



Editorial Office

P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt. Pithoragarh 262 524, U.P.

Publication Office

5 Dehi Entally Road
Calcutta 700 014
Phone : 44-2898



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Prabuddha Bharata

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No. 2

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

INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS*

'Truth is one : sages call It by various names'

एतावानस्य महिमातो ज्यायांश्च पूरुषः ।
पादोऽस्य विश्वा भूतानि त्रिपादस्यामृतं दिवि ॥

1. Such is His greatness;¹ but Pūruṣa² is greater than even this. All beings constitute one-fourth of Him ; His three-fourths constitute the immortal heaven.³

R̥g-Veda 10.90.3.

त्रिपादूर्ध्वं उदैत्पुरुषः पादोऽस्येहाभवत्पुनः ।
ततो विष्वङ् व्यक्रामत् साशनानशने अभि ॥

2. Three-fourths of the Puruṣa rose upward. The other one-fourth again came into being in this world, and spread in all directions, entering all living and non-living beings.⁴

R̥g-Veda 10.90.4.

* *Puruṣa-Sūkta* is continued here.

1. The meaning is, all this manifested world is only a reflection of the glory (*vibhūti*) of God.

2. The lengthened form *pūruṣa* is for metrical adjustment.

3. This stanza is a clear refutation of pantheism. God is immanent in creation but vastly transcends it. This division into three-fourths and one-fourth gave rise to the concept of *para-brahman* and *apara-brahman* in later Vedantic thought.

4. Sāyana's interpretation of the stanza is: the essential nature of Puruṣa is beyond the realm of Māyā, only a part being involved in it. *Punah* means *punah-punah*, again and again, and refers to the repeated cycle of creation and dissolution of the universe. *Viṣvan* is the masculine form of the adjective *viśvac* meaning 'going or being everywhere'. The word *sāsana-anasane* (meaning 'those who eat and those who do not') is interpreted by Sāyana to mean living and non-living beings. The idea implied in this stanza became in later Vedānta schools a controversial question: how the ever-changing mundane world could rise from an immutable, transcendent spiritual Reality.

ABOUT THIS NUMBER

This month's EDITORIAL discusses some of the important effects of meditation which enable the personality to renew itself continually.

In the second instalment of SWAMIJI'S MESSAGE TO THE WEST Robert P. Utter touches upon the main ideas that Swami Vivekananda emphasized in the West, and shows how these were all prefigured in his famous addresses at the Chicago Parliament of Religions.

Swami Muktinathananda of Belur Math concludes his inspiring character sketch of one of the foremost disciples of Swami

Vivekananda in the second instalment of SWAMI ATMANANDA.

IN AN OUTLINE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF JIVA GOSVAMIN Prof. Ranjit Kumar Acharjee of Ramakrishna Mahavidyalaya, Kailashahar, North Tripura, provides a lucid summary of the philosophical contributions of Jiva Gosvāmin to Bengal Vaiṣṇavism.

Many of our readers will be delighted to find in the brief article HOW TO STUDY SWAMI VIVEKANANDA a new and helpful way to understand the vast and varied teachings of Swamiji. Its author Brahmachari Shuddha Chaitanya is an American novice at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta.

MEDITATION AND SELF-RENEWAL

(EDITORIAL)

Spiritual growth and self-renewal

Spiritual growth is the result of continual self-renewal. Growth implies the development or creation of something surplus. The body gets its energy for work and maintenance from catabolism, a destructive physiological process of breaking down and oxidation of organic molecules and tissues. This loss is made up through anabolism, a constructive physiological process of synthesis of complex organic molecules and tissues. These two processes together constitute metabolism which is one of the three fundamental characteristics of living organisms (the other two being evolution and consciousness). If anabolism merely balances catabolism, the body will only be just able to maintain itself, but there will be no growth. For growth a surplus of energy and tissues is necessary, and this becomes pos-

sible only when the constructive process exceeds the destructive one.

This is true of spiritual life also. Spiritual struggle involves a considerable amount of destruction—destruction of past habits, memories, attitudes, feelings, lower pleasures, and so on—and the expenditure of mental energy in the effort to control impulses, senses and mind. If this is not counterbalanced by a positive and constructive process, spiritual life will appear futile and as another form of needless suffering. But a balancing and replenishing process of spiritual anabolism exists, and it is called Yoga. However, for the attainment of spiritual growth or progress this constructive process must exceed the destructive effects of spiritual struggle, otherwise it will only enable us to lead a fairly well-adjusted and peaceful life. In other words, yoga becomes an effective means of spiritual

growth only when it is practised with a certain degree of intensity and is raised to higher and higher levels.

Spiritual growth is not a three-dimensional increase in bulk. It is an evolution of the Self, an extension of consciousness from a lower level to a higher level. Yoga is a comprehensive system of disciplines which operate at different levels of personality, but its main thrust is the transformation or unfolding of consciousness. Spiritual growth needs not only the recuperation of the different powers and energies of the different parts of the personality but also the transformation and extension of consciousness. Of all the disciplines of Yoga it is meditation that directly and most effectively brings about this renewal and inner transformation. How meditation does this is the subject of our discussion here.

Before proceeding further, three points are to be noted in the practice of meditation. One is that meditation is something more than thinking about an object or stilling thought waves or relaxing the mind. When a person meditates, many changes take place in his consciousness. These changes are at first so subtle that the gross mind is often unable to detect them. Hence many people complain that meditation does not produce any tangible result in them. However, as their minds get purified and sharpened by the practice of meditation, they gain the capacity to detect these interior changes and understand their significance.

The path of spiritual life is full of obstacles and it is not possible to know or practise true meditation unless some of these major obstacles are overcome through some other preliminary disciplines like selfless work, prayer etc. But once a person gets established in meditation, he will find that meditation itself is capable of overcoming the obstacles. Regarding this there is an ancient saying : 'If through carelessness a yogi does something wrong, its evil effect

can be burnt up through Yoga itself and not otherwise.'¹

The third point to be noted is that meditation is not a sudden flight into the super-conscious. It passes through different stages, as Patañjali clearly states in one of his Yoga aphorisms.² But then, how to know which stage comes after which, and how to know where exactly one is? The commentator Vyāsa says that (the yoga of) meditation itself will teach us this; and he quotes an ancient authority : 'Yoga is to be known through yoga; yoga is attained through yoga.'³ The knowledge needed for the transformation of consciousness, the laws governing the ascent of the Self, the process of self-renewal—all these are lying hidden in the depths of the human mind. Meditation will reveal them if it is practised systematically for several years.

Counteracting the effects of the past

Our present habits, attitudes and the way we react to people and circumstances are all determined by our past experiences. Now and then everyone finds himself overpowered by moods of depression and dissatisfaction, when life appears empty and meaningless. After making pious resolutions people fail to carry them out, and thus develop feelings of guilt and sin. Many people who cherish an ambition for wealth, power or fame find their plans frustrated at every turn. Spiritual aspirants find that on some days their minds are bright and full of aspiration, but on other days they feel dull and

1. यदि कुर्यात् प्रमादेन योगी कर्म विगर्हितम् ।

योगेनैव दहेदहो नान्यत् तत्र कदाचन ॥

Mahābhārata 11.21.25.

2. तस्य भूमिषु विनियोगः ।

Yoga-Sūtra 3.6.

3. योगेन योगो ज्ञातव्यो योगो योगात् प्रवर्तते ।

Quoted by Vyāsa on *ibid.*

are unable to meditate or repeat the divine name with concentration. All these happen in spite of their best efforts and intentions, apparently without any cause. Nothing, however, happens without a cause. The causes of our failures, sufferings and fluctuating moods originated in our past and lie buried deep down in us beyond the reach of the conscious mind. Two of the significant contributions of Freud to world thought are the discovery of the unconscious and the discovery of the deep-seated influence of childhood experiences on adult life. Another discovery of his is that in the dark chambers of the unconscious operate two types of forces: a force of expression and a force of repression, though he did not fully understand their nature. It is surprising to note that all these principles form a part of the foundation of yoga psychology and were discovered by the ancient sages of India more than two thousand years ago.

An important question rises here: can the effects of the past be overcome now? An effect can be overcome only by destroying its cause. The destruction of the past psychological causes of present suffering involves three conditions: (1) discovery of the actual causes of our present difficulties by tracing their roots into the depths of the unconscious; (2) handling the mental forces of expression and suppression operating there; and (3) the destruction of the causal root. This was what Freud and his followers attempted to do, and the three conditions mentioned above form the basic steps in their psycho-analytic technique. But they attained only partial success in their attempts.

Yoga offers a comprehensive scheme for the complete eradication of the past causes of present suffering and for the total renewal of the whole human personality. This scheme is based on three fundamental principles of yoga psychology. The first principle is that every action and experience

leaves a subtle effect in the mind in the form of a residue or seed known as *samskāra*. This seed is capable of reproducing the original action or experience later on by sprouting into a *vṛtti* or thought-wave. Thus it is the *samskāras* that are the real cause of all our present sufferings, and in order to get rid of sufferings we have to get rid of the *samskāras*.

The second principle of yoga psychology is that there are two forces operating in the mind: a force of expression called *vyutthāna*, and force of suppression or control called *nirodha*. These are mutually contradictory. The *vyutthāna* force converts a *samskāra* into a *vṛtti*. It is owing to the operation of this force that hundreds of ideas and desires arise in our minds and make meditation difficult.

The *nirodha* force is of two kinds. One type stops the *vṛtti* and converts it back into the *samskāra* form; this is called *vṛtti-nirodha*. It does not control the *samskāras*. It operates at the conscious level of the mind and controls the gross *vṛttis*. It is this force that we generally apply when distracting thoughts appear during meditation. Patañjali says, 'The gross *vṛttis* can be eliminated through meditation.'⁴

The second type of *nirodha* force controls the *samskāra* itself, and is hence known as *samskāra-nirodha*. There are thousands of *samskāras* lying in the mind; but only some of these find expression (the *udāra* state, as it is called), the rest of them remaining in a dormant (*prasupta*) state or in a controlled state.⁵ *Samskāra-nirodha* or control of *samskāras* takes place in two ways. One is a natural automatic process going on in the unconscious without the knowledge of the person. It is the suppression of one *samskāra* by another *samskāra*. For example, the fear *samskāra* may suppress

4. ध्यानहेयास्तद्वृत्तयः ।

Yoga-Sūtra 2.11.

5. *ibid* 2.4.

the greed *samskāra* or sex-*samskāra* and prevent the person from exhibiting these emotions. This kind of unconscious suppression is what Freud has called 'repression'. The *samskāra* does not lose its power but only gets temporarily checked, a state which Patañjali calls *vicchinna*. Some form of repression is an unavoidable aspect of man's social life. But, as Freud has shown, repression of very powerful instincts and emotions may lead to neurosis and psychosomatic diseases. The second way of *samskāra-nirodha* is to consciously suppress the *samskāras* using will-power. Since the *samskāras* are subtle potencies existing in the unknown depths of the mind, the will cannot directly contact them. The nature of a *samskāra* can be understood only when it is changed into a *vṛtti* and brought to the surface of the conscious mind. Then after understanding the nature of the past experience revealed by the *vṛtti*, if the *vṛtti* is converted back into *samskāra*, the *samskāra* will remain under the control of the will.

The important point to note here is that a *samskāra* cannot be controlled by merely suppressing its *vṛtti*, but only by understanding the nature of the experience hidden in the *samskāra*.⁶ *It is knowledge that controls a samskāra and not mere suppression.* This is the third principle of yoga psychology. What it really means is that in order to overcome the effects of the past, we must re-live, re-experience, the original past events with full awareness and will-power. All hidden desires, fears and antagonisms must be dug out, boldly faced,

understood and conquered.⁷ This is what intense meditation enables you to do. It churns the whole unconscious and brings to surface all buried instincts, complexes and defects; the purified and sharpened mind then reveals their true nature, and the strengthened will enables you to conquer them. If your meditation fails to do all this, it means that it lacks either intensity or proper direction.

The knowledge gained through ordinary meditation, *dhyāna*, can only convert the *samskāras* to a state of control and reduced vigour, but cannot destroy them. It is only the knowledge which arises in the advanced stages of meditation known as *samādhi* that can completely de-activate the *samskāras*. This higher knowledge, known as *ṛtambharā-prajñā* ('truth-bearing intuition'), *prajñāloka* (light of intuition) etc. in Yoga books, acts as a kind of inner fire and light and reduces the *samskāras* to what is called the 'burnt-seed state' (*dagdha-bīja avasthā*).

It is therefore good to remember that every time you meditate you apply a check on the past causes of your present difficulties, conflicts and suffering.

Maturity of character

Freedom from the past should lead to the second step in self-renewal, namely, maturity of character. For this it is necessary to have a mature ego. Man's true nature is the self-luminous Atman, but this is eclipsed

6. This is the difference between *vṛtti-nirodha*, mentioned earlier, and *samskāra-nirodha*. In the former, a *vṛtti* which rises of its own accord is merely suppressed without understanding the nature of the experience involved in it. In the latter, a *samskāra* is consciously roused into a *vṛtti* and, after studying its underlying experience, is reconverted into the *samskāra* consciously. In the first, control of *vṛtti* is an end in itself. In the second, control of *samskāra* is the goal and is effected through the control of the *vṛtti*.

7. This is of course the central principle of Freudian psycho-analysis which, however, owing to its crude theories and techniques, does not produce any deep or thorough transformation. In the path of the Tantras actual life-situations are created through rituals in order to dig out from the bottom of the mind past experiences and repressed instincts and to conquer them. Every spiritual aspirant will have to do a sort of mental Tāntrik sādhanā at some stage or other in his spiritual life.

by the ego. Without understanding the nature of the ego it is not possible to understand the nature of Atman. Spiritual aspirants find the ego or egoism a great obstacle to spiritual progress, and want to get rid of it. They want to practise humility. It should be first of all noted that 'ego' and 'egoism' do not mean the same.

The ego is an internal organ (*antah-karana*), just as the heart or liver is an external physical organ. It has several useful functions to perform, like the co-ordination of the different parts of the personality. For a beginner in spiritual life the main problem should be, not to destroy the ego (which is impossible, anyway) but to purify, strengthen and develop it. For without a pure, strong and mature ego it is impossible to sustain prolonged spiritual struggles and bear the shocks of life.

Egoism, on the other hand, is the way the ego behaves, especially its mode of referring to itself. Egoism becomes troublesome only when the ego behaves wrongly towards others and makes exaggerated claims regarding itself. This kind of 'wrong' or 'false' egoism is to be eliminated. 'Right egoism', that is, the correct judgement of oneself and other people, and the ability to live in harmony with all people alike, is an important mark of maturity of character. It is true humility.

The first step to the development of a mature ego is to confront the ego as it truly is. The ego puts on so many different masks that it is difficult to understand its real nature. The next step is to accept this true image of oneself with all its defects and limitations. The third step is to give up 'wrong egoism' in the form of hypocrisy, self-deception, pretending to be more than what one really is, and jealousy. The fourth step is to re-educate the ego to develop 'right egoism' in the form of the ability to make a correct appraisal of oneself, strength to face the problems of life, and freedom from fear and hatred. Truthfulness, Strength

and Freedom—these are the characteristics of a mature ego, and hence, of a mature character.

For all these steps meditation is a great help, for only in the depths of meditation can man truly confront his ego, understand it, and transform it. And through all this the whole moral life of the aspirant gets renewed.

Waking up from dreaming

Though meditation is a fully conscious discipline, its effects are not restricted to the waking state alone but penetrate into the dream and deep-sleep states. Dreaming is of three kinds. What is coming to all these types is man's helplessness and inability to use will-power in that state.

The first type of dreaming is that which produces the dreams proper during sleep at night. Many of the dreams are reappearances of past experiences and repressed desires. Some are symbolic and, if understood, give valuable information about the working of the unconscious. Some dreams are unpleasant and harmful, and yet occur even though we don't want them. The reason for this is our lack of knowledge of the dream-self which has been allowed to develop like a tribal or an outlaw. However, through meditation it is possible to create pockets of awareness in the dream world which will protect us from bad dreams. It is even possible to contact the dream-self through meditation and change the whole dreaming pattern in due course.

The second type of dreaming is day-dreaming, fantasy, *manorājya*. Unlike the first, this type is not totally cut off from the waking-state. The day-dreamer is still his waking self, but not his actual ego but an imaginary ego with which he identifies himself so completely that for a time he forgets the real world and dwells in the fantasy world. Human energy instead of being utilized in practical life is wasted in futile imagination.

However, day-dreaming is an expression of the deep-seated urge of the ego to transcend its present limitations and achieve glory. Meditation acts as a check on day-dreaming and, when through long practice of meditation one realizes the luminous glory of the true Atman, this persistent habit completely vanishes.

The third type of dreaming is leading a forgetful, mechanical life identifying oneself wholly with the real objects (which distinguishes it from day-dreaming) of the world. In other words, it is a life without self-awareness. This kind of somnambulistic existence, which characterizes the lives of the majority of mankind, deprives a person of self-mastery, and converts him into a machine controlled by the blind forces of nature. Most people do not live, they are driven—driven to eat, work, talk and sleep. Meditation is a struggle for consciousness. Through it man recovers his self-awareness, becomes a master of his own life, gets out of the unconscious drift, and leads a purposeful goal-oriented life.

Release of energy

There is a close connection between consciousness and psycho-physical energy. Meditation increases not only knowledge but also power. This increase in energy takes place in several ways. As the unconscious comes under greater control through meditation, a lot of energy, which had till then been wasted in repressing or suppressing lower thoughts and in day-dreaming and automatic activities, becomes available for higher life. Secondly, meditation unlocks some of the hidden chambers of the unconscious, activates the higher spiritual centres, and releases psychic and spiritual energies which the aspirant had never known before. There are special yogic techniques called *saṁnyama* for this, but even ordinary simple meditation is sufficiently effective.

The third way meditation releases energy is through sublimation. When the energy of lower instincts is conserved, purified and lifted to a higher level, it changes into a form of spiritual energy known as *ojas*. This *ojas* is actually a highly refined and luminous form of *Prāṇa*. Says Swami Vivekananda : 'All forces that are working in the body in their highest form become Ojas. You must remember that it is only a question of transformation ... The Yogis say that that part of the human energy which is expressed as sex energy in sexual thought, when checked and controlled, easily becomes changed into Ojas, and as the *Mūlādhāra* guides this, the Yogi pays particular attention to that centre. He tries to take up all his sexual energy and convert it into Ojas.'⁸ The mere observance of continence known as *Brahmacharya* only conserves the vital energy. This energy becomes *ojas* only when it is purified and raised to a higher level ; and meditation is the best way effecting this.

Apart from the release of energy, meditation strengthens the will by freeing it from the hold of instincts and then unifying its scattered powers through concentration. A pure strong will is a man's greatest asset.

Coupling of individual yoga with Divine Yoga

Creation, maintenance and dissolution of the universe are indeed the cosmic *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *saṁādhi* of the Yoga of God, worked out on an astronomical scale. The maintenance of the whole universe is a manifestation of the Yoga of Meditation of God. The mind-boggling fecundity, variety, intricacy and the inexhaustible power of life are only the splendours (*vibhūti*) of the Divine Yoga. This being so, man's spiritual struggle, the human yoga, is only an

8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977) vol. 1, p. 170.

infinitesimally small fraction of the mighty universal Yoga of the Divine. But owing to egoism and ignorance many spiritual aspirants forget this truth. When separated from the universal forces of Divine Yoga, egoistic attempts at meditation become a laborious task, one more source of trouble and worry. When, however, individual yoga is coupled with Divine Yoga, it becomes a spontaneous, easy, quick and powerful means of transformation of life and consciousness.

How to achieve this coupling? Through self-surrender. Surrender is of two types. One is that done through fear. It is the fear of misfortune, disease, suffering and uncertainty of the future that makes most people turn to God in prayer and surrender. The other type of surrender is based on wisdom. The enlightened spiritual aspirant, understanding the integral nature of life, willingly and consciously surrenders every part of his personality to the corresponding cosmic part of universal life—individual body to the Virāt, individual Prāṇa to the cosmic Prāṇa, individual mind to the cosmic Mind, individual spirit to the cosmic Spirit. It is this yogic surrender that Patañjali calls *īśvara-praṇidhāna*, which he unhesitatingly declares to be a direct and quick means to superconscious realization.⁹

Yogic self-surrender is done through meditation. This topic cannot be discussed in detail here. It is enough to mention that the coupling of individual yoga with Divine Yoga through meditation needs repeated practice and that there are two ways of doing it. The aspirant should begin with the practice of intense prayer or devoted worship (either ritualistic worship or some kind of social service done as worship) in any way that is possible for him. Along with it, he should attempt to do meditation as best he can. Gradually, prayer and worship should be internalized, and he should

learn to look upon prayer as opening the heart to the inflow of divine grace (*prasāda*) and power (*śakti*), and to look upon worship as an interior *yajña* or oblation of the individual spirit into the divine Light. The third step is to merge both prayer and worship into meditation. Meditation then becomes a two-way channel of communion between the individual and the cosmic, and the aspirant's whole life becomes a part of Divine Yoga. Meditation converts the wheel of life into the 'wheel of yoga', impelled by the power of Divine Yoga.

Renewal of love

Love is the positive and reciprocal flow of consciousness-energy (*cit-śakti*) from one soul to another. When fear, hatred or misunderstanding produces a break in this current, tensions build up and life loses its joy, direction and meaning. Love is the most refreshing and invigorating power known to man. A person who is full of love experiences perpetual self-renewal spontaneously.

As Swami Vivekananda has said, human love when purified and directed towards a personal God becomes Bhakti. The main problem is how to direct love towards an unknown Being and how to keep the flow unbroken. Prayer and worship solve this problem only partially. Meditation alone can do this perfectly. Meditation directs life-energies to the centre of the Atman, the very place where God dwells as the Paramātmā, the Supreme Self. Secondly, meditation being the unbroken flow of a single thought, is the only way to maintain love of God unbroken. When through long practice a person succeeds in maintaining constant meditative awareness as an undercurrent in his soul, he experiences the perennial self-renewing power of divine love.

Awakening of the Self

The true and irreversible renewal of personality is the result of the awakening of

9. Cf. Patañjali's *Yoga-Sūtra* 1.23; 2.45.

the Self, which is the direct and most important function of meditation. Spiritual awakening has been described in different ways in the scriptures. But it invariably means a two-fold experience : the realization of the self-luminous Atman as the true

centre of one's consciousness, and the contact with a vaster state of existence. With this experience, the aspirant feels that his human life is coming to an end and a new Divine Life has begun.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S MESSAGE TO THE WEST

ROBERT P. UTTER

(Continued from the previous issue)

The Message

Though the Orient is symbolized by the transcendental peace of the Buddha, and though Swamiji was every inch the Buddha in his physical appearance, his serene face, his long and deep meditations, his keen mind, his insight into human nature, his boundless compassion, and his attainment of the highest nirvana or samadhi, he came to the West also as a warrior monk, ready to do battle for the greatness of the Vedanta philosophy against the scepticism and narrow-mindedness of the West. Like another great predecessor of his, Sri Krishna, he did battle against the demons of ignorance and prejudice, and slew them right and left wherever he met them. Swamiji came to conquer, and conquer the West he did, winning it for the establishment of the cultivation of Vedantic ideas from London to San Francisco.

Swamiji's first salvo of shots in this conquest of the West was fired in the very first small handful of speeches he made before the Parliament of Religions at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1893. Few and short as these speeches were, they yet laid down the essence of his whole message to the West. All the rest of his lectures and talks and books simply expanded upon and

added details to the basic framework he laid down at the Parliament of Religions.

On the 11th of September, 1893, he made his first speech at the Parliament. Though this was not his first talk in the United States, it was, as Marie Louise Burke makes clear in *New Discoveries*, his first truly public lecture to a large, unselected audience.⁹ That first day, as he sat on the platform before the huge crowd among the many other distinguished delegates representing all the major religions of the world, he felt very alone, and very nervous. This was a new experience for him. He kept postponing his address, but finally he could do so no longer. So he rose, and looked over the whole, huge sea of faces outspread before him, and in that moment something happened, as if a vast floodgate suddenly opened, and he was inundated by the ocean of the Divine Self manifested in the crowd of people, and he spontaneously addressed them with the words : 'Sisters and Brothers of America!' And in that instant the electric contact was made, and it was as if a bolt of lightning had shot between them, for the whole crowd rose as one man and cheered him for several minutes. He had

9. Marie Louise Burke, *New Discoveries*, 2nd Ed., (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1966) pp. 15-48.

hardly said anything, yet he had already conquered their hearts.

Then the crowd hushed, and the words came, like rain falling drop by drop, faster and faster, on the parched earth.

It was a brief talk, but it opened hearts deep-buried under long ice-ages of griefs and fears and prejudices. He gave two quotations from Hindu scriptures which revealed what few if any in the audience then knew, that religion is not for the purpose of destroying other men's beliefs, but for the purpose of finding the infinite divine unity underlying all apparent religious differences. He went on to say, 'Sectarianism, bigotry, and ... fanaticism ... have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it ... with ... blood, destroyed civilizations. ... But their time has come; and I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honour of this convention may be the death-knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions ..., and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.'¹⁰ He thus sounded the main theme of his message: the unity of religions. This was the theme of his second talk, too, a little parable about a frog in a well who met a frog from the sea and who couldn't believe the sea was bigger than his well, an apt symbol for religious and cultural bigotry. The third lecture, however, was much longer, and laid down a magnificent, systematic groundwork for his whole message, and it is here that we get to the essentials.

This lecture was given on the 19th of September, and it began by reminding the audience of what he had already said, that Hinduism is a vigorous and all-inclusive religion that has absorbed and assimilated all the separate sects that have existed in India from time immemorial. This must

certainly have been a new idea for his listeners, most of whom probably looked upon India as a land of competing sects and many jealous gods which were worshipped in the form of what the West called 'idols'. To dispel these ideas, Swamiji said, 'From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion.'¹¹ He have used the Western term 'idolatry', though later he was to condemn its use and deny there is any such thing as idolatry anywhere, but here he used it probably because he knew his listeners would understand no other word, and at this point he could not go into details. But the main idea he introduced here was that there need be no conflict among apparently conflicting religious beliefs. He also introduced the idea that there is no conflict between Hinduism and science, because he knew that the conflict in the West between religion and science was one of the main issues of the day, a conflict which must be resolved, but could not be except on the basis of an all-inclusiveness such as that exhibited by Hinduism.

He then said that Hinduism is based on the revelations of the Vedas, an idea that sounds like the Christian belief in the Bible as divine revelation, but he went on to say that the Vedas are not a book but are immutable spiritual laws like the laws discovered by Western science. Here he is illustrating the meaning of divine laws revealed to the mystics by the Western belief in the universal and timeless laws discovered by science. Note that he is not repudiating or belittling science, but rather is using it to show that science and religion are harmonious in that both are engaged in

¹⁰. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965) vol. 1, p. 4.

¹¹. *ibid*, p. 6.

the discovery of immutable laws that exist beyond time and space. This was an appeal to the scientific West to accept Oriental religion on the same basis as it accepted science: experimental proof. Thus in one deft stroke he destroyed the Western idea that science and religion are necessarily at war with one another. And by introducing the idea that the Vedas are not a book but are the revelations of eternal truths, he made a distinction hitherto unknown in the West between mere book-worship, which is bigotry, and the acceptance of a higher mystical revelation of truth which is completely beyond all words and books and is open to all who truly seek it. When words are spun on the wheel of the Eternal, they blaze on the skies of the mortal mind as more than words. They shine with a beauty which is truth. Thus was the Western belief in the Bible as revelation at once accepted and enlarged to infinity and taken out of all sectarian bigotry, for such an interpretation opens the doors to the acceptance of all religions as equally revelations of eternal divine truths.

He then said that the discoverers of these laws in ancient times were the Rsis, the seers, the mystics, and that some of the greatest of these were women. Thus did he at once strike a blow for the equality of women in spiritual life and show that revelation means the mystical experience. He went on to say that in Hinduism creation is considered to have no beginning and no end, but is an eternal process. This statement was a decided blow against the Western belief that the world was created once and once only at a particular time in history, a problem wrestled with by Christian theologians since at least the time of Augustine. Swamiji opened up this insoluble paradox of how God who is eternal could have created the world at a particular time, by saying that according to Hinduism creation is cyclic and never begins or ends, but, from the point of view of time, con-

tinues like a revolving wheel forever, with its *kalpas* or aeons forever succeeding one another. Time is thus shown as one with eternity, as eternity perceived in bits, as it were, not something separate from it. In all this Swamiji is not really refuting Western beliefs but enlarging them to infinity.

He then said that the human being is not the body but the spirit, a statement that agrees with the Christian teaching, a teaching which was all but forgotten under the avalanche of materialism that was burying the West. He went on to say that the soul is immortal, which means, according to Hinduism, that the soul is not only deathless but birthless as well. This destroys the barriers erected by Western orthodoxy against the prenatal eternality of the soul, thus giving the soul an all-dimensional immortality instead of a one-way immortality as does the traditional Western view which says that the soul is created by God at the conception of the body.

Then he solved another problem, the problem of why God seems to create some people happy and others miserable. Swamiji said that we cannot say that God does anything so arbitrary, that the inequalities in happiness and misery are due to our past actions in former lives, and that the soul, being immortal backwards in time as well as forwards, has been incarnated in various bodies for many lives in the past, and that its past actions, performed under the veil of ignorance of its infinite and perfect nature, are what produce in the present life the effects of happiness and misery. The soul alone produces its own sufferings and joys; it alone creates its own fate. So was the West introduced to the idea of karma and reincarnation, so important in Eastern religions, so long discredited and forgotten in the West. Heredity, the Western scientific explanation of many individual differences, Swamiji said, could only be applied to bodily differences, not to differences of character and personality, mental

differences. We create our own minds, he said, since they are formed by what we have done in the past. He disposed of the question of why we can't remember our past lives by calling attention to the fact that we also forget much of our present life too. Our conscious mind forgets, but there is a deeper mind where all our memories are stored, and these memories can be evoked by the right means. There are some people, he said, who do remember their past lives, or some fragments of them. Thus in a few deft words he placed before the West the whole theory of reincarnation as a major psychological, philosophical, moral, and religious theory and experience.

Then he went on to say that the soul is infinite, perfect, and all-knowing, and compared it to a circle whose circumference is nowhere but whose centre is the body, reincarnation being simply the moving from one centre to another. Why does such a perfect soul ever think it is imperfect? he asks. He replies that we do not know, that Hinduism makes no attempt to answer this question. The idea that some questions are unanswerable was then and still is, to many Westerners, too appalling to admit, because Western man has, from Greek times to the present, arrogantly assumed that reason could know everything (Zeno having long since been conveniently forgotten). Thus did he deal a blow to the rationalistic bias of the West, though not to the spiritual use of reason, as we shall see.

Yet he repeats the question, rephrasing it slightly, for it is an insistent one: How can the perfect soul be deluded? How can we be anything but soul, and how can soul be anything but perfect? An entirely new approach to the whole problem of selfhood is thus opened up. For centuries the West had writhed under the accusations of sin by which religion flagellated the people. Now Swamiji was saying that the soul is perfect. This was an idea the West had not heard since the days of Plato and Plotinus; it

had long since lain buried under the rubble of collapsed civilizations, and now Swamiji brought it forth as vital and fresh as a new-born babe, a spring-born lamb, from the East, where it had never died. The mystery of human life is deeper than the West had dreamed, and Swamiji put it before us. We go up and down, he says, 'a powerless, helpless wreck on an ever-raging current of cause and effect Is there no hope? Is there no escape?' Here Swamiji's dispassionate reasoning gives place to impassioned poetry and high drama. In presenting this picture he first gives the materialistic view of man as but a cork on the waves of an impersonal, nonconscious matter. He seems almost to be agreeing with it; the law of karma seems to be a cause and effect vortex from which there is no escape. All this is but prelude to one of his highest flights of poetry and truth. He says: '(This cry) reached the throne of mercy, and words of hope and consolation came down and inspired a Vedic sage, and he stood up before the world and in trumpet voice proclaimed the glad tidings: "Hear ye, children of immortal bliss! even ye that reside in the higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again."' Swamiji continues, "'Children of immortal bliss"—what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name—heirs of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call man so.'¹²

This outwelling of ecstatic love for all mankind as manifestations of perfect divine being struck at the outward form of Western religion which was primarily concerned with sin and its punishment and had little to say about bliss, and it exploded a large portion of the stern fortress wall of the Western obsession with sin and witch-hunting that had

¹². *ibid*, pp. 10-11.

turned much religion in the West into a grim and sadistic affair. For the first time in centuries the West was told by someone who saw it with his own spiritual eyes that the soul is perfect and divine.

One might think that the lecture would end on this high note, but Swamiji had much more to say, all of it extremely relevant. He said that the Vedas did not teach a wrathful and unforgiving God but rather a God of all-pervading power and love, the formless One, yet at the same time the Father, Mother, Friend, and the Beloved Who is dearer than all, Who is to be loved without bargaining or self-seeking. He said the Vedas teach the essential divinity of the soul though it is held in bondage by matter, but this bondage can be broken through the mercy of God, and this mercy comes only as a result of the soul's having purified itself. Purity of heart, he says, evokes the mercy of God and leads to God-realization. He says that the Hindu wants God right now in this life, not in some vague future time after the death of the body. For the Hindu, he says, religion is not a matter of formalized creeds but is the actual experiencing of God here and now by the pure soul. When a man realizes God, he says, he lives a life of infinite bliss and perfection. Perfection for the Hindu means oneness with God. Swamiji thus combined the paths of Jñāna and Bhakti with exquisite finesse and brevity in this first major lecture to the West. And he added the point he later repeated many times in different ways, that oneness with God through knowledge and love is not a loss of individuality but is rather the shedding of the false individuality and the gaining of the only true individuality there is, the Infinite Self.

He made two more important points before he closed. The first was about science. He used the West's intensive involvement in the development of science to show how the Infinite alone is the true individuality and the true reality. He said that science

reveals that matter is one unbroken ocean, and that the so-called individual body is a delusion. What I call 'my' body is simply a wave or a bubble in that ocean; through it flows the whole material universe. It has no real boundaries. So the soul has no real boundaries either. Then he made the point he later expanded upon many times. Science, he said, is the search for unity by sorting out particulars into classes, and smaller classes into larger classes. So science consists in the search for and the finding of unity. But why stop before ultimate unity is reached? he asks. Religion is the search for ultimate unity or God, so religion is simply the science of sciences. Thus at one stroke Swamiji destroyed the separating ramparts reared in the West between science and religion. He did not say to stop being scientific. Instead, he said to carry science to its logical conclusion and reach the final unity of all, the Absolute One, which is the goal of all sciences and all religions. Thus, not only are all religions one, but science and religion as well are one, according to Swamiji, in the sense that all sciences and all religions are seeking the same goal, and in the sense that that goal can be found, Absolute Unity. Since Swamiji spoke these words in 1893, modern scientists in their search for unity have produced results that bear out the mystical view of the final unity of all beings. Einstein's Relativity Theory and his Unified Field Theory¹³ broke down many barriers of beliefs that had previously appeared to separate various phenomena that are not really separate. Fritjof Capra, professor of physics at the University of California at Berkeley, has shown the harmony he believes exists between Eastern religions and modern physics in his book *The Tao of Physics*. In an article of the same title published in the *Prabuddha Bharata* magazine of March, 1979, Dr.

13. See Lincoln Barnett, *The Universe and Dr. Einstein* (New York: Mentor, 1950).

Capra summarizes his views. Thus we can see that science, using scientific methods, is getting closer and closer to the universal unity behind phenomena as it was urged to do by Swamiji in 1893.

The second important point he made was about idolatry. He discussed not the word but the idea. He showed why image worship is necessary as a preliminary step on the spiritual path. He said that God cannot be expressed in images, words, or ideas; being formless He is beyond all relative things. But that doesn't mean that all images, words, or ideas are wrong. 'Would it be right,' he asked 'for an old man to say that childhood is a sin?'¹⁴ Thus did he show that it is no sin to worship God through images. It is a stage on the path, that is all, a stage that must be used and transcended. He said that Hinduism recognizes nature's plan of unity in variety; that is, Hinduism is universal and accepts all forms of religion if practised with sincerity. He quoted Kṛṣṇa as saying, 'I am in every religion as the thread through the string of pearls,' and pointed out that Hinduism admits Buddhism and Jainism that do not believe in God. What a tumbling of walls was there! To the cradle Western mind atheism could not have been considered a religion at all, yet here is Swamiji saying that Hinduism includes even atheism in its pantheon of religions.

Now this is the essence of his message to the West, this his first major lecture in the West, at the Parliament of Religions. Whatever he said after that was an expansion of these points. The only subjects he did not introduce in this lecture were the paths of Karma Yoga and Rāja Yoga. These two paths he lectured on extensively later and wrote out painstakingly in book form, showing that he considered them just as important as the other two paths of Jñāna Yoga and Bhakti Yoga. He thus intro-

duced Advaita Vedānta, the immortality of the soul and the oneness of the soul with God, the essential infinitude, eternality, and perfection of the soul, the law of Karma and reincarnation as applied to the apparent self, and the truth that religion and science are not really opposed to one another but are actually seeking the same goal, absolute unity. He also wanted the West to know that sin should not be the chief preoccupation of religion, but he cautioned here that Hinduism is not indifferent to immorality since it teaches that the mercy of God in granting illumination to the soul depends upon the purity of heart in the apparent self. And, instead of urging the West to give up reason, science, and philosophy, he urged it to develop these studies much more thoroughly than it had yet done and to apply scientific methods to religion to find ultimate unity. Above all, he urged the West not to be content with mere verbal theories about God but to translate theories into practice and actually realize God in experience here and now.

In developing later his teachings on Karma Yoga and Rāja Yoga, he brought out the fact that he was urging the active, practical, scientific West to be active, practical, and scientific about religion and treat religion like a science in order to produce practical results in experience by following the rules of practice laid down by the experts, the *ṛṣis*. The path of Rāja Yoga is a series of techniques which if followed correctly will produce certain specific results in spiritual experience inevitably, just like any experiment in science. He was not suggesting irresponsible tampering with higher experiences, any more than scientists teach irresponsibility in the handling of chemicals, but rather he taught an exact, scientific approach which uses specific means to produce specific results.

Thus God can be reached by experience, says Swamiji. Consciousness can be altered, raised, and redirected away from the senses

¹⁴. *The Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 17.

and the mind toward God, not by drugs but by the four yogas. Kant was absolutely right except that he did not go far enough. The senses and the mind are but forms superimposed upon the 'thing-in-itself', and we know things through the forms of the senses and the mind, but this is not true knowledge. Kant was wrong, says Swamiji, in saying that neither the thing-in-itself nor the soul nor God can be known; they are one and the same all-embracing, infinite non-duality which is what each one of us is and which can be known through identity, not through separative, objective knowledge which is not knowledge at all. The veil of ignorance hiding reality can be pierced, not by the senses, not by reason, not by the two together, but by consciousness raised above the senses and the mind so that it cuts the veil like a sword of light and dispels all darkness. Consciousness is independent of the forms of the senses and the mind, and when it is freed from these, and from the desires for these forms, it can soar into the infinite, its proper home. The four yogas together give us the means to accomplish this.

All the rest of his teachings to the West developed the details of the four yogas into one yoga. He thus blew up the roadblock that had obstructed Kant, for, as it turned out, Kant, the forgotten Kant, was, or is, in reality, ourselves, each one of us, and all his bumbling doubts and hesitations are ours, and it is we ourselves, all of us Western Kantians, who need the courage to pierce the veil of scepticism we have interposed between ourselves and reality and to see that reality as our very own inmost Self. Swamiji gave us the power, which is, after all, courage, to realize this. He came to the West and bridged the gap of centuries, a gap that was not so much geographical as mental, and completed the world circle, and thus became the encircling World Serpent, the Serpent with its tail in its mouth, the *kundalinī* power awakened and united with

itself, the ring symbol of immortality, of Eternal Life. The emblem which we see on every Advaita Ashrama publication symbolizing the unity of the four yogas was devised by Swamiji himself, and it embodies the essence of his message to the whole world. It is magic talisman for our infinite meditation.

What did Swamiji himself say about his work? Two quotations from his letters are of great interest. In one he says: 'To put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry Philosophy and intricate Mythology and queer startling Psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, and popular and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds—is a task which only those can understand who have attempted it. The abstract Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life; out of hopelessly intricate Mythology must come some concrete moral forms; and out of bewildering Yogism must come the most scientific and practical Psychology—and all this must be put into a form a child can grasp. This is my life's work.'¹⁵ In the other letter he says: 'All religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, the Dvaita, the Viśiṣṭādvaita, and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are three stages of spiritual growth in man. Everyone is necessary.' He then goes on to show how every major world religion can be classified under one or another of these three stages of Vedanta.¹⁶ The popularization of Hinduism without watering it down, and the teaching of Vedanta as the comprehensive unity of all outward form of religion, as the Mother of all particular religions—these are the important aspects of his work, not only in the West, but in the whole world, according to Swamiji himself.

15. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1960) p. 392.

16. *ibid*, p. 345.

Above all, Swamiji taught renunciation and self-sacrifice. He laid before the West a plea for the sacrificial life in words of eloquence such as had never before been spoken by anyone. Speaking from his own personal experiences as a wandering monk all over India, in the towns, villages, and jungles, he said: 'As a result of this intense, all-absorbing love comes the feeling of perfect self-surrender, the conviction that nothing that happens is against us. Then the loving soul is able to say, if pain comes, "Welcome pain." ... If a serpent comes, it will say, "Welcome serpent." The Bhakti in this state of perfect resignation, arising out of intense love for God ... ceases to distinguish between pleasure and pain in so far as they affect him. ... Why should our body be saved, say from a tiger? The tiger will thereby be pleased, and that is not altogether so very far from self-sacrifice and worship. Can you reach the realization of such an idea in which all sense of self is completely lost? It is a very dizzy height on the pinnacle of the religion of love, and few of this world have ever climbed to it.... Blessed are they whose bodies get destroyed in the service of others.'¹⁷ He himself was the best example of this ideal; he laid down his body in the service of mankind as a whole, but especially in the service of the West, for he spent his best years in the West and spared no effort to bring to it the whole message of Vedanta as taught by his Master, Sri Ramakrishna.

We are here today to remember him and think about him, and especially to think about his impact upon our lives. I ask you to consider this: if he had not been born, where would we be today? What would we be today? If he had not been born, this Temple would not have been built, and this gathering would not have been held. We cannot begin to comprehend the extent of his influence upon us. He himself was

overheard to say, on the last day of his life, 'Only another Vivekananda could understand what Vivekananda has done.'¹⁸ This thought explodes the mind. The finite mind cannot hold the Infinite. Swamiji was that very explosion itself. He made the commonplace world no longer commonplace. He revealed that the streets we walk on are not stone but the very living flesh of God, that the air we breathe is the very breath of the Eternal, that the sunlight is the immortal fire of divine knowledge and vision, that the trees that line the street are all divinities who salute us as we pass, that all the people who walk the streets are divinities we have the opportunity of serving.

The essence of Swamiji's message to the whole world can be summed up in one word: Advaita, non-duality. Not oneness, unity, a bringing together of diverse and separate elements into one homogeneous whole, but rather the opposite principle, the expansion of the finite into infinity. The Infinite is beyond all limited experience, as space is beyond the atmosphere, but yet it is *here* and *now* with no there or then. It is a lightning flash of vision with no limits of any kind.

That is his message, his message to the world, East and West. Whether he was immersed in the Mother, in Śiva, or in Nirguṇa Brahman, his message was always essentially the same: the total dissolution of the many into the Infinite, dualism and qualified non-dualism being way-stations on the path to the unqualified non-dual Infinite. His message to the West was simply the particular way he expressed this ascent into the non-dual so as to meet the special needs of the West. He was a Pilgrim from the Eternal who wandered for a time on the shores of our relative world, bringing us a message from that Infinite Sea, stirring us to remember our ancient divine heritage, and then returning to the Infinite once more.

17. *The Complete Works*, 1964, vol. 3, pp. 82-3.

18. *The Life*, p. 749.

He was himself his own greatest message. He taught us of the West by his own example how to live in our own mechanized society. He meditated in street-cars, in trains, in railway stations, on lecture platforms, and in doing so showed us how to be yogis in the world of daily affairs. He rekindled in the West the flame of God-knowledge. He brought the guru-power in his own person, and in the persons of all the Ramakrishna swamis who have followed, so that now here in the West we have that flame burning that has descended in unbroken succession from Vedic times down to the present. His person is like the ocean, at once powerful, illimitable, sublime, terrifying, and peaceful. The ocean has the power to send a strong ship to the

bottom in one blow. But it also is the tender, gentle, all-sustaining nurse and mother, sweet, refreshing, and ineffably beautiful. In the sigh of the smallest wave one can hear the whisper of infinitude. In Swamiji, as in Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother, the Fatherhood and Motherhood of God are ceaselessly and endlessly manifested, so much so that even we who never saw him in the flesh, in this life at least, can never forget him, nor ever cease to think on him day or night, for we have come under his holy spell, where we shall remain—forever.

Our gratitude to him for coming here and giving himself to us, and to all the swamis who carry his flame from the East to the West, is illimitable.

(Concluded)

The Lamps that Vivekananda Lighted

SWAMI ATMANANDA

SWAMI MUKTINATHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Shukul Maharaj started taking scriptural classes in Sambalpur also. The *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, the Gita and the Upanishads were regularly read and discussed. His brilliant expositions and keen insight revealed fresh meanings of the passages and created a great interest among the listeners. Usually someone would read the scriptures and he would speak a few words in between, by way of explanation. He had a wonderful capacity to communicate the maximum meaning through a minimum of words. He held the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* to be the Veda of the modern age and the works

of Swamiji to be the commentaries on that Veda. He said, 'The Vedas cannot be understood without studying the commentaries. Hence the truths contained in the *Gospel* can be grasped only when it is read with the help of the commentary provided by Swamiji in his works.'³¹ Once he asked a devout gentleman, 'How do you spend your time apart from your duties at your office and home?' The devotee humbly replied, 'I read a little from the *Gospel*.' He again interrogated, 'Have you read any of Swamiji's books?' On hearing

³¹. *Swamijir Padaprānte*, p. 160.

a negative answer he became quite excited and said, 'Without reading Swamiji's works, without understanding his message, what will you understand by studying the *Gospel*?' On another occasion the reading from the *Gospel* was going on. Atmananda was deeply absorbed. Even after the reading was over he remained quiet for a long time and then spoke gently :

Only those who have attained the state of a Paramahansa (an exalted stage of realization) can truly understand the words of the Master recorded in the *Gospel*. Only the *mumukṣus* (seekers of liberation) can translate his words into life. After listening to the readings from the *Gospel* many people say, 'The Master has spoken this very well; ah! how dear are these words to our heart!' But where are the persons who can follow his advice in this life? You see, I am telling you the truth: to understand the words of the Master it is extremely essential to study the life and the message of Swamiji, keep the company of holy men, and perform spiritual practices. One has to understand Swamiji first if one wishes to understand the Master. All the elements needed to build the spiritual life of the modern man are given in the works of Swamiji.³²

Atmananda laid special emphasis on the mode of reading the scriptures. He used to say, 'If the scriptures are read with proper rites, sitting on a separate seat and with concentration, they will leave a deeper impression on the mind. The full merit of reading the scriptures cannot be obtained unless one follows the purificatory rules like taking a bath, changing one's clothes after going to the toilet, not to read holy books sitting on the bed in an impure mood.'³³ He gave more importance to the attitude rather than to the style of reading. One day a highly educated gentleman was reading from a book of Swami Vivekananda. His style of reading in English was quite admirable, though he was not so much careful about the purport. When the gentle-

man left, Shukul Maharaj told a devotee, 'Mr.— has spoilt today's reading. You should come earlier to take your seat and commence the reading. Can anyone properly read these books unless one is imbued with a spirit of devotion for the Master and Swamiji? What is the use of merely getting a bunch of degrees or knowing English? The main thing is the right spirit.'³⁴

Atmananda had a very tender heart. His love would flow to all beings without any distinction and reservation. On one summer noon he was taking rest in his room. An unknown coolie, too tired to carry his load farther in the scorching sun, entered the verandah adjoining Atmananda's room seeking temporary shelter. Atmananda immediately came out of his room and seeing the exhausted poor man exclaimed with grief, 'Ah, must a human being be made to work so much!' Then he brought a hand fan and sat beside the stranger to fan him. Much embarrassed, the porter tried to dissuade the Swami, but to no effect. Atmananda kept on fanning the man till all his sweat was dried and he felt refreshed. Such touching scenes were not uncommon in the life of this loving monk.³⁵

Though soft-hearted by nature, Atmananda could be stern if necessary. He could not tolerate any falsehood, hypocrisy or cowardice. Whenever he encountered such weaknesses he roared like thunder. Once several influential citizens of Sambalpur including a few high-ranking officers met in their rendezvous and, owing to their ignorance, passed some derogatory and vulgar remarks against the order of *samnyasa* and the Sannyasins. A gentleman who was present there reported this to Atmananda who at once asked him back, 'Since you visit this place quite frequently, you knew the facts. Why didn't you protest against these false allegations and give them the

32. *ibid*, p. 160-61.

33. *Udbodhan*, 1356 B.S., p. 433.

34. *Padaprānte*, p. 160.

35. *ibid*, p. 164.

right picture?' The gentleman humbly apprised, 'All of them attacked me in such a way that I could not tackle them.' 'Just now you go to them,' retorted Atmananda excitedly, 'and tell them about me. If they have courage, let them invite me and ask any question in a gentlemanly manner. If they lack the courage, I am inviting them here. Let them tell me whatever they have got to say. I am a child of Swamiji, I shall teach them by catching hold of their throats like a bulldog.' He further added. 'Cowards as they are, do they have the guts to stand before me face to face?' The gentleman repeated these bold words to the persons concerned who became startled and declined to meet Atmananda. On coming to know of this the Swami commented, 'You see, perhaps one of them is a lawyer, another a magistrate, their backbones are crushed by serving the English. They are terrors to the poor and sycophants to the mighty.... What more can be expected from them. Alas, what an accursed fate has befallen our country!'³⁶

A similar incident is narrated here to illustrate Atmananda's abhorrence of falsehood. Once a meeting was arranged in Sambalpur to celebrate the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna. A certain speaker related some unreal incidents in the life of Swami Vivekananda in order to demonstrate his familiarity with Swamiji. A distinguished devotee was present in that meeting. Afterwards he came to Atmananda and criticized the speaker for his false statement. Atmananda scolded the devotee sternly, 'The Master has sent you here to do his work, and not to flatter this or that person. Your main duty is to propagate his message in this remote place. To remain a witness to untruth and injustice is equal to telling a lie and acting improperly. You have only shown your cowardice by

not protesting against the false utterances of Mr.—.'³⁷

After about two and a half years' stay in Sambalpur Atmananda's health was sufficiently recuperated, and so he came back to Belur Math in 1919. The next year he was asked to take charge of the Ashrama at Dacca (now the capital of Bangla Desh). On the eve of his departure to Dacca Swami Shivananda (Mahapurush Maharaj) wrote a personal letter to Sri Thakur Charan Mukhopadhyaya, the then Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission, Dacca. He introduced Atmananda thus: 'One of the favourite disciples of Swamiji Maharaj, a man of great renunciation, a great devotee, a great ascetic and a senior monk of the Order, Atmananda is coming to your place. By his presence that region will be blessed with boundless good fortune. Know that Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) too holds a high opinion about Shukul Maharaj.'³⁸ Atmananda's life in Dacca proved the above statements to be true to the letter.

The special feature of Atmananda's life at the Dacca Math was his abiding interest in training the young inmates. Through scriptural classes, intimate conversations, alert observations, and above all through his own life, he tried to impress upon their young minds the stamp of spirituality permanently. He used to get up before dawn and sit quietly on his bed after finishing his ablution within a remarkably short time. He would say, 'One should not spend much time for bath and other physical needs, for it is difficult to remember God while engaged in them.'³⁹ He would go to the shrine every morning and offer his obeisance there. After that he would take a brisk walk in the Math ground. Parched rice was his favourite breakfast. After finishing his bath he would burn incense in his room, perform

³⁷. *ibid*, p. 166.

³⁸. *Udbodhan*, Bhādra 1356 B.S. p. 528.

³⁹. *ibid*, p. 430.

³⁶. *ibid*, p. 165.

japa and chant a few prayers from the *Candī*. He would spend a long time quietly sitting on his cot. Then his countenance assumed such a brilliance and tranquility that none dared to approach him. In the afternoon he would sit somewhere in the open ground of the Math and explain the message of Swamiji to a group of Brahma-charins and young men. In the evening he would meditate in his room. Thus we find that in Dacca he did not participate in many activities of the Ashrama, rather he lived a quiet life of study and meditation. Once when a monk came from Dacca to Belur Math, Swami Brahmananda asked him, 'Hello, how is Shukul? What does he do?' The monk frankly replied, 'He is well, but he does not do any work.' Hearing this Brahmanandaji remarked emphatically, 'If he merely sits, it will be more than doing any work.'⁴⁰ Indeed, Atmananda had attuned his life to the Divine in such a way that his very presence created an elevating and tranquil atmosphere in the whole Ashrama.

Like the true Sannyasin that he was, he would keep only a minimum number of clothes and other personal effects with him. Usually he kept only one shirt, two pieces of loin cloth, two *dhotis* and one vest. With this sparse outfit and no money he travelled in his earlier days to Hrishikesh, Badrinath and many other places of pilgrimage in the Himalayas. He used to say with deep conviction, 'If a monk is solely dependent on God, he will never be in want of money.' Occasionally he used to pack up all his belongings and, tying them at the end of a stick, would check whether he could, if necessary, carry his own luggage himself.

He used to keep his things very nicely arranged. Even a broom was to be very carefully placed in its own particular corner. His motto was : 'Everything must be in its proper place.' Regarding the importance of keeping things in order he said, 'It

is a sign of control over one's mind. Those who are haphazard externally, are so internally also. A good artist can become a good monk. An artist must have concentration of mind without which spiritual practice is impossible.'⁴¹

Shukul Maharaj used to emphasize that not even a moment of one's precious life should be wasted. He would say, 'Make a routine and follow it strictly. Of course, sometime should be provided for talking after the meals or for walking in the afternoon.' He strongly disapproved gossip. Addressing the inmates of Dacca Math, he once said, 'Gossip is the greatest enemy of life. Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) used to say, "Gossip ruins a man." Therefore beware of it. If you have no work, you might as well sleep in your room but do not indulge in gossip. If someone comes to you to gab, start reading a book. You will find that the intruder will soon go away; thereafter he won't come anymore.' Sometimes he would ask jocosely, 'Do you know how many types of exercise are there?' 'Two types : physical and mental,' would be the usual reply. 'No,' Atmananda would add, 'There is a third variety, namely vocal exercise ! Useless chatter is merely an exercise.'

On noticing the inmates of the Ashrama wasting their time in gossiping at the bathing ghat, leisurely applying oil on their bodies and so on, he reprimanded them, 'You cannot attain the goal if you waste your time like this. Your time should be spent in holy thought or selfless action. Practise meditation and japa, at least for a short time, regularly everyday. You have not seen God, have You? The Master, the Holy Mother and Swamiji—they are veritable gods. Pray to them.' On another occasion he said, 'How will you spend your days in old age when you won't have the capacity to do work? This is why it is

⁴⁰. *ibid.* p. 528.

⁴¹. *ibid.* p. 527.

necessary to form right now a few good habits like meditation, japa, reading the scriptures and holy discussion. If you waste your time now by gossiping, then in old age also you will have to do the same.' Regarding spiritual studies, he used to instruct the young inmates, 'Daily read a little from books on Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji, and from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*. After a few days you will see that much has been covered. Don't read other books now, not even the books of other religious denominations, until you are established in a definite spiritual mood.'⁴²

At the Dacca Math he made Swami Brahmeswarananda memorize the whole of Gita. Everyday the latter had to learn by heart five verses. Thus he memorized the first eleven chapters when the time came for Shukul Maharaj to leave Dacca. But before departure he advised the young monk, 'Never stop reading the Gita even for a single day. Go on memorizing five verses a day as you are doing now. Everyday go to the shrine and recite the verses before the Master.' The monk followed the advice and memorized the remaining seven chapters. Atmananda used to say, 'Every monk should learn the Gita by heart.'

He disliked the reading of newspapers by monastic inmates. If a monastic member brought the newspaper from the Math library to his room he would be annoyed. 'Unless we read the newspaper how shall we get the information about flood, famine and other calamities?', asked a young monk. 'Are you the head of the Ashrama?', was his counter-question. Then he said, 'The Superior who is in charge of your centre will gather all the information and instruct you accordingly; simply obey his orders. The goal of life is to realize God. For that purpose only the strict vows of Brahmacharya and Sannyasa are adopted. Therefore whatever stands in the way of

following these vows and whatever distracts the mind should be mercilessly abandoned.' For this same reason he would be displeased if he found the monastic inmates engaged in political discussions. He would advise them to avoid such discussions as these would disturb the mind and drag it down to worldliness. He would say, 'When one is unable to remove the undesirable impressions already existing in the head, why gather new impressions? It is not good for a monk to cherish such desires as "I shall see this," or "I shall know that," etc.'

He used to consider the work of the Ashrama equally important as the worship of the Master in the shrine. Once the inmates of the Ashrama started taking food before it was served to the patients of the Ashrama hospital. He reprimanded the inmates with a sad heart, 'How could you sit for food before feeding the Nārāyaṇas (gods)?' He used to see that even the work of teaching the students in the Mission school was conducted with due regard and attitude. He used to say, 'The quality of the first class aspirant is to be ready to serve the Master by gladly obeying the orders of the Superior without caring for his own personal taste, liking and inclination. The second class aspirant looks after his own comforts while carrying out the orders. Those who look after their comforts first belong to the lower class.'⁴³ In the field of work he liked to combine discipline with individual freedom. He used to say, 'The man who is made responsible to execute a work must be given sufficient freedom. If everyone starts meddling in it, how can he work?'

Atmananda encouraged the monks to express manliness in their deportment and conduct. He disliked womanish behaviour in men. He exhorted, 'If you want to progress along the path of spirituality, eradi-

^{42.} *ibid*, p. 530,

^{43.} *ibid*, p. 432,

cate all feminine attitude from your minds.' If any young monk was found seated timidly or walking lazily, he reproved him in a tone of annoyance, 'What is this? You should walk, talk and act like a brave soldier. Unless you have recourse to *rajoguna* (activity) you will sink into *tamas* (dullness).'

He used to point out to the young monks the special responsibilities of their lives, 'Do you know what is Sannyasa? It is to sacrifice the body for the good of the world, for the welfare of the people, by eating whose food you are maintaining your monastic life.'⁴⁴ Regarding doing good to others he would make a practical observation, 'Even if you cannot do good to others, never do any harm. All do not have the capacity or opportunity do good to others, but many get a chance to injure others.'⁴⁵

He was very particular about the conduct of every monk. He disliked unrestrained mixing of the monastic members with lay devotees and advised the former to always keep their distance. He would caution the monastic members, 'Don't remain in the town after dusk. The mind gets attached to worldliness after witnessing the attractive glamour and beauty of the city at night. Finish your work early and return to the Ashrama before evening. The *āsan* (prayer rug) protects the monk. While walking along the street don't look right or left out of curiosity Fix your gaze on your toe while walking.'⁴⁶

Many educated ladies of the city used to visit the Dacca Math in the evening. Atmananda would not converse with them at all. One of the monks of the Math then prayed to him, 'Many of these ladies help the Math financially, please speak a few words to them, otherwise they would be hurt.' Thereafter, as a duty, Shukul Maha-

raj started talking to the ladies, but only in the way of answering questions, if any.⁴⁷

Atmananda had deep devotion to the Holy Mother. However, only on rare occasions he would let out his emotions. Once while practising austerities in Bhuvaneshwar, he prepared *pāyas* (milk pudding) on the Mahāṣṭamī Day of the Durgā pūjā and, holding a cup of it before the picture of the Holy Mother, wept bitterly saying, 'Mother, you have made me a Sannyasi. How else can I worship you?'⁴⁸ A similar incident occurred in Dacca also. After the passing away of the Holy Mother her relics were sent to Dacca Ashrama for daily worship. On the day the relics were to arrive Atmananda became restless like a child awaiting the arrival of its mother. He instructed the kitchen staff, 'Don't cook rice beforehand. Keep the water boiling and put rice only after the Mother arrives so that she may be served a hot meal.' When the relics reached the Ashrama, he was overwhelmed with emotion. That day he fasted until the worship and the food offering to the Holy Mother were completed in the late afternoon.⁴⁹

Atmananda attained a high state of spirituality a glimpse of which others could obtain at rare moments. Once while explaining an aphorism of the *Brahma-Sūtra* his mind obviously rose to a very high level. Touching his head, he declared in public, 'By the grace of Swamiji something is here.' Once a monk directly asked him, 'Maharaj, have you seen God?' Atmananda laughed aloud like a child and humorously said, 'Had I seen at least a ghost, I could have claimed to have realized something.' But the next moment he became serious and added, 'You see, by the grace of Swamiji, my mind is free from desires.' On this topic he told another day, 'Visions of divine forms etc.

44. *Padaprānte*, p. 169.

45. *Udbodhan*, 1356 B.S., p. 433.

46. *ibid*, p. 431.

47. *ibid*, p. 532.

48. *Padaprānte*, p. 156.

49. *Udbodhan*, 1356 B.S., p. 529.

do not belong to very high stage of spirituality. Know that the world of realization is higher than that of the visions. Visions of forms etc. do not suit the nature of all aspirants.⁵⁰ He used to brush aside any question asked about visions, saying, 'I have received the grace of Swamiji, I have seen him. I do not hanker after any vision.'^{50a} However, he confided at least one of his experiences to his dear friend Shuddhananda who described it as follows :

One day he narrated to me a dream that he had seen (perhaps some years ago). He was floating, as it were, on the surface of the ocean, lying on the lap of the Mother. He then felt an unspeakable bliss—as if torrents of bliss were gushing up everywhere—and he lost all outward consciousness. As he came back to his senses after a long time, he found himself to be a little child, dancing in the arms of the Mother. I had never,' he said, 'the experience of *samādhi* in life. It may be that what I felt in dream was something like that covetable state.'⁵¹

In 1921, Atmananda's health again broke down as a result of an attack of dysentery. He resigned from the Presidentship of Dacca Math and came back to Belur Math. Then he went to Bhuvaneshwar and stayed at the Math there for a year, spending most of his time in contemplation and studies. He would rarely talk to anyone there.

In July 1922, at the demise of Swami Turiyananda the inmates of the Benares Ashrama felt a great void in their lives. Revered Swami Shivananda, the then President of the Order, decided to send Atmananda to Benares. Consequently Atmananda came back to Belur Math and set out for Benares in 1923. At the time of departure when Atmananda sought the blessings of Mahapurush Maharaj, the latter looked straight at him for a long time and then blessed him. Atmananda left the Math by a boat but noticed, to his surprise, that

Mahapurushji was still gazing at him from the first floor verandah of the Math building facing the Ganges. Therefore Atmananda too remained standing in the boat, offering salutations with folded palms as long as the Math was visible. This was his last visit to Belur Math and the last meeting with Mahapurush Maharaj.

Atmananda went to Udbodhan office also to take leave of Swami Saradananda who too blessed him heartily. On his way to Benares Atmananda visited Patna and stayed there for a few days. Many devotees from far and wide flocked to Patna to be blessed with his holy company.

At last Shukul Maharaj reached the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service, Benares, where he spent the last few months of his life. His arrival aroused a great joy and enthusiasm among the inmates of the Ashrama. Atmananda started taking classes on 'Inspired Talks', 'Rāja Yoga', 'Bhakti Yoga', 'Jñāna Yoga', 'Karma Yoga' and other works of Swami Vivekananda. As was his system, someone would read the passages and he would explain wherever necessary. If there was any mistake in reading, he would immediately point it out. Everyone was amazed to note that he remembered most of the passages verbatim. In the course of the reading, he would sometimes refer to some words which were not found in the text. However, on consulting earlier editions it invariably turned out that whatever he had said was correct. Besides his brilliant memory and deep insight, his pronunciation of English was very distinct and accurate. When he recited the poems of Swamiji, the whole place would appear as if vibrating with a spiritual current. He had a special fascination of the 'The Song of the Sannyasin'. He used to advise the novices, 'If you really want to be a monk, then from today meditate on each word of this poem.'⁵²

50. *Padaprānte*, p. 171.

50a. *ibid.* p. 171.

51. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1923 p. 436.

52. *Padaprānte*, p. 173.

Atmananda had a very high notion about the dramas of Girish Chandra Ghosh. He would read as well as take classes on those books. Some of his favourite books were : *Pūrṇacandra*, *Vilvamaṅgala*, *Kālāpāhār*, *Nasirām*, *Caitanya-Līlā*, *Nimāi-Sannyās*, *Pāṇḍav-Gourav* and *Rūpa-Sanātan*. About Girish Ghosh he said, 'Such a great poet was never before born. Most of his dramas were written in a deep spiritual mood. When he was under such a mood, he would go on reciting and two or three writers would take them down. He did not write himself. There is a little bit of philosophy in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. But a deep philosophical import lies hidden in every verse of Girish Babu's dramas. The more the message of the Master spreads, the more will people be able to understand and appreciate the books of Girish Ghosh. The world has not seen the like of him.'⁵³

Shukul Maharaj kept a watchful eye on the conduct of the monastic brothers at Benares also. If he found any anomaly he would not hesitate to take appropriate steps. Once an old monk told a lie. Hearing this Atmananda called the monk and admonished him severely, 'Work can transform even a monk into a hypocrite. Such a senior monk like you did not feel shy to tell the lie! If possible, give up work and spend a few days exclusively in divine contemplation.'⁵⁴

Although Atmananda enforced a strict code of discipline, he was considerate to weaker aspirants also. He would sympathetically hear their problems and guide them individually. One day a monk asked him, 'Swamiji has permitted us to take rest for two hours after the noon meal. Does "rest" here imply sleep?' Atmananda replied with a smile, 'Swamiji, for sure, did not formulate the rules for weaklings like

you. What will you do? If you can't help it, have a nap.'⁵⁵

Shukul Maharaj never rejected the affectionate gifts given by any devotee or monk, notwithstanding his strict vow of non-receiving any gift. He would gladly accept the presents but would at once send them to the general store of the Ashrama for the use of all. One day a devout Brahmacharin wished to serve him his favourite dish. For this purpose he handed over a small amount of money to the monk attending on the Swami. The dish was prepared and offered to Atmananda who was highly delighted. He repeatedly praised the preparation and lovingly enquired who had arranged for it. Out of the money given for this purpose there remained a credit balance of one anna! Atmananda advised the attendant to buy a photo of Swamiji with that small amount. When the photo was brought, he became happy like a child and carefully kept it near his pillow. The incident is a small one but it enables us to have a glimpse of the Swami's loving heart.⁵⁶

Atmananda gradually became very introspective towards the close of his life. Two months prior to his demise he told Swami Karunananda, 'Enough of play; come, let us again retreat to a secluded place by the side of the Ganges. I do not like the noise and company of people any more.'⁵⁷ He was then staying at the 'Ambika Dham' close to which was a thick bush in those days. By arranging a few bricks and stones under the fig tree he prepared a seat on which he would be found lost in meditation for long hours. When this 'secret seat' became known to others, he moved further deep towards north east corner of the hospital's Ward no. 10. Nobody dared to disturb him there as the place was infested with snakes. However, his intense contemplative mood inspired everybody to dive deep within.

⁵⁵. *Udbodhan*, 1356 B.S., p. 528.

⁵⁶. *Padaprānte*, p. 176.

⁵⁷. *Udbodhan*, 1356 B.S., p. 532.

⁵³. *Udbodhan*, 1356 B.S., p. 529.

⁵⁴. *Padaprānte*, p. 174.

Swami Shuddhananda arrived in Benares at this time. Atmananda was very happy to be once again in the company of his dear old friend. He opened his heart to Shuddhananda, 'I am sick of useless talks and discussions. How I wish to see worship, spiritual practices, bhajan, recitation of hymns etc. going on everywhere!' Sometimes he would observe, 'Incapable as I am, I cannot do any thing myself here. I do not therefore like the idea of being in an active centre. However, I am here in obedience to the dictates of Swami Shivanandaji. I wish I could lead a solitary life in a place like Hardwar situated on the banks of the Ganges. But now I have not the strength to go about for alms or draw water. If someone would live with me and help me a little, I could cook my food.'⁵⁸

Atmananda and Shuddhananda lived happily together for a few days. One day both of them walked a long distance to the outskirts of the city to pay homage to Swami Akhandananda (a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna) who was then staying there. Soon after that both the Swamis fell ill. Everyone took it for ordinary influenza. But Atmananda declared, 'Swamiji is calling me; now he will sacrifice his goat. My fever is not a simple one. It is a case of either typhoid or pneumonia.' Actually, his statement proved true. Shuddhananda recovered shortly, whereas Atmananda's condition deteriorated.

Even on his death bed Atmananda maintained his spirit of renunciation as bright as ever. Without anybody's help he would somehow walk to the washroom holding to the walls. His bedding consisted of an old *sataranci* (a coarse cotton carpet), a clean towel, a pillow and a thick sheet for covering the body. One day while he was away in the washroom, the attendant spread a new mattress on his bed. On his return Atmananda felt very unhappy to see the soft

bed. He reprimanded the attendant, 'Won't you let me die in peace? If that be your wish, then please leave this place. I don't want your service.' As the attendant begged pardon, he asked him, 'What is the use of this for a dying monk? Will you remove it please?' Seeing the attendant still deliberating, he could not stand any longer and lay down on the bare floor. He returned to the bed only after the mattress was removed. The next day Swami Akhandananda came to see him. At the affectionate request of this venerable monk and the entreaties of his monastic brothers Atmananda finally relented and agreed to use the mattress.⁵⁹ He was a Sannyasin in the truest sense of the term. Once a lady asked him, 'Maharaj, are you a Brahmin?' 'I am a Sannyasin,' was the Swami's answer. The question was repeated thrice only to be met with the same answer.⁶⁰ He would not keep any article other than bare necessities. Shuddhananda related an interesting event in this regard:

Soon after my arrival at Benares, one day he brought to me a trunk and after handing over its key requested me to keep it. The trunk had in it two good warm wrappers which he might have got as presents from Swami Brahmananda and the Holy Mother. 'Did not Swamiji formulate the rule,' he observed, 'that a monk should give away all that he has to the president of the Order? Please send these things to him and relieve me from the anxieties they involve in taking care of them. I shall get a cheap Balaposh (a kind of thin quilt-like wrapper) made for me and use that in the coming winter.'⁶¹

Just a few days before his passing away a Brahmacharin attending on him importunately requested him to say something about his visions. After remaining silent for sometime Atmananda at last said:

I never experienced any vision in the ordinary sense of the term. However, I saw a divine

⁵⁹. *Padaprānte*, p. 177.

⁶⁰. *Udbodhan*, 1356 B.S., p. 530-31.

⁶¹. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1923, p. 436.

⁵⁸. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1923, p. 435-36.

dream.... One night I lay down to sleep dwelling on the thought, 'Nothing has been attained, this life has gone in vain.' I was not really asleep. Suddenly I saw a pair of luminous footprints before me. I could not recognize them at that time—later I understood that they were the footprints of the Holy Mother. As I was gazing at them, unlimited light emanated from the footmarks and engulfed me. I felt as if I was submerged in it. I know not how long I was in that state, but I was in inexpressible bliss. I felt as secure and happy as a child in the lap of its mother. It appeared to me that I was going to a very distant place—I cannot say whether the 'I' was there, everything got mixed up. The intoxication of that bliss lasted for a long time. Later I pondered for a long time, 'Was it a reality or a dream?' To this day I have not come to a definite conclusion. Perhaps it was a dream but I still get the taste of that supreme bliss, for that alone the mind still yearns.⁶²

Atmananda's fever gradually developed into broncho-pneumonia. Despite the sincere efforts of a team of reputed doctors, his condition deteriorated. His body became extremely weak and his organ of hearing ceased to function properly. Dr. Amar Babu, the senior physician, very lovingly looked after the Swami and visited him quite frequently in spite of his numerous professional engagements. Swami Swaprakashananda and several other monastic inmates of the Ashrama nursed him with great love and care. But the disease showed no sign of abatement. At last the final day came on Friday the 12th October, 1923. Swami Akhandananda arrived and sitting near the bed, started chanting the holy names in a loud voice. Atmananda gracefully entered into Mahāsamādhi at 7.25 p.m. On the

following morning his mortal body was decorated with flowers, garlands etc. and taken to the Manikarnika Ghat to be immersed in the Ganges. Akhandanandaji accompanied the procession and proposed to arrange a *bhāndārā* (feast) on the following full moon (kojagari pūrṇima) day. Shuddhananda wrote a long letter to Swami Shivananda giving details of Atmananda's last days. After hearing everything Shivanandaji remarked, 'Shukul Maharaj was a Mahapurusha (great soul).'⁶³

In conclusion, let us quote the editorial comments of *Prabuddha Bharata* published after his demise: 'Everyone who came in close contact with the Swami felt the silent influence of his unassuming and saintly character and loved and respected him. He combined in his life the hard rigour and discipline of an ascetic with the quiet inward disposition of a Yogi. And every minute detail of his activity was a clear demonstration and proof of that particular phase of his personality. Though naturally of a retired bent of mind, he never spared himself when the Mission authorities asked for his service for the good of others. He was, truly speaking, a genuine worker and could not tolerate the idea of doing a thing haphazardly. Sincerity of purpose, obedience to authorities and above all the spirit of renunciation—the keynote of his life—lent a special grandeur to his character. By his death the Mission has sustained a loss which it will be impossible to make good.'⁶⁴

(Concluded)

⁶². *Padaprānte*, p. 178-79.

⁶³. *ibid*, p. 178.

⁶⁴. *Prabuddha Bharata*, 1923 p. 433

AN OUTLINE OF THE PHILOSOPHY OF JĪVA GOSVĀMIN

PROF. RANJIT KUMAR ACHARJEE

His life

Jīva Gosvāmin, who flourished shortly after Śrī Caitanya, was a great Vaiṣṇava apostle and one of the six Vṛndāvana Gosvāmins of the Caitanya sect of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. He was the only son of Vallabha (alias Anupama), younger brother of Rūpa and Sanātana. The date of his birth is uncertain. Jīva was only five years old when his father died. It is generally held that he never saw Śrī Caitanya. However, according to a well-known Bengali work, Jīva had the direct blessing of Śrī Caitanya at Rāmakeli when he was only two years old.¹ In his boyhood he was greatly influenced by the extraordinary asceticism and deep devotion of his illustrious uncles Rūpa and Sanātana, which infused in his mind a strong desire for ascetic life. A combination of profound scholarship and sharp intelligence characterized his academic career. Within a short time, he acquired proficiency in grammar, rhetoric, *kāvya* and *smṛti*. After the completion of his studies at his native place, he left for Navadvīpa, the centre of learning in those days, where he met Nityānanda, a close associate of Śrī Caitanya. He visited different spots associated with the holy memory of Śrī Caitanya. Then he left for Benares where he studied Vedānta under the able guidance of the renowned scholar Madhusūdana Vācaspati. Within four or five years Jīva became well versed in Vedānta in its various ramifications.

Thereafter he set out for Vṛndāvana to join his uncles Rūpa and Sanātana, who by this time had come to be recognized as the

great masters of Vaiṣṇava faith and philosophy. Under the competent guidance of Rūpa and Sanātana, Jīva devotedly studied various scriptural texts, especially Vaiṣṇava literature, and in no time became well-grounded in both Vaiṣṇava theory and practice. He also assisted, so it is said, Rūpa Gosvāmin in his composition of *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and other literary efforts for the cause of Caitanyaism. The Vaiṣṇava inclination latent in him from his very boyhood blossomed forth magnificently when he came into close contact with the luminous personalities of Rūpa and Sanātana. Thereafter he led the arduous life of a recluse and scholar.

It is said that Jīva Gosvāmin once defeated Śrī Vallabha Bhatta, a south Indian Vaiṣṇava scholar belonging to the Viṣṇu-svāmi sect, in exegetical disputation for which he was reprimanded by his uncles; for according to them, this did not fit in well with Vaiṣṇava modesty and discipline. It is also popularly believed that the great Mugal emperor Akbar once met Jīva Gosvāmin and was deeply impressed by his extraordinary scholarship and profound devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Akbar was so moved that he liberalized some of the prohibitions against the religious activities of the Hindus.²

When Rūpa and Sanātana passed away, the responsibility of consolidating the entire Vaiṣṇava community of Vṛndāvana and guiding seekers of God in the path of Bhakti devolved on Jīva Gosvāmin. In course of time, he became the dominant figure in the vanguard of the Vaiṣṇava movement in Vṛndāvana and Bengal. He was the moving spirit behind the propagation of Bhakti-śāstra of the Vṛndāvana Gos-

1. Sankar Nath Roy, *Bhārater Sādhaka* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Prachi Publication, 1366 B.S.) vol. 5, p. 168.

2. *ibid*, pp. 180-81.

vāmins in Bengal through his able and devoted disciples, Śrīnivāsa Ācārya, Narotama and Śyāmānanda. He soon came to be considered the sole authority and highest court of appeal in all doctrinal matters. He passed away probably in the year 1596 A.D.

Principal works

Jīva Gosvāmin wrote on almost all the branches of Vaiṣṇava śāstra following the footsteps of his illustrious uncles, Sanātana and Rūpa, and gave Bengal Vaiṣṇavism a sound metaphysical foundation. His early philosophical training at Benares fitted him well for the task of giving an elaborate and a systematic exposition of the religio-metaphysical tenets of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism. He was a prolific, versatile and voluminous writer who, according to the *Bhakti-ratnākara* composed more than twenty different works. Of all his works, *Ṣaṭ-Sandarbha* which is also designated *Bhāgavata-Sandarbha* by the author himself, contains the entire theology and philosophy of the Bengal Vaiṣṇavism in a systematic fashion. It consists of six discourses called Tattva-sandarbha, Bhagavat-sandarbha, Paramātmā-sandarbha, Śrīkṛṣṇa-sandarbha, Bhakti-sandarbha and Prīti-sandarbha. Evidently, the *Ṣaṭ-sandarbhas* are not the products of dry intellectual exercises like discursive reasoning and logic chopping. On the contrary, in these discourses the philosophical views of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism are interwoven with the details of its devotional practices and mysticism. True to the spirit of Vaiṣṇava modesty, Jīva did not claim any originality for whatever he wrote, yet his *Ṣaṭ-Sandarbha* 'betrays a systematic plan and execution, as well as originality in its ideas and methods'. As has been rightly observed, 'To Jīva Gosvāmin belonged the whole heritage of Vaiṣṇava philosophical thought, upon which, as a matter of fact, he freely draws, besides utilizing Śruti

(chiefly Upaniṣadic) and Purāṇa texts; and no important proposition is laid down which is not supported by some such text.'³ On the basis of these texts, he raised a metaphysical system, which merits special consideration in view of its originality of exposition and profundity of penetration.

The *Bhāgavata* Purāṇa is the principal source of inspiration for the Bengal School of Vaiṣṇavism which regards it as the most authoritative scripture. Jīva Gosvāmin wrote a running commentary on it entitled *Bhagavat Sandarbha* which forms the second chapter of his principal work, *Ṣaṭ-sandarbha*. The sole objective of this magnum opus of Jīva as indicated by the author himself, is to establish that Kṛṣṇa is the only *tattva* or Reality—the supreme Godhead and the most exclusive object of worship—and that it is only through devotion and love that this ultimate Reality can be attained. After closely examining the different sources of knowledge (*pramāṇas*) and establishing the superiority of the testimony of the *Bhāgavata* Purāṇa in the first Sandarbha, Jīva devotes the next three Sandarbhas, namely Bhagavat, Paramātmā and Kṛṣṇa Sandarbhas to the exposition of the nature of the supreme Reality. The last two Sandarbhas are mainly concerned with Prīti (love) and Bhakti (devotion) as the means for the attainment of the supreme Godhead. To give an adequate account of the philosophy of Jīva Gosvāmin would require more than one treatise, and hence our attention has to be restricted here to some major aspects of his thought contained in the first three Sandarbhas, leaving aside Śrīkṛṣṇa, Prīti and Bhakti Sandarbhas wherein the theology and devotional praxis of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism have been elaborated in meticulous detail.

In the Tattva-Sandarbha, Jīva examines

3. Dr. S. K. De, *Early History of the Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement in Bengal* (Calcutta: Firma KLM, 1961) p. 256.

Hereafter, *Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement*.

the pitfalls and limitations of the recognized *pramāṇas* except śabda or testimony which according to him, consists of revealed words (*aprākṛta-vacana-lakṣaṇa*) and therefore is the only valid and authentic source of knowledge of the Supreme Reality. The other *pramāṇas* are either superficial or erroneous. The later Vaiṣṇava scholars including Jīva Gosvāmin accepted śabda in a wider sense so as to include, besides the Vedas and the Upaniṣads, the Itihāsas and Purāṇas, and regarded these as equally authentic and dependable sources of knowledge. Between the Itihāsa and the Purāṇa, the latter is to be preferred, and among the large number of Purāṇas representing different schools and sects, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* is acclaimed to be the greatest and most authoritative of all the scriptures, for it elucidates the quintessence of the luminous thoughts of the Vedas and the Upaniṣads. 'The theory of the school, thus believes that the themes of the *Brahma-Sūtra* and the *Bhāgavatam* respectively are identical, for what appeared to Vyāsa's mind in a subtle shape and was expressed by him in the form of brief Sūtras, is alleged to have been amplified in the *Bhāgavatam* in the form of extensive Bhāṣya on these Sūtras.'⁴

The Absolute Reality or Bhagavat

In the *Bhāgavatam* the Absolute Reality has been described in the following way: 'The knowers of Truth say that the supreme non-dual Reality is called by different names such as Brahman, Paramātman and Bhagavān.'⁵

This verse is said to sum up the Bhāgavata concept of the Absolute Reality and

has been accepted by Jīva Gosvāmin as the central theme of his first three Sandarbhas. The Absolute Reality, according to him is therefore the *advaya-jñāna-tattva*. As this is the pivot round which the Vaiṣṇava concept of the Absolute Reality as expounded by Jīva Gosvāmin revolves, it is of cardinal importance to understand the significance of the expression. According to him *advaya-jñāna-tattva* does not mean the non-dual, indeterminate, *nirguṇa* Brahman of the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara. The *tattva* or the Absolute Reality which is the heart or essence of all things and beings is self-existent, pure consciousness (*cideka-rūpa*) and self-luminous (*sva-prakāśa*). The Absolute Reality is 'advaya' which though literally means 'without a second', really signifies 'that like it there is no second *tattva* or Reality', or there exists no other reality which is similar to it in any respect. Jīva Gosvāmin, following the Upaniṣadic teachings, regards the Supreme Reality as the most perfect embodiment of *sat* (absolute existence), *cit* (absolute consciousness, implying non-materiality), *ānanda* (absolute bliss)—*sacchid-ānanda-svarūpa*. According to Jīva Gosvāmin, an infinite number of energies or *śaktis* inhere in It and they cannot exist without the ultimate Substratum.⁶ In his *Sarva-Saṁvādinī*, Jīva Gosvāmin further elucidates that the Absolute Reality is a synthetic unity and is therefore devoid of all the three kinds of difference (*bheda*) namely, Svajātiya-bheda (difference between two objects of the same species), Vijātiya-bheda (difference between two different species) and Svagata-bheda (internal or intrinsic difference within each object). According to Jīva Gosvāmin, difference (*bheda*) implies the existence of at least two independent and self-subsistent entities but the

4. *ibid*, pp. 262-63.

5. वदन्ति तत्त्वविदस्तत्त्वं यज्ज्ञानमद्वयम् ।
ब्रह्मेति परमात्मेति भगवानिति शब्दते ॥

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.2.11.

6. Jīva Gosvāmin, *Tattva-Sandarbha* (Varanasi: Achyuta Granthamala Karyalaya) pp. 130-31.

Jīva (individual Self) which shares the same essence of *cit* or consciousness along with the Supreme Reality, and the material universe possessing just the opposite essence of the Supreme Reality are not self-evolved and self-dependent (*svayamsiddha*). They solely depend on the Absolute Reality for their existence and status and thus cannot be the source of difference of the first two types. The Ultimate Reality is devoid of Svagata-bheda or internal difference also. In spite of the apparent plurality in it the Absolute Reality is essentially a unity. The *advaya-jñāna-tattva* of Jīva Gosvāmin is the supreme Divine Personality, the ultimate goal of man's religious and spiritual endeavours (*parama puruṣārtha*). Thus, the Reality is both religious and philosophic Absolute.

Three concepts of the Absolute Reality

Having explained the concept of the Bhagavat, Jīva Gosvāmin in his Bhagavat-Sandarbha elucidates the three-fold aspect of Bhagavat—the highest and most perfect manifestation of the *advaya-jñāna-tattva*—as Brahman, Paramātmā and Bhagavat, understood according to the capacity of realization of the devotee. 'The three names Brahman, Bhagavān and Paramātmā are used in accordance with the emphasis that is put on the different aspects of the total composite meaning, thus, as any one of the special aspects of God appears to the mind of the devotee, he associates it with the name of Brahman, Bhagavān or Paramātmā.'⁷ Thus it is apparent that these three aspects of the Supreme Reality are simply Its three dimensions or gradations, and not distinct entities.

Of these, Brahman is the indeterminate, unqualified (*nirviśeṣa*) state of the Absolute Reality. It signifies the state of pure con-

sciousness not characterized by particular attributes. At the moment of deep intuitive realization, the devotee realizes that his own self is in essence pure consciousness identical with the nature of Brahman. Brahman, according to Jīva Gosvāmin, is not the Ultimate Reality but simply the unqualified and undifferentiated state of the Supreme Reality, the Bhagavat, which represents the highest Being in the hierarchy of the spiritual manifestations, the most perfect person in whom all the attributes are most perfectly developed. Thus Bhagavat is the full manifestation with all divine energies (*sa-śaktika āvirbhāva*), while Brahman is an imperfect and incomplete manifestation of the Supreme Reality (*asamyag āvirbhāva*) and has been picturesquely described as the bodily lustre (*tanubhā*), the effulgent light of Consciousness-Bliss surrounding Bhagavat. Bhagavat is the *aṅgin* (Principal), Brahman is the *aṅga* (subsidiary) of Bhagavat (Kṛṣṇa). This is illustrated by Kṛṣṇa's statement in the Gita, 'I am the support of Brahman.'⁸ This distinction, Jīva Gosvāmin explains, is not like that between two independent entities, the Absolute Reality being one and indivisible. The apparent distinction arises from the degree of realization of the two kinds of devotees following two different paths, namely, Jñāna and Bhakti. This by implication suggests the superiority of Bhakti over Jñāna as a means of attaining the complete vision of the Ultimate Reality. This is one of the distinctive features of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism.

Paramātmā, as Jīva Gosvāmin explains in his Paramātmā-Sandarbha, is the partial appearance of the Absolute Reality conditioned by Jīva-Śakti and by Māyā-Śakti which controls all beings and their movements. Paramātmā is thus that phase of the Supreme Godhead which is the indwelling spirit and the inner ruler (*antaryāmin*)

7. Dr. S. N. Das Gupta, *A History of Indian Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1961) vol. 4, p. 396.

8. ब्रह्मणो हि प्रतिष्ठाहं . . . ।

Bhagavad-Gītā 14.27.

of the conscious Jīvas and also immanent in the non-conscious Prakṛtī thus making the evolution of the universe possible. In short, it is the presiding Deity of the conscious beings and the material universe. 'Both the subtle Jīvas and the subtle material powers of the universe emanate from Paramātmān, from whom both the conscious and the unconscious parts of the universe are produced. Paramātmān, considered in Himself, may be taken as the agent of the production (*nimitta-kāraṇa*), whereas in association with His powers, He may be regarded as the material cause of the universe (*upādāna-kāraṇa*).⁹

Bhagavat and His Śaktis or powers

Refuting the Advaita concept of Nirguṇa and Nirviśeṣa Brahman, Jīva Gosvāmin in his *Bhagavat-Sandarbhā* discusses elaborately the nature of the divine energies or Śaktis which reside really and eternally in the Bhagavat in an intimate and inseparable relation of inherence. Śakti is not different from the Absolute Reality just as the burning property of fire is indistinguishable from fire. This suggests that the Śaktis are not adventitious but essential potencies of the Absolute Reality which are therefore natural (*svābhāvika*) to it, though unthinkable (*acintya*), being themselves inscrutable and beyond the reach of common human comprehension. The relation between the Bhagavat and his manifold powers is that of Śaktimat and Śakti, powerholder and power. Śakti, as the potency of the Śaktimat, has no independent existence apart from the substratum and constitutes an identical non-dual unity with the Supreme Reality. But the Supreme Reality remains transcendental without being affected by the world of multiplicity which is the creation of His Śakti. Thus Śakti is identical with as well

as different from Śaktimat; the relationship is one of identity and difference, or to be precise, identity-in-difference. But the co-existence of these two contradictory features in this peculiar relationship is a very unusual phenomenon which defies logical resolution and therefore is inconceivable (*acintya*). Thus, the relation is an 'inconceivable identity-in-difference' (*acintya-bhedābheda*), a term by which the whole philosophy of Caitanya's school is known.

The Śakti or Divine Energy of the Bhagavat is viewed in three aspects and is accordingly grouped into three classes, namely, *svarūpa* (or *parā*) śakti—essential and intrinsic power; *jīva* (or *taṭastha*) śakti—peripheral power; and *māyā* (or *Bahiraṅga*) śakti—extraneous power. Svarūpa-Śakti is the power or energy which the Absolute Reality possesses by virtue of His ultimate nature. Now, since the essence of the Absolute Reality is Being, Consciousness and Joy, His inherent energy must consist all these three in a synthetic unity, or in other words; it is that energy (*śakti*) which constitutes the intrinsic perfect selfhood of the Bhagavat. It is also called Antaraṅga-Śakti on account of its being inseparable from him. The Svarūpa-Śakti, which is otherwise called *cit-śakti*, is 'a centripetal force of concentration and inwardization whereby not only the whole is apprehended in its integrity as individual unity but also every element of the whole as the whole itself in an essential aspect of being. It may thus be called a capacity to intuit the many as one and the one as many, as a capacity to realize the spirit as a true spiritual unity obliterating all fixed distinctions and resolving distinctions into internal spiritual relations.'¹⁰

The Svarūpa-Śakti has three aspects

⁹. *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 4, p. 403.

¹⁰. Dr. S. K. Maitra, 'Caitanya (Acintya-Bhedābheda)' in *History of Philosophy, Eastern and Western* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957) vol. 1, p. 363.

namely, *saṁdhinī*, *saṁvit* and *hlādinī*, corresponding respectively to His nature as *sat*, *cit* and *ānanda*. *Samdhinī* is the 'energy of existence of the self-existent being', and it is by virtue of this energy the Jīva and Prakṛtī are sustained. By *saṁvit-śakti* the Absolute Reality knows, becomes self-conscious and makes others possessed of knowledge. The last but most important is *hlādinī-śakti* which is Bhagavat's energy of infinite bliss by which he enjoys and makes others enjoy bliss. These three cannot be separated from one another, but their proportion may differ in the different manifestations of the Divine. The Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavism assigns *hlādinī* a place of prominence, for according to its view, *hlādinī* includes and transcends the other two. 'The prominence given to the Hlādinī Śakti explains the peculiar standpoint of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism which conceives that its deity is essentially composed of infinite bliss, which is his highest attribute and which necessarily involves the other attributes of knowledge and existence.'¹¹

Now we come to the second power. Māyā-Śakti is that aspect of Bhagavat's power which is insentient and material (*jada*), as opposed to Cit-Śakti or Svarūpa-Śakti. It cannot operate without Svarūpa-Śakti. Paramātmā is the displayer of Māyā-Śakti through which Bhagavat reveals Him as the insentience of the inanimate world. Māyā-Śakti is extraneous to his essence and is therefore called Bahiraṅga-Śakti, which is thus 'a centrifugal force of self-dispersion and self-alienation in the Lord whereby the spiritual appears as insentient and purely material and the integral total point of view gives way to one of atomistic pluralism and particularism.'¹²

The third power of the Divine, the Jīva-Śakti or Taṭastha-Śakti, which is distinct from both Svarūpa-Śakti and Māyā-Śakti, is

that aspect of Śakti which the Bhagavat displays in his role of Paramātmā assuming the form of limited finite selves or spirits. In other words, it is represented by countless centres of consciousness called Jīvas—the spiritual monads, or selves. The expression 'Taṭastha-Śakti' suggests the dual nature of the finite spirit as belonging to both earth and heaven at the same time. (*Taṭastha* literally means situated on river bank, something in between the river water and the dry land and partaking the characteristics of both.)

Jīva, Jagat and Bhagavat

In the Paramātmā-Sandarbhā, the Jīva or individual spirit is described as the finest, indivisible conscious entity which is an infinitesimal part (*aṁśa*) of the Bhagavat, atomic in size (*aṇu*) and infinite in number. The Bhagavat or the Supreme Reality through His Jīva-Śakti multiplies into finite selves. The Jīva is not an aggregate of consciousness arising out of the amalgamation of the material particles as expounded by the materialists. It is a conscious principle itself with a distinct self-awareness which, however, is different from the empirical ego. Jīva is self-luminous, having the capacity of revealing others. It is an unchanging, abiding principle retaining its identity in the midst of all differences. In its essential nature, Jīva is pure (*nitya nirmala*) possessing the natural tendency of resolving into a part of the Paramātmā (*pāramātmika-śeṣa-svabhāvaḥ*). But owing to its association with the physical body, Jīva is deluded by the allurements and manoeuvres of the Māyā-Śakti. Nevertheless, owing to its ultimate affinity with the Supreme Reality, Jīva possesses the capacity of being emancipated from bondage and, on the attainment of liberation, it ceases to be overpowered by Māyā-Śakti.

According to all schools of Vaiṣṇavism including the followers of Bengal

11. *Vaiṣṇava Faith and Movement*, p. 280.

12. Dr. S. K. Maitra, *op. cit.* p. 363.

Vaiṣṇavism, the experience of the world is not unreal, and the world is a real creation, a real transformation of the Supreme Reality by way of Self-limitation into the insentience of the inanimate material world and self-multiplication into the consciousness of the finite selves. Paramātmā, by the exercise of His Māyā-Śakti, brings into being the material universe and he is also the divine agent of its sustenance and dissolution. Māyā is therefore responsible for the evolution of all cosmic categories and Prakṛtī or *pradhāna* which is their root. From what has been discussed above as regards the creation of the world of things and beings, it is evident that Bengal Vaiṣṇavism upholds both *satkārya-vāda* and *pariṇāma-vāda* (real transformation) as against *vivarta-vāda*, the doctrine of illusory transformation advocated in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta.

But the most crucial question is: if Jīva is an *aṁśa* or part of the Supreme Reality, then how are we to explain the relation between the individual self and the Paramātmā? Again, if the universe is a real transformation of the Supreme Reality, does it not affect the unity and immutability of His Being? How does the Supreme Spiritual Reality appear as the insentience of the

material world? In reply to this, Bengal Vaiṣṇavism expounds the doctrine of 'Inexplicable identity-in-difference (*acintya-bhedābheda*)' already referred to. Jīva Gosvāmin after elaborate examination in his *Sandarbhāṣa* and *Sarva-Sāmvādinī* holds that the relation between Jīva and Jagat on the one hand, and Bhagavat on the other hand is one of *acintya-bhedābheda*. It is transcendental and superlogical and therefore not amenable to human understanding. By qualifying the relation with the word '*acintya*', the Bengal school of Vaiṣṇavism has introduced a mystic element into the philosophical concept.

The philosophy expounded by Jīva Gosvāmin in his *Ṣaṭ-Sandarbhāṣa* contains elements which may be characterized as idealistic, theological and mystical. Thus his philosophy meets man's moral, spiritual, emotional and practical needs and aspirations. It does not regard life and its values, spiritual striving and goal as illusory. Overall, it cannot be denied that Jīva Gosvāmin has built a philosophical edifice of intricate beauty and basic unity which, being one of the latest additions to Vedānta, has incorporated into it some of the best points of other schools.

HOW TO STUDY SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

BR. SHUDDHA CHAITANYA

The word *study* evokes images of a teacher in a classroom, of homework assignments and stacks of paperwork. We may think of it too as the process of acquiring mere book-knowledge and recall Sri Rāma-kṛṣṇa's injunction to eat the mangoes rather than waste time in counting the trees. But study, when directed to sacred scripture and pursued in the right spirit, is an integral

part of spiritual life. Patañjali, in his *Yoga-Sūtra*, lists *svādhyāya* or study as one of the essential preliminaries of yoga sādhanā. It is with a view to achieving some self-improvement in this area that we want to proceed.

The question is, how to *study* Swami Vivekananda. We have to mark at the outset the difference between devotional read-

ing and analytical, discriminative reading or study. The purpose of devotional reading is to evoke religious feelings; the purpose of study, on the other hand, is to clarify ideas and deepen the understanding. The one is passive; the other more active and participatory. The benefits of the one are immediate, but short-lived—feelings are transient. The benefits of serious study are more long lasting. One must always remember the psychological truth that thought creates feeling, and hence the inculcation of thought and idea is of primary importance.

In outlining a method of study I want to begin with an approach to one particular aspect or portion of *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, be it the letters, the conversations, or any particular set of lectures. Let us take, for instance, *Karma Yoga*—a slim volume in ninety-one pages. ... One could go to great lengths exploring the ideas in this book and a wide variety of study projects could be suggested. But before undertaking any advanced project one has to become thoroughly familiar with the contents of the book. We have to begin by reading the book—and this is where problems begin.

Most people think they know how to read, but they don't. Reading, like thinking, is a skilled occupation and requires some methodology to achieve the best results. I want to suggest an elementary five-step technique that can be utilized in any serious study. It is popularly known among college students as the SQ3R method—survey, question, read, recite, review—and will enable one to better understand, assimilate and retain the ideas in any book.

One begins by making a survey and getting an overview of the book as a whole. Turn to the title page and the table of contents and carefully note the chapter headings and sub-titles. Thumb through the book and note the format, the layout and the principal divisions. Try to get a feeling for the general subject, its major parts and their

mutual relationship. All this will give a broad idea of the scope of the material—it is a fly-over of the area we are going to explore on foot.

Step number two is to set the book aside and question oneself on the subject. In the context of *Karma Yoga* we can marshal our ideas about Karma, character, duty, non-attachment—the words/concepts that have been suggested by the previous survey. This step is the most important of the five. As the Vedanta says, all knowledge is within; and a person will be amazed to discover how much he already knows about the matter at hand. It is endlessly instructive to wander back through the corridors of memory and open those long-forgotten store-rooms where countless reels of mental videotapes are stacked and gathering dust. This exercise of recalling our own foreknowledge may take days or weeks, but it is well worth the time when we settle down to acquire new information.

The third step is to read through the book from beginning to end. The secret of effective reading at this stage is to pay special attention to leading words, phrases, and sequences of sentences; that is, to basic concepts, leading propositions, and arguments advanced. This will be especially easy in the case of a book like *Karma Yoga* where key words and phrases abound.

Recitation is the fourth step in the technique. It is not enough to keep the information in mind only; it has to be verbalized. This does not mean memorizing by rote and then playing back the lessons like a record or reciting like a parrot. The point is to put the teaching into our own words. We have to percolate the principles up through our own experience, refurnish them with our own illustrations and translate the whole into our own language. This is not just an exercise in vocalization; it will help in clarifying the understanding and in fixing the ideas in memory.

Finally, it is essential to review what

has been read. Retention of information is hardly possible without repetition; and this is what reviewing is—a renewing of impressions. This renewal may be effected by a contemplative recall of mental images or by an actual rereading of the study material. The latter will not come as a surprise, for any book worth reading once is worth reading again, and in the case of scriptural classics may form the subject of a lifetime study.

If a person follows the above five-step method he can rapidly master the material in any book. This mastery will provide him with a firm information base and a ready ability to branch out and undertake other more advanced study projects successfully.

But it will be helpful now to consider a more comprehensive, wholistic approach to the study of the *Complete Works*. These eight volume of over four thousands pages will seem formidable to any student of sacred knowledge. He will remember that they do not represent the ideology of a single doctrinal system, but cover the whole spectrum of philosophy and religion. Perhaps he will compare Swami Vivekananda with other seminal thinkers like Plato or Aristotle, and, in imagining the profundity of their thinking, intensify his own feels of trepidation. He will no doubt hear that the *Works* are like a gem with many facets; that the Swami spoke on many different levels, giving rise to apparent contradictions, etc... All this is likely to drive the timid student to conclude that he can't hope to understand.

But take heart, dear student! Brush aside such negative thoughts! They are wholly unfounded and it is certainly not impossible to grasp the teaching. In the first place, as the proverb says, the water is always clearest at the source. One should remember this with regard to all classics, that they are easier of access than the many books of learned commentary written upon them. Furthermore, Swami Vivekananda came to

earth to preach the gospel of a new religion. If sincere seekers on reading his words cannot make out the meaning, then he himself has failed in his mission. We do not believe that; on the contrary, we believe that anyone can understand the teachings. Needless to say, some thinking is necessary; but first we must evoke that feeling of *śraddhā*—faith in the teacher, in the truth of his words, and in our own ability to understand.

The first prerequisite for a study of the *Complete Works* is to read through the entire eight volumes. This might sound like an overwhelming assignment, but it isn't. Spending a short two hours a day reading approximately one hundred pages, a person can go through the entire material in forty days; spending three hours a day will enable one to complete the reading in less than a month. A certain friend while carrying a full course load at college, managed to finish the whole set of the *Complete Works* in two weeks. Of course one might say, so what? What is the virtue in scanning so much type all at once? But the hidden fact is that this is a clue to the enthusiasm and intensity of the student's interest. Others, who poke along, barely managing to complete one volume in a year, will scarcely attain anything in this life.

But even after a reading of the *Complete Works* a student will find himself in a state of confusion. The fact is that there is just too much material of wide variety to comprehend by going through volume after volume. We feel a need for some system of management, some principle of organization that will enable us to arrange and classify all the information. If a heavy monsoon rain falls on barren ground it will run off in every direction, causing erosion and floods; but if the ground is prepared the water can be contained. It is only when there is a proper system of drains, canals, storage tanks and reservoirs that the water

from on high can be directed to serve the tillers of the land.

Of all the systems of approach to the study of the *Complete Works* it is the chronological that stands out at the best. This is the method that will enable us to appreciate and fully comprehend the message of Swami Vivekananda. In following this method, the first step is to prepare a table listing all the separate letters, lectures, and conversations one after another in the order of their occurrence. This may sound like a mechanical and tedious process; on the contrary, it will require a good bit of detective work and investigative thinking. In fact, the preparation of the chronological table is a significant study project in itself that is immensely beneficial.

There are several strong selling points for using the chronological approach to the study of the *Complete Works*. In the first place, it enables one to form departments of thought. Each department, labelled by month and year, will contain one set of materials; the letters and lectures of 1894 will be one set, those of 1895 another set and so on. This temporal arrangement of material divides it up into manageable parts; this, in turn, facilitates learning and memory. In fact, the whole science of memory culture can be applied with amazing results to the chronologically ordered *Works*.

Another benefit in the chronological approach is that it enables one to trace the development of Swamiji's message and the evolution of his thought. That the Swami did struggle through stage after stage of growth in his thinking seems obvious from the reading of his letters and lectures. For instance, we read in one letter to E.T. Sturdy dated 31st October, 1895, 'Just now two young gentlemen, Mr. Silverlock and his friend, left ... both of them want to know the rituals of my creed! This opened my eyes. The world in general must have some form ... It is absolutely necessary to form some ritual and have a Church ... That is

to say, we must fix on some ritual as fast as we can ... We will fix something grand, from birth to death of a man. A mere loose system of philosophy gets no hold on mankind.' These remarks, taken in the light of Swamiji's later teachings, will throw us into confusion until we read in a letter dated 2nd November 1895, 'I think you are right; we shall work on our own lines and let things grow.' Evidently Sturdy had questioned Swamiji's view and Swamiji, thinking the matter through again, had decided against it. Here then we see an evolution, a struggle for clarity and purpose and definition that runs throughout the *Works*.

A third advantage to the progressive, evolutionary approach to the study of the *Works* is that it enables us to resolve certain apparent contradictions. There is a popular notion that Swamiji's writings are a mine of self-contradiction and that it is difficult to penetrate and evaluate his true position on this or that issue. One writer, in an introduction to a collection of Vivekananda's teachings says, 'Vivekananda was the last person in the world to worry about formal consistency. He almost always spoke extempore, fired by the circumstances of the moment, addressing himself to the condition of a particular group of hearers, reacting to the intent of a certain question. That was his nature—and he was supremely indifferent if his words of today seemed to contradict those of yesterday.'¹ Now, it is true that there are certain apparent contradictions in Swamiji's teachings. For instance, in 1896 and 1897 he often spoke about the necessity of following the 'line of least resistance' in religious development as the natural and easy way to progress. But in a conversation with Sister Nivedita in 1899 he says, 'I have been thinking for days about that line of least resistance, and it is a base fallacy ... as for me

1. *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta; Advaita Ashrama, 1976), p. 37.

I'm never going to think of it again.'² This apparent contradiction, if it can ever be called such, is completely resolved by the chronological approach. We clearly see that Swamiji had, on mature thought, simply changed his opinion on this subject.

Another benefit of the chronology is that it can be easily meshed with the biography; one will complement and enhance the other. If I read 'The Song of the Sannyasin' for instance, by itself, I will attain one degree of happiness; but if I also read the biography and reminiscences of that day along with the letters written before and after—all this will add a richness to my appreciation of the poem. What is being suggested here is that references to the relevant portions of the *Life*, the *Reminiscences* and other works be dovetailed into the chronology along with the letters and lectures; thus, we will be directed first to read a letter, then a lecture, then a poem, then a portion of the biography, etc. Proceeding in this way, a fuller picture of Swamiji's life and thought will emerge.

I have tried to catalogue some of the benefits of following the chronological approach in the study of the *Complete Works*. It is obvious that we need some system to comprehend and organize the immense amount of material contained therein. The

2. *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1961), p. 273.

progressive, day-by-day arrangement will serve that need well.

In conclusion I want to make two points. The first is that reading and study are learned skills. Just because we can dash through a novel a day doesn't mean that we know how to read. Just because we have received degrees for studying through high school and college doesn't mean that we know how to study. One has to do a bit of introspection here and come to know if there is a lack of practical know-how. If so, then it would be well to make a study of study; that is, to obtain one of the many how-to-study manuals and take guidance therefrom. Working in this way will gradually improve the practice of *svādhyāya*.

The second point is simply this. There are hundreds of books on the Vedānta philosophy. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature in itself is vast—we cannot hope to read and master all these books. This is the age of specialization. If a person wants to study in depth, he has to limit himself to a definite province; he has to lay down certain boundary lines. This does not preclude discursive reading, but it means that all serious efforts should be concentrated in one area. The *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* are the source-books for the religion of the New Age. Why not focus the mind here, remembering the truth of the old proverb, 'When you water the root, you water the whole tree.'

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

ANALYTICAL SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF FINDING ULTIMATE REALITY: BY ASHOK KUMAR BHATTACHARYA. Published by Firma KLM Pvt. Ltd., 257-B Bepin Bihari Ganguli Street, Calcutta 700 012. 1981. Pp. 132. Rs. 45.

The search for the ultimate Reality of Truth is perennial. The human mind has engaged itself to find out the truth behind the visible. The attempt to find the ultimate Truth is *darsana*

(philosophy), religion as well as science. Whether it is for the sage Nārada of the Upaniṣads or Parmenides of the early Greek thought, the problem has been the same as it was for Śaṅkara or for Rene Descartes in later centuries. The idealists have tried to find a unitary principle behind the phenomena but the realistic analysts have not come across such a principle. For a Buddhist or to a Humean it is difficult to comprehend a cause that could be regarded as a lasting principle claiming the title to ultimate Reality.

The author of the book originally entitled *Metaphysics* (1976) presents an analytical solution to the problem of finding the ultimate Reality in the revised second edition which is under review. Although the writer does not intend or claim to have departed from the traditional Upaniṣadic philosophy or from the thinking of European origin, his rediscovery of the ultimate Reality through analytical method is definitely novel. His initial training in engineering and physics, grounded in genuine philosophical interest, has made him work seriously to solve the riddles of our existence. His analytical approach leads to a rather unusual destination which might be very disturbing for the analysts group of thinkers. He comes to realize that Brahman is the universal subject of perception and our life is an imagined or dreamt game (*līlā*) of the ultimate Reality. The experiences in dream, death and Yogic trance provide ample evidences for the indubitable existence of the agency behind such experiences. The Upanisads, Śamkara, Descartes, Leibnitz and others have reached similar conclusions, but not through the analytical method. The author uses a new method to confirm old conviction.

The book is an excellent attempt to use modern methodology to handle traditional problems and makes older mysteries and riddles intelligible to the contemporary mind in familiar terminology. It is equally interesting to a student of philosophy and to experts in science and to lay people. Some of the technical terms in Sanskrit have been repeatedly mis-spelt (example: *sattvā* for *sattā* or *satya*) which should be corrected in future editions.

DR. S. P. DUBEY

Joint-Secretary

Indian Philosophical Congress

BENGALI

JAP-DHYAN: BY SWAMI SATYANANDA. Published by Sri Sri Ramakrishna Sevayatan, No. 2, P. K. Saha Lane, Calcutta-700 036. 1980. Pp. 12+88. Rs. 6.

Jap-Dhyān is a small book meant for devotees who are intent on developing the spiritual life through practices of Japa and meditation. After a good introduction the book continues in two long chapters on Japa and meditation, and finally ends with a few devotional songs on Sri Ramakrishna. The author, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, is also a musician who spent, according to the book, long years in spiritual sādhanā. The book, is in fact, a series of answers to various questions raised by the devotees regarding

meditation and Japa. Some of the answers are illuminating and will inspire sincere souls. The exact names of the *rāgas* and *tālas* of the songs may be mentioned in the next print, so that more devotees may get the benefit.

SWAMI JITATMANANDA

Ramakrishna Math

Hyderabad

KANNADA

BADUKALU KALIYIRI: BY SWAMI JAGADATMANANDA. Viveka Prakashan, Krishna Kutira, Saligrama, South Karnataka, 576 225. Pp. xiv+215. Rs. 16.

Learn to Live is the expressive title of this important book from the pen of a Swamiji who is involved in shaping the lives of thousands of young students. Situated in the vortex of the hopes and frustrations of modern youth in our country, the author has keenly felt the absence of reliable books in Indian languages on the subject of self-building on the model of the famous book by Samuel Smiles on *Self-Help*. Here is his answer to the need of the day, based upon his own experience, observation and study. He draws upon the lives and examples of many illustrious personalities of the past and the present, from the West and the East; his style is epigrammatic and the lessons go home, even to elderly readers.

The first part of the book, *Secret of Success*, analyzes the life-situation in its several salient ingredients and prescribes appropriate corrective and dynamic measures to turn difficulties into opportunities and openings into spring-boards. To note a few of the important guidelines:

'Take interest in what work comes to you instead of waiting for an interesting assignment to offer itself. Effort with enthusiasm generates its own inspiration.'

'Choose an Ideal and organize your life around it. Make it your life-breath.'

'Leave the past behind, let the future take care of itself. Concentrate on the present. Have your attention on the immediate step before you, do not waste time on dreaming of the ultimate goal.'

'Hasten slowly. Nothing is insignificant. Whatever you do, do as perfectly as you can.'

'There is no difficulty that can permanently stand against your determined will.'

The second part of the book expounds the potentialities of the human being, the latent powers and capabilities that are waiting to be activated.

With abundant illustrations from contemporary life in Russia and countries in Eastern Europe, the author underlines the amazing powers of consciousness and describes the techniques for developing them to make life more meaningful. He makes the following observations with documentary proof:

The mind is different from the brain.

Exteriorization is a capacity that can be cultivated.

Thought-reading has a rationale behind it. Hypnotism reveals that there is an element in our consciousness that plays the Chitragupta and

records every minute happening dating from the time of birth (and even earlier).

Faith has untold power to heal, to achieve, to surmount.

Not a page of this fascinating treatise is dull. It communicates the author's vision, confidence and inspiration. Here is a book that deserves to be translated into the major Indian languages and prescribed for non-detailed reading in the colleges.

SRI M. P. PANDIT
Sri Aurobindo Ashram
Pondicherry.

NEWS AND REPORTS

SRI RAMAKRISHNA ASHRAMA, TRICHUR

Report for 1981-1982

Religious: Daily puja, *ārātrikam* and bhajan were conducted in the temple of Sri Ramakrishna. The Swamis of this centre delivered a number of lectures and discourses on diverse topics in the Ashrama and out stations. Apart from monthly spiritual retreats, an annual five-day retreat was conducted in which 270 devotees took part. Birth anniversaries of religious celebrities were observed with special puja, discourses etc.

The publication department brought out new editions of 11 books and 4 new books during the period. It publishes a monthly journal *Prabuddhakeralam* in Malayalam. The Ashrama has its own printing press.

The town branch at Punkunnam runs a library and a reading-room with books 4,850, periodicals and dailies 16. Free classes to coach students for promoting Sanskrit were conducted.

Educational: The Ashrama runs a boys' Gurukula oriented to the traditional ideals of Hindu life. There were 134 boys of whom 27 were free boarders. The Vidyamandiram (School) had 1,267 boys in the High School section and 773 pupils (boys: 403 ; girls: 370) in the Lower Primary section. Nearly 550 children were fed daily with food materials supplied by the CARE.

Medical: The hospital of the centre treated 10,688 outdoor patients (new: 4,959 ; repeated: 5,729) and 1,082 indoor patients, and conducted 137 surgical operations. It needs generous help from the public to continue its service activities.

The Ashrama pays special attention to Harijan welfare work. It maintains one social-

service centre and a nursery school at the nearby Harijan colony.

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION CALCUTTA STUDENTS' HOME

Report for 1979-80 and 1980-81

This centre, started in 1916, conducts a hostel, specially for poor and meritorious college students, which had 106 boarders in 1981 of whom 60 were totally free and 11 were half-free of charges. Daily puja and evening *ārati* were carried in the temple. Birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and other religious celebrities were observed along with Kālī-pūjā, Sarasvatī-pūjā etc.

The Ramakrishna Mission Shilpapitha, a polytechnic college, offers four-year diploma courses in civil, electrical and mechanical engineering sponsored by the Government. There were 640 students on the roll. There are four workshops and a library with 7,500 books, 5 dailies and 6 periodicals. There is also a book-bank for the benefit of those who cannot afford to buy costly textbooks.

The centre also runs a public library and a free reading-room in which 703 new books were added during these two years. The Homeopathic dispensary treated nearly 200 patients on every Sunday under the care of four efficient doctors. The Assembly Hall of the centre was well utilized for socio-religious discourses, music recitals, and film shows for the inmates as well as the public. On every Thursday morning the Home fed more than 150 local poor people with *khichuri*. The Home has so far published 21 religious books.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Spectre of Drought

With the failure of monsoon this season, the spectre of drought is looming large in the horizon of several States in India, though the situation has not created a panic thanks to the large buffer stock of grain held by the Government. Frequent occurrence of drought is an unavoidable feature of all those geographical areas which depend on the monsoon. Since man has no control over the atmosphere, he can meet the vagaries of the monsoon only on the land. India has achieved a commendable increase in agricultural production, but this has not been steady or even. The imperative need now is to stabilize agricultural production and make it independent of the mercies of the rain-god.

It is estimated that India has 143 million hectares of arable land. Only a fourth of this is under irrigation, the rest is all rain fed. The general belief is that the only solution to the problem of drought is to bring more areas under irrigation. This prompted us to start several gigantic irrigation projects which have so far cost more than 10,000 crores of rupees, with another 10,000 crores projected by the Sixth Five Year Plan. However, after 30 years of experience we are now beginning to realize that this solution is neither simple nor very effective.

For one thing, irrigation will increase production only if it is supported by other factors like high-yield varieties, fertilizers and efficient crop management. Under ideal conditions, irrigated land should yield 4 to 5 tonnes of grain per hectare, but at present it is hardly 1.7 tonnes on an average. So unless productivity increases proportionately to the increase in irrigation facilities, the enormous investment in large irrigation projects cannot be justified. This has been admitted by the Planning Commission in one of its reports which says, 'In spite of the large investments made in the irrigation sector and the phenomenal growth of irrigation during the past 30 years, the returns from the investment, both in terms of yield and as finance, are very disappointing.'

Secondly, many, if not all, of the major and medium irrigation projects at present benefit comparatively more humid areas and, in a few cases, areas where there has already been a surplus of water. Another point is that indiscriminate increase in irrigation has caused salinity, alkalinity and other soil management problems. A fourth point to be noted is that the farmer can make full use of irrigation water only when the supply is under his control.

These facts lead us to two important conclusions. One is that more attention should be paid to small-scale irrigation projects, and more encouragement should be given to farmers in the form of subsidies, loans and technical advice to own private irrigation facilities like wells, tube-wells and ponds. The second point is that greater attention should be given to dry land farming. At present over 60 per cent of the area under rice is rain fed; about 45 per cent of our cereal production and 75 per cent of pulses and oil seeds come from dry lands. It is these dry lands which experience wide fluctuations in crop production and are effected most by drought. Through better water, soil and crop management it is necessary to improve agricultural conditions in these areas.
