your breakfast, say 9 o'clock; then you will feel hungry at 9. Similarly if you have a fixed time for meditation, because of mere habit the mind also will be very responsive to meditation at that particular time. So a fixed time is very essential; and if you meditate daily, that is called *abhyāsa*. And *abhyāsa* also means that every time our mind goes astray at the time of meditation, we have to bring it back and fix it on the object of our meditation. That is a sort of tug of war. The mind will not accept your order to meditate on the Lord, and then you have to catch hold of it, bring it back and fix it on the object of your meditation. Take for example a child. If a teacher wants to teach a child, he sits by its side and teaches it. If the teacher is a little inattentive, however, the child runs away from him. But he catches hold of the child, brings it back and makes it study. Similarly the mind also will have to be again and again brought back and made to meditate on the Lord. That is what we call *abhyāsa*. It not only includes regular daily practice but also forcing the mind to meditate on the Lord

each time it goes away from the object of meditation.

Due to our past *samskāras* (impressions) and desires, our mind runs after sense objects, and on account of that it becomes restless. If there is a strong breeze, the surface of the lake is thrown into ripples. In such a lake you will not see the reflection of the moon very clearly. For that, the surface of the lake must be placid and the water clear. There should not be even a single ripple in the lake. Similarly in the mind-lake no reflection of the Ātman is possible if there are ripples due to the breeze of desires blowing over it. If there are no desires and consequently no ripples in the mind, you will be able to see the reflection of the Ātman in that mind. So you should not entertain any desire in the mind. You should get rid of it through *vairāgya*—that is, you have to discriminate and thus give up desires. If you give up desires, the mind will not be thrown into ripples. It will be placid and quiet. To attain that state is the goal of yoga. It is said, '*Yogaścitta-vṛtti-nirodah*—restraining mental modifications is yoga.'⁸

Thus, for controlling the mind, *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya* are needed. We have to practise for a long time. We have to remove bad *samskāras* with the help of the opposite type, that is, good *samskāras*. In this way evil *samskāras* can be removed if we carry on *abhyāsa* for a long time.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa also advises Arjuna in the *Gītā* thus: '*Sarveṣu kāleṣu mām anusmaru yudhya ca*—Always remember Me and fight.'⁹ Similarly our remembrance of the Lord and performance of worldly duties must go together. We have to pray to the Lord always. We have to repeat His name always. When we will constantly think of the Lord, our mind will slowly give up its habit of running after sense objects. Turn

7. *Gītā*, VI. 35.

8. *Pātañjala-Yoga-Sūtras*, I. 2.

9. *Gītā*, VIII. 7.

your mind inward and let it always dwell on the Lord. For achieving this object, *japam* is prescribed. *Mantra* means that which draws your mind from the outside world and brings it to the lotus feet of the Lord. If the *mantra* is repeated constantly, the mind can be controlled. Constant repetition of the *mantra* is very essential to change the nature of the mind. It is only when all these things are practised regularly through constant effort, that you will be able to control the mind. Not otherwise. The Holy Mother used to say, 'Sages have practised meditation, *japa*, etc., life after life for attaining God-realization, and you want to have it in no time. Is it possible? But then, Sri Ramakrishna has made it easy for everybody in this age. So in this age

anyone with a little effort can easily attain God-realization.' She also used to say: 'In this age Sri Ramakrishna has come and removed all the bolts of the temple door from inside. As the bolts are removed, no hard effort is necessary for opening the doors. You have only to push the door a little and the door will open, and you will have the vision of the Deity. That much effort of pushing the door you have to do if you want God-realization.' Therefore we should try to realize God in this life itself, as it has been made so very easy by Sri Ramakrishna, and should not postpone it to the next. May Sri Ramakrishna bless us all and may He help us to realize God in this life itself is my earnest prayer to Him.

SAINTS AND THE MODERN AGE

DR. PRAKASH CHANDRA

There is a notion in certain quarters that the sannyasis are not of much practical use to society. They shut themselves up in caves on mountaintops, spending their time God knows how; and when they descend on the plains, they go about asking for alms, which in these days of scarcity one can ill-afford to spare. Why can't they do some physical or mental work and earn an honest living instead of being a burden on society? is the question often asked. There are a number of schemes afoot nowadays, the object of which is to help the weaker sections of society or to beautify towns and villages. Why can't they join them instead of remaining idle, talking to a few admiring disciples, speaking words which are incomprehensible and giving advice which if acted upon will make a man unfit for success in life in the modern age?

Now, it is true that the sannyasis bake

no bread, nor do they spin or build houses. What they do is work of a higher order: they minister to the spiritual needs of man. With a little practise, everybody can make bread, but it is given to only a few to be able to heal the wounds of mankind, to give hope and purpose to a man who deems himself lost, to bring solace to a house of sorrow. If a sadhu does not work, it is only because he is free and independent. He is not forced to work by love of money or false ambition. He has set before himself the highest goal of life which is to become a knower of Brahman. To achieve this, he has made tremendous sacrifices. He has renounced all worldly goods, given up his family and taken the five difficult vows of non-violence (*ahimsa*), truthfulness (*satya*), non-covetousness (*asteya*), chastity (*brahmacharya*) and non-receiving of gifts (*aparigraha*). By

slowly degress he has been able to tame his ego, because selfishness and selflessness cannot exist together. He lives now only 'for the highest freedom of the self and the good of the world.'

A real sannyasi is a great benefactor of mankind, because he is a teacher of householders. It is with the light and teaching obtained from him that the householders of old triumphed many a time in the battles of life. They were taught one supreme lesson : that life is not a prison-house but a battlefield, and that every man has within him enough strength to come out of it victorious. Thus common men were made to realize their real nature. The conviction that they were divine filled them with a sense of self-confidence and made their conduct good and pure. This, however, implied a firm belief in the existence of God and His perfection and was accompanied by a sense of man's utter dependence on His will. The modern age has upset such beliefs. The process began with the Industrial Revolution which showed how man by his invention of machines and new discoveries could increase his powers tremendously. To a considerable extent he was able to bring his environment under his control. To the extent his own powers increased, his belief in the supremacy of God diminished. He could do a lot for himself without seeking the help of God. He decided not to bother about Him any longer. The Industrial Revolution has been followed by great scientific and technological advance, so much so that today we are fed, clothed, sheltered, transported and even educated by means of machines.

The control over environment has been accompanied by one serious evil. In the past, man had to carry on a twofold fight: fight against nature and fight with himself. With the struggle against nature being no longer necessary, the

struggle with one's own self has been eagerly abandoned. The easing of the situation on the one front has led to relaxation on the other. Without troubling to ask ourselves whether or not the traditional rules were necessary for the success of individual and collective life, we have emancipated ourselves from all moral discipline. The frontiers of good and evil have crumbled down. Morality was bound up with religion; and with its decline, the hold of morality on the people has considerably weakened. The new generation is not even aware that such internal discipline ever existed. Temperance, honour, truthfulness, responsibility, purity, self-mastery, love of one's neighbour, heroism are outworn expressions, meaningless words, which provoke nothing but a contemptuous smile from the young. For modern man the only rule of conduct is his own pleasure.

The fall has been more precipitous in India since the advent of Independence. Truth and goodness on which our Shastras have laid so much emphasis, have ceased to command much respect. There has been no open disavowal of God as happened in the histories of several countries like France and Russia, but it is clear enough that the people have strayed away from Him. Religion has ceased to be a living force and its place has been taken by ego-worship. Questions like: how to grow rich quickly irrespective of the means adopted? what style of clothes to wear? which pictures to see?—absorb all the attention of young men today. Truth, honesty, upright conduct, devotion to work, punctuality, abstinence, living within one's means, and self-sacrifice are at a discount. Even university teachers are not ashamed to tell lies, and there are graduates not disinclined to become robbers and adulterators of food and medicine.

The Government also by its one-sided

poicies promotes materialism. Planning is all the rage. Open factories to produce cheap goods, build dams to supply water, set up reactors to produce atomic energy, and there would be all-round happiness—such is the prevailing mood. Now, it is true that poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance have to be removed, as they stand in the way of self-fulfilment; but to say this, is not to admit that if a man wallows in wealth, he will have attained his true goal. Physical comforts will not by themselves enable him to become truthful, unselfish and noble. We all want a Welfare State; but what will be the nature of that State if it is created by corrupt politicians, bribe-taking bureaucrats, unscrupulous businessmen and citizens unmindful of moral issues?

Man may be an animal driven by the instincts of greed, fear and hate. But he is much more than a mere animal. What distinguishes him from other animals is the irrepressible urge to become better than he is. This aspiration may take several forms: the ambition to achieve something great, the desire to love and be loved, the effort to seek and realize beauty, and finally the attempt to find harmony within himself as well as in the natural and social environment that surrounds him. Such beings, however, do not come from the body, but from the Spirit. We have to turn to the seers, saints, artists and poets to get the necessary stimulus.

It is, then, to the saints that we must look for our spiritual development. To them have been revealed glimpses of a secretly luminous life whose outer crust alone is known to most men. Others become aware of it only in moments of great crisis: in the shadow of death, in the radiance of joy or the flames of beauty and love. We have all known such moments—moments of joy which are like flowers in the pastureland of living. But they soon

pass away. These things are, however, habitual with the saints; they do not come by chance. They have learnt to live in beauty, in earnestness that has become a part of themselves. All of us know which is the noble and beautiful thing for us to do; but we lack the necessary strength. It is this invisible and abstract strength which the saint has acquired. And this gained the habit of resting, more frequently than others, upon the heights whence one can see that every thought and every act are infallibly connected with something great and immortal. It is no longer necessary for them that a great King should die to remind them that the world does not end at the house-doors. They keep open the road that joins the seen with the unseen. They never cease to behold that of which we have caught a passing glimpse. They have accustomed their eyes to behold events and men in a divine atmosphere. The saints have communication with the Intime, which they may pass on to us. It is enough, perhaps that a few sages should know what has to be done for the rest of us to follow. God hides, but the saints who are familiar with the path can lead us to Him. They can show the light. 'Be sure that the day you lingered to follow a ray of light through a crevice in the door of life, you did something as great as though you had bandaged the wounds of your enemy, for at that moment you had no enemies,' say Maeterlinck, the well-known Belgian author and mystic.

Saints usually prefer to live away from human habitations and to keep themselves aloof from worldly affairs. But if one has the privilege of being admitted into their presence, one feels a sense of power and of peace. Power and peace sound contradictory, but this is because power for long has been narrowly interpreted as physical power. Physical power rouses fear and

repels. Spiritual power draws out love and attracts. As you enter the dwelling of a saint and sit near him, you are irresistibly drawn towards him. He may be frail and emaciated, but you like to look at him; his face has a strange fascination. He may speak very little, but it is wonderful that you should remember what was said with so little emphasis and skill of words. Yet it is remembered, like a thought that does not need saying; it sinks deep into the mind, beyond language, like an actual experience; and if it retains its hold, you are changed as if by an event.

A devout disciple has thus recorded his impressions about Sri Chandrasekharendra Sankaracharya of the Kanchi Kamakoti Pitha: 'It is an indubitable fact that when anyone with sincerity and faith has an audience with him, a miracle happens. Words cannot adequately express the solemnity of the occasion. There emerges a subtle, imperceptible but lasting change for the better in the seeker's life. There ensues a meaningful dialogue, often not with many words exchanged, but replete with understanding and sympathy. Doubts are dispelled with no questions raised; blessings received though unasked, and compassion and grace flow in abundance.'¹

Buddha, the Compassionate, gave up the life of a prince in order to become a mendicant. Yet by the sheer power of compassion, he set up a force which has altered the lives of millions. The spiritual intelligence which he exerted knew no bounds. He would spend hours alone in the forest, causing, as he said, 'the power of benevolence which fills my mind to extend over one quarter of the globe, in the same way over the second quarter, over the third, over the fourth, above, below, across, on all sides, in all directions. Over the entire

universe, I send forth the power of benevolence which fills my spirit; the wide, the great, the immeasurable feeling which knows none to hate, which doeth no evil.'²

What did Sri Ramakrishna do? Apparently he did nothing; he led a quiet life, outside the social and political movements of his time. But the energies that he created and released from his inner life powerfully influenced men and movements around him.

The late Arnold Toynbee, one of the most distinguished of contemporary historians, who made a comprehensive study of civilizations, came to a very interesting conclusion which may be summarized thus: 'When a civilization comes to a time of troubles, such as we are now in, individuals here and there, turn from the outer world of political and social chaos to the inner world of the psyche; there they come upon a vision of a new way of life; and returning to the outer world, form the nucleus of a creative minority through which that civilization may find renewal.'³

Compassion has an element of creativity. There is a remarkable story about Beethoven, the great composer: Once while he was walking, he heard the sound of music coming out of a house. It was one of his own compositions, which was being played with great mastery. Feeling curious, he entered the house and discovered that the girl who was playing on an old harpsichord was blind. To oblige her, he seated himself and his hands fell on the keys of the instrument. She and her brother were enraptured. Beethoven did not stop there, but under the inspiration of the misty, white moonlight which came flooding into

1. S. Ramakrishnan, 'Acharyadeva', *Bhavan's Journal*, Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, June 24, 1973, p. 26.

2. S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 2nd edition, p. 67.

3. Quoted in Rohit Mehta, *Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of Yoga*, Ahmedabad: Navajeevan Press, 1971, p. 19.

the room, improvised his famous 'Sonata to the Moonlight'. Thus was a new melody born, the product of a deed of unselfish, loving kindness.

Compassion in a saint may sometimes be misplaced. But it has its bright side. He may trust a swindler who may profit by his softness and go his evil way. On the other hand, there is also a possibility of such a man being reclaimed. There is enough of mistrust and suspicion in the world as it is. It is, therefore, good that it should produce some men who are willing to trust and take the consequences. Mahatma Gandhi tried the experiment of a community settlement at Phoenix in South Africa. He was let down by a boy and girl, but that did not deprive it of its merit. Again he practised non-resistance as a method of overcoming evil and succeeded. When such experiments do succeed, they are far more powerful than force or worldly prudence. The saints play a vital role in social evolution. They make goodness real which, but for them, might remain dormant. It is not possible for us to continue to be as mean as we are disposed to be with their inspiring example before us.

One of the most valuable ideas contained in the *Bhagavad-Gita* is that of the Jivan-mukta. He is one who does not have to wait till his death for his liberation, but who gets it during his life-time through God-vision. He is full of joy in the contemplation and realization of God. To know God, to enjoy His presence, to devote himself to His service and do His work, are what he does. This is the highest state a saint may attain.

In an article reproduced in the August 1976 issue of the *Kalyan*, the late Mahamahopadhyaya Pandit Gopinath Kaviraj has explained lucidly the concept of Jivan-mukti. There are three states of the Jiva, he says: the Jiva-state, the Brahman-

state and the post-Brahman state. In the first state the Jiva regards his body as his true self and is full of I-ness. Gradually, his egotism ebbs away and there dawn in his awareness of the Self. He discovers that he is Atman, different from his body with its three qualities (*gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*). When his ignorance is totally dispelled he achieves perfection and is united with the Paramatman. The bliss which he then experiences cannot be described in words. A strange quietness enters the soul. The supreme awareness, the intimately felt pressure brings with it a rapture beyond joy, a knowledge beyond reason, a sensation more intense than that of life itself. The Yogi is steeped in infinite peace and harmony. He becomes one with God and in the contemplation loses all sense of himself, the other Jivas and the world.

This is the Brahman-state, but beyond it, continues the Kaviraj, there is a further stage, not open to all, but to which only a few great souls have access. In that state, knowledge of the world returns, but this state is not opposed to the Brahman-state of which the characteristic is that once reached, it is never lost. Knowledge of the Jivas and the world returns without, however, disturbing the beatific vision. In the Jiva-state, the individual had known pain which he had found himself powerless to remove; in the second state, pain disappeared altogether; it comes back in the third with all its nakedness and intensity. The heart of the Yogi, however, overflows with tenderness, and bliss assumes the form of compassion. The spiritual strength which he had acquired in the second state, he can now apply to relieve the sufferings of mankind and other living beings. Of all the three states this is the highest. It is the state of the Sadguru or Jivan-mukta, one who has earned his own salvation and now

strives to promote the salvation, of others. The bliss which he has secured for himself, he now wants others equally to enjoy. Side by side with his illimitable bliss there wells up in him a spring of infinite compassion.

Once in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, talk was going on about helping the world. He grew a bit impatient and asked the young men to explain what it meant. He himself then gave some example : to feed a number of people, to treat them when they were sick, to construct a road or dig a well, etc. They were good deeds, he admitted, but added that the problem was too vast for man's unaided efforts. How much could men do in the face of a severe famine or a malaria epidemic? He then uttered the following significant words:

'God alone looks after the world. Let a man first realize Him, get His authority and be endowed with His power, and then alone may he think of doing good to others. A man should first be purged of all his egotism. Then alone will the Blissful Mother ask him to work for the world.'⁴ Behind many so-called acts of charity he saw vanity, desire for glory, an expedient to kill time or an attempt to soothe a guilty conscience. True service, he declared, is the result of love of God, service to man in a spirit of worship.

He that feeds men serveth few ;
He serves all who dares be true.

Emerson

4. Swami Nikhilananda, *Sri Ramakrishna*, Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1868, p. 91.

THE GOSPEL OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

*Tava kathāmṛtaṁ tapta-jīvanam
kavibhir-īditaṁ kalmaṣāpaham ;
Śravaṇa-maṅgalaṁ śrīmad-ātataṁ
bhuvī gṛṇanti te bhūridā janāḥ.*

'O Lord, your nectar-like words stop the burning misery of afflicted souls ; your words, which the poets have sung in verse, vanquish the sins of worldly people for ever. Blessed are they who hear about you ; blessed indeed are they who speak of you. How unparalleled is their bounty !'

The above-quoted invocation is taken from the 'Gopī-Gīta' of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (X. xxxi. 9). Kṛṣṇa promised to meet the shepherd girls (Gopīs) of Vrindavan on a full moon night in autumn. The Gopīs came to meet the Lord accordingly on the bank of the Jamuna river, and he exchanged love and affection with them ; but

he sensed them to have become proud and egotistic due to this rare privilege. Therefore, the Lord disappeared from the scene, and they lamented their loss. These verses were sung by the Gopīs with tears and prayers. 'M', the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, used this verse on the title page of each of the five volumes of his original Bengali *Gospel*.

The verse begins : *Tava kathāmṛtam*, meaning, 'Your words, O Lord, are like nectar.'

We speak sweet words. We sometimes say, 'Oh, your words are so full of honey !' But having no nectar inside, we do not know how to speak nectar-like words. The divine Incarnations have this nectar within and so their words are full of it.

Amṛta means nectar or immortality. According to Hindu mythology, the gods and demons churned the ocean in order to obtain nectar. After a hard struggle, they got a jar of it. But the gods deceived the demons and drank it all, and thus the gods became immortal. This immortality, however, was relative, for absolute immortality only comes from the knowledge of Brahman. That nectar is within all beings. 'The Kingdom of Heaven is within you.' Dive deep inside. Then you will find that nectar and attain immortality. That is the symbology.

God is the ocean of *amṛta* or Immortality. Once Sri Ramakrishna said to Swami Vivekananda : 'Suppose there were a cup of syrup and you were a fly. Where would you sit to drink the syrup?' Vivekananda replied : 'I would sit on the edge of the cup and stretch out my neck to drink it.' 'Why?' Sri Ramakrishna asked. 'What's the harm in plunging into the middle of the cup and drinking the syrup?' Vivekananda answered : 'Then I should stick in the syrup and die.' 'My child,' Sri Ramakrishna said to him, 'that isn't the nature of the Nectar of Saccidānanda. It is the Nectar of Immortality. Man does not die from diving into it. On the contrary he becomes Immortal.'¹

We say that man is mortal. It is not true. The body is mortal, but the Ātman, the real nature of man, is immortal. It is that immortality which man is always searching for. The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* mentions that when Yājñavalkya offered worldly prosperity to his beloved wife Maitreyī, she replied : '*Yenāhaṁ nārtāsyām, kimahaṁ tena kuryām*—What should I do with that which would not make me immortal?'²

That is the bold challenge of Vedanta. If you want immortality, give up whatever you have. Christ also said the same thing : 'Give up and follow me.'

The Bengali title of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Kath-āmrta*, which means 'Sri Ramakrishna's immortal or nectar-like talks'. We hear the *Gospel*, we read the *Gospel*, we speak about the *Gospel*—but we do not 'drink' the *Gospel*. It does not matter if we drink a drop, a glass, a jar or a barrel of nectar. We will be immortal. It is not a matter of quantity, but of the substance itself. If we could actually absorb the *Gospel*, all our worldly desires would be destroyed instantly. But it is not easy. We like to hold onto our desires. That is our problem.

Sri Ramakrishna tells this beautiful parable :

Once a fishwife was the guest in the house of a gardener who raised flowers. She came there with her empty basket after selling fish in the market, and was asked to sleep in a room where flowers were kept. But, because of the fragrance of the flowers, she couldn't get to sleep for a long time. Her hostess saw her condition and said, 'Hello ! Why are you tossing from side to side so restlessly?' The fishwife said, 'I don't know, friend. Perhaps the smell of the flowers has been disturbing my sleep. Can you give me my fish basket? Perhaps that will put me to sleep.' The basket was brought to her. She sprinkled water on it and set it near her nose. Then she fell sound asleep and snored all night.³

We worldly people like the smell of fish baskets. We cannot stand the beautiful divine fragrance. But we will have to drink that nectar. Mere speaking, mere talking, mere hearing won't help us. We may repeat 'wine' a thousand times but that will not make us intoxicated. The wine must be

1. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974, (hereafter *Gospel*), p. 645.

2. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, II. iv. 3, and IV. v. 4.

3. *Gospel*, p. 386.

drunk. Christ also said, 'Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock.'

The next aspect of the invocation is : *tapta-jīvanam*, meaning, 'your words stop the blazing fire of worldly life.' The world is burning with misery. When we talk about life we heave a deep sigh. I remember when I was a young student of Vedanta, I heard a vivid description of this world. The teacher was expounding the concept of maya. He said: 'Do you know what this world is? A traveller was passing through a desert. The sun was scorching hot. He was dead tired, thirsty, hungry and exhausted. He was trying to find shelter, a shady place where he could take a little rest. At last he found a place where he laid down his head and slept, not knowing that the spot was made shady by the shadow of a poisonous cobra's hood! A single hiss and one drop of poison from that cobra would finish his life. So is this world.' We do not know how maya traps, binds, and enslaves us.

Human life is tormented by desires and doubts, disease and death, passion, jealousy, hatred and so many things. The words of the Lord alone can stop the burning chaos of life. The *Gospel* of the Lord carries solace and succour for suffering humanity. It soothes our nerves and brings peace to our minds. Just as water extinguishes fire, the words of the Lord extinguish the burning misery which emanates from worldly cravings and enjoyments.

Kavibhir īditam means 'poets elaborate, expound, eulogize the words of the Lord in many ways.' At the advent of each Divine Incarnation, there evolve many books, much music, art and sculpture. Sri Ramakrishna spoke but a few words. Swami Vivekananda expounded his message of the harmony of religions and the divinity of man all over the world. 'M' recorded his immortal

Gospel. Girish Chandra Ghosh, the actor-dramatist, wrote several dramas incorporating the ideas of Sri Ramakrishna. Many poets composed songs based on the ideas of the Master. But Sri Ramakrishna had no formal education. His knowledge came straight from God. He said one day, 'If you want to understand in one sentence, come to me. If you want to understand the thing with a thousand words, go to Keshab.'⁴ Keshab Sen was a famous orator. It was he who first wrote about Sri Ramakrishna in the paper. When the Master came to know of it, he said, 'Keshab, by writing about me, you want to make me famous? Don't try. Whom Mother makes famous, he becomes famous.'

The next aspect of the verse is : *kalmaṣāpaham*. It means that the words of God 'destroy all types of sinful actions instantly.' They cleanse our bodies and minds. Try to visualize the world as a room just painted black. You are there, dressed in white clothes. You may be extremely cautious but you cannot be alert for the entire twenty-four hours. In only one moment of forgetfulness, your clothes will be tinged with black. So it happens in this world. Desire, doubt, anger, jealousy, greediness and lust tinge the mind. Man stumbles and falls. He is overcome by evil temptation. But one should not yield. Fight. Struggle against such unmanliness. The *Gospel* has the power to cleanse the body and mind of such weakness and temptation.

Śravaṇa-maṅgalam; that is, if anybody hears the *Gospel*, it will undoubtedly do good to him. Knowingly or unknowingly, if you eat chili, your tongue will burn. You can't help it. Similarly, these words of the Lord positively and definitely do good to people. You may think that just hearing

4. *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇadever Upadesa* (Bengali), comp. Suresh Chandra Datta, Calcutta : Haramohan Publishing House, 19th edition, p. 162.

the *Gospel* will not give you the taste of it. It will. The words of the Lord are *śrīmad*, that is, beautiful; they are truly fascinating and overwhelming. The *Gospel* has an attractive power. Irresistably it draws us to itself.

Ātatam means 'vast and easily available'. Those who are spiritual aspirants do taste the *Gospel*. Though taste comes gradually, slowly, as the *Gospel* reveals its truths according to the aspirant's spiritual development and understanding, yet it has an intoxicating effect on the mind. We may read it a thousand times, yet it remains an endless source of inspiration. There is no end to spiritual experience, and the *Gospel* is a unique record of immeasurable and highest realizations. No one finishes the *Gospel*. Each time new light will come.

The last aspect is: *bhuvi gr̥ṇanti te bhūridā janāḥ*. You may do various kinds of charity but the best of them is to distribute the *Gospel* to humanity. It has another meaning: those who are spiritual seekers, those who have done spiritual practices in previous lives and in this very life too, get the bliss, the taste, of that spirituality.

Christopher Wood wrote about the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: 'It is a fascinating piece of biography, quite extraordinarily honest. And as for its being long, the truth about anyone is never dull. Try it. I don't think you will be disappointed.'⁵

One of our Swamis presented a copy of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* to a chemistry professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The professor read the book, and upon returning it he said: 'I didn't like it.' The Swami requested him to read it again, saying: 'Please read those portions which suit you. Don't take the whole

thing.' The second time the professor read it and said: 'I think Ramakrishna is the answer to our society; I love this book very much. Our society is guided by two things: Dollar-king and Sex-queen. Ramakrishna is the answer to those crucial problems. I think he will be the answer, a nice solution, for our people.' Sri Ramakrishna himself said, '*lejā muḍā bād diye nāo*—remove the head and tail of the fish and take the fleshy middle part which you like; that is, take as much or as little of what I say as you like.

Thousands of people came to Ramakrishna with their thousands of problems and questions. Some only came out of curiosity. Scholars came, scientists, doctors, lawyers. Some were teachers, professors, others were students. Some were spiritual leaders and social reformers. There were also actors, actresses, dramatists, dancers. Some were hypocrites, some drunkards, ruffians, and villains. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is the first-hand record of the conversations of these various characters with Sri Ramakrishna. It is possible to find one's own character in the *Gospel*, also. Sitting on a wooden cot at Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna used to solve the problems of people. His life was free from problems. Only he whose life is free from problems can solve other's problems. But he would not only solve problems; he would also boost the spirits of his visitors. As he himself said, 'One man makes fire and others enjoy the heat. I have cooked food for you; you need only come and eat it.'

Another time he said, 'I am the destroyer of karma. I am the French colony.'⁶ At that time India was divided by three colonial powers—British, French and Portuguese. If one did something wrong in British

5. *Vedanta for the Western World*, ed. Christopher Isherwood, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961, p. 266.

6. 'Swāmī Turīyānanda Smṛti' (Bengali), *Udbodhan*, Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, *Śrāban*, B.S. 1342, p. 359.

India, he could take shelter in the French colony where the British rule had no power. 'I am the French colony'; that is to say, whatever sinful actions a man may do in this world, if he but takes shelter in Sri Ramakrishna, he will be free from fear. No worldly rules will be able to bind him.

The subject of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is God and *God alone*. It is concerned with how to realize Him and nothing else. Sri Ramakrishna's simple and unostentatious utterance was, 'I only know God and nothing else.' In the beginning, in the middle, and in the end of the *Gospel*, you will find only one thing, God.

Ordinary people preach religion, but Divine Incarnations like Buddha, Christ, Kṛṣṇa and Ramakrishna can give religion. Religion means realization. Only a single touch, a single glance or word from one of them can bring a revolution in human life, can change human character. Sri Ramakrishna was a tremendous spiritual force who could awaken others' God-consciousness in no time. He was a spiritual phenomenon. At one moment in the *Gospel* he is merged in Samādhi; the next moment he is making fun and cutting jokes. He was that prince who could travel all seven stories of the palace. Ordinary people live on the first floor and do not even know what is on the other six floors, that is, the seven levels of consciousness. He had free access to all levels. But all his jokes and frivolities and fun were connected with God and God alone. 'It is a tragic mistake that the popular idea of a good person is so often that of someone rather dull and somber, someone who rarely laughs. Whereas, in actual fact, the joy of approaching God surpasses anything we know.' In the *Gospel*, 'M' recorded in many places: 'All laugh', or 'Laughter'.

Sri Ramakrishna never turned anyone away. He said, 'Let me be condemned to be born over and over again, even in the form of a dog, if so I can be of help to a

single soul. I will give up twenty thousand such bodies to help one man.'⁷

'M', the recorder of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, was the principal of a school in Calcutta. Christopher Isherwood writes: "'M" would have been overwhelmed, no doubt, if he could have known that Aldous Huxley would one day compare him to Boswell and call his *Gospel* "unique in the literature of hagiography."⁸ God sometimes plays mysteriously. 'M' had a terrible family problem. He was even planning to commit suicide. He came to his sister's home near Dakshineswar and his nephew brought him to the Dakshineswar Temple garden where Sri Ramakrishna lived. The man who was trying to commit suicide was brought by Divine Providence to Dakshineswar where he met the Divine Incarnation. The man who accompanied 'M' to Dakshineswar, as far as the record goes, never visited Sri Ramakrishna again.

'M' had the habit of maintaining a diary since he was in his early teens. He had an amazing photographic memory, artistic skill and, above all, poetic imagination. He boldly proclaimed, 'My record (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) is not a collection from other sources. I recorded whatever I heard with my own ears from the lips of the Master and whatever I saw of his life with my own eyes.'⁹ He mentions in the beginning of each volume of the Bengali edition that there are three kinds of evidence: the first being direct and recorded on the same day; the second, direct but unrecorded at the time of the Master; and the third, hearsay and un-

7. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, trans. E. F. Malcolm-Smith, Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1931, pp. 294-95.

8. Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1965, (hereafter *Ramakrishna*), p. 282.

9. Swami Nityatmananda, *Śrīma Darsan* (Bengali), Chandigarh: Sri Ramakrishna Srīma Prakashan, 1st edition, p. 106.

recorded at the time of the Master. Since 'M' recorded what he heard the very same day that he heard it, the *Gospel* belongs to the first category.

You can challenge the historicity of Christ, Buddha or Kṛṣṇa, but you cannot challenge the historicity of Ramakrishna. His conversations were meticulously documented with time, place and persons, year, month and day. Moreover, there is a saying, the camera never speaks a lie. Sri Ramakrishna's exact photographs are available.

Did Ramakrishna speak anything new? Not really. He reinterpreted the same ancient Truth. He said, 'The money which was in vogue at the time of the Moham-medan kings was outdated with British rule.' The coin changes according to the rule of a different king. The Divine Incarnations who came previously, spoke to the values of that time. Now a new Incarnation has come and preached according to the need of the new age. One hundred years ago people did not know much about medicine and cured their diseases with herbs and natural sources. Now we have antibiotic capsules. Herbs and antibiotics both are medicines but their use changes with the times. Kṛṣṇa mentioned in the *Gītā*, 'Arjuna, I am speaking to you the same Truth again.'¹⁰ Tautology is a weakness in logic, but it is not a weak point in the scripture. The scripture never tires of saying the same thing again and again, but it is said in different languages in different ages.

'M' was asked to remove the repetitions from his *Gospel*. He said: 'I cannot do that. Sri Ramakrishna spoke the same parable to different people. If I remove that section, then the line or link of conversation will be disturbed. Moreover, you won't have any chance to see the effect of the *Gospel* in the lives of particular

persons. Look, sometimes the setting increases the brilliance of the diamond. If you put a beautiful diamond on the dusty ground, you will get one effect. The same diamond set on a green lawn will give a better effect. But set in a blue-velvet casket, it will give a dazzling effect. It depends upon the setting. Just so this *Gospel*.' To 'M' each word of Sri Ramakrishna was just like a precious diamond.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna came directly from 'M's faithful diary. He said, 'Sometimes I meditated on one scene over a thousand times. Sometimes I had to wait for a word of the Master like a Cātaka bird.' The Cātaka bird drinks only rain water and it waits for that alone, no matter how thirsty. In the *Gospel* we find 'M' not only recorded the teachings and conversations of Sri Ramakrishna, but graphically depicted beautiful scenes so that they would make a deep impression on the reader's mind. I shall read an example of a description from the *Gospel*, 22 July 1883:

Sri Ramakrishna had enjoyed a little rest after his midday meal. The room had an atmosphere of purity and holiness. On the walls hung pictures of gods and goddesses, among them one of Christ rescuing the drowning Peter. Outside the room were plants laden with fragrant flowers and the Ganga could be seen flowing toward the south. It is the rainy season; the exuberant Ganga is busy to meet the ocean and is happy to touch and to see the holy ground of the great saint of Dakshines-war.¹¹

'M' was attempting to depict the attitude of the devotees, the spiritual seekers, who were coming to meet Sri Ramakrishna, as

10. *Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā*, IV. 3.

11. Śrīma, *Śrī Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta* (Bengali), Calcutta : Kathamrita Bhavan, I, B.S. 1364, p. 129.

being that of rivers going and merging into the infinite ocean of Saccidānanda.

It is hard to acquire the qualifications for the study of Vedānta. A Vedānta student should practice discrimination, renunciation, control of the senses, and he should have the burning desire for liberation. But if you want to read *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, no qualification is necessary, no commentator is necessary, no teacher is necessary because it is so simple. Simplicity was Ramakrishna's style and his sentences are seldom compound or complex. And simplicity is holy. Aldous Huxley wrote in the Foreword to the *Gospel*: 'What a scholastic philosopher would call the "accidents" of Ramakrishna's life were intensely Hindu and therefore, so far as we in the West are concerned, unfamiliar and hard to understand; its "essence", however, was intensely mystical and therefore universal.'¹²

Though the background and plots of Ramakrishna's stories and parables are Indian in origin, they are so vivid and simple, so enchanting that even a child can understand them. A man once came to him and asked, 'Sir, how can I realize God?' Sri Ramakrishna answered: 'You may see God if your love for Him is as strong as these three attachments put together, namely, the attachment of a worldly man to the things of the world, the attachment of a mother to her child, and the attachment of a chaste and devoted wife to her husband.'¹³

'Gospel' means 'godspel' or good story. Sri Ramakrishna's stories and parables are very positive, instructive, and constructive. He always inspired people. His parable of the woodcutter is typical of this. A holy man told a poor woodcutter, 'Go forward.' The woodcutter took his advice, advanced further into the forest and found a sandalwood forest! He sold the sandalwood and

became very rich. Then one day he thought to himself: That holy man asked me to go forward. He did not ask me to be satisfied. So he went further into the forest again and he found a copper mine. Going further still, he found a silver mine and then a gold mine. Finally, he found a diamond mine with which he became exceedingly rich. Sri Ramakrishna said that there was no end of spiritual bliss, spiritual illumination.¹⁴

Sri Ramakrishna's teachings are very simple: 'To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest.' 'Sir, I cannot go to the forest.' 'All right. Meditate in the corner of a room.' 'Sir, my house is full of people. I cannot get a corner of a room.' 'Meditate in the inner chamber of your heart.' There are many alternatives. If you cannot do anything, surrender to the Lord and He will do everything for you. 'Give me the power of attorney.' Only a Divine Incarnation like Sri Ramakrishna can speak that way. Sri Ramakrishna gave the example of a mother cat carrying her kitten wherever she wants. The kitten completely surrenders to its mother.

A very simple and beautiful example of Sri Ramakrishna concerns three men who were curious to know what was on the other side of a high wall. The first man climbed up a ladder and found Infinite Bliss on the other side and he jumped into it. The second man did the same thing. The third man saw it but he came back to tell others of that Infinite Bliss behind the wall, behind *maya*. The third man is Ramakrishna. In the evening when the vesper bells would reverberate through the Temple compound of Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna would climb on the terrace of the house and cry: 'Come to me, my boys! Where are you? I can't bear to live without you!'¹⁵

12. *Gospel*, p. vi.

13. See *Gospel*, p. 7.

14. See *Gospel*, pp. 35 and 407.

15. *Ramakrishna*, p. 167.

On his second visit to Sri Ramakrishna, 'M' asked four vital questions on behalf of humanity. The first question was : 'Sir, how may we fix our minds on God?'

Sri Ramakrishna answered, 'Repeat God's name and sing His glories, and keep holy company. . . . When a tree is young it should be fenced all around ; otherwise it may be destroyed by cattle.'

The second question was : 'How ought we to live in the world?'

Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all—wife and children, father and mother—and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.'

In this connection, Sri Ramakrishna gave several examples :

'A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. . . .

'The tortoise moves about in the water. But can you guess where her thoughts are? They are on the bank, where her eggs are lying. . . .

'First rub your hands with oil and then break open the jackfruit ; otherwise they will be smeared with its sticky milk. First secure the oil of divine love, and then set your hands to the duties of the world.'

The third question was, 'Is it possible to see God?'

The answer came : 'Yes, certainly. Living in solitude now and then, repeating God's name and singing His glories, and discriminating between the real and the unreal—these are the means to employ to see Him.'

The fourth question was, 'Under what conditions does one see God?'

Sri Ramakrishna answered, 'Cry to the Lord with an intensely yearning heart and you will certainly see Him. People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. They swim in tears for money. But who weeps for God? Cry to Him with a real cry. . . . Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn, out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.'¹⁶

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is a big volume. The price may be a few dollars, but no price can be put on the value of those words. Sri Ramakrishna had a household disciple, an Īśvarakoṭi (literally, akin to God), whose name was Purna Chandra Ghosh. He had family trouble and wanted to commit suicide. He decided first to take his bath, then go to the shrine to salute the Lord and then kill himself. So accordingly, he took his bath, went to the shrine, saluted the Lord, and then thought : 'Let me read a little bit of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Taking the beautiful message of the Master, I shall depart from this world.' At random he opened the book and his eyes fell on this sentence : '*Pūrṇa bālak bhakta. Ṭhākur pūrṇer maṅgal cintā karitechēn*—Purna is a young devotee. Sri Ramakrishna was thinking of his welfare.' 'What?' cried Purna to himself. 'The Master is thinking of me and I shall commit suicide? Impossible ! He is thinking of my welfare and I am contemplating killing myself. It cannot be.' He gave up the idea and thus his life was saved. Such is the power of the words of the *Gospel* !

¹⁶. *Gospel*, pp. 5-7.



HUMAN TRENDS

HARMONY IN CHAOS

BARBARA FOXE

The words of Swami Vivekananda : 'Amidst this chaos there is harmony, throughout these discordant sounds there is a note of concord ; and he who is prepared to listen to it will catch the tone,'* speak truly to us about this world of maya in which we find ourselves. In this article I should like to consider Britain today in the light of those words.

The general impression of Britain today is certainly one of chaos, in some respects. Friends and well-wishers overseas worry about us, sometimes asking us if Britain is, indeed, 'the sick man of Europe', or only temporarily assuming that title before handing the doubtful honour over to some other nation. English people like myself who were born and bred in Great Britain and have lived through a world war, remember that the more savagely we were bombed then, the greater grew the spirit of unity and comradeship which bound us together as a nation ; that spirit sometimes now seems to us to be lost or forgotten. Even the name of our country is used by cynics with a certain caution. Great Britain is generally referred to, in Europe, as the United

Kingdom, or U.K. But Scotland and Wales are increasingly restive in nationalistic aspirations, the word 'devolution' is often heard, though with different shades of meaning; Northern Ireland is in agony and turmoil, while some of her extremists fight as fiercely to break from the mainland as others (who form the majority in numbers, which places the British government in an insoluble dilemma) fight with equal determination to remain linked with Great Britain, and much blood flows in consequence—including our own, on occasion, with terrorist bombing by the Provisional I.R.A. in London and other mainland cities.

Immigrants who live in our midst are very conscious of race and colour tensions, too often exploited by extremists on both wings of the political spectrum, who seek to stir up violence. The struggle between Management and Trade Unions, as the unions become increasingly powerful, results in strikes which not only disrupt an already unstable economy—with both sides stridently blaming each other—but cause a divisive atmosphere among weary and disillusioned citizens in everyday life. All these difficulties can—and do—give a cer-

* *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati : Advaita Ashrama, III, 1973, pp. 1-2.

tain ironic overtone to the word 'United' as applied to our small islands.

The liberal thinking which led Britain to reject Empire-building at last, and to restore independence to what had been subject countries, is still strongly with us. But some of our young people who are growing up in this era of confusion and uncertainties, see our party politics split down the middle, moral values chaotic, and religion no longer a strong force in the land. They see violence and promiscuous sex not only accepted as part of the pattern of life, but presented daily on television within their homes. These youngsters watch the spread of violence and lack of respect for law, and it is not surprising that many of them are beginning to turn to a tougher, more clearly defined, more disciplined ethic, which unfortunately comes dangerously close to fascism in its insularity and lack of tolerance towards minorities. On the other hand, students and intellectuals move to Marxism, in one form or another, and there are many forms, and much confusion.

I am not suggesting that these difficulties are unique to Britain; indeed, my list of problems perhaps resembles the bomb-stories in the war which, while perfectly true, inevitably brought from the listener the response, 'You think you've got problems? Wait till you hear *mine!*' In particular, the spread of sexual promiscuity and the more brutal forms of violence among some of the very young—the under-twenties—is causing alarm in more countries than this one. Political fragmentation is widespread, the increase in alcohol and drug-taking, the depression and anxiety which results in a situation where more beds are occupied in mental hospitals than in medical wards; drama and literature presenting all too often the alienated and the distraught minds, rather than wholeness; these elements of chaos, together with a perilous economy and a great increase in unemploy-

ment, may indeed be a part of widespread chaos.

We recognize chaos; and I am being frank about our own, so that we may then listen, as Swami Vivekananda so beautifully said, to hear the note of concord, of harmony. *Tamas* (inertia) and *rajas* (activity) are making the most noise, but behind them sounds the still small voice of *sattva* (the quality of goodness). Not only are there still noble and good people and institutions—this is always so, in all countries—but I would like to set out here some notes of harmony which have sounded on a great, a universal scale in this country. They are not political, not in any way imposed, but spontaneous, springing from the hearts of millions of people, deeply grounded, lasting—and so, surely, giving cause for hope and joy.

Before turning to the more serious of these causes for hope, I will sound a light-hearted note in the harmony, which is more important than it may appear. I am happy to report that the British sense of humour, which rejoices in restoring a sense of proportion and in deflating our national ego, is still alive and well and living in Britain. The cartoons and 'funny pictures' in the humorous journal, *Punch* (which was read and enjoyed by Swami Vivekananda) still depict, as they did in his day, the British laughing at themselves.

For instance: Now that a recognition of the cruelty of confining wild animals in small cases in zoos has led to the development of safari parks, in which the animals roam freely while human sightseers drive through the parks in closed cars to observe them, *Punch* recently published a picture of a family of lions—father, mother and cubs—roaming freely in a park, and gazing with sad and compassionate concern at the human sightseers in their cars. Father lion is saying, 'I think it's cruel, the way they keep them cooped up in those little cages!'

This delightful comment on man's vaunted modern technology, and the much-worshipped motor-car, is echoed in something which is happening here at the moment. It is funny enough for *Punch*, but it happens to be true! It was found that conveying blood-samples from hospitals to laboratory for urgent testing, in one of our large cities, took far too long for safety, because the post was uncertain and there were postal strikes, and if taken by taxi, the taxis were held up in traffic-jams in the teeming city streets. So the local council has wisely returned to the method of conveying urgent messages, which was used by our ancestors centuries ago: the carrier-pigeon. The birds are trained to fly straight over the busy streets, carrying the tiny phials as once they carried messages. They make the journey in minutes, they never go on strike, they enjoy flying, and the total cost to the tax-payer is about eight pounds a year, for each bird's grain.

Now, let us turn to a deep note of harmony. Something is going on which, while not completely new, is stronger and deeper than anything of the kind I have ever seen in this country before. It cuts across class, colour, sex and age. Even very young children are caught up in it.

There is a widespread concern here that man is endangering the environment; that we, and all Nature, including even rocks, trees and clouds, are part of a Whole which is being dangerously threatened by business interests, governments, by greed or expediency, for quick profits or war purposes or even easy convenience. It expresses in a deeply-felt way Dr. Schweitzer's famous phrase, 'Reverence for Life'; and when we talk or take action about that, we are not laughing. We are very serious indeed.

It may have begun with our realization of possible contamination of food in the use of chemical insecticide sprays on the crops; we saw the seas polluted with oil, fish dying in rivers from detergents and

other waste from factories; there was some dismay at the building of nuclear establishments, and experimentation for chemical warfare. It has often been said that the British have a permanent love-affair with nature, in the sense that the smallest house is proud to grow flowers in even a few square feet of garden, and flat-dwellers cultivate window-boxes or indoor plants. But the present concern has gone far beyond all this.

It has been helped and fostered by television—so when we claim that television is sometimes a corrupting influence, we must also give it all honour for the good things it brings us; there are always two sides to the same coin. It not only brings us superb films of the life of nature—birds, animals, plants, all over the world—in a way that we could never hope to see for ourselves, but it has also shown us the crusade of many a great ecologist; for instance, Captain Cousteau and his famous team of scientists and divers in the research ship *Calypso*, and his struggle to preserve not only marine ecology, but wildlife all over the world, and to awaken our awareness of the greed of man and the broken promises of governments, in the despoiling of the planet for unworthy reasons. It has shown us Sir Peter Scott's World-Wildlife campaign, and so many groups and societies doing practical work in this way, that it seems unsurprising when we see—as we saw some months ago on television News—the men of the Greenpeace Society, going to sea with experts to protect whales, a dying species hunted almost to extinction, and placing their own bodies between the whales and the harpoons of the hunters. There is a continual protest against the extermination of baby seals on a huge scale; anti-blood-sport societies strive to stop the hunting of stags which have been bred for the hunt. Protest marches against the pollution of rivers have stirred local

councils into action. In some cases, where a proposed motorway would cut clear across peaceful countryside, devastating the landscape and its wildlife for ever and ruining local agriculture on these small overcrowded islands of ours, hundreds of people from poor homes, middle-class houses, and landowners with great estates, have all joined together in a common purpose, using solicitors, experts, and petitions to government, to chart a better route for the motorway. They do not always succeed, but often a compromise is reached, a road re-routed, and a feeling perpetuated that 'we are all in this together.' The previous summer, when intense heatwaves started forest fires which ravaged hundreds of miles of woodland, the same 'bully-boys' as they are sometimes called, whose violence causes us such anxiety, were out there night after night fighting the flames, side by side with the police and local people whom normally they would be more inclined to attack. What is called 'the rough element' used violence in the right way: against fire. That was harmony indeed.

The second widespread, unifying note was sounded in the recent Silver Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II, and it had very little to do with pageantry or ceremony, or even with the debate for or against the monarchy as such. In times of political upheavals and uncertainties like these, inevitably there are some who passionately support the retention of a monarchy, without power to govern but with the importance of a great symbol, and others who regard it as an outdated and over-expensive institution. Even those who argue against a monarchy, value its continuity. Successive Prime Ministers, of whatever Party, value their weekly discussions with a monarch who is not only concerned and friendly, but who has at her fingertips twenty-five years of experience and knowledge of past Prime Ministers and policies. The same sense of continuity is felt by ordinary people who see the monarch

as someone who has always been with us, since babyhood, in war and peace, in crisis or calm. Governments come and go, but the monarch remains. But none of this was the essential note that we heard recently. What hit us with unexpected force was something different. It was a question of values.

Here again, television played a constructive part. On our screens, we saw, day after day, for months, the Queen making public appearances that would have worn out a woman half her age; travelling every day to different parts of Great Britain, not only making speeches and attending functions, but meeting ordinary people in her now famous 'walk-about' in which she walked in the streets amongst thousands of people. We saw her stop and chat to them, and accept the little letters and poems and flowers the children thrust into her hands, and the sheer warmth, friendliness, and spontaneous affection on both sides, was overwhelming. It went on, week after week, day after day, in all weathers. We had grown accustomed to seeing her fulfilling her duties with cheerful good humour; as one newspaper said of the ceremonial 'trooping of the colour', 'Who but the British would require a mother of four children, in her fifties, to sit on a horse, wearing a fantastic uniform, in the pouring rain, endlessly, for no practical purpose whatever?' But this was different. This was an appreciation of certain values which she has demonstrated over a lifetime, values that seem to be dangerously ignored nowadays.

An American commentator reported that one moment from the Jubilee celebration, seen on television in America, had made a totally unexpected impact on American audiences, almost as strong as the terrible moment when they saw their President assassinated; not because it was tragic, in this case, but because it was so unexpected, and lingered in the mind. It was not a

moment of pageantry or procession. It simply showed the crowds, late at night, standing in thousands, packed shoulder to shoulder, outside Buckingham Palace, hoping that the Queen would appear on the Balcony and wave to them again. Then the camera moved back, and it could be seen that the crowds stretched back, mile after mile, along the Mall and far out of sight, so that the majority could not see the palace, still less the Queen; but they were content to be there, in their thousands, patient and happy. Why?

Next day the American newspapers made what I believe was the right deduction; they thought that the people were there to express a unity of appreciation of certain simple old-fashioned values that they feared were threatened, and to express solidarity; and the values they named—correctly, in my view—were these: (1) Duty in the sense of dharma, of Karma-Yoga performed cheerfully, tirelessly and without complaint, laziness or fuss. (2) Family. (3) Country; in its aspect of our own country extending the hand of friendship to other countries, for that is the Queen's chief function when she goes abroad. Duty, family, country. Such simple, old-fashioned values; such unity to appreciate them when chaos threatens!

The third great note of harmony was heard in events that are now known all over the world, and have just been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in honour of the Irish 'Peace People' who have sounded the note so nobly. To see it in perspective, we must examine the background a little more closely.

For three hundred years, Protestant ascendancy in Northern Ireland was maintained by those who originally came from the mainland with force, but who, after three hundred years, are as totally Irish as any other Irishman. The great division has been caused by their allegiance to the British mainland government, and the total

separation between Catholics, who mostly favour a Catholic Republic, such as now exists in Southern Ireland (Eire), and the Protestant majority. This has been worsened by complete religious segregation in schools, so that each side has grown up regarding the other as almost a different species. Past British governments have not always been conspicuous for their wisdom and tact in handling the situation; everybody concerned, on all sides, may well claim that we are all suffering to some extent for the sins of our forefathers. But the terrible bloodshed which has set street against street, neighbour against neighbour, in Northern Ireland, and the daily death-toll of murder, maiming, bombing, as hate breeds hate on each side in that most unhappy land, has now created a situation where moderate and peace-loving Irish people, of both denominations and all political allegiances, are terrified, depressed and nerve-racked. The British government has the duty of keeping a large military force over there to keep the two extreme factions apart and to protect the Irish population in general; a 'policing' role which has caused some British clamour along the lines of 'Get our boys out', as more and more young soldiers are killed, while, paradoxically, the Irish themselves become indignant, on occasion, if the British Army is not present when needed—or if it appears to under-react or over-react. The British bomb-disposal units who dismantle Irish bombs intended to blow Irish people to pieces, may receive vilification—or touching bunches of flowers in their memory when they die performing that hazardous duty.

British people, like myself, often have Irish blood in our veins and friends in Ireland; we regard the Irish as 'part of the family'. We have watched in agony of mind, for many years, the murders and bombings in Northern Ireland that came to us on each day's television News. We in England have endured terrible bombings by

the Provisional I.R.A. in our own country. We have done what little could be done to help individual Irish families in small ways, such as offering holidays over here away from the 'troubles' to the children who knew so little peace. But nothing of permanent help could be done, no political settlement, no final decision can be made until the people of Northern Ireland themselves can create sufficient peace amongst themselves to make constructive action possible. Nothing imposed from outside can be of any use. And the men of violence saw to it that the people were kept in fear so that the violence could continue. Even the violent groups split into splinter groups and fought amongst themselves, as always happens when violence reigns.

Then it happened. Such a simple thing, and nothing unusual in itself. A car carrying bombing terrorists, pursued by the British Army, refused to stop. The driver of the car was shot, and the car, out of control, crashed into a young mother, who, with her tiny children, including a baby, was standing on the pavement. She was terribly injured, the children were killed. Such things were everyday occurrences. Nobody blamed the British Army. Terrorists throw bombs, soldiers pursue them, the innocent die. Everyone was accustomed to the pattern. But this time, a young unmarried girl, Mairead Corrigan, the sister-in-law of the injured mother, and aunt of the dead children—one of the Catholic minority who knew only too well what the Provisional I.R.A. did to those of their 'own' side who spoke up against them—proved for all time the truth of Swami Vivekananda's saying: that the frightened young woman who runs from the tiger in fear, will face that tiger when the tiger attacks a child. The 'mother-nature' in her, spoke up in defence of all the children who were being killed and maimed, and, as she said, whose minds were being perverted towards hate and violence. She knew the

tortures, the blindings, the knee-cappings (shooting of the bones of the knee, to cripple for life), used by the I.R.A. Provisionals against their 'own' people who acted or informed against them. She was terrified, and said so. But she also said something which is now famous enough to be published in the anthologies of great sayings. She said: 'We'll never get anywhere if we sit back and say we're afraid.'

She asked the people of Northern Ireland, whatever their religion or politics, who agreed with her in longing for peace and who were sickened by the years of fear and bloodshed, to join together on the following Sunday, and march together through the streets as friends, and to pray for peace. And the following Sunday, I saw the unbelievable thing actually happening, on my television screen in England. I saw thousands of Irish people, whole families, children, clergy of all denominations, the old and the young, walking together through the streets of Ireland in the summer sunshine, without political motives, simply as friends. Then they gathered together in their thousands and prayed for peace, spontaneously and unled by any clergy or politicians, and they sang a simple hymn known to both religious denominations, and spoke together that prayer of Jesus, used by both churches, familiar to all Christians, 'Our Father'.

It was spontaneous, it was unorganized, and it did not stop there. The miracle extended. They marched Sunday after Sunday, and not a terrorist stopped them. The British Army, delighted and almost afraid to hope that it could continue, stood ready for trouble, but held well back. Then, for a while, there came the greatest miracle of all. Those little back streets of Belfast, the capital, which were strongholds of Catholic and Protestant sectarianism, where each opposing side was forbidden to enter, and had not entered for years, took down the barricades which sealed off their

streets, and welcomed members of the other faith who cared to walk down there, one afternoon, as friends. I think it was one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen on television; a Protestant 'no-go' street. At each door and gate stood a Protestant householder and family, and as Catholics hesitantly entered the street, they greeted them with handshakes and welcome. Never shall I forget seeing an old Protestant coming forward to take the outstretched hands of a Catholic nun as she passed his house, or the tears of joy in her eyes that such a God-given thing could happen, and for all that it symbolized.

There was even a brief spell when rioting youngsters, as usual, hijacked buses and dragged them across their streets as barricades, ready to set them alight, and mothers and grandmothers climbed into the buses, saying, 'Burn this, and you burn us with it.'

Then, marches of 'Peace People' all over the world began. Mairead Corrigan had been joined by another brave young woman, Mrs. Betty Williams, mother of four children, whose husband is at sea, so she, also, is a vulnerable target for terrorists; indeed, 'Kill Betty' is a slogan that is painted up in the streets of Belfast, her child has been injured, and like Mairead she is accustomed to being pelted with rotten eggs, beaten up, and constantly threatened. The third organizer is a man, Ciaran McKeown, and on their world-wide marches they were joined by the sad and brave widow of the British ambassador to Dublin, a man noted for his peacekeeping efforts, who was murdered by a terrorist's bomb when he was in his car.

The Peace People marched in many countries, and held rallies for peace. The response was enormous. In Norway, for instance, there was an almost royal procession; in America they not only marched and held rallies, but they begged Americans with Irish sympathies to stop sending

money for guns and explosives to Ireland, for the Irish 'troubles' were long past a simple 'Get the British Out' issue, and the weapons were used against the Irish people, or against innocent bystanders in England, and were merely perpetuating hatred. Then they came to England, and were received with joy. Irish rallies had been forbidden in London, because previously they had led to violence. But on this occasion the ban was lifted, and over four thousand people from all over the world joined them in Trafalgar Square, London; clergy of many denominations attended, and the Dean of Westminster led a procession from Westminster Abbey to join them; not only the British, but visitors from all over the world were cheering and singing for peace.

As for the future—the Peace People are realists, and they know that there is a long road ahead yet. The paramilitary organizations in Northern Ireland have weapons, and they can terrify with torture and murder. Fear is not dead, but hope is not dead either. Community projects are being organized, Peace Groups are being started in schools, and fourteen-year-old boys who are being used by terrorists and dare not disobey their orders, are being offered a chance to get away, occasionally. Some people are cynical about the continuing impact of a spontaneous movement, once it becomes organized. But cynics have been wrong in the past. We can only hope and pray. Certainly a turning-point was reached which can never be forgotten, and Irish history will have a strand woven clearly in it which cannot but influence the generations to come. Chaos was there, in a most terrible form. But the note of harmony was sounded, and it was heard not only in Ireland but across the world; and the award of the Nobel Peace Prize, plus the money which is a part of the prize (and which will be used for peace projects) is a form of world acknowledgement for these brave people and their cause.

It may be that sometimes we are so conscious of the sword of the Divine Mother Kali, that we forget that her hands also give blessings; we must see both her aspects, before we can go beyond both. In Britain, we may be oppressed by overmuch technology, industrialization and economic strife; but there is also a great wave of deep feeling for a simpler life, and for more protection of nature against man's greed and selfishness, spreading throughout our country. Simple daily values are sometimes forgotten, but the appreciation of them was expressed by millions of people in the Silver Jubilee recently. Friendship and sympathy for the people of Ireland in their internal struggle, is deeply felt here; the Irish Peace People were welcomed with joy. Perhaps religion does not seem a strong force in our country at the moment, but gleams of it shine strongly here and there. We thank God that this light is still permitted to shine, and the law protects religion. Churches remain open, and religious services are broadcast and televised; a huge mosque has just been

built in central London; small religious groups, often centring on meditation, are springing up; our own Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre continues to function fully.

I began with the words of Swami Vivekananda, which remind us that 'amidst this chaos there is harmony, throughout these discordant sounds there is a note of concord; and he who is prepared to listen to it will catch the tone.' As this article concerns Great Britain, the United Kingdom—more united, at a deep level, perhaps, than we realize—it is fitting to end with the words of a Christian hymn, often sung here at Christmas; words which say the same thing a little differently. The hymn tells the beautiful story of how, on the night that Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, was born in Bethlehem in a stable, the angels of peace sang a song, which only those who listened could hear:

But man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song which they bring.
Oh, hush your noise, ye men of strife—
And hear the angels sing.

A GIFT TO HUMANITY*

TRANSLATED BY H. P. GANGULI

The image which naturally comes to mind when we think of Sri Ramakrishna is the one commonly seen in his photograph in sitting posture. We find in this photograph Sri Ramakrishna sitting, completely immersed in deep Samadhi. He looks hale and hearty, well built and full of divine

grace; his charming, well-proportioned body is full of inexplicable and attractive beauty. He is wearing a dhoti which covers only the lojn and upper thighs of his body—the lower portion of his thighs and his feet are completely bare. The end of his dhoti is very neatly placed on his left shoulder like the sacred thread. He wears nothing else. He sits in an easy posture (Sukhasana) on a small carpet (Asana), a little portion of which can be seen below his left foot. His right leg rests on the left foot, and his right thigh is raised a bit from the

* A free translation of the Bengali essay 'Sri Rāmakṛṣṇer Photo Prasange' by Sri Surendra Nath Chakravarty, published in the *Udbodhan* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office) in Asvin, B.S. 1369, pp. 529-33. By courtesy of the *Udbodhan* and kind permission of the author, Sri Chakravarty.

ground. Except the little toe, all the other toes of his left foot are visible. And his fingers are joined together and suspended a little below his lap. The tips of the thumbs are joined and the other fingers are clasped with one another. The lower portion of his left hand looks a little curved. His eyes are slightly open, but his vision is introspective and completely withdrawn. His nose is well formed and sharp looking. A heavenly smile adorns his beautiful face. Two upper teeth are visible through his slightly parted lips which are rather thick. The right shoulder is more prominently seen than the other. His quiet, serene and lively face, covered with a well-trimmed beard, is full of love, kindness and celestial grace. His hair is well groomed—in all he looks wonderfully and celestially beautiful.

About this photograph Sri Ramakrishna once said : 'This pictures a high yogic state ; the state is very lofty. To meditate and think of this will be enough. One day you will see, this photograph will be worshipped in every house.' Along with the pictures of other gods and goddesses this photograph also found a place in Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar. While offering his Pranams to these deities the Master looked at his own photograph also and bowed before it with folded hands. Not only so, once he even worshipped this photograph himself by offering flowers.

This photograph of Sri Ramakrishna was taken on the front verandah of the Radhakanta temple at Dakshineswar, due to the efforts of his devotee Bhavanath Chatterjee. It was taken by another devotee, Abinash Chandra Dan of Kutighat Road, Baranagore, about 9.30 in the morning on a Sunday in October 1883 (Kartik, B.S. 1290).

Bhavanath, also a resident of Baranagore, knew Abinash intimately. Abinash was then an apprentice in the well-known firm of photographers Bourne & Shepherds, and was just learning photography with a camera purchased by himself, though he

had not yet mastered the art. Bhavanath knew all this, and nursed a fond desire to get a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna taken by Abinash. One day he entreated the Master to agree to his proposal. The Master could not decline the wish of his affectionate devotee ; and so, although he did not like the idea, he remained silent. Bhavanath took this as his tacit consent.

On the appointed day, Bhavanath arrived at Dakshineswar with Abinash about nine in the morning. Sri Ramakrishna, after his morning bath and prayers to Mother Bhavatanj (Kali) was pacing up and down the Nat Mandir with a smile, his eyes beaming with celestial tenderness, calm and peaceful, intoxicated as it were with the divine love of the Universal Mother. The end of his dhoti adorned his left shoulder. Mahendra Kaviraj of Sinthi and several other devotees were present there.

After visiting Mother Bhavatarini, Bhavanath and Abinash paid their respects to Sri Ramakrishna. The Master was very pleased to see Bhavanath and enquired about his companion. Bhavanath introduced Abinash to the Master and repeated his prayer to him. The Master hearing his affectionate devotee's request just smiled a bit.

Thereafter, Sri Ramakrishna went to the temple of Radhakanta, followed by all the devotees. After bowing to Lord Radhakanta, he stood with a smile on the northern verandah of the temple, facing Sri Sri Sadashiva Mahadeva's temple with his gaze fixed on that deity. In the meantime, Bhavanath spread a small carpet (Asana) there ; and the Master sat on it and immediately fell into deep Samadhi. Finding an opportune moment, Bhavanath signalled to Abinash to take the photograph, and the latter got ready at once.

Sri Ramakrishna's body was slightly tilted and he was sitting in a casual manner. Noticing this through the lens of his camera, the photographer approached him

to correct his posture. But he had no idea about the Master's Samadhi. While trying to adjust his shoulders and the knees, Abinash felt that the Master's body was extremely soft and light—so much so that in attempting to adjust one of his legs, his entire body appeared to be rising above the seat. Abinash became very afraid and nervous, overcome by a sense of guilt at having touched the holy body in that state of supreme Bliss.

Bhavanath and all others present noticed that Sri Ramakrishna's body was still and motionless like something inanimate—his eyes almost closed, his face filled with holy love and tenderness and lit up with a celestial smile, and his entire body vibrating with waves of fathomless love. They had seen Sri Ramakrishna in Samadhi many times previously, but had never witnessed such deep absorption as on this occasion.

Bhavanath asked Abinash to take the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna immersed in Samadhi. Controlling himself somehow, Abinash managed to take the snap quickly. But due to his extreme hurry the wooden case containing the glass negative fell down from his hand while being taken out from the camera, breaking the negative. Fortunately, only the top portion of the negative broke, no injury having occurred to the photograph itself.

Thus fulfilling the wish of his devotee, the Master gradually came to himself and returned to his room. Bhavanath bowed before him and informed him with folded hands about the fulfilment of his prayer. With a loving look, Sri Ramakrishna merely smiled sweetly. Abinash also bowed before him and stood nervous and embarrassed in a corner; but the Master could guess his feelings and took the burden off his mind by lovingly addressing him as 'Photomaster'. Abinash felt very grateful and blessed, having thus obtained the Master's grace though unsought. Sri Ramakrishna having come to know of Abinash's financial condi-

tion, asked his devotees to pay him some money towards the cost of the photograph. Mahendra Kaviraj offered Abinash a ten rupee note, which Abinash accepted after a few refusals. He assured all present that the photograph would be ready within a week.

Thereafter about three weeks went by, but Abinash did not turn up. On the Tuesday following the Sunday on which he took the photograph, a son was born to Abinash; and so, due to financial stringency, the money given for the photograph was spent. For want of funds Abinash could not purchase the requisite chemicals and paper for developing and printing the photograph. He felt so embarrassed because of this that he could not go to Sri Ramakrishna, who himself anxiously asked Bhavanath one day what was wrong with the 'Photomaster' and why he had not turned up although three weeks had gone by. Finding the Master anxious for Abinash, Bhavanath asked if he should enquire about him, to which he replied affirmatively. At the Master's behest, Bhavanath went to Abinash's house and began calling him loudly by name. After a while Abinash appeared before him, one of his legs bandaged and limping with the help of a stick. Bhavanath was sorry to see him in that condition and enquired what was wrong. Abinash replied that on the same evening he took Thakur's photograph, he had accidentally slipped and fallen in the courtyard of his house and was narrowly saved through the Master's grace. He touched his bandaged foot with an expression of pain on his face and said that there was still much pain and he was therefore not yet able to finish the photograph.

Sympathizing with him, Bhavanath said he was lucky not to have sustained a fracture and that he should be careful and avoid moving about much and would soon be all right. Returning to Dakshineswar, Bhavanath related the incident to Sri Rama-

krishna, who, without expressing any sympathy, just smiled and said, 'I see, but can't you bring him here somehow?' The next morning Bhavanath again went to Abinash with a few friends and brought him to Dakshineswar.

Abinash, a picture of misery with a bandaged leg and leaning on a staff, appeared before Sri Ramakrishna, who looking at him asked, 'What is wrong with you Photomaster?' Abinash narrated the same story. In the tone with which a father rebukes his erring son, the Master said, 'Come, come Photomaster, all that is bun-kum. Why don't you confess you have spent up the money to meet the expenses of the birth of your son?'

Abinash was astounded and shuddered in his heart of hearts to hear the truth from the Master, and stood before him speechless and crest-fallen. Seeing him standing thus, the Master lovingly asked him to have a dip in the Ganga and sing devotional songs to him. Abinash at once untied the bandage and washed off his embarrassment by a dip in the holy Ganga. On his return, the Master himself gave him Prasad—some fruits and sweets—partaking of which Abinash felt much relieved. Abinash had a sweet voice and could play on the Pakhoaj (a type of drum) well. At the Master's behest he began to sing a song about Mother Kali. The melodious and soulful music of Abinash produced varieties of feelings in the Master: the feelings of Sakhya (friendly relationship with Divinity), Dasya (servant and master relationship with Divinity), Vatsalya (mother and child relationship with Divinity), and Madhura (mistress and paramour relationship with Divinity). Abinash seemed to lose himself in wonder seeing the Master's unique reactions to the music.

At the Master's request, another ten

rupees were given to Abinash who felt very repentent for having resorted to false pretexts earlier. He begged the Master's pardon again and again. The Master blessed him and said, 'Stick to truth; truth alone is *tapasya* (spiritual discipline) in the Kaliyuga.'

Returning home, Abinash purchased materials for the photograph with the money given to him. As a portion of the negative had broken, he cut the top in the shape of a semicircle, and printed the photograph therefrom. He knew the art of making negative plates and made another negative from the first one, from which he prepared several full-size prints and gave them to Bhavanath. The above explains why a semi-circular curve is seen in the original photograph.

Bhavanath took the photograph to Sri Ramakrishna, who fell into Samadhj on seeing it. In that state, he repeatedly touched the portrait with his head and said with emotion: 'The photograph, indeed, came out very well; the state is very sublime; it is at one with Divinity; it reveals the image of God Himself.' Through the devotion of the dedicated artist the divine body of Sri Ramakrishna had revealed itself in the photograph. Millions upon millions of devotees all over the world are finding divine satisfaction and sublime solace everyday by meditating on the benign image of Sri Ramakrishna revealed in this photograph. Actually this portrait is being worshipped in every household. Blessed indeed are Bhavanath and Abinash. For this photograph they will earn from the entire world unbounded thanks and eternal gratitude. For this gift to humanity, the whole human race will humbly remember them with everlasting gratitude and unending thankfulness.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Brain, Consciousness and Superconscious Experience—I (Editorial) : Modern science has progressed by leaps and bounds ; and Swami Vivekananda—a yogi par excellence—did not fail to observe its utility even in his life-time. During his student days, Swamiji had studied some works on Western science along with other Western literature, and already had up-to-date knowledge of the scientific developments of those days. He was the first, in a way, to apply the findings of modern science—especially those of human physiology and psychology—while explaining Raja-Yoga to audiences in the West. This made his *Raja-Yoga* very popular in the United States and England. In this Editorial an attempt has been made to study the Hindu spiritual practices and concepts regarding consciousness and superconscious experience in comparison with the recent findings of neuro-physiology and psychology.

Practice of Religion : In this talk given to the devotees at Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Nagpur, Srimat Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, has very beautifully explained the meaning of 'Religion', and the methods for its practice. This can well serve as a guideline to those who are on their way to the Goal Supreme.

Saints and the Modern Age : In this thought-provoking article, the author, Dr. Prakash Chandra, a retired Principal of the Victoria College, Gwalior, M.P., (now settled at Varanasi), beautifully narrates the significant role played by the saints in every age in ministering to the spiritual needs of man. He points out that due to the scientific and technological advancement in this age, the trend of modern man is becoming more and more materialistic,

to which Indians are no exception. The author is of the opinion that if we want a Welfare State, it must be governed by men who are morally sound. And for helping us in this respect, 'we have to turn to seers, saints, artists and poets to get the necessary stimulus.'

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna : This is a transcribed lecture delivered by Swami Chetanananda on June 26, 1977, at the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood, U.S.A., where the Swami was then an assistant minister. (At present the Swami holds the same assignment at the Vedanta Society of St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.A.) In this lecture the Swami has very skilfully dealt with the subject and explained the spiritual significance of the *Gospel*, in the light of an invocation-verse from the 'Gopī-Gīta' of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. He has also mentioned the opinions of some great writers like Christopher Isherwood, Aldous Huxley and others. While dealing with the subject, the Swami has given some information which is generally unknown to the non-Bengali-knowing readers. He has also discussed some teachings of Sri Ramakrishna mentioned in the *Gospel*.

A Gift to Humanity : The photograph of Sri Ramakrishna in meditation posture, which is often seen in the temples of the Ramakrishna Order and the shrines of the Master's followers, has a very sublime and interesting story behind it. An article on this subject appeared in the *Udbodhan*, a Bengali monthly of the Ramakrishna Order, in its *Āśvin*, B.S. 1369 issue (September 1962). Shri H. P. Ganguli translated the article into English with the kind permission of the author Sri Surendra Nath Chakravarti and the Publishers. This

photograph of Sri Ramakrishna, about which the Master himself foretold that 'this photograph will be worshipped in every household,' is really a gift to humanity.

Harmony in Chaos: In this thought-provoking write-up Mrs. Barbara Foxe of England has drawn a beautiful pen-picture of the conditions prevailing in the United Kingdom. She says, 'The general impression of Britain today is certainly one of chaos in some respects'; but a note of harmony raised by peace-loving people is also being heard side by side. The author being

a thoughtful observer is neither an extreme pessimist nor an extreme optimist. She takes a balanced view of the whole situation. Perhaps she got this vision of life from Swami Vivekananda's words: 'Amidst this chaos there is harmony, throughout these discordant sounds there is a note of concord; and he who is prepared to listen to it will obtain the tone.' The author is a member of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, England, and a writer for B.B.C. Recently, she has written a beautiful biography of Sister Nivedita under the title *Long Journey Home*.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

YOGA UNVEILED—PART I: By U. A. ASRANI, Publishers: Motilal Banarsidass, Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi-110 007, 1977, pp. xxiv+230, Price: clothbound Rs. 40/-, paperback Rs. 25/-.

The book under review is a collection of about twelve of the most important papers contributed to various journals and books by Prof. U. A. Asrani. The work is intended to unveil mysticism or yoga of the Jnana-Yoga type, and to bring it within reach of common understanding, explaining its techniques psychologically, its philosophy scientifically, as well as its psychosomatic physiological benefits. The author proves that this yoga is meant for life here, with a definitive account on its contribution to man's mental and physical health. This is a comparative, critical and thoughtful contribution from an empirical and rational investigator. Documented with references to both modern and ancient endeavours in the study and practice of Jnana-Yoga, the book unfolds the Easy Path (Sahaja) of psycho-physiological well-being through a specific therapy, called Jnana-Yoga Therapy.

The author writes on yoga with conviction, and in his view yoga is a way of life and a view of life, as philosophy is. The author deals with a very interesting and vital problem of life, namely, the highest consummation of human existence, which has been the theme of all philosophy, all religion and all mysticism of the world; and he

has brought to bear upon the problem the testimony of all the schools of Indian philosophy, both orthodox and heterodox, and that of non-Indian mysticism, such as Taoism, Sufism, Zen Buddhism and Christianity. The author has made wide references to the views of Western psychologists, who have studied the concept of mental health and the integrity of the human personality, and to most recent schools of contemporary psychology, such as Parapsychology, Depth Psychology, Psychosynthesis, Field Psychology, Gestalt Psychology, Hormic Psychology and Psychosomatic Medicine. Contemporary Western writers on religion, history and civilization, who are well known today as guides of modern thought, have also been quoted by him. The author has thus tried to establish his thesis, that the psychological aspect of the cream of all mystic effort consists in a remarkable level of mental health, with concentration, efficiency and maturity of potentialities to such an extent that he calls it *ideal mental health*.

Prof. Asrani has quoted the testimony of all the various yoga disciplines of India, such as Jnana-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Dhyana-Yoga, Karma-Yoga, Laya-Yoga, Hatha-Yoga, Raja-Yoga, Patanjala-Yoga, Kundalini-Yoga, etc., and has clearly expounded their psychological implications. He has also made references to the contemporary Indian saints, sages and writers, such as Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda,

Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramana Maharishi, Mahatma Gandhi, etc. The author has not spared any writer who has said anything about the highest consummation of man and how to realize it. The book is as thorough in this respect as it could be and is well documented.

Prof. Asrani was motivated to undertake this study in order to understand the nature, mechanism, meaning and purpose of 'a very remarkable psychological and spiritual experience' which suddenly flashed upon him and 'which lasted for about forty-eight hours', 'at a time when he was a detenu on political grounds in a prison.' According to the author it commenced as a 'come what may' attitude, dispelling anxiety; but it soon developed into something very much similar to the Sthitaprajna state described in the *Gita* (II. 54-71) as the quintessence of mystic achievement. This accidental sort of experience led Prof. Asrani to write this valuable work, which can be compared to the falling of an apple before Newton which led the latter to the study of the force of gravitation.

There are many useful books in recent times on yoga which have been widely distributed and which have served well. This current offering by Prof. Asrani is an excellent guide to the sincere and dedicated seeker on the path and whose yearning is for liberation of consciousness. In short, this book is for the one who wants to become an embodiment of yoga, and it is free from the usual deficiencies and incompetence of most of the popular literature propagating yoga and can well be recommended to students as a valuable introductory reading on the subject. That the author of the present volume may be able to bring out early the second volume is the earnest wish of the reviewer.

PROF. K. S. RAMAKRISHNA RAO, M.A.

THE UNIVERSE, GOD, AND GOD-REALIZATION—FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF VEDANTA : 1977, pp. 310, Price : \$ 11.00.

THE GOAL AND THE WAY—THE VEDANTIC APPROACH TO LIFE'S PROBLEMS : 1977, pp. 302, Price : \$ 10.50.

BOTH BY SWAMI SATPRAKASHANANDA, Publishers: The Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 205 South Skinker Boulevard, St. Louis, Missouri, 63105, U.S.A.

We had occasion to review Swami Satprakashananda's excellent book on *Meditation : Its Process, Practice, and Culmination* (see *Prabuddha Bharata*, December 1977). Here are two more

profound books by him which provide the necessary religio-philosophic background to the former. Among the Swami's other valuable publications is *Methods of Knowledge : According to Advaita Vedanta*, which is intimately allied to this series. These four books together provide an authoritative, comprehensive course in the salient features of the philosophy and religion of the Vedas, covering the ontological, epistemological, cosmological, ethical, psychological, axiological, mystical, eschatological, and practical-cum-realizational socio-religious aspects.

In the Introduction to *The Universe, God, and God-realization*, as also in the Appendices and in the text of the two books, the author emphasizes the role of religion in human life and affairs; how it is universal and basic to human nature; that of all sciences religion alone can fulfil the individual's aspirations for the Eternal, for it alone deals with it while all other sciences deal with the temporal. He shows clearly that ultimately human problems can be satisfactorily solved and peace and happiness attained, fully in individual cases and to a great extent socially, only on the basis of religion, if properly understood and acted upon, and not by any other means. For all other remedies are intrinsically deficient, being based on partial and superficial views of man.

The book is divided into four parts. Part One, dealing with the 'Universal Significance of Vedanta', describes what Vedanta is, and points to its triple basis in revelation, reason and realization, represented by the Vedas, the *Brahma-Sūtras* and the *Bhagavad-Gītā*. Then its fundamental teachings are delineated, showing the specialities of Vedanta, namely: On the basis of revelation, supported by rational methods, it posits an Absolute Being or Undifferentiated Reality (*nirviśeṣa* Brahman), which being creation, cannot be described as It is in Itself but can only be indicated negatively (*neti, neti*); but from the empirical point of view. It is the ground of the Universe—the phenomena. And in this role, It is apprehended as the Supreme Being with the nature of Sat-Cit-Ananda (Pure Being-Consciousness-Bliss) in Its transcendental (*nirguṇa*) and Immanent (*saguṇa*) aspects. This Supreme Being is the basis and support of both the monistic or non-dualistic view of the Impersonal Reality (*nirguṇa* Brahman,) and the monotheistic view of the Personal God, (*saguṇa* Brahman or *Īsvara*), in relation to the universe. The Supreme Being, being immanent in the universe, manifests as the inner Self in every living

being. As such, the inner Self of man is luminous, free, pure and immortal. This is the real nature of man, but empirically the Self is identified with the embodied being, the apparent man, due to the individuating principle—the inscrutable power of the Supreme Being called Maya, which is the primal cause of the world-phenomena and embodiment. The Vedas declare the unity of the individual selves and the Supreme Being, and the identity of both with the Absolute Being or Ultimate Reality beyond phenomena. Man is, therefore, capable of understanding the Truth or Reality, which is his real nature, and of realizing his unity with the Supreme Being or being identified with the Absolute by transcending his phenomenal personality. And there are different paths to suit the different temperaments, aptitudes and capacities of the aspirants leading to unity with Reality or with God, called Yogas (paths of union) which are classified under four main types—Karma-, Bhakti-, Jñāna-, and Rāja- Yogas. Thus Vedanta provides a complete scheme for realization of unity with Reality to the whole of humanity; for Reality or God is in harmony with the inner nature of man and the universe, and as such, amenable to practical verification aided by the scriptures (*śravaṇa*), reflection (*manana*) and meditation (*nididhyāsana*). Ultimately, the proof of God or Reality is not in theories, or in scriptures, but in direct communion (*aparokṣa-anubhūti*); religion is realization, not belief.

Vedanta does not preach any person or prophet, or any personal creed or dogma, but yet accepts all prophets and incarnations as living illustrations of eternal spiritual truths. It recognizes that they often express these truths in diverse mythical and allegorical language and couch them in different symbolic doctrines and rituals to suit the needs of the people. These are direct or indirect means to reach the ultimate goal, like rivers to the ocean, and are acceptable to Vedanta so far as they do not contradict reason and morality, and are based on, or lead to, universal principles not disharmonious with nature, and are universally applicable and verifiable.

The next three parts deal with the 'Universe: Its Origin and Nature' and the process of creation; the 'Quest for God, Reality of Realities', in the midst of this diversified universe—both as the Creator of the universe, externally, and as the Self, internally; and finally, the different paths for God-realization in all aspects.

The Goal and the Way, a companion volume

to the above, consists of three parts: Part One deals with the Real Man and his psycho-physical vehicle, that is, the inner Self and Its threefold body—the gross (with which we are familiar), the subtle (which migrates), and the causal (which is at the root of embodiment)—divided into five sheaths; the mind and its ways; and the life principle. It is shown how all these aspects in the individual, from the inner Self to the gross body, have their cosmic counterparts in the universe as a whole, of which man is an integral part. Both the macrocosm and the microcosm are built on the same plan constituting the total integral Reality, of which the Absolute is the ground or substratum.

The part two deals with man's individualized empirical existence and how he progresses towards discovering his unity with the total integral Reality of God, life after life, acting in consonance with the law of cause and effect on the moral plane (karma) and reaping the fruits of his good and evil deeds, until he gains wisdom and perfection and reaches the supreme goal. It shows how the three states of man's experience of waking, dream and deep sleep, indicative of his three vestures, point to the real immortal Man behind and beyond them, the Self within, which is the witness of all these three states and yet distinct from them. This is realizable through discrimination and meditation in the state of Samādhi (pure consciousness).

The part three deals with man's Goal in life and his twofold journey: one, on the secular, temporal plane, as an individual and as part of society fulfilling his duties in life (*svadharma*); and the other, the quest for his true eternal nature as Spirit, which is ever integrated with the cosmic spiritual Reality, called *saḡuṇa* Brahman (Personal God) in Its immanent aspect, and *nirguṇa* Brahman (Impersonal Reality) in its transcendent aspect. It throws light on how both duty in society (dharma) and highest spiritual fulfilment (*mokṣa*) can be harmonized through the path of Yoga—especially Karma-Yoga, which is basic to all other Yogas.

The exposition of the whole subject in both the volumes is done in an objective scholarly manner, supporting the statements profusely with appropriate quotations from authoritative Sanskrit works as also from the modern authorities like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna, and various Eastern and Western scholars. The treatment, while sticking to the viewpoint of the traditional works, is done in the context of other Eastern and Western philosophies and modern rational and scientific thought. The Vedantic

views on creation, mind, life, evolution, psychology and other allied topics are compared and contrasted with those of the latest modern thought. Attention is drawn to the similarities where they exist, and it has also been pointed out, with cogent reasoning, how some of the modern views are deficient as contrasted with Vedantic views.

The Swami, well versed in modern thought, with over forty years of preaching experience in the West in thoughtful and scholarly circles, with his profound knowledge of and insight into a wide range of Vedantic texts and their traditional interpretation, and with his capacity for lucid, precise, systematic and thorough treatment of all relevant topics, has accomplished the task of the presentation of Vedantic views in the modern rational and scientific context in an admirable manner. The treatment is scholarly, yet simple, and brings out the sublime spirit of the teachings. Whereas most Western and Eastern scholars present ably the mere dry skeleton of Vedantic thought, here is a presentation which is living, throbbing and practical, since he himself is a practising Vedantist. He shows the relevance of Vedanta not only to the highest spiritual development of man in modern times, but also its applicability to solve the problems facing humanity in an enlightened manner in harmony with the highest nature of man. Several misunderstandings and deliberate misrepresentations of Vedanta—that it is illusionism, that it does not lay emphasis on morality, that the doctrine of Karma is fatalism, that the Vedantic teachings are pessimistic, and so on—all such ignorant or wanton criticisms have been effectively stultified. However, he does not refer to them or plead any case specially, but simply presents facts objectively, and the facts speak for themselves.

The books bear out Swami Vivekananda's statement that 'Vedanta will be the religion of the future thinking humanity.'

These two books, together with the other two on *Meditation* and *Methods of Knowledge*, will form a good *vade mecum* of Vedanta as they discuss all its important topics, and can be of great help not only to Vedantists and students of Religion and Philosophy, but to the followers of

every religion, as they will assist them in understanding their religions better and in interpreting them liberally. The breadth of outlook and comprehensiveness of Hinduism and its liberal acceptance of other religions is due to its adoption of Vedanta for its philosophic background. These books will also stimulate the interest of all intelligent lay readers. The general reader may go through these two books followed by that on *Meditation* for practical guidance, and if interested he may go through the *Methods of Knowledge*; but the students of philosophy will profit by reading the *Methods*, preferably first.

The printing and get-up of the books are excellent. A cheaper paperback Indian edition will be welcome, as in the case of *Methods of Knowledge*.

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA
Ramakrishna Math, Belur, W.B.

THE GITA : EDITED BY ANANTA PAI, Publishers: Amar Chitra Katha, India Book House Education Trust, 29 Wodehouse Road, Bombay, 400039, 1977, pp. 32, Price: Rs. 2.50, 25p, 50c.

The India Book House is doing a good job of bringing out immortal pictorial classics based on Indian mythology, history and legend. The multi-coloured pictures actually make those ancient moments real for the readers. The accompanying text vividly brings home all that the pictures stand for. The book is absorbing not only for the young children but also for the elders. As mentioned by Swami Chinmayananda in the Preface, 'The "comics" literature is proving today to be the most effective "art" by which the impressionable minds of children can get readily soaked with exemplary ideals and creative ideas.' The present booklet which resembles the 'comics' in every respect, offers saner values of life as enshrined in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The text has been checked by Swami Ranganathananda and Swami Chinmayananda, and thus bears a stamp of authenticity. Let the IBH produce many more such books for the children and adults of India and of the world.

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Deputy Director of Languages, Bombay

NEWS AND REPORTS

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION HOME OF SERVICE, VARANASI

REPORT: APRIL 1976—MARCH 1977

The name of this institution is familiar to all who are acquainted with the history of the Ramakrishna Order. Begun in 1900 by Swami Subhananda with four annas, encouraged by Swami Vivekananda, and blessed by the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, this Centre has always striven to serve the sick and needy of Varanasi in a spirit of worship. The activities for the year under review are outlined below :

Indoor General Hospital : The total number of cases admitted during the year was 3,239 ; of these, 1,442 cases were relieved, 1,108 cases were cured, 284 discharged otherwise, 248 died and 157 remained at the end of the year. Surgical cases in the indoor hospital totalled 1,546. The total number of patients picked up from the roadside was 73. An average of 135 beds were occupied daily.

Outpatient Department : The number of outpatients treated, including those of the Shivala Branch, was 2,58,393 (new cases 60,646, and repeated cases 1,97,747). Daily average attendance was 839. Surgical cases numbered 3,330.

Homoeopathy : The Homoeopathic sections of the Home of Service at Luxa and at Shivala, attended by 8 Homoeopaths, served many patients.

Clinical and Pathological Laboratory : The Laboratory conducted many and varied tests under the general headings of clinical pathology, serology, chemical pathology, L.F.T. and bacteriology.

X-Ray and Electro-Therapy Department : The number of cases examined during the year were: chest 1,073, bones 1,264, urinary bladder 118, cholecystography 26, pyelography 47, G.I. tract 199, fluoroscopy 177, diathermy 177, mastoid 41, P.N.S. 27, tube chalengogram 4, sinogram 4, mandible 7, foetal shadow 3, ultraviolet ray 30, infra-red ray 14, and E.C.G. 111.

Invalids' Homes : Two separate homes meant for this purpose maintained 18 men and 25 women. The men mostly comprised old retired monks of the Ramakrishna Order, who, having served the Ramakrishna Math and the Rama-

krishna Mission for long years, have come to spend their last days in holy Varanasi. The women were helpless poor widows who had none to look after them.

Outdoor Relief to the Poor : Monthly pecuniary help was given to 43 poor invalids and helpless ladies. Occasional pecuniary help was given to 14 persons. The total expenditure was Rs. 3,079.25. Besides, 100 cotton blankets worth Rs. 945.50 and old blankets and garments were distributed to needy persons. Only a very small number of the poorer section of Varanasi could be served due to the paucity of such funds.

Immediate Needs : The income during the year was Rs. 8,35,402.78, and the expenditure Rs. 9,62,183.68, the deficit balance for the year being Rs. 1,26,780.90. Adding this to the accumulated deficits of the previous years, the Home has incurred a total deficit of Rs. 3,25,048.68 as on 31 March 1977. As the Home's existence depends mainly on the generosity and support of sympathetic donors, the public is earnestly requested to come forward and donate generously to the following needs : (1) Funds are badly wanted for maintenance of the 186 beds of the hospital. (2) Endowments for the beds: Out of the 186 beds, only a few have been endowed. The cost of endowment of a single bed is Rs. 30,000/-, but donors may perpetuate the memories of their near and dear ones by making partial endowments of Rs. 10,000/- or Rs. 5,000/-. (3) To help the Invalids' Homes maintain the old and invalid men and women, similar endowments are essential. (4) Donations are needed to meet the accumulated deficit of Rs. 3,25,048.68. (5) The proper growth of the institution has necessitated appointment of more qualified doctors, nurses and other staff, for whom residential quarters have to be provided. For this a sum of Rs. 5,00,000/- will be necessary. (6) The present dairy, which did not supply even 50% of the Hospital's requirement, needs immediate improvement to serve the patients with sufficient milk. For this, funds are urgently required.

Contributions large or small, in cash or kind, will be thankfully received and acknowledged by the Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Varanasi, 221 001. Donations are exempted from Income-tax.