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

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Phone: 29-0898



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No. 2

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

VISIONS OF THE INTERIOR CASTLE

St. Teresa of Avila

St. Teresa wrote,

“I began to think of the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions.”

First Mansions: The souls in the First Mansions are in a state of grace, but are still very much in love with the venomous creatures outside the castle—that is, with occasions of sin—and need a long and searching discipline before they can make any progress. So they stay for a long time in the Mansions of Humility, in which, since the heat and light from within reach them only in a faint and diffused form, all is cold and dim.

Second Mansions: Here all the time the soul is anxious to penetrate farther into the castle, so it seeks every opportunity of advancement—sermons, edifying conversations, good company and so on. It is doing its utmost to put its desires into practice: these are the Mansions of the Practice of Prayer.

Third Mansions: These Mansions of Exemplary Life begin with stern exhortations on the dangers of trusting to one's own strength and to the virtues one has already acquired, which must still of necessity be very weak. Yet, although the soul which reaches the Third Mansions may still fall back, it has attained a high standard of virtue.

Fourth Mansions: Here the supernatural element of the mystical life first enters. Henceforward the soul's part will become increasingly less and God's part increasingly greater. The graces of the Fourth Mansions, referred to as 'spiritual consolations', are identified with the Prayer of Quiet.

Fifth Mansions: This is the state of the Spiritual Betrothal, and the Prayer of Union—that is, incipient Union. It marks a new degree of infused contemplation and a very high one. It is of short duration, but, while it lasts, the soul is completely possessed by God.

Sixth Mansions: In the Sixth, Lover and Beloved see each other for long periods at a time, and as they grow in intimacy the soul receives increasing favours, together with increasing afflictions. They may be purely exterior—bodily sickness; misrepresentation, backbiting and persecution; undeserved praise; inexperienced, timid or overscrupulous spiritual direction. Or they

may come partly or wholly from within—and the depression which afflict the soul, which is comparable only with the tortures of hell.

Seventh Mansions: Here at last the soul reaches the Spiritual Marriage. Here dwells the King—‘it may be called another Heaven’: the two lighted candles join and become one; the falling rain becomes merged in the river. There is complete transformation, ineffable and perfect peace; no higher state is conceivable, save that of the Beatific Vision in the life to come.

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL discusses the Incarnation aspect in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. In this month we celebrate the 152nd anniversary of the Great Master.

THE HOLY MOTHER'S UNIQUENESS by Swami Brahmeshananda of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Benaras discusses some unique aspects of the teachings of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi.

RELEVANCE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA TO MODERN LIFE by Swami Harshananda, head of the Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad, is an

attempt to project Sri Ramakrishna's teachings of self-control and harmony as the anodyne for the basic problems of modern life.

EGO AND SELF by Margaret Bedrosian is a brilliant piece of writing discussing several aspects of man's ego in its relation to his transcendent Self. The author is a lecturer in English and comparative literature at the University of California, Davis.

A TRIP TO LEH IN THE HIMALAYAS by Swami Vamanananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, is based on the author's trip to Leh made in July 1987.

RAMAKRISHNA—THE INFINITE

(EDITORIAL)

For a person of the highest enlightenment, according to Vedanta, the world is not. Only God is. To him the duality of I-thou, here-there, this-that has ceased to exist for ever. He lives in the bliss of the SELF within and without. He speaks like the sage of Ashtavakra Samhita:

Wonderful am! Adoration to myself... I am Pure Consciousness... Where is bondage or liberation, joy or sorrow for one who shines as the Infinite, and does not perceive relative existence?... How wonderful! In me the shore-

less ocean, the wave of individual selves...rise...play for a time and disappear.¹

Such a person, like the sage Avadhuta Dattatreya, speaks of God as beyond space and time, mind and words.

Thou art declared to be Omnipresent. A pilgrimage towards Thee means negation of thy omnipresence. Thou art declared to be beyond thought. Any contemplation of Thee implies that Thou

1. *Ashtavakra Samhita*, 2.13, 2.22, 18.72, 2.25.

art not so. Thou art declared to be beyond speech. Any chanting of praises to Thee signifies that Thou art accessible to speech.²

Sages like Dattatreya and Jada Bharata, Sri Ramakrishna used to say, did not return to the relative plane after having the vision of Brahman. Even Shukadeva, according to some, tasted 'only one drop of that ocean of Brahman-consciousness. He heard the rumbling of the waves of that ocean but he did not dive into it.'³ That is why he could relate the glory of Krishna through the *Bhagavatam*. The path of reasoning—that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory—is an extremely difficult path which is meant only for the chosen few in all the ages. To one who follows it even the world becomes a dream and persons unreal.

* * * *

For most of us, however, the world is very much real with all its charms and disappointments. Like the wealth-intoxicated elephant Gajendra, we go down to the sea of life for enjoyments. And the crocodile of karma catches us in its inescapable jaws. We suddenly realize that the sand beneath our feet is sinking. In the whirligig of life, permanence is nowhere. Everything is whirling, and changing. Like Narada, in the spell of Maya, we too, begin a life of ease and comfort, love and attachment, dependence and delusion. Then comes one day the whip of the all-changing and all-destroying time. Situations change. Things drift. Deluge of suffering, separation and bereavement overwhelms us. The nearest ones leave for the farthest. The familiar faces fall into oblivion of death. Prosperity ends in adversity. The delusion of hope leads us, due to our

deadly attachment, to the night of despair and loneliness. We grope for something permanent, something which will never leave us, which will always give us love, strength, power, and bliss. We seek God whom we have never seen. Travellers on the way to God come to our help. They are saints and sages. They ask us to turn inward for infinite bliss, strength and knowledge. They ask us to meditate on the SELF within. But philosophy fails to raise our deluded minds. Sages then ask us to meditate on the Infinite in the form of Om, which they regard as both the auditory and the visual symbol of the Infinite. We try. But our minds accustomed to reach out to our beloved and dear ones, find it difficult to concentrate, all of a sudden, on a sound-symbol. We seek for that Infinite in the form of a lovable and adorable human being. Sages come to our rescue. They ask us to meditate on or worship some specific aspects of Supreme Godhead like Kali, Krishna, Shiva, Jehova or the God in heaven. But our sceptical mind refuses to believe in these images, rituals, and worships. Bereft of faith we ask, 'Are not these symbols mere figments of imagination?' Then comes one day a strange human being embodying and even surpassing all the divinity that our limited intellect can think possible for a single individual. We wonder, 'Is he a man, or a God?' He is an Incarnation of God. As a finite man he comes to lead us to the area of the infinite. He loves us more than we can love ourselves. With a superhuman power he takes our burden out of a spontaneous compassion. He never seeks. He only gives, and gives out of God's bounty. We take refuge in him. We call him saviour, a Son of God. We find a rock for us to stand upon, and feel assured that no deluge of temptations or terrors of life, will be able to dislodge us from the rock and make us drift like a broken catameron in a choppy sea. Our hearts get fulfilled and fear dispelled. A divine assurance animates

2. *Avadhuta Gita*, 8.1.

3. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Swami Nikhilananda, tr., (New York: Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, and also the new Madras edition) p. 354.

us. Faith comes in place of doubt. Reason follows faith.

* * * * *

There was an infinite field beyond a high wall. Four friends went to find out what was beyond the wall. Three of them climbed the wall one after the other, saw the field, burst into loud laughter, and dropped to the other side. These three could not give any information about the field. Only the fourth man came back and told people about it. He is like those who retain their bodies even after attaining the highest realization in order to teach others. Divine Incarnations belong to this class.⁴ This is a parable of Sri Ramakrishna. 'Incarnations like Chaitanya keep body alive to bring spiritual light to others.'⁵ He said. 'An Incarnation is like a hole in the wall of the infinite. Infinite meadows can be seen through the hole in the wall. One can even pass through it. Incarnations and Iswara-kotis (everperfect souls like the apostles of an Incarnation) are like the hole in the wall', Ramakrishna said.⁶

* * * * *

A widow was stricken with unbearable grief at the death of her only child, a princess-like young daughter. One day Sri Ramakrishna entered her house. At once a flood of bliss inundated her. She forgot all grief and began to cry out in ecstasy, 'This joy is too much for me. Perhaps I shall die of it. Tell me, friends, how shall I be able to live?... Oh, now I have no trace of grief at her death.' Intoxicated with the sudden joy, the widow moved, in divine ecstasy, near Sri Ramakrishna. Her sister came up and asked her to make arrangements for the feast to be given in honour of devotees. But the widow forgot all, and could not take her eyes away from

the Master and the devotees. M. who accompanied Sri Ramakrishna told him the similar story of Martha and Mary, in the life of Jesus, and how Jesus blessed the devoted Mary with the words to Martha, 'Your sister is blessed. She has developed the only thing needful in human life: the love of God.' M. said to the Master, 'I feel Christ, Chaitanya and yourself all are one and the same'. He also narrated the story of the infinite field, the obstructing wall, and the round hole in it, of which Ramakrishna had told him earlier, and said to the Master, 'You are that hole. Through you can be seen everything—that infinite meadow without any end.' 'I see you have understood that. That's fine', said Ramakrishna.⁷

Through many mystic visions Ramakrishna was shown that the indivisible satchidananda, the infinite Reality, the bliss-knowledge-existence Absolute had taken a human form—his own form. After one such vision, Ramakrishna said, 'I saw satchidananda come out of this sheath. It said, "I incarnate myself in every age..." I saw it is the fullest manifestation of satchidananda; but this time the Divine Power is manifested through the glory of sattwa.'⁸ While Rama killed the demons, and Krishna led the Kurukshetra war, Ramakrishna lent reality to the lofty ideas of immaculate purity, superhuman renunciation of lust and gold, bliss of devotion, highest spiritual transcendence in Samadhi, the vision of Divinity and especially of the Divine Mother of the universe in everything of this world. He neither killed nor rejected anyone, but unified humanity irrespective of caste, creed or nationality with his all-engulfing love for God in man. Krishna's or Rama's rajas—the dynamism of righteous war—was replaced in his life by sattwa—the dynamism of

4. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, p. 354.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 152.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 760.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 823-26.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 720.

spiritual passion to move and have his being only in God-consciousness.

* * * * *

Who can recognize the infinite in a human form? 'One needs spiritual practice in order to know God and recognize Divine incarnations'.⁹ Ramakrishna says. 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God', said Jesus. That is why the simple fishermen of Galilee, Peter and Andrews, left their net at once and followed the unknown Jesus when he came to them and said, 'Come, and I will make you fishers of men'. It was the old Srinivas, the unlettered conch-seller of Kamarpukur who first recognized in the little boy Gadadhar the growing emergence of an Incarnation of God for this age. The old man worshipped the little Ramakrishna with flowers, and prayed to him in tears, 'Lord, I will not remain alive to see how many divine sports you will play in your life as the latest Incarnation of God on earth. But I know that you are God-incarnate in this small body.' This Srinivas uttered nearly a century before the world recognized the Incarnation in Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when Sri Ramachandra was going to the forest, he saw Rishis meditating on the Atman, the all-pervading ultimate Reality. Seeing Rama they said: 'We do not recognize you as an Incarnation of God. We know you only as the son of Dasharatha. We are trying to realize the undivided bliss-knowledge-existence—Akhandā Satchidananda'. Sri Rama smiled and left them in peace. But Rishis like Bharadwaja knew that in that little body of the son of Dasharatha, God had incarnated himself in human form. Their devotion, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, was the ripe devotion or *paka bhakti*, devotion based on knowledge.¹⁰

9. Ibid., p. 354.

10. 'Sri Ma', *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Kathamrita Bhavan, 1389 B. S) Vol. 2, p. 16. (Hereafter *Kathamrita*).

The highest devotees of Sri Krishna were the rustic milkmaids of Vrindaban. When Uddhava, the devotee steering the path of knowledge, told them that Krishna is not just a human being, but the all-pervading Reality, encased in a human form, they reminded him at once that they knew perfectly well that Krishna was verily the Atman, the immortal seer dwelling inside all the living beings. But they preferred to play with Krishna as a small eleven-year-old shepherd of Vrindaban. They did not want to see the Lord's cosmic form which Krishna had revealed to Arjuna on the battle-field of Kurukshetra. The love of the Gopis, Sri Ramakrishna used to say, was based on the most exalted knowledge.

Mere pundits are like vultures, Ramakrishna used to say, who soar high in the sky but whose mind is always set on the carcasses in the burial ground. Jesus was driven out of synagogue and finally crucified by the Pharisees and the sadducees, the money-making priests. The faithful sinner Magdalene had the vision of Christ, the saviour, in the thirty-three year young man on the cross. Chandra Halder was the family priest of Mathura Nath Biswas whose intense devotion to Sri Ramakrishna made the priest jealous of him. Jealousy gradually intensified. One night when Sri Ramakrishna lay unconscious in a God-intoxicated state in a dark corner of Mahur's house, Chandra began to beat Ramakrishna with a shoe asking to tell him the secret of attracting the rich landlord.

Renowned pundit Shivanath Sastri who was so much loved by Sri Ramakrishna believed until the end of his life that Ramakrishna was an epileptic. Opposite is the case of genuine seekers of God like Padmalochan, Keshab and Bhairavi Brahmani who, like the Magi, the wise man from the East, recognized without delay, the Incarnation power in the simple priest of Kali temple. Pundit Padmalochan was the court pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan. Despite his

vast scriptural erudition he was sincere and had no show or pride of his knowledge. Once Sri Ramakrishna went with Mathur to see the scholar. Instantly the life-long sadhana and sincerity of Padmalochan made him realize that in front of him stood not a simple man but an incarnation of God. He said in tears, 'The holy dust of your feet can turn scores of fools into pundits like me. The idea of an incarnation of God is a trifling one (with you). You are the one who creates incarnations of God. Well, if any one challenges my statement, I am prepared to defend it on the strength of holy texts'¹¹

Keshab Chandra Sen was drawn to Sri Ramakrishna out of an intensity of devotion. He was seeking God. Hinduism divided hundredfold into conflicting sects, could not satisfy him. Image-worship of the Hindus appeared to his modern rational mind as only idolatrous, meaningless and superstitious. Keshab turned to Christianity and felt the divinity of Christ. Before meeting Ramakrishna, Keshab was at the height of his name, fame, prosperity, and greatness. He had already visited England and spoke to nearly 40,000 people in 70 meetings. Queen Victoria honoured him. The English Viceroy became respectful to his sincerity, devotion to Christ, and great power of oratory. But his sincerity led him to search, as Roman Rolland said, for the 'Indian Christ',¹² who would be living a life of total renunciation and intense love of God. At this time Ramakrishna, the priest of Dakshineswar Kali temple, appeared in his life, and Keshab did not take much time to realize that here was the ideal for which he had been searching all over the world. Keshab became a life-long devotee of the Master. Looking at the photo of Sri Rama-

krishna in samadhi, he once said that this state of spiritual realization was attained only by persons like Christ, Mohammed and Chaitanya.¹³

Incarnations of God have the power to bring total transfiguration in the life of the so-called sinners and the fallen ones. Saul, the dangerous antagonist of Christ, was changed into St Paul by a sudden theophany from Christ. Jagannath and Madhav, the two despot-drunkards of Navadwip were transfigured into great devotees by the love of Chaitanya. The spiritual transfiguration of the drunkard-dramatist Girish Ghosh by the divine touch of Ramakrishna is a well-known story. Drunkenness drove this genius to embrace all the accompanying vices. 'Then came evil days', wrote Girish, 'which allowed me no rest. There was darkness within, there was darkness without, darkness everywhere'. Suddenly by a spiritual experience, Girish realized, 'God was not unreal'. But how to reach God? Friends suggested that he must have a guru. Restless, Girish went home, 'closed all the doors and began to weep'¹⁴. On the same evening Sri Ramakrishna came to the Star Theatre of Girish, in order to see a drama on the life of Sri Chaitanya. Girish hardly knew that the God whom he was seeking had come to lift up the burden of life from him and leave him go on rejoicing and free. The divine grace of Ramakrishna transfigured Girish into a very symbol of faith and purity. He became, like St Paul, the first protagonist to openly preach to the westernized Calcuttans that Ramakrishna was the Incarnation of God in this age.

The strange influence of Sri Ramakrishna was also exerted on persons belonging to other religions and even those who had never seen him. William Rigby, a British historian in India in those days, had heard

11. Swami Prabhananda, *First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1987) p. 21.

12. Roman Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1974) p. 114 and p. 129.

13. *Kathamrita* (Bengali) Vol. 5, p. 129.

14. *First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna*, op cit p. 323.

of Sri Ramakrishna. Digby wrote: 'During the last century the finest fruit of British intellectual eminence was, probably, to be found in Robert Browning and John Ruskin. Yet they are mere gropers in the dark compared with the uncultured and illiterate Ramakrishna of Bengal, who knowing naught of what we term "learning" spoke as no other man of his age spoke, and revealed God to weary mortals.'¹⁵ Professor Hastie, the principal and a Christian Father of the Scotch Church College in Calcutta, spoke out openly in his classes that it was Sri Ramakrishna in modern times, who had attained samadhi, the superconscious state, as described by Wordsworth in his poem 'The Excursion'. The unknown Indian Christian Mr. William was searching for God desperately in the north-western India. Suddenly he read about Sri Ramakrishna in some journals. He came all the way to Dakshineswar and met the Master. His spiritual insight at once prompted Williams to say to Sri Ramakrishna, 'You are, Sir, Jesus himself, the Son of God, the embodiment of eternal consciousness.'¹⁶

Advanced spiritual aspirants found in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna a direct vision of their chosen ideal. Bhairavi Brahmani, the woman scholar-teacher and spiritual guide of Sri Ramakrishna, was the first to declare Ramakrishna as an incarnation of God in the presence of Calcutta pundits, and showed, on the basis of scriptural evidences that the unprecedented spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna proved beyond doubt that he was no ordinary mortal. One day when she was offering food to the sacred stone image of Raghuvira, Sri Ramakrishna in divine ecstasy, suddenly

came and ate the food. She realized that she had finally found her beloved God, in the very person of Sri Ramakrishna. Shedding tears of love and joy, she consigned the holy stone symbol of Raghuvira in the Ganges. Her long years of daily rituals had seen a consummation.¹⁷ The same experience came to the Rama-worshipping sadhu, Jatadhari when he found his beloved God Rama manifested in the person of Sri Ramakrishna. He, too, offered the beautiful stone image of Ramlala which he had been worshipping for many years, to Sri Ramakrishna, and left with a full heart. His sadhana had borne fruit.

Many felt the presence of a superhuman Power lurking inside the body-mind of Sri Ramakrishna. The Brahmin widow Golap Sundari Devi was one day surprised to see distinctly the hood of a snake which was devouring every morsel of food put into Sri Ramakrishna's mouth. In the scriptures such eating is called an offering to the coiled power of Kundalini.¹⁸ Bhairavi Brahmani used to ask Ramakrishna while eating food, whether he was himself eating the food or offering it to someone else within him. Mathur, the steward of the Kali temple, and the life-long devotee of the Master, used to see some other person moving, as if covered with a long veil, through the body of Sri Ramakrishna.¹⁹ Any sincere soul, or a genuine seeker of God whoever would come to Sri Ramakrishna, would feel the unspeakable presence of a Divine Power in the very presence of Ramakrishna who had lost himself in the Divine Mother. 'Thou art verily I and I am verily Thou',²⁰ Sri Ramakrishna used to speak to the Divine Mother.

At the very first meeting M. found in Sri Ramakrishna talking in his room, the ever-

15. *World Thinkers on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda*, Swami Lokeshwarananda, Ed., (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1983) p. 29.

16. *First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna*, op. cit., p. 168.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 379.

19. *Kathamrita* (Bengali) Vol. 4, p. 45.

20. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, op. cit., p. 207 and p. 272.

pure Shukadeva or Sri Chaitanya expounding the message of the *Bhagavatam*. Keshab thought of Sri Ramakrishna as the Chaitanya of the 19th-century.²¹ Ishan Mukhopadhyaya, another orthodox devotee, admitted that Sri Ramakrishna's words would come from the deity. 'I speak as She (the Divine Mother) speaks through me', Ramakrishna told him.²² In moments of samadhi, wrote M. 'An amazing transformation took place in him before the very eyes of the devotees. His face shone with a heavenly light.'²³ A young man who used to stay with Sri Ramakrishna during the days of his Kali-worship said, 'I see a light on your face. I am afraid to come very near you.'²⁴ One day when Vijayakrishna Goswami, the advanced spiritual seeker, said to him, 'I know who you are', Sri Ramakrishna in ecstasy muttered, 'If so, so be it.' Vijay fell prostrate before him and clung to his feet.²⁵ Sri Ramakrishna went into deep samadhi, motionless as in picture.

* * * * *

An incarnation is the 'Impersonal Personal God',²⁶ as Vivekananda liked to call, who draws us to Him first and then through Him to the knowledge of the Infinite. To the deputy magistrate and devotee Adhar Sen, Ramakrishna said, 'To have the vision of God and have the vision of the Incarnation of God both are same.'²⁷ To others he said: 'Through an incarnation of God you can taste devotion and love.'²⁸ God's play is infinite but what we need is only love and devotion. We need milk. This comes through the udder of the cow. The Incarnation of God, in the simile of Ramakrishna,

is the udder of the Cosmic Cow.²⁹ Devotion and reason are harmonized in an Incarnation's life. In them we can see, as Ramakrishna said to philosopher M., both highest rationalism and highest devotion existing together just as sometimes we see the setting sun and the rising moon in the same sky.³⁰ As the water of the roof rushes through gorgoyle, the power of God rushes through the life of an Incarnation. He is like the morning sun which we can see and enjoy with our bare eyes. 'The greatest manifestation of God is in man', Ramakrishna said to the westernized Keshab, 'there are small holes in the balk of a field where crabs and fishes accumulate in the rainy season. If you want to find them you must seek them in the holes. If you seek God, you must seek Him in incarnations.'³¹ With these and many other strangely simple similes born out of his deep mystical visions, Ramakrishna used to explain the otherwise difficult concept of an Incarnation, the 'Impersonal Personal God' The 'vision of the enlightened men', according to Shankara, is a vision of the Ultimate Truth.³²

Why does the infinite appear as finite? History tells us that whenever humanity has lost sight of the way to the Kingdom of God, God has appeared as man in order to lead man to God. He comes in simple guise like the carpenter's son in Judeah, or the cowherd boy of Vrindaban. Ramakrishna himself came as the poor brahmin boy of an unknown village of Bengal, Kamarpukur. When God plays as man, Ramakrishna used to teach, he behaves like an ordinary human being. He feels the same thirst, hunger, disease, bereavement like any other human being. Rama wept at the

21. Ibid., p. 422.

22. Ibid., pp. 616-17.

23. Ibid., p. 928.

24. Ibid., p. 891.

25. Ibid., p. 881.

26. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973) Vol. 3, p. 249.

27. *Kathamrita* (Bengali) Vol. 5, p. 32.

28. Ibid., p. 45.

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., p. 94.

31. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, op. cit., p. 353.

32. *Brahma-sutra. Bhashya*, Swami Gambhirananda, Tr., (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977) I, ii, 17.

bereavement of Sita. That is why it is so difficult to identify them.³³ He is like the unknown tree, according to Ramakrishna's simile, which everybody admires but no one knows. An Incarnation is like a king who comes in the guise of a beggar to look to the welfare of his subjects who forgot, out of circumstantial sufferings, that they too, were heirs to the same kingdom. We are like the deluded prince, according to Vivekananda, who moves with a begging bowl over a goldmine which belongs to him. Incarnations come to tell us that the Kingdom of God is for us, too, and that it is within us.

Like the king in disguise, Ramakrishna came to help men and women who were suffering, who were lost and down-trodden, who sought God with all their soul and yet failed, who decried God with all their arrogance and yet who sobbed at heart, who lost the moorings of life and felt destined to die in the darkness of ignorance. Like Christ, Buddha, and Chaitanya, he himself went from house to house, not with the pride of an accomplished teacher, but with the passion of a saviour who came to accept all the sins, pains and tribulations of humanity in order to lead them to divine life, and everlasting bliss. With infinite pain and sacrifice he paved the new way to divine life suited for this age and lead us along the way. 'Incarnations of God are like giant ships', Ramakrishna said, 'they themselves can cross the ocean of life and carry others also. Their sadhana and austerities are for the good of humanity.'³⁴ An incarnation comes to teach people ecstatic love of God.³⁵ He comes to teach devotion and inspires us to direct all our human emotions and moods (Shanta, Dasya, Vatsalya,

Madhura etc.) towards God,³⁶ and find fulfilment in life.

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Even in the Vedantic texts where pure knowledge is extolled, the possibility of the Infinite expressing through the finite man is not denied. A knower of Brahman becomes verily the Brahman itself, declares the Upanishads. The *Taittiriya Upanishad* (II, viii, 5) says, 'He that is here in the human person, and He that is here in the Sun, are one. Shankaracharya, commenting on this idea writes: 'In the sun is found the highest perfection of duality, consisting of the formed and formless. If, from the standpoint of the supreme Bliss, that perfection can be placed on the same footing with the human personality, after eliminating the peculiarities of the latter, there will remain no superiority or inferiority for one who attains that goal'.³⁷ Commentator Anandagiri follows the same line of thought taken up by Shankara, 'The same unsurpassing bliss of the conscious Reality that is reflected on a superior medium, viz., the sun, is also reflected on an inferior medium, viz., a human being possessing head, hand etc. Thus from the standpoint of supreme bliss, the two distinct entities are on a par, and intrinsically they are the same.'³⁸

The 'Cosmic Person' (*Vaisvanara*) or the Supreme Lord is hidden in human beings, says the *Brahmasutras*. 'Even though the Supreme Lord transcends all limitations still there can be a spatial limitation for the sake of (His) manifestation', interprets Shankara. The 'Supreme Self', according to him, which has no spatial limitation has to be meditated on as though 'spatially determined'.³⁹ In meditation, we try to visualize a space-time limited 'form' of the all-perva-

36. Ibid., p. 957.

37. Swami Gambhirananda, *Eight Upanishads* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957) Vol. 1, p. 372.

38. Ibid., p. 371.

39. *Brahma-sutra Bhashya*, op. cit., Sutras: I, ii, 24, 29, 30.

33. *Kathamrita* (Bengali), Vol. 4, p. 47.

34. *Kathamrita* (Bengali), Vol. 3, p. 116.

35. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, op. cit., p. 725.

ding Reality⁴⁰ in the internal space (*dahara*) in our heart.⁴¹

Human imagination is essentially anthropomorphic. The moment we try to think, meditate or visualize the Infinite we grope towards a finite form. The soul-stirring songs of Brahma samaj praise the glory of the formless God, yet the ideas of 'a loving face' 'the radiant face like the sun' 'the feet' where we must take refuge, creep in. Man is bound to worship God as man, Vivekananda said, as cows are inclined to look for an infinitely big cow as their God. 'Therefore it is absolutely necessary to worship God as man', says Vivekananda 'and blessed are those races which have such a God-man to worship....God cannot be worshipped. He is the immanent Being in the universe. It is only to His manifestation as man that

we can pray.'⁴² Sri Krishna says in the Gita: 'Fools not knowing that I, the omnipresent God of the universe have taken this human form, deride Me, and think that cannot be'. To think that God cannot have a form is to limit the unlimited. The Incarnations come in every age, to demonstrate the power and divinity of God. 'These great incarnations of God are to be worshipped. Not only so, they alone can be worshipped', said Vivekananda.⁴³ In Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda found the greatest manifestation of incarnation-power so far recorded in the history of humanity. In the celebrated vesper song on Sri Ramakrishna, which is sung all over the world, Ramakrishna's name is nowhere mentioned. He is verily the Infinite in the finite.

40. Ibid., I, ii, 23.

41. Ibid., 1.13, 19.

42. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1978) Vol. 4, p. 31.

43. Ibid., p. 32.

THE HOLY MOTHER'S UNIQUENESS

SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA

Once Swami Saradananda was asked to write a biography of the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. The Swami kept quiet for a long time and then replied by humming a song which signified that he had been unable to understand the Mother's divine play. In this context one is reminded of the feelings expressed by Sister Nivedita in one of her beautiful letters. The Sister wanted to send a 'wonderful hymn or a prayer' to the Holy Mother, but felt 'even that would seem too loud, too full of noise', in comparison to the serenity of the Mother. 'We should be very still and quiet' in her presence, Nivedita realized. Like the greatest and the sublimest creation of the Lord, Nivedita wrote, 'Like the morning dew, the Ganga, and the Himalaya', Mother is quiet, and yet

she is all beauty, all purity and sublimity in its highest sense. 'The highest men are calm, silent and unknown', said Swami Vivekananda.

Similar feelings were experienced by Swamiji and other great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, whenever they went in the presence of the Holy Mother. Swamiji had argued and fought every inch of the way with Sri Ramakrishna and did not swallow his word without being convinced. But he never did so with the Holy Mother. He used to accept her command unhesitatingly. For example, he had planned to perform animal sacrifice as a part of the Durga Puja at the Belur Math, but when the Holy Mother disapproved of the idea he immediately dropped it. Once the Swami dismissed

a cook on a charge of theft. The poor man approached the Holy Mother, and when she sent him back to be reinstated, the Swami accepted her verdict without the least protest. Once he wanted to sell away even the newly acquired Belur Math to procure enough money for plague relief work. It was again the command of the Holy Mother which deterred him from doing so. Swami Saradananda accepted the divine unity of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother, but pointing out the difference, he said that while it was possible to argue with Sri Ramakrishna, one could not do so with the Holy Mother. Her few soft words had a strange power that would at once silence even the loudest arguments.

Why was it so? Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda had a common message to deliver. But each had an assigned task. The Holy Mother's role is not exactly the same as that of Sri Ramakrishna's or Swami Vivekananda's. Swami Vivekananda's great task was to present to the world the ideas and ideals as lived and demonstrated by Sri Ramakrishna. But he wanted to present them in a manner intelligible to modern man. The Holy Mother's task was to present and demonstrate the spiritual side of the same message, especially the power and love of the Divine Motherhood in a human body. While Swamiji's appeal is to the intellect, the Holy Mother's is always directly to the heart. Swamiji satisfies the intellectual hunger of modern man. The Holy Mother's words go straight into the heart of the listeners with a rare and irresistible power. But more than words, it is the unseen aura of her love and affection for all that would strike a newcomer to her. She appears at the very first sight as the 'real' mother of all. When as a young boy Swami Virajananda first saw Holy Mother, he at once felt the presence of his own mother of many births.

Words can express only the thoughts arising in the mind, and not the sentiments

of the heart. It was neither possible nor necessary to argue with the Holy Mother. She could convey whatever she wanted to, without the exchange of words. When she went to visit South India, many South Indians did not know her tongue, and yet they understood what she spoke, and all felt an unspeakable sense of bliss and fulfilment in her presence. She used to work at a level deeper than thought or language. That is why Nivedita, Ole Bull and Josephine McLeod understood every word she first spoke to them in Bengali. And none of them failed to understand her spiritual profundity, and universal Love, when she first addressed them as 'my daughters'.

Swami Vivekananda said that if there is a conflict between the head and the heart, follow the heart. We may sometimes apply this rule in choosing between the teachings of Swamiji, and those of the Holy Mother's. In case of doubt, let us accept what mother teaches. Swamiji had the tremendous capacity of presenting even opposite ideas in a way that would make them appear equally true. When he spoke of any one of the four yogas, for example, he used to extol that particular path as the best of all. This used to confuse his listeners. To such a brother-disciple who was in dilemma after listening to Swamiji, Swami Yogananda had advised to follow the words of Holy Mother.

A conduit of love

What was the secret of the Holy Mother's infallibility? Why was it that in every matter she hit the mark, that her judgement never failed? It was because of love. Learning may fail; love never fails. Rightly has it been said, 'All errors are the want of love'. All errors of judgement, understanding and action are due to the want of love. This brings us to another comment of Sister Nivedita. She calls the Holy Mother, 'Sri Ramakrishna's own chalice of love for the world'. It was indeed Sri Ramakrishna's

intense, unfathomable love for suffering humanity, men and women in bondage, either social or spiritual, which was condensed and personified in the form of the Holy Mother. He made the Holy Mother a receptacle and a conduit in and through which he could pour out his unbounded love for humanity irrespective of caste, creed and nationality.

Sri Ramakrishna had poured his own Divine love into the Holy Mother's heart when she, as a girl of fourteen, had for the first time after marriage, an opportunity to live with him. Describing the experience, the Holy Mother used to say. 'My heart remained incessantly so very full of an indescribable bliss that I have always felt since then as if a jar of bliss, full to the overflowing, was installed in my heart.' The effect of this sense of fulfilment was far-reaching. It made her selfless, and infinitely sympathetic to the sorrows and miseries of humanity. Sri Ramakrishna's compassion for humanity transformed her by degrees into an embodiment of compassion itself. When Sri Ramakrishna asked her to look after the Calcuttans wallowing in the mire of the darkness of ignorance, Holy Mother initially felt herself unequal to this task. But Sri Ramakrishna's love began to flow through her, and she emerged as the Mother of all, saint or sinner, high or low.

Further inpouring of this love occurred at the time of Shodashi Puja when Sri Ramakrishna instilled into her spiritually awakened soul the nectar of love and bliss which he had gathered by twelve long years of superhuman spiritual practices for the welfare of humanity. To this the Holy Mother added her own quota by doing hundred-thousand japa daily for years together. And then out of the fullness of her heart, a cry went forth like that of Jesus, 'Come all ye that labour and leave thy burden on me'.

It is for us to respond to her call and run to her as would Sister Nivedita, and drink deep the nectar of divine bliss in her quiet presence. In the eyes of the Sister, it was

foolish even to try to meditate in the Mother's presence. The Mother herself used to dissuade devotees who tried to do a lot of japa and meditation in her presence at Jayarambati. Instead she asked them to live freely and cheerfully like children in their mother's presence.

A call for surrender

This brings us to another speciality of the Holy Mother's message. The superhuman spiritual practices of Sri Ramakrishna inspires one to practise at least one sixteenth of it to see God. Swami Vivekananda urges one to intense activity, to sacrifice one's life for the good of mankind. But the Mother wants us to relinquish even the ego of a spiritual aspirant or that of a reformer, and to surrender to Her without caring for one's own salvation or the welfare of the world. And the balanced combination of these three, namely, meditation, work, and surrender would conduce to the greatest good. This is the composite message of the trinity.

In the life and message of all incarnations, we see two sets of teachings, one emphasizing self-effort, and the other self-surrender. An incarnation of God shows us the path, and by his own exemplary life, sets an example to be emulated. Secondly, by his divine power he takes the burden of the weaker man on his shoulders, and urges him to do his best for God, and then resign to the Divine will. Individuals too differ in their mental make-up. There are some strong enough to stand on their own feet, but there are others who are weak, and need to lean upon others. This is not all. Each human being is conscious of his powers as well as limitations. There never was a man so strong as never to feel the need to relax or seek help. At one moment man feels free to do certain things, the next moment he realizes his limitations. Both strength and weakness, ability and inability,

can and must be made use of in order to attain highest perfection. The Holy Mother's teachings are in many cases, meant for those who are conscious of their weaknesses more than their ability. In her teachings we find again and again such statements as: 'What can you do? How much can you do? I am doing all for you.' 'Have no fear; I have taken upon me your responsibility.' 'Remember always that you have a mother to fall back upon.' As an affectionate mother, she was fully aware of the utter helplessness of the multitude of her children and could fully realize the frustration and despair which they have to face so often in life. At such moments she would stand out to them as their mother with a super-human power of protection and elevation.

The recovery of faith

In this context it may be mentioned that the Holy Mother emphasizes the personality of, and advocates faith in, the incarnation of this age, Sri Ramakrishna. Every incarnation not only rediscovers and demonstrates the universal and eternal spiritual principles and presents them in a manner befitting the times, but he, in his own capacity, also becomes the *Ishta*, or the ideal. Like the previous ones, the new incarnation in his turn is worshipped by his followers as the human manifestation of the Almighty or God. Both these aspects in the life of an incarnation are important. One gives breadth to his message, the other deepens it. The universal and philosophical truths based only on principles, are only for the select few. But when such truths are demonstrated through the personality and the earthly divine play of the incarnation, a new cult is formed of which the God-man becomes the centre. While Swami Vivekananda preached the ideals and spiritual principles as represented in the life of Sri Ramakrishna without even naming him, the Holy Mother emphasized faith in the life and personality of Sri Ramakrishna.

She repeatedly stressed the divinity, the godhood of Sri Ramakrishna so that the disciples may have firm faith in him as their chosen ideal. Ultimately it is faith and not reason which imparts stability to an individual. Faith is not belief; It is not mere reason. Faith is a 'grasp on the Ultimate' as Swamiji said. In the present age of crisis of faith, the efforts for its recovery through the life of Sri Ramakrishna as shown by Holy Mother, therefore, gain great importance.

Love, faith and surrender, all these three messages of the Holy Mother are related to the emotional or the affective aspect of human psyche. She therefore fulfils one of the greatest needs of the times by emotionally integrating and stabilizing man through inculcating faith in the Incarnation Power. But as long as man remains the recipient only, the process is not complete. He must not only be the receiver, but must also become the donor of love, sympathy and consolation, without which there cannot be true fulfilment. This the Holy Mother fully realized and hence, although she was always ready to give, she also taught others to be givers of love, help and consolation in their turn.

We remember her advice to the head of an ashrama who was too exacting and demanded strict obedience from his subordinates. When he complained that they were not sufficiently obedient to him, the Holy Mother snubbed him, reminding that love was the binding force in a religious community, and that he should command by love, rather than demand obedience. Her last message to a lady devotee who was weeping at her imminent passing away, has become immortal. 'Why do you fear? You have seen the Master.... But I tell you one thing. If you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child; the whole world is your own.' By reminding

that she had seen and known the manifest divinity of the Master, the Mother wanted the devotees to have firm faith in Sri Ramakrishna and in the ways of all-engulfing love in which he moved and lived. We see faults in others only when we lack love. But we shall cease to find faults in them and thus gain abiding peace, if we begin to love them. And the only way of making others one's own is to win over them by loving care and service, by giving help and consolation and what little we can without asking for a return. This is what the Holy Mother did and taught.

RELEVANCE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA TO MODERN LIFE

SWAMI HARSHANANDA

Nearly a century ago when Sri Ramakrishna, the priest of Dakshineswar Kali temple, breathed his last very few people realized the far-reaching influence his message was going to have in the days to come. Seven miles away from Calcutta, the metropolis of western culture in India in those days, this virtually unlettered priest lived a life of constant communion with God, absolutely oblivious of the social norms of the so-called cultured and the educated. Yet society veered round him. After nearly 75 years of his Mahasamadhi, Ramakrishna slowly began to emerge as the pathfinder for the modern times. Arnold J. Toynbee concluded his monumental *Study of History* with the idea that today's problems are neither economic nor social, nor scientific. They are primarily spiritual. After coming in contact with Ramakrishna's life and message, he wrote:

Sri Ramakrishna was born and brought up in a village in Bengal. He spent most of his life in a temple on the bank of the Ganges, only a few miles away from Calcutta. Outwardly his life might seem uneventful. Yet in his own field, the field of religion his life was much more active and more effective than the lives of his contemporaries, Indian and English, who were building the framework of modern India in Sri Ramakrishna's lifetime. Perhaps Sri Ramakrishna's life was even more modern than theirs, in the sense

that his work may have a still greater future than theirs.¹

Ramakrishna brought the power of religion to solve the problems of life. He brought, as it was often said by his disciples, the Vedanta of the forest to the homes of life. With him Vedanta, the eternal values of India's spiritual culture, became practical and effective in solving day-to-day problems of life.

Problems are and will always be there in human life. Except two, none is free from problems: the perfect being who has transcended them, and the perfect fool who does not understand them. All other human beings in-between these two extremes, at various levels of evolution, are beset with them. Modern world, notwithstanding all the wonders that have been wrought by science and technology raising our civilization to higher levels of comforts, has multiplied psychic problems and tensions. If lack of basic amenities of life worries certain segments of the world society, a surfeit of them is threatening life on earth itself in other sections. The various problems that our society is facing at the individual level (like alcoholism, drug-addiction, and sex-

1. *Vedanta and the West*, Hollywood Vedanta Centre, No. 141 (Jan-Feb, 1966). p. 9.

perversions), social or national level (like exploitation, crimes, and violence, group animosities, and conflicts based on pride and prejudice), and the inter-national level (like wars, and violations of human rights) are all, in the ultimate analysis, simply the symptoms of a sick mind. Today's problems have to be tackled at a more fundamental level and more fundamental solutions have to be found and applied.

This is what we find in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna who stood out, in the vision of Vivekananda, 'as an object lesson for future generations'. Ramakrishna (1836-1886) more known as the 'Parma-hansa' is the brightest star that rose on the spiritual firmament of India in the nineteenth century. Born of pious parents in the tiny village of Kamarpukur in a remote part of Bengal (b. 18 February 1836), he spent his early life there itself. Ever since he shifted to Calcutta in 1852 to assist his elder brother, until his Mahasamadhi on the 16 August 1886, it was a long life of total dedication to God. Starting his life as an unknown temple priest—the vocation which was not considered as a very honourable one—he rose to be a world-teacher of religion and spirituality, by dint of intense austerity culminating in an uniquely comprehensive spiri-experience. From simple image worship right up to the highest flights of Advaita philosophy, the whole gamut of Indian spiritual culture, was traversed by him. Not being satisfied with it, he experimented with alien religions like Christianity and Islam, and found, to his joy that they too lead to the same super-conscious mystic state. Being thus armed with the direct experience of Truth through the known and unknown paths of various cults and religions, he proclaimed the great message of his life: *Harmony*; harmony not only of religions but of *all* aspects of life, within the framework of the ultimate spiritual welfare of man. He specially prepared a band of disciples under the leadership of Narendra-

nath (Swami Vivekananda) to give a practical shape to his teachings and spread them far and wide for the benefit of humanity. Through Sri Sarada Devi, his consort, he exhibited to the world the possibility of raising conjugal life to the highest spiritual level and the nature of universal motherhood.

Thanks to Mahendranath Gupta (pseudonym 'M'), Ramakrishna's teachings have come down to us in abundance. M's book *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, is an all-time classic by any standard. Even a cursory glance at the book will reveal the refrain of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings: *Bhagavan labh*, 'realization of God' as the only goal of life, and *kama-kanchana-tyaga* 'renunciation of lust and lucre' as the essence of spiritual life. To modern man deifying sex and material wealth, day in and day out, these solutions of Sri Ramakrishna appeared ridiculous some fifty years before. Today, however, his ideas are appealing to modern mind due to the socio-economic changes that have taken place. The Marxian concept of the economic determination of life is today put to severe doubt. Only money cannot solve the problems of the psyche which plague modern generation, especially the youth. In December 1984, the *People's Daily*, China's official news organ, openly declared that China has rejected the ideas of Marx, Engels and Lenin as their ideas do not apply to modern problems of China. The recent *Glasnost*, the liberalization policy in Russia, is a pointer to the same direction. The Freudian slogan of giving free release to impulses is largely responsible for bringing the black angel of AIDS which, according to recent statistics, may claim lakhs of lives by the end of this century. One can even find such slogans in the schools of some of the most advanced societies—spare the Freud and save the child.

When Sri Ramakrishna used the word *kama-kanchana-tyaga* or 'renunciation of lust

and lucre' he did not ask everyone to embrace monastic life. If the young men who were earmarked by him for a life of total renunciation and dedication, were advised 'not even to look at the picture of a woman' or to look upon *all* women as aspects of the Divine Mother, the householder couples were directed to live like 'brother and sister' after the birth of one or two children. He himself worshipped his own wife as the Divine Mother, and remained absolutely chaste throughout his life. If he himself had practised renunciation of money to such an extent that he could not even bear the least touch of metal, or reject outright the fabulous gifts by his admirers, he permitted a young disciple of his to earn money to take care of his mother. He even admonished severely an errant householder who had squandered his ancestral wealth by fast living, and who had abandoned his family, leaving them at the mercy of others. In other words, he tailored his teachings to suit the needs and capacities of his disciples, but always leading them, gradually though, to higher levels of spiritual perfection. To him none was damned, none was too bad to be reformed. He knew that everyone was groping at lower levels of development, and had to be led up to higher ones.

Almost all the problems that the modern man is facing, whatever be their ramifications, can ultimately be traced to two basic infirmities of the human mind: lust and greed. It is these two that manifest themselves through various desires. These desires, when unfulfilled, lead to frustrations and complexes. When fulfilled, instead of getting satiated, they grow further in intensity, like the fire that consumes inflammable substances. It is a strange fact that as desires are fulfilled in arithmetic progression, they seem to grow further in geometric progression! Fulfilment or satiation can never catch up with the desires: This will again lead to the same old result of frustration with all its concomitant evils.

At the same time total abandonment of all desires is a chimera except for the spiritually perfected being. So, the only way left for an ordinary person is to regulate his lust and greed, within the permitted perimeters of Dharma (the Law) as sanctioned by the scriptures, and gradually overcome them through disciplines prescribed for them. This is what Sri Ramakrishna taught to his householder disciples. One must cling to God with one hand and perform worldly duties with the other. When the worldly responsibilities are over, the mind will go to God and the renunciation of lust and greed will only be natural. Placing a limit on our lust and greed, and trying to gradually transcend them is a primary solution even for our complex problems. Given the chance of its trial it deserves, it can certainly prove its worthiness to us in our lives—both individual and social, as also national and international.

Another great message of Sri Ramakrishna is *Harmony*. Harmony of notes is a well-known concept in music. When various notes, differing in pitch and volume, coalesce, without jarring one another in any way, harmonious music is produced. And, such a music is a feast for the ears. So also, when the spiritual and the material aspects of our personal and social life, coalesce as to bring a successful life, we feel ready to proceed towards *Nisreyas* or a life of spiritual perfection.

The materialists consider themselves a combination of body and mind. They do not care for the Spirit, the undying Self the divinity within. On the other hand, the spiritual teachers, especially in the post-Vedic India, almost invariably relegated and even derided the role of the body, often picturing it as filthy and a formidable obstacle to spiritual progress. But Sri Ramakrishna's approach is positive and full of respect for life. He advised the ordinary aspirants to care for the body since the body is a great aid in obtaining spiritual experi-

enece. At the same time he taught, like Buddha, to make all possible sacrifice for God realization. He was conscious of the minimum needs of the body. He practically demonstrated this teaching in his life by arranging for treatment, nursing and nourishment of his wife or disciples whenever they fell ill. But with all this, he never approved bestowal of too much of attention on it, lest it develops into inordinate body-consciousness which is a great obstacle to spiritual progress, the ultimate goal of life. His discouragement of Hatha Yoga should be viewed from this angle.

Speech is the second aspect of our personality. Sri Ramakrishna used to teach that to speak the truth is the greatest austerity in this age. Ramakrishna's truthfulness was phenomenal. He was the very symbol of truth. Yet he never hurt others. Ramakrishna never condemned anyone. He only loved. In today's society even the educated and civilized people have assiduously cultivated the art of speaking untruths and half-truths to a degree of sophistication unknown, perhaps, in our previous history. Ramakrishna's life of absolute truthfulness may seem an impossibility for others. But this, nevertheless, is the ideal. Truth ultimately wins and brings fulfilment. Ramakrishna's life teaches us this great lesson. Have we ever, even for a moment, stopped to think of the disastrous consequences if everyone starts telling lies to everyone else? One cannot say that one can tell a lie or the truth as it suits one. One must not be a thief in the room of ideas, Ramakrishna used to say. He meant that one must shun hypocrisy and must try to make his words coincide with the thoughts in his mind.

Mind is the most important aspect of our personality. It is the quality of our mind that makes or mars our life. Uninformed people sometimes talk flippantly that Ramakrishna, himself being a 'non-intellectual', disdained and discouraged intellectualism. Far from it. Though he had had little schoo-

ling, he had 'heard much', as he himself confesses, from great intellectuals and sincere seekers. And, he had a photographic memory! He used to delight in explaining religio-philosophical truths, and would even encourage his disciple to read tough texts like the *Ashtavakra Samhita* or have friendly debates and discussions on metaphysical topics. What he really disliked and discouraged was dry intellectualism meant for public consumption, and not for self-realization.

As regards the spiritualisation of emotions and the aesthetic spirit, Ramakrishna was a supreme artist. Himself an adept in various fine arts like music, painting and clay-modelling, he could also appreciate the beauties of nature. It is now a well-known fact that his very first samadhi (superconscious experience) was brought about by the sight of an exquisitely beautiful scene of nature. He was sensitive to high class poetry and would often improvise lines, very aptly, when the matchless compositions of the poet mystics of Bengal (like Ramprasad and Kamalakanta) were being sung. He exulted in singing devotional songs in his golden voice, and delighted in listening to good music—as that of Narendranath or Trailokyanath. As regards the purity of emotions he was the last word. The whole philosophy of his life was, that all our faculties—physical, vocal, intellectual, aesthetic and emotional—should be directed to one single purpose of life, viz., God-experience. If this is not harmony of life and harmony in life, what else can it be?

Rama upheld the highest principles of Dharma in his life. Krishna fought relentlessly to destroy the enemies of Dharma and gave us a dynamic philosophy of work. Buddha and Mahavira quietly brought about the burial of the meaningless labyrinth of ritualism and substituted it with simple moral values based on non-violence and mutual love. Shankara heralded a revolution in metaphysical speculations and restored intellectualism to a respectable position.

Chaitanya, Nanak and a galaxy of saints of the Bhakti schools, brought back sanity into a society riven by caste-prejudices and ridden with superstitions, and strengthened the social fabric by preaching a philosophy of mutual love and respect. Everyone of them, without exception, fulfilled the needs of his times, both by precept and by practice.

The same Supreme Power that manifested through these incarnations, saints and sages, either partially or otherwise, has come down once again to show us the way, away from the way leading to total destruction of mankind; the way to universal fulfilment through individual fulfilment by a harmoni-

ous and God-oriented development of all aspects of human personality. And in this, the role of self-control, fidelity to truth and God-centred living as taught by him stands supreme.

Ramakrishna's message stands as the way out of modern problems. We are too near Sri Ramakrishna in time to understand the true impact of his epoch-making message. But, if the vision of Vivekananda is to be believed, the world is already Ramakrishna's! Even if we do not believe this, we can ignore Ramakrishna's message of harmony and self-control only at our own peril.

EGO AND SELF

DR. MARGARET BEDROSIAN

Like two birds of golden plumage, inseparable companions, the individual self and the immortal Self are perched on the branches of the selfsame tree. The former tastes of the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the latter, tasting of neither, calmly observes.

The individual self, deluded by forgetfulness of his identity with the divine Self, bewildered by his ego, grieves and is sad. But when he recognizes the worshipful Lord as his own true Self, and beholds his glory, he grieves no more.¹

This famous passage from the *Mundaka Upanishad* essentializes the central task of the spiritual quest, our need to discover the identity of the individual self and the divine Self. It also draws our attention to the "bewildered ego" and its bewildering role in this process of discovery. It reminds us that only after we have developed a clear understanding of the relationship between

the ego and the Self can the two golden birds emerge in the fullness of their beauty. As we begin to make friends with the ego and help it take its proper place in our growth, we come to appreciate it for what it is, a marvellous instrument designed by evolution to make possible greater and greater levels of Self-realization. But before we are able to consciously direct the powers of this instrument toward expressing the will of the Self, we have to go through an extensive period of sorting out: as the scriptures teach, we have to distinguish between the proper functions of ego and the primary will of the Self.

The term "ego" carries many divergent connotations in everyday speech. When we use it in its descriptive form, as in the word "egotistical," images of self-involvement, selfishness, self-aggrandizement, and conceit appear in our minds. We usually associate puffed up bellies and swollen heads, haughty looks and booming voices with the notion of egotistical. Even those who seem to

1. *Mundaka Upanishad*, *The Upanishads*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester (Hollywood, California: Vedanta Society of Southern California, 1948), pp. 46-47.

possess "a strong ego" may in fact be weak: such persons may appear self-sufficient and competent most of the time; they may carry off actions that require "nerve" and great worldly strength. They may even fill positions which the rest of us, who are worried about the abuse of power, shy away from. But if we observe such people in crisis, at moments when they have to deal with an issue beyond their power to control, we notice how quickly they buckle under the strain. It is as if their egos, inflated with a gaseous ignorance, can not process life's flow. Breakdowns, apoplectic fits, reactions that endanger the very work they sought to achieve show that their egos are cut off from their supply source. In its most grotesque form, this separation marks the megalomaniac, exemplified by the Ahab of Herman Melville's novel, *Moby Dick*; intent on working his will over nature, this driven man destroys himself and most of his ship's crew as he chases the whale across the oceans of the world.

There is another, shadowy side to the ego as well: we see it in the pose of the overly meek and deferential, the silence of one who never contributes because of a sense of inferiority or an unwillingness to take risks; these are the manifestations of ego masking as an exaggerated—and very self-involved—humility. These extreme symptoms suggest that the ego can thwart the individual self in endless ways, each designed to protect the self from some harm or threat. Insofar as any of us is driven by an unenlightened ego, we live to promote very specific and narrow images of ourselves; we may not even be aware of what is most distinctive or appealing in our nature; bewildered by any number of collective ideals, our own need to experience our individual importance, or the deep-seated fear that there is nothing behind the facade we present to the world, we misdirect our attention: we use the ego to protect ourselves from the higher purposes of the Self. In this role, it is as though the

ego exists to keep the individual bird eternally separated from the divine.

Since so much can go wrong with the workings of the ego, it is hard to believe that it might have a positive role in our lives. And yet, through thousands of years of human development, it has become a directing agent for the individual, and our common experience of the ego is that it organizes and centralizes the functions of the personality. Without its ordering ability, we would be stranded in the mush of random phenomena, struggling to wrest meaning and direction from the chaotic sensations that move through our body and psyche. In *Return of the Goddess*, Edward C. Whitmont describes this stage of human development:

Ego is a Roman word. Divide and rule was the motto of ancient Rome, the first fully ego-conscious society. It is also the motto of the ego...Ego strength is measured by the capacity to assert one's will over nature, forcing it to serve ego's striving for permanence, comfort, and avoidance of pain, and by the capacity to control one's urges, needs and desires. Existence is perceived as limited to the world of space; hence it is irrevocably terminated by death and decay of the space-visible body.²

This passage points out the double-edged nature of the ego as we know it. As an instrument of order, of division and rule, it represents a great victory over the regressive pull of the unconscious; it holds us to values and principles that overcome inertia and lead to the overall development of human faculties which depend on stability and security to flourish. But despite the fact that the ego is a necessary instrument in the growth of consciousness, its temporal and spatial orientation can blind us its larger role in human evolution, as a great servant of the Self. Thus, once we recognize that there is more for the ego to do than "divide and

2. Edward C. Whitmont, *Return of the Goddess* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), p. 71.

rule" or to keep us safe, we are free to explore exciting new possibilities: what can the individual do to align the ego with the Self?

As we begin to coordinate the efforts of the ego with the directives of the Self, we need to constantly keep in mind that the ego is not some alien power that has mysteriously usurped the prerogatives of the Self—even though it may often appear this way. In its purest, most evolved form, the ego is the executive agency of the Self, the tool which helps bring the ideal visions of the Truth into time-and-space reality. In no sense would we be justified in saying that the ego must be destroyed for the sake of the Self; for without the ego, the Self does not have a pipeline into the world. Or to use more Vedantic terms, the ego is ideally like a choreographer who listens to the music of the Self and then gives form to the Cosmic Dance. This music is always radiating from the deepest level of our consciousness, but usually our lives are not consciously moving to it. In fact, to the extent that we are not aware that the Self is moving us toward alignment with its will, the choreography of our daily lives will often resemble a disjointed fumbling for control and meaning. Confused and driven by urges beyond its understanding, the ego in this state of ignorance only falls in the way of the higher will.

Faced with a lifetime in which the ego has undone them and afraid to give the assertive ego any excuse to bully its way back into power, spiritual seekers may feel the only answer is to go after this ego with a knife or a gun, to starve it into submission, anything to put an end to the trouble it causes. But if we fall into this trap of making the ego the enemy rather than seeing that it's the *misplaced power* we've given it, which leads to our downfall, we destroy the bridge that might lead us to greater meaning. Since the Self expresses itself in the world through the channel of the conscious and

aligned ego, a major task in our sadhana is to strengthen the ego *without* inflating it. Meeting this challenge takes skill, patience, and unbroken communion with the Self; it is the art of walking the razor's edge; it is the science of constantly monitoring the movements of our inner life, sorting out the impulses and instincts that push and pull us away and toward the Self. And yet, if we don't go through this process of intentionally building the ego's strength, it will shatter as the tremendous force of the Self rushes through the nervous system.

Examples of this shattering are familiar to all of us. They include failed mystics who may have been much at ease in the higher reaches of the spirit but did not have a clear sense of their ego boundaries, i.e. where their personalities ended and where the divine began; thus when the Self raises its head and makes its demands of the individual, such a person finds himself without the means of enacting these directives, wandering about like an emotionally disturbed person unable to distinguish between different states of reality. Other examples take in artists who may have a soaring vision of what they wish to create, but have not built an adequate ego container in which to nurture and mature that vision. As a result, when they attempt to express the beauty and power of their imagination, it comes out formless, incoherent, leaking through the crevices of the psyche without impact. Yet another example of a weak ego sabotaging the will of the Self is found in those instances where a person may have an idealistic vision about service to humanity but has not developed the ego strength to filter this vision into a realistic framework that actually makes a difference in daily life. Without the means of enacting this ideal, such persons may well experience an excruciating, even a crushing, frustration. They are torn between an intuition of what is possible and an inability to give structure to this possibility in time and space.

Referring to this need to strengthen the ego container so that the spirit may be born in the world without defect, the Jungian psychoanalyst, M. Esther Harding, has compared the container to an alchemical vessel. As the aspirant undertakes the slow and necessary work of transforming the irrational and instinctual energies into the carriers of a higher consciousness, he needs to depend on those "human and civilized" factors to hold the experiment:

This wall of the personality is built of the qualities of the personal character—honesty, fairness, love of truth, honour, unselfishness. The alchemists insisted that these qualities must be present in considerable measure before the novice could undertake the great work; for only then would the vessel he built be capable of containing the very dynamic materials of the experiment.³

Harding's observations about the alchemists' approach to transformation bear a significant resemblance to statements made by Ramakrishna. One of the recurring themes of his teaching, echoed in that of all the great world teachers, concerns the importance of building a strong character before the realization of God, that without character we have no scaffolding to support us. No world teacher has ever stated that character is simultaneous with Self-realization; and yet, each has emphasized the disciplining role of character virtues such as honesty, charity, and compassion on the way to higher realization. Thus Ramakrishna taught that in the Kali Yuga, truthfulness—one of the rarest qualities among contemporary persons—is the great sadhana. In a very important sense, character is one of the main lookouts of the ego, that is to say its development falls under the ego's jurisdiction. Like any capacity that benefits through the structuring power of the ego, character can be enhanced through

conscious effort and discrimination, through the creation of helpful habits and the gradual eradication of harmful habits. In turn, as one's character takes on greater integration, it helps the ego resist negative impulses.

Just as it is vital that the ego be strong, it must also be flexible and supple. Without elasticity, the ego cannot adjust to the constant fluctuations in the expansion and contraction of consciousness. For example, many of us have had the experience of feeling very high, very exalted in the presence of great art, nature, a holy person, or during our own meditation. Or we may take a week off and go on a pilgrimage or a retreat, hoping to cleanse our system of all the accretions of daily life. During these times, we feel expansive, fully in tune with the Self; it is as if we're learning how to breathe again. But how curious that just as we leave the sanctuary and come home from the retreat, just as we are on the verge of transforming the old through a renewed vision, the most vicious or depressing emotions invade our psyche, as if to argue that those moments in the presence of something greater than our personal life were an illusion. What is going on?! In coming to terms with this phenomenon of the "rocky return," it helps to keep in mind that spiritual masters also move through different levels of consciousness; sometimes, as in the case of Ramakrishna, they do so with dizzying speed and finesse. Though they may be established in the truth—or perhaps *because* they are so firmly grounded in the truth—they move up and down the register of reality without stumbling. Emotions come and go: they feel sadness for the death of a friend, as when Sri Ramakrishna kept to his room for three days when Keshab died; they express displeasure when a student says something stupid; they allow hunger, joy, and curiosity to move through them, making the transition from the depths of contemplation to the upper reaches of the mundane with a grace that approaches

3. M. Esther Harding, *Psychic Energy: Its Source and Transformation* (Princeton, New Jersey: Bollingen Paperback Edition, 1973), p. 437.

art. After observing this quality for many years, I can only conclude that the secret lies somewhere in their ego's capacity to receive without trying to hold on, without trying to "rule over" the experience, as its own.

Psychologist Marion Woodman notes a similar ability in the greatest artists. Describing the dynamics of genuine creativity as the ability to receive the inspiration of the divine, she writes: "Real creativity happens only when the ego is strong enough to surrender. Imagine the strength of Shakespeare's chalice pierced by the divine phallus."⁴ Woodman draws attention to the central paradox of the strong ego as opposed to the self-willed ego: in the case of the latter, fear and arrogance set up a rigid boundary that prevents the creative breath of God from freely entering and planting the seed of the new; but where the ego is strong and confident in fulfilling its ultimate task, it can expand to tremendous measures to accommodate greater and greater surges of the creative power. Such strength also implies that when the divine energies recede, the ego will have enough elasticity to return to its more mundane functions without going into spasms of withdrawal. At such times, when we are making the transition from inspiration to eating or dusting the furniture, it helps us to remember that as long as we are oriented toward Self, the cycle will regulate itself.

The danger of not being oriented toward the Self, especially during periods of creative inspiration or inner development, is great. For if the ego becomes filled with the gifts of the spirit and then becomes *identified* with them, it loses all perspective: God's voice may echo through the ego container, but it does not originate there. Each of us knows what it is like to be in the presence of a person whose ego has this suppleness, the ability to resume normal "size" after a

creative fit; such persons impress us with their freedom to carry on a perfectly down-to-earth conversation or participate in the most ordinary acts without "pulling rank." Their human stature is expressed precisely by this ability to take responsibility for their gifts without ceasing to be human beings who live among other people and suffer existence in a body like everyone else.

The culmination of this maturation process is *samadhi*, the vision of sameness. When we speak from the perspective of the self-willed ego, there can be no sameness: there is only *my* differentness from the rest of humanity, my need to assert my needs in opposition to everyone else's. Misperceived, the vision of sameness can terrify; images ranging from self-annihilation to bland monotony suggest how deeply we fear losing our sense of "I" in an ocean of "sameness." Driven by this very fear, millions engage in the most bizarre and pathetic behaviors just so they'll "stand out." But the Self-willed ego, strong in its relation to that Self, knows better; it does not work about establishing its "differentness": this despite the fact that Self-realized individuals are the most distinctive human beings we are likely to meet. They naturally stand out from the crowd with a clarity and authority that are unmistakable; like the Self, they "bow their head to no one." How is it that they have achieved the very goal which eludes the misguided and desperate ego? The key lies in the seminal discovery that comes to the ego as it begins to turn to the Self, submitting to an alchemical process which subtly and dramatically alters the individual's consciousness of self. This discovery is quite simply the same truth which the Vedic seers found at the end of their contemplation: the source of our sense of "I" is not the ego, but the Self. Only the growing experience of this deeper "I" can strip these words from the Kena Upanishad of their enigma, "That which cannot be expressed in words but by

4. Marion Woodman, *The Pregnant Virgin* (Toronto, Canada: Inner City Books, 1985), p. 130.

which the tongue speaks—know that to be Brahman. Brahman is not the being who is worshiped of men.”⁵

When our sense of “I” approaches this level, “sameness” takes on a radically new meaning: it no longer suggests the leveling or the eradication of forms which the old ego found so threatening. Instead, it implies the recognition of one’s selfsame Self everywhere. This experience of Sameness annihilates death for there is nowhere left for it to hide or oppose. Yet, paradoxically, as we approach this secret truth, our individual life takes on a much finer texture and authenticity. We are finally free to be ourselves, having won through consciousness what the child possesses naturally. Observing holy men and women who are established in this truth, we see how distinct their personalities remain. What they share in their diversity is a vision of the world lit by the Self: their egos are firmly planted in the Source, which is to say they are aware of their connection as most of us are not. And because of this awareness, their egos will not cave in the minute something unexpected or beyond their personal control charges out of the dark.

On the contrary, when a Self-realized person meets such unexpected challenges, it seems as though he lands foursquare on his feet like a cat chased out of its perch; a sense of moral proportion and good will enables him to keep a balance between foolishly opening his arms to danger and overreacting before the fact. This balance is a mark of an ego instrument tuned in to the Self; like a transparent crystal it can receive and amplify the higher Will; it can communicate and mediate between the inner

and outer worlds; in its highest form, it consciously links those two inseparable companions on the selfsame tree.

Humanity has ways to go before all individuals have achieved this spiritual consummation. For most of us the word “I” is still synonymous with defensiveness and narrow personal desire. And when we taste of “the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree,” we often notice a vague aftertaste of sadness, if not outright indigestion. The remedy for this isn’t to taste “more” of the fruits or do so “more intensely”; these are the usual strategies people come up with to fight their frustration, but they only drive the car deeper into the mud: for our problem is never really with *what* we are experiencing in the world, but rather in our relationship with it. Thus, when the individual is ready to take responsibility for his life, the inquiring power of the ego consciously enters into a new relationship with its source; it opens to the calm, yet revolutionary Intelligence of the Self. Out of this intimate collaboration is born that new “I”; no longer in exile from its origins, it is able to taste and *digest* all the fruits of the tree of life.

This new ‘I’ Ramakrishna used to call the ripe ‘I’, while the ‘I’ which was aligned not towards God, but to selfish motives and sense enjoyments was termed by him as unripe ‘I’. Even after God realization this rascal ‘I’, as Ramakrishna says, lives in us, but it then lives as the servant ‘I’, the ego of the servant, of the devotee of God. It is then like a knife alchemised into gold, with which no killing can be done. It is this ripe ‘I’ which prompted St. Francis to address his own body as ‘brother donkey’ and cheer it up to carry heavy stones, day after day, to the heights of San Damien in order to build the Church of God.

5. Kena Upanishad, *The Upanishads*, p. 30.

A TRIP TO LEH IN THE HIMALAYAS

SWAMI VAMANANANDA

On a sunny morning of July 1987, a jonga jeep was waiting for us in front of Srinagar Ramakrishna Ashrama gate at 7.30 a.m. A medical officer, personally came to pick us up. In no time we boarded the jeep and started. We were finally going to realize our long-cherished dream of visiting the Himalayan heights of Leh. Another big bus accompanied us all through the journey. The passengers in the bus were officers on their way to Leh. On our way we halted to pay our homage to that holy spot at the Silk Road (Srinagar City) where one day Swami Vivekananda came after his western conquest to spend some time in the year 1898. The magnificent 'Chenar' trees stood like sentinels to receive the great Swami who meditated here for long hours in those blessed days. Here a few monks were still there in a monastery named Narayan Math. One young monk came out, introduced himself with us and took us round the Ashrama. In the monastery, portraits and photographs of various postures of Swamiji along with his disciples, both westerns and easterners, reminded us of the great autumn of 1898 when Swamiji visited Kashmir.

On the eve of our final journey we were five in number. Three local officials, my young musician-friend from Calcutta and myself set out from Srinagar at about 8.00 a.m. The small city vanished within a few minutes. The Dahl Lake looked disappointing when we saw it within the city. Now, at the northern outskirts, it had a charming look. Thousands of birds were flocking on its waters. Many a 'Sikara', a typical boat of this place, decorated nicely for the visitors were plying here and there. The transparent water of the vast lake gave us a glimpse of calm repose. The driver of our jonga pressed the accelerator. Speed shot up to 100 kilometers per hour on the spacious

metalled road. The rows of Chenar and Poplar trees stood on both sides of the road.

From Srinagar to Baltal the road wined through Ganderbal, Kangan, Surbara, Gangan-gir and Sona Marg. It was a distance of about one hundred kilometers. Along the road the ancient river Sindh accompanied us all through, some times on the left hand and some times on the right. Huts and bungalows of the road side villages situated at the foot-hills, were mostly constructed of wooden materials or of stone pieces. Sometimes the road passed through the villages and sometimes it was away from the foot of the hills. All around, the fields were full of green. At some places the poplars rallied on the both sides of the road. These were very tall trees with white stem and thick green leaves in short branches which stretched upward, were standing as if on a parade show in a long row. In some place, the giant chenars stood as if inviting the unknown visitors and trekkers to sit for a while under its huge shadow.

As our jeep moved along the bank of the river Sindh, intense cultivation came to our notice. Crops were mostly of maize and winter vegetables. The natural beauty of the foot-hill forests casts a spell on any visitor. For thousands of years this busy runner, the Sindh, has been carrying the legendary heritage of Aryan culture. The Sindh has originated from the holy lakes of Manas Sarovar and Rawan Hrad, in the South-western slopes of the Kailash mountain, in north latitude $31^{\circ}20'$, and east longitude $80^{\circ}30'$, at an estimated height of 17,000 ft. From its source to the extreme end of our Indian territory, the total length of the mighty river will be not less than 800 kilometers.

At about 11.15 a.m. we reached at Baltal

foot-hills. The busy Sindh took leave of us unnoticed. Our guide Mr. Singh told that a single-way road ascends the mountains up from here. Vehicles were to be cleared from the other end of the road. An hour passed but not a single car came down. They informed us that a truck broke down on the roads and a rescue van had gone to fetch it. Everything around us—the green field, the vehicles, and the mountains stood still. Our guide ordered for lunch. Time passed away soon and it was three o' clock when we got release for trekking up. All the engines of the vehicles roared simultaneously and echoes clattered from the opposite hills. Within an hour we were at the height of 14,000 ft. White patches of clouds were floating free on the vast sky. Sometimes, the snow-capped lofty peaks were surrounded by white clouds.

At the *Zyoji-la* (*la* means Pass) point, on our right side the mountain stood near. The ridges were not high and distant. On our left, the vast endless mountain ranges, and absolutely barren rocky hills had worn thick silver-white layers of glaciers. Elsewhere, glaciers came down right from the hill top. The vast wall of the hills was wrapped with heavy and thick ice, frozen from time immemorial. The marvellous ornamentation of perpetual snow all around the mountains brought to us a unique sense of Himalayan grandeur. The soft sun rays, the beautiful sky, and the hoary mask of the hills peeping like snowy crown, strangely elevated our minds to the kingdom of the Infinite. Such visions of the Infinite elevate the mind to a feeling of the Absolute. We realized why the Himalayas is the eternal inspiration to the mystics of all ages. This unspeakable sublimity and calmness of the Himalayan environment has been permeating the Indian lore.

Our jonga had been trying, again, to keep pace with the speed of the river Sindh. The river was ever busy. Already, we were on our way through Maten, Dras, Yashgund

and Kharbu. The second pass Seojila at Maten (height 11,634 ft.), was already crossed. Now a downward descent began towards Dras. This was known as the second coldest place on our planet. The small tributary, Dras, flows from the Seojila. Other three tributaries, Wayaka, Suru and Kuksar join at the confluence of Dras. Keeping to the right bank of the Dras we reached at Kharbu. Two big mountain walls stood on both side of Dras valley which was like a meadow, wet by rain, and full of pebbles and boulders.

It was 6.00 p.m. The sun was on the western sky. A little ochre colour was there in its last rays. We were about 50 kilometers away from Kargil, the point of our night-halt. Here, at the Pindras point, a turbulent river ran far down below along the gorge called wolf's leap. The river might be Kuksar, which cuts the trans-Himalayan range and unites with Dras near Kargil. The colour of the water was black owing to the presence of hydrogen sulphide in its rock-bed. Pungent rotten-egg odour pervaded the long river side. From this point Kargil was only about 20 kilometers. The setting sun gave the red signal to finish our journey as the dusk was drawing near. Kargil is an important hill town.

At about 8.00 p.m. when we finally reached our place, the sunlight had already disappeared. A nice tent was ready for us where we could stretch ourselves comfortably. Hot tea and dinner were served. We discussed about the next morning's programme and retired for the night.

The night was chill for us. In the next early morning the golden sun rays of Kargil gave us a warm reception. The whole camp appeared to me a beautiful dreamland. Down the camp, a river was flowing, almost around the tent. Green bushy plants, perhaps of pencil-cedar group, covered the whole area. At a distance on the opposite bank of the river, green vegetation looked like a green carpet around which scattered

huts and houses were visible. After the Baltal landscape, this was the only spot where a green panorama offered us a pleasant picturesque view. Small birds were chirping sweetly. It was an impressive good morning. At 7.00 a.m., after breakfast, our second phase of journey started. A distance of about 225 kilometers was to be covered. Getting out of the camp zone we crossed a bridge on the river. This had been the important connection between Leh and Kargil. Within a minute we ascended up to a point from where our camp and the river became a microscopic view. After driving for some time it was Mulbek where we saw a small Buddhist Vihara on the roadside. The Avalokiteswara posture (with four hands) of the Lord Buddha had been engraved on a big slab of a stone piece placed on the top of the Vihar which looked like a pyramid with a pinnacle of spearhead. The government noticeboard hung at the roadside read that the sculpture and some 'Khorosti' scripts appeared to be of the Kushan dynasty of about 1st century B.C. At the back of the temple the same river of Kargil was following us.

Leaving Mulbek after a halt for 15 minutes, we started at 9.45 a.m. for Namikalla. The height of the road at this pass was 12,200 ft. At about 11.30 a.m. we were at the Fotu-la, the road height being 13,556 ft. From here Leh was only 139 kilometers. About seven kilometers ahead of Fotu-la, the next oldest Buddhist Vihar named Lama-Uru monastery, was on our wayside, but it was far below the road level. Crossing further two kilometers, an excellent mountain came in our view. We were told that it was the 'Moon Land mountain'. This part of the Himalayas was barren and appeared to be made of accumulated lava gushed out from the numerous volcanoes, which erupted long before and now are frozen and formed into this sort of mountains. The range looked like the back of a dinosaur.

It was 12.35 p.m. We strode fast over

Kallach, Nurla and Hemisokp, one after another. The Sindh had again come to our right. We took a halt for 20 minutes at the Moonland viewpoint to have a comprehensive view. A little ahead there was a projected point on the roadside from where a frightening view of a deep fall of several thousands of feet to the down below, came in our view. The mountain ranges in the right seemed like paintings on canvas. We had to hurry to reach the next place Khalsi, because 24 kilometers of road from Khalsi was a down trek only. The road was full of hairclip bends—18 in total number. The travellers might be frightened of rolling down to an unknown hell. At the Saspol point at Khalsi, we had our lunch in a small hotel named View Moon hotel.

We left Saspol after lunch at 2.40 p.m. Ninety-five kilometers more had yet to be covered. Suddenly at a steep point the jonga felt shaky and refused to move up. Fortunately a bus arrived and one of the passengers came down to assist us. Our luck clicked and the next drive started at 5.15 p.m. after being held up for nearly two hours. Since then, jonga had not been in a good condition and suffered further trouble in Pather Sahib Gurawada at 6.35 p.m. while a distance of 24 kilometers was yet to be covered. As the sun had taken its rosy colour we made all effort to move to our forward post. We had to descend down on a gradual slope. Our Jonga, despite its bad condition, moved slowly down to Leh. From a distance of about six kilometers while rolling down through the valley between the hills on the both sides a picturesque view slowly emerged before our eyes. On the right, the Sindh flew down most busily. Just one kilometer before Leh, we gazed upon a vast soft green field which stretched in east-west direction. It was Leh. Within a few moments the jeep stood before the doorsteps of our host Sri S. R. Bhattacharya who was standing there to receive us.

The climate and geographic feature of

this Himalayan Zone is uncommon. In the early morning a northern wind began to blow. As the day went on, it gradually took a north-eastern direction. After the sunset, there blew a southern high wind. The humidity in the air was virtually nil. For newcomers, it is always difficult to adjust to such a climate. Throughout the day and night there was irritation and burning in the eyes, nose and lips and even on the skin. It was a sort of respiratory problem due to lack of oxygen in the air. Every third breath should be a deeper one for better respiration, said our host. However, much care also could not save us from dry coughing. From 9.00 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. there was scorching sun in the valley; but immediately after sunset temperature fell down much below the normal, and at night use of warm clothes was essential.

When we got acclimatized a little, we ventured to go round Leh town (9,500 ft approximately). A small town, Leh, held on its northern side a height of about 11,500 ft where an old ruined fort stood even today as a monument. In the heart of the town markets, shops and emporiums stood here and there. A little away a school and other office complexes were visible. On the western side, the road went down towards the airport. The airport run way, a desert-like big field, was a strange sight. The zone was barricaded by barbed wire only. Aircraft hangers were also under the ground. One could hardly assume it to be an airport. Along with it, a spot had been earmarked for developing a stadium.

The sun was quietly sinking behind the mysterious mountain peaks. We climbed up one such mountain top where an old monastery named Spituk had been existing. Renovation and repair work were going on. The monastery had three isolated parts. At the entrance, one decorated room (about 30'×12') with a wooden floor, was replete with many images of Lord Buddha and other exhibits related to him, all preserved

nicely within glass-case almairahs. One altar was meant for the head preceptor (Lama) who teaches scriptures. Seats for the students were on the floor. On the right stood a separate house of 'L' shape where an image of black stone representing some goddess, probably the Goddess Tara, was standing on an altar. It had four hands and a height of 15'. The face was covered with a cloth piece which could be unveiled only at the time of special festivals. Another small image of some goddess, comparatively smaller in size, and an image of Lord Buddha in sitting posture were existing together on the same altar. The hall was not well-ventilated, and there was dearth of light also. Besides this, there was another house where we saw some fresco paintings which had lost lustre and beauty. That evening due to high wind and dusk we had to hurry back to our host's house.

The next morning was meant for our visit to Hemis and Thicksay monastery. The Hemis monastery was about sixty kilometers east-south from here. On the way up, the gorgeous new palace of Sri Dalai Lama, which was built at a cost of nearly two crores of rupees came in our view. No visitors were allowed to meet the respected lama for a month, as he was in spiritual retreat. This was stated in a notice put up on the gate. The next place was Karu, where army shades and tents were on the road side. Crossing further, to the right, a bridge over the Sindh, and after a sharp upward climb through zig-zag roads, we reached the famous and one of the oldest monasteries, the Hemis Gompha. The situation of the monastery was completely in a concealed pocket of the hill. On the north, and west it was blocked by hills. Only the eastern side was visible to us who had come all the way to see this monastery. The monastery had three separate blocks on gradual steps of the foot-hill. On the extreme right, stood the northern block. In a recently renovated portion, a majestic and an excel-

lent image of the Lord Buddha had been installed on the altar. The height of the image in the *Maitreyee* posture would be no less than fifteen feet. Many miniature images of the Lord were also there. The room would be something like 20'×30' with a height of about 20'. The right and left side walls were decorated by a fresco art displaying the life and message of Lord Buddha. The art-works were inspiring and living, and commanded the admiration of the visitors. The image of the Lord was painted with a lustrous golden colour and the divine expression on the face was beyond words. Small water pots of silver and a few small light-stands of metal were offered before all the altars. This was the usual custom with all the Tibetan monasteries.

In the second block, on a higher foothill, there was a big house where old scriptures were preserved. One altar was made for seating the high priest who discourses on scriptures, and for the listeners about a hundred seats had been made in this big hall. Some small images of the ancient lamas and a small picture of Sri Dalai Lama, were also exhibited. Frescoes on the old wall which were faded, depicted the fight of demons and gods, punishment in hell, and the cyclic order of birth and death.

The third block was in the extreme south, almost on the same plane. Entering a room through a narrow porch we saw the images of a female deity like that of Mother Durga, and some other goddesses. One lamp had been lit, and incense was burning. Small pieces of new clothes offered in the past were still hanging on the deity's hands. Standing outside these blocks, there was one long one-storey building which had covered the whole length of these three blocks. It was erected in order to protect the monastery from the terrible cold wind, and to ensure a secured boundary for the compact monastery complex. Bhikkhus and Lamas had been staying here since a long time.

On our way back to Leh we halted at

Karu for visiting the Thicksay monastery (Gompha) which was on the top of a northern Karakoram pass range. This monastery was built on a range which looked like an elephant's trunk. Here also at the entrance of the monastery which was renovated recently, a new image of the Lord Buddha had been installed. The image in the sitting Maitreyee posture of Lord Buddha had a height not less than 15 feet. It was painted with bright golden colour. The rich decoration of the statue undoubtedly revealed the artist's devotion and commanded visitor's wholehearted respect. This monastery, though smaller in size, was very similar to the Hemis Gompha.

To ascertain the exact time of the arrival of Buddhistic culture in this zone is difficult. But it is clear that these monasteries in their present condition had been destroyed several times by foreign invaders, and again renovated. Not merely that, their ancient scriptures had been thrown into the Sindh, and their wealth plundered. However these monasteries have survived these challenges through centuries. Since the crusade led by Shankaracharya, the great exponent of Advaita Vedanta, the Buddhist movement has been existing in these regions under the garb of Hindu-Tantrik rituals and practices.

On our way back to Leh in the afternoon, our path lay through a vast green valley surrounded by poplars and some green vegetation grown around Leh. A small project for generating hydro-electricity from the water source of Sindh had also been taken up. After the sunset, the whole Leh glen under the summit of the grand Karakoram range in north and the endless range of Kailash mountain range in the south, glimmered under a moonlit glow and offered a beautiful panorama to us. The unbroken solitude pervaded all over and brought a mystical sense of harmony between Himalayan nature and man. The unheard music

went on within us: 'Who can tell where, had freed all the stars to move. The joy or in what garb, the Lord Himself may next of the twinkling stars permeated our human come to thee? One God is hidden in heart, and conveyed to us a glimpse of the all these....' The infinite deep blue sky Infinite Bliss behind this universe.

They Lived with God

HARAMOHAN MITRA

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

According to the Hindu scriptures it is a blessing to be the recipient of the Lord's anger. If an unmotivated, all-loving, all-compassionate God shows displeasure towards some, it is for their own good and not for their harm. If a loving mother disciplines her unruly children by force, it does not mean that she is cruel. Caring for them and thinking of their future, she chastizes them, even though it pains her to do so. At the time, the immature, rebellious children may resent their mother, but later, as adults, they can only be grateful to her.

Haramohan Mitra was born in a poor family and raised by his uncle, Ramgopal Basu, who lived near Swami Vivekananda's house in Simla, Calcutta. Haramohan's mother was a devotee, and, having met Sri Ramakrishna herself several times, she encouraged her son to visit Dakshineswar.

Haramohan was a handsome young man and a classmate of Swami Vivekananda. The Master was very fond of him. In course of time, however, Sri Ramakrishna became indifferent towards him because of his worldly tendencies. On July 3, 1884, the Master said: "This attachment to 'woman and gold' makes a man small-minded. When I first saw Haramohan he had many good traits. I longed to see him. He was then seventeen or eighteen years old. I used to

send for him every now and then, but he wouldn't come. He is now living away from the family with his wife. He had been living with his uncle before. That was very good. He had no worldly troubles. Now he has a separate home and does the marketing for his wife daily. The other day he came to Dakshineswar. I said to him: 'Go away. Leave this place. I don't even feel like touching you.'"

Haramohan was present on Kalpataru Day (January 1, 1886) when Sri Ramakrishna blessed the devotees at Cossipore. For some reason, however, the Master, approaching Haramohan, simply touched his chest and said, "Let it be postponed today."

Sri Ramakrishna's divine touch transformed the life of Haramohan. He later had numerous spiritual experiences, including visions of gods and goddesses. Haramohan was well known among the devotees for his devotion and his sweet, catholic nature. He mixed freely with the disciples of the Master, and Swami Vivekananda, in particular, was very fond of him.

One summer evening in 1887, Swamiji was conversing with Haramohan in his home about the deep meaning of Sri Ramakrishna's message. Inspired, the Swami said, "Look, all philosophical thoughts are at my beck and call; and Western philo-

sophy is also on the tip of my tongue.” Then he continued, “One can write shelves of philosophical books based on a single teaching of Sri Ramakrishna.” Surprised, Haramohan replied: “Is that so? But we don’t find any such profundity in his teachings. Could you explain one of his sayings in that manner?” “Do you have the brains,” asked Swamiji, “to understand the Master? Well, take any saying of his, and I shall explain it to you.” “All right,” Haramohan said, “please explain his story of the elephant-god and the *mahut*-god which illustrated his instruction to see God in all beings.”

At once Swami Vivekananda launched into the controversial doctrines of free will versus predestination and self-effort versus the will of God—a perpetual, unresolved conflict among scholars of both the East and the West. For three continuous days, Swamiji explained to Haramohan in simple language that this story of the Master’s was a solution to that age-old controversy.

Haramohan took an active part in spreading the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. At his own expense, he reprinted Swami Vivekananda’s *Chicago Addresses* and distributed free copies. He also published the *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*, compiled by Suresh Chandra Datta; *Paramahansa Ramakrishna*, written by the Brahmo leader Pratap Chandra Majumdar; *Ramakrishna and His Sayings*, by Max Muller, and several pamphlets expounding the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

While he was in America, Swami Vivekananda gave permission to Haramohan to publish his lectures. He did so to ease the poverty of his old friend. But later, in a letter written on October 28, 1896, Swamiji expressed his irritation at the cheap quality of materials used for the publication. He wrote: “That Haramohan is a fool,..and his printing is diabolical. There is no use in publishing books that way; it is cheating the public and should not be done.”

In the beginning of the Ramakrishna

movement, very few people took the risk of publishing books about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Haramohan was a striking exception. His devotion, boldness, and zeal impelled him to undertake this pioneering work. He not only took the responsibility of publishing these works, but he also defended the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement through his writings and lectures. Haramohan had a good command of English, and among his writings are some critical notes on Pratap Majumdar’s book, *Paramahansa Ramakrishna*.

In 1899, when Sister Nivedita (Miss Margaret Noble) read her paper, *Kali the Mother*, at Albert Hall in Calcutta, Dr. Mahendra Lal Sarkar made some disparaging remarks about image worship. In response to his criticism, Haramohan rose and delivered a profound lecture, quoting Sri Ramakrishna in defense of image worship. Another incident occurred after Swami Vivekananda’s return to India from the West. Haramohan was present at a meeting in which Christian missionaries were attacking Hinduism, whereupon he protested vehemently. Such instances show that in spite of all his personal shortcomings, Haramohan was a lover of truth and fought to uphold it whenever necessary.

Although he was poor, Haramohan did not covet money. He considered the publications of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature, which were his only source of income, to be his service to the Master. Many people, especially young students, became acquainted with the life and message of Sri Ramakrishna through Haramohan. Once a young boy went to his bookshop to buy a lithoprint of Sri Ramakrishna which, at the time, was not available anywhere else. When the boy asked for the price of the picture, Haramohan said, “It costs six pices”, even though the actual cost was eight annas (50 pices).

After the boy bought the picture, Haramohan asked out of curiosity, “How did you

come to know about this bookstore?" "Swami Yogananda gave me your address and asked me to buy the picture," replied the boy. Haramohan was delighted to meet a new devotee of the Master and immediately offered him some fruits and sweets. After that he told him many stories about the Master and remained in touch with him.

Haramohan used to spend part of his income for the service of Holy Mother. Once, when he heard that her bracelet had broken from constant wear, he borrowed money from friends and bought a new pair of bracelets for her. Moreover, he gave jewelry to Radhu (Holy Mother's niece) at the time of her marriage.

Benevolent by nature, Haramohan never hesitated to borrow money to help others. Even if a dog or cat followed him in the street, he would buy some food from a nearby shop to feed it. With the desire to spread religion by publishing religious books at a low price, he gave away more copies than he sold. As a result of his generosity, he suffered financially later in life.

Haramohan thrived on the sweet memories of Sri Ramakrishna. Whenever people came to visit him, he talked only of the Master and forgot all else. Blessed was Haramohan who received the touch of Sri Ramakrishna on the Kalpataru Day! Although the Master withheld his blessing on that day, he bestowed it in the latter part of his life.

SRI JNANADEVVA'S AMRITANUBHAVA

(A Review-Article)

Dr. NARENDRANATH B. PATIL

[EXPERIENCE OF IMMORTALITY: BY RAMESH S. BALSEKAR. Published by Chetana (P) Ltd., 34 Rampart Row, Bombay 400 023. 1984. p. xvii+235. Rs. 120.]

Experience of Immortality is an English rendering of Jnaneshwar's *Amritanubhava* with a commentary in the light of the teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. While *Bhavartha-Deepika* (popularly known as *Jnaneshvari*) is an elaborate exposition in Marathi of the Sanskrit *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Amritanubhava* is an original work by Jnaneshwar, said to have been composed at the instance of Sri Nivrittinath, the elder brother and *guru* of Sri Jnaneshwar. The composition runs into 802 *ovis** and perhaps, was chapterized later into ten chapters. Jnaneshwar preferred to call this work as *Anubhavamrita* but the work came to be known as *Amritanubhava* for an easy pronunciation. There are a number of commen-

taries on this treatise—chief among these is one by Shivakalyan Swami. This commentary is said to have been of immense help in understanding the sublime philosophy of Jnaneshwar—a variant of the Advaita philosophy propounded by Acharya Shankara. The philosophy of Jnaneshwar bears a close relation to the Kashmiri Shaivism.

Attempts to express 'the deep experience of being one with the entire existence' are as old as the Vedas. A few men in every clime and in every age have realized this selfsame experience and very few among

* *Ovi* is a typical form of Marathi verse used by Jnaneshwar for his poetical works.

them attempted to express this indescribable experience for the benefit of mankind. Although the words of expression differed outwardly from person to person, the thing described was the same as existence, knowledge and bliss. The expressions of all these realized souls are almost uniform in spirit, and any one expression finds a close parallel with any other. Sri Ramakrishna has succinctly expressed this as *sab shrigaler ek rag*—all jackals yell in the same note. It is, therefore, no wonder that Sri Balsekar has found the teachings of Sri Nisargadatt Maharaj more meaningful in the light of Amritanubhava.

Sri Balsekar has lucidly translated all the original ovis of Amritanubhava. In this translation there is little deviation from the original text. He used the choicest vocabulary to express the sublime thought. This translation alone would have been a rich contribution to the English literature. What is more is that Sri Balsekar has added his own gloss to the translation. He makes a deft use of the actual experience of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, made vocal by the latter, in his numerous conversations with spiritual aspirants. A close parallel is seen in the teachings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj with those of Sri Ramana Maharshi. Both these saints lay a great stress on the understanding of the true nature of the Self.

The five introductory Sanskrit verses of Jnaneshwar are significant and, in fact, they tell us the very essence of the subsequent 802 ovis.

In the first chapter, Jnaneshwar narrates the identity of the noumenon and the phenomenon, the latter being the objectivization of the supreme subjectivity. (P. 6). The second chapter is 'Homage to the Guru'. Here, Jnaneshwar's profound love for his Guru overflows into the full flood of his poetic fancy and yet it fails (as is the nature of manifested words) to describe him. Jnaneshwar's experience is that his individual entity gets demolished along with his Guru's

just as camphor and fire both vanish when they are brought together. (P. 84). Chapter 3 deals with 'Debt to the Four Forms of Speech'. These are *vaikhari*, *madhyama*, *pasyanti* and *para*. The identification of oneself with one's body is unequivocal in the first three stages of waking, dream and deep sleep, with which the first three forms of speech are associated. Here Jnaneshwar asserts that it is only when the identification with a separate entity is totally abandoned that we remain as what-we-are in the total absence of all ignorance and also of all knowledge. The four forms of speech though they ultimately awaken in the aspirant an impersonal consciousness and an identity of Jiva and Shiva, yet this union of Jiva and Shiva is not our true nature. What-we-are has never been sundered into Jiva and Shiva.

The next chapter is 'Nothingness and the Plenum'. The main theme of this chapter is well expressed in the following verses:

Ignorance is transitory, it is pure knowledge that prevails. The transitory ignorance identifies itself with each sentient being (4-1, 3 p. 83). Knowledge consumes the ignorance and increases sufficiently to ensure the destruction of ignorance (4-10 p. 84). The state of pure knowledge is such that it is not affected by the duality of knowledge and ignorance; it does not increase because of one, nor does it decrease because of the other (4-17 p. 85). Pure knowledge cannot be an object to be experienced (4-22). If knowledge can know itself, surely then that knowledge (being relative) would be ignorance.

Sri Balsekar wants us to comprehend this theme in its proper perspective. He elaborates it painstakingly and says that pure knowledge is that knowledge where there is no relationship of subject and object. This absolute knowledge cannot be known nor can it be possessed for the simple reason that such knowledge is beyond the subject-object relationship. He cites Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj who often said that we are consciousness and therefore, we cannot know or possess consciousness....When conscious-

ness is in repose, there is not even the 'I-AM-ness'. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj further says that 'what is' is prior to space-time conceptuality and is, therefore, that which in the phenomenal sense neither 'is' or 'is not'.

In chapter 5, Jnaneshwar describes Sat-Chit-Ananda, as the three attributes (of the Brahman) and says that these do not affect the Brahman even as the poisonous nature of the poison does not affect the poison itself. (Cf. Sri Ramakrishna's saying that Maya does not affect Brahman even as the poison does not affect the king-cobra.) Sri Balsekar's gloss on this is very relevant. The totality of these three words, namely, Sat-Chit-Ananda must be taken to mean bliss, that is, the absolute abolition of suffering in both, the positive and the negative sense. He cites Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj saying that bliss is absence of positive or negative suffering—a norm of equilibrium which obviously could not be experienced relatively but could be conceived as supreme intense joy. (P. 92).

The next two chapters are on 'Invalidation of the word' and 'Invalidation of Knowledge'. Jnaneshwar says that word is born in the unique family of the unmanifest (Maya) and it is the word which has given the name *ambara* to space (sky) (6. 3). Like the proverbial 'flower in the sky' the word is non-existent, but it produces fruit in the form of the manifest universe. Sri Balsekar explains this thus: Word is merely a concept but it is instrumental in creating all the conditioning which makes the individual accept something non-existent as existent... It is word which brings about communication among the millions of individuals in the world... Even the indescribable Absolute is brought within the influence of the word, although only as a concept which points to the Absolute. Sri Balsekar wants us to pay attention to the words of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj—'Look son, you are already liberated. You have never been under a bon-

dage.... Listen not to the superficial meaning of the word; listen in such a way that the listener in you disappears along with the speaker. Go deep into the meaning of my words, meditate on them and your misunderstanding will disappear. There is nothing to be done, because whatever you do, you will do as a phenomenal entity and identification with the phenomenal entity is itself the 'bondage'. All that you must constantly remember is that what you are seeking is what you already are.'

In the chapter dealing with the 'Invalidation of Ignorance', Jnaneshwar points out that since the very word 'ignorance' depends on one's being conscious—and ignorance means knowledge of being ignorant—ignorance as such cannot have an independent existence. (P. 127). Sri Ramana Maharshi has also observed,—'to think is not our real nature'. Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj says this in different words. According to him we did not think, or conceptualize before we were born. This is a condition wherein living becomes merely witnessing of events that take place in this living-dream; such living, as in the case of both Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj and Sri Ramana Maharshi, is outwardly like that of any other individual; but inwardly it is without the least identification with any psychosomatic entity. Both Nisargadatta Maharaj and Jnaneshwar point out off and on, that the manifest and the unmanifest, are not different. Absolute awareness (not aware of itself) becomes 'witnessing', when it is in contact with an object as a physical form; and it becomes an individual person when it becomes simultaneously identified with the object it reflects. The difference, however, is only notional because nothing has actually happened; only waves have appeared on the expanse of water. Jnaneshwar further wants us to remember that all inter-related opposites are the product of conceptualization, and therefore, unreal. Jnaneshwar gives a beautiful simile: If a fish could be created

out of salt and life infused into it, it would not be able to live either in water or out of it. Similarly, if the existence of ignorance is accepted, it cannot exist along with knowledge (being its opposite), nor can it live independently because it is only through knowledge that it can be known.

It is here that we find the sublime philosophy of Jnaneshwar—*sphurtivada*. This idea of negation of both knowledge and ignorance, and of assertion of an ever-existent self-same reality, makes Jnaneshwar a unique teacher of mankind. Sri Balsekar has done well in citing many a sayings of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj which throw light on this aspect of the philosophy of Amritanubhava. In chapter 9 of the book, Jnaneshwar states that what prevails is consciousness, the sense 'I am', and this has swallowed both the concepts of ignorance and of knowledge. Thus knowledge also is no good for being in a state of awareness. Nisargadatta Maharaj used to say 'when there is knowing, knowledge disappears'. He used to say that it would be useless for anyone to see him unless he had left his luggage elsewhere. It is only a vacant or fasting mind—and therefore, an alert mind—in which knowing can enter. Through knowledge you can only pretend to know. The luggage of accumulated knowledge is an obstructive burden.

In the concluding chapter Jnaneshwar avers that a meaningful apperception of this anubhavamrita will result in a *jivan-mukta jnani* becoming the anubhavamrita itself.

Sri Balsekar has indeed done a great service to all those who are desirous of diving deep in Amritanubhava. His Guru, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj had at one time suggested that he should make a thorough study

of Anubhamrita of Jnaneshwar. Sri Balsekar had almost forgotten it, but rather finishing his book *Pointers From Nisargadatta Maharaj* he felt drawn, as it were to the study of Jnaneshwar's classic. He read the book with the help of available commentaries, but could not get insight into the text and was much disappointed. Later he tried to read the original text with an open mind and was surprisingly drawn to the beautiful inner meaning of the verses. He thought of translating the *ovis* in English and could do so with great ease. He wanted to add his gloss to the translation and it also came very easy. He was lucky to hear Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj on a number of occasions and this stood in good stead for him in the present venture. The entire work has become a piece of spiritual artistry.

The book contains a biographical note on Jnaneshwar and also an appendix on the Concept of Mukti.

Sri Balsekar has translated the text in suitable sets of verses, and this made it easy to follow the thought pattern in the original book. The book contains a number of technical words such as nonmentality, phenomenality, conceptualization, plenum, meta-noesis, objectivity, subjectivity, objectualization and also a few Sanskrit words. It would have been better if a glossary of all such words would have been appended to the book. Subject index also could have been helpful.

The editor Sri Sudhakar S. Dixit, who also is the publisher deserves hearty congratulations for the beautiful production. The get up and the printing are excellent.

NARENDRANATH. B. PATIL, M.A. LL.B. PH. D.
Director of Languages, Bombay

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS

Two faces of Shiva

In the early dawn of a September morning the pilgrim stood at Somnath on the western shore of India. A carved pillar with an arrow, traditionally believed to be stalled by Adi Shankara, told him that standing here one can have an unobstructed vision beyond the seas to the end of the south pole. The waves were splashing ceaselessly on the stones of the temple compound and the sandy beach on the southern side. The temple gate had just opened in the half-light of the early morning. Standing in the magnificent hall a few devotees saw the shiva-lingam radiating in the candle light. It was absolutely silent inside except for the dreary monotone of the sea waves dashing against the shore. The same music has been going on through the phalanx of years and centuries during which waves of invasion, plundering, and war destroyed this historic temple sixteen times and razed the stones to the ground. Even now the huge stones and pillars carved with figures of men and gods were strewn on all sides of the new temple which now stands exactly on the same spot, with the same architecture and magnificence as the one destroyed last by the idol-breakers.

Each time the invaders felt happy that Shiva was banished from the western shore of India. They hardly knew that they had succeeded to remove only the stone symbol or the lingam which, in Sanskrit, is only a *pratika*, a symbol of the Immutable Reality. The SELF within, is the real Shiva—the embodiment of all knowledge and bliss. *Chidanandarupah Shivoham Shivoham*—sang Acharya Shankara. Shiva remains above all the turmoils, changes, joys, sorrow, bereavements of life, and even the death of the body. The infinite superiority of the undying SELF within, the Hindus symbolized through this symbol of *stambha*, the pillar, the bed-rock of life. The whirling, changing, phenomena changes and passes away while the One remains. We worship the Spirit, and like Spirit, we too, are immortal. There are people who worship matter, and like matter they too perish. Vivekananda reminded the Westerners this eternal message of India.

The dreary monotone of the thundering waves was still going on. The hordes of invaders who destroyed this temple must also have heard the same music. As the pilgrim was leaving the temple, the new temple tower stood majestic with the pinnacle flag fluttering in the sea wind. The temple stood above all the torments of time, the

ravings of the ocean and the wind. Somanath is indeed a symbol of how man attains to divinity by clinging to the eternity of the soul in the midst of the unceasing restlessness of life. At Somanath, Shiva stands, immovable even today with the eternal calmness and transcendence in the midst of the sound and fury of our world.

Only a few days before while crossing the severely drought-hit, stony, and sandy areas of Porbandar at high noon, the pilgrim suddenly felt a relief when a vast lake with simmering waves appeared in an area where the last grass was burnt due to scorching heat. It was a mirage! Today after crossing the burning planes of Gujarat and Rajasthan, the pilgrim walked quietly up to his Himalayan home of Mayavati. At once a feeling of intense calm engulfed him. In the golden light of the late October afternoon the cosmos flowers were waving their heads in the cold wind. Winter was round the corner. Beyond the garden of flowers stood the familiar Dharmagarh hill, with its dark deep woods of magnificent oaks, Rhododendrons, Pines, and Cedars. There was no sound anywhere. As he looked around, he saw, after an absence of three weeks, the same waves he had seen at Somanath. But today they were all stilled into the waves of green mountains. This is how the Himalayas was formed after the last great geological upheaval billions of years ago—a sea of undulating waves of stones which rose tier above tier, the distant ones more misty and dim. Beyond these stood the majestic peaks crowned with unmelting snow, silent and sublime.

In the quiet of the October afternoon, there was no sound anywhere. The nearest bus route, rarely crossed by simple transports, was far down the valley at a distance of three miles. In the deep pathless woods of the huge Himalayan trees no human voice was heard anywhere, nor any human being was seen. The vast solitude mingled with the all-engulfing silence. Only Shiva was meditating there calm, immutable, eternally silent and immaculately pure. One or two occasional chirping of birds were heard, but they, too, were drowned in the meditative silence of Mayavati.

The 'great active silence' became vibrant. It began to speak in unheard voice—'Everything in this life of sick-hurry, this life of frantic steep-chase for sense pleasures, will end in the weariness of life. Everything is changing, drifting. The world goes on chasing shadows after shadows,

weaving dreams after dreams of desires in an impermanent world. Deep, deep within is the Atman. This is the source of all bliss, strength and knowledge. Come and cling to this solitude. Do not listen to the words of the world. They are mere froth. Listen to this silence—the

cosmic music of the OM. This silence itself will one day reveal the Self which is infinitely greater than all the evanescent wealth and glory of this world. Silence is Brahman. Silence is Shiva.' Mayavati reveals this Himalayan face of Shiva—the face of eternal silence.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

THE SACRED TOUCH: BY T. S. AVINASHILINGAM. Published by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kulapati Munshi Marg, Bombay 400 007. 1986. Pp. xvi + 358. Rs. 60.

The Sacred Touch is the story of the unfolding of divine grace in the life of Sri T. S. Avinashilingam, an outstanding organizer in the field of education in modern India. As a college boy of eighteen the author first met his Guru Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The "Sacred Touch of his feet, his loving and deeply penetrating eyes and above all his protective love and blessings", (p. 7) brought the manifestation of great energy, dedication, service, patriotism, intense struggle and suffering for the freedom of the country, and above all a passion to lift the people, especially the neglected masses through the 'man-making education' of Swami Vivekananda.

Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Shivanandaji) blessed him, 'Have no fear, my boy. You have lived so long with us. My love and blessings are ever with you. And so I am sure, wherever you are and in whatever circumstances you may be placed nothing will be able to drag you in the world and make you forget Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) who will be ever with you. He is your guide and goal.' (p. ix). Every word of this knower of Brahman came true in the life of his beloved 'boy'.

Sri Avinashiji, the life-long bachelor, philanthropist and educationist, is known among his students and colleagues affectionately as 'Ayya' or elder brother. The story of this autobiography begins with this divine grace and then unrolls through nearly 65 years of the author's life. We see him getting initiated by his Guru at the Ramakrishna Math, Bhubaneswar, to the spiritual ideals of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. We then see his founding of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya in 1930, the last moments of benediction from his great teacher, his diving into national struggle and courting arrest four

times, sometimes for long periods of solitary confinement when only contemplation of God and study of *Kamba Ramayanam* and *Thirukkural* sustained him. Then we see him coming out of the jail absolutely broken in health due to a virulent asthma which some suspected as tuberculosis, his slow recovery, and again his plunging into freedom struggle. The 'divine seed' implanted by Mahapurushji was now nurtured by Mahatma Gandhi who providentially appeared as another great influence in his life. Gandhiji's intense austerity, steadfastness to truth, and his superhuman capacity to inspire the entire nation including women and children, left a permanent stamp on Avinashiji's mind. Several times he worked as the personal attendant and guide of Gandhiji during his tempestuous tour to South India, and other places. ('A week with Mahatma' p. 103). We read some unforgettable incidents. A little girl in South India came up to Gandhiji after one of his lectures, and gave her anklets, ear-rings, necklace all one after the other, to Bapuji for his Harijan movement. Hundreds came in the same way, as the book tells us, and gave their ornaments for this historic movement.

The book of 358 pages with 37 chapters and 37 photoplates, in fact tells more about a whole age than the individual author. The story of the first national congress, the round-table conference, the partition and freedom of India, the day of 'second crucifixion' (p. 187), the days of his life as minister of education in Tamil Nadu, and the long years of institution-guilding, are given in vivid details. Personal statements, rare utterances and incidents of Gandhiji, Nehru, and host of other outstanding national leaders are portrayed with exact dates and details. We then see the author becoming a member of the state assembly, and then of the parliament. We also see him publishing the first ten monumental volumes of Tamil Encyclopedia and starting educational programmes at Coimbatore. Along with these years of the hectic activities of public

life which were more patriotic than political, we see him trekking 400 miles on foot to Kedar, Badri and then to almost inaccessible height of the Sat Pant (18,000 ft) where Adi Shankaracharya is said to have left his body. We see him rushing again and again to Belur Math, and Madras Math in order to rekindle the power of the 'sacred touch', and to share the bliss and grace of Satsang.

We also see the providential hand of Sri Ramakrishna behind the running and the big expansion of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya at Coimbatore. We see the birth of Sri T. S. Avinashilingam College of Home Science for women which is an outstanding institution in South East Asia. We read about his vision of Sri Ramakrishna and his words during the moments of his depression, 'Do you think you are doing everything?' (p. 167). This divine assurance sustained him during periods of stress and strain.

Today Sri Avinashiji is still alive. Though retired, he spends his days in praying for his

beloved children thousands of whom have shared the blessings of the 'Sacred Touch' of Sri Ramakrishna through the three big institutions founded and nurtured by him: The Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, The College of Home science for women and Vivekanandapuram Centre for Rural development, in which, all combined nearly 12,000 students are on the rolls.

Awards like Padma Bhushan, Jamunalal Bajaj award etc do not hang heavily on the quiet dignity of the man, who remains at bottom, a humble servant of the God of his Guru whose 'Sacred Touch' still works through his silent life of dedication to and concern for humanity.

The book which has a preface by Sri C. Subramaniam and a benediction by Swami Ranganathanandaji, is written in impressive English with the usual frankness and sincerity of the distinguished author. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan deserves praise for the excellent printing of this inspiring autobiography.

S. J.

NEWS AND REPORTS

Vedanta Convention at Vivekananda Monastery and Retreat, Ganges, Michigan, U.S.A. in August 1987

In August 1987 a large convention of monks and devotees from all over the U.S.A., Canada, and other countries was held in our Ganges Monastery in Michigan. This convention, called VEDANTA CONVENTION II, was a sequel to the first such large gathering of Vedanta devotees and monks held in 1976 in a place called Ellcottville in New York State. Many senior swamis such as Rev. Swami Aseshanandaji, Rev. Swami Nityaswarupanandaji, and Rev. Swami Ranganathanandaji were present during this Convention. Nearly 800 people from all over the United States, Canada, and other countries participated in this Convention. Among the participants were a large number of monastic members, academicians and devotees.

The following swamis and special guests attended the Convention and served as speakers on the various panels: Swamis Sarvagatananda, Damodarananda, Pramathananda, Prabuddhananda, Tathagatananda, Bhaskarananda, Vidyatmananda, and Asitananda, Ms. Marie Louise Burke, Prof.

T. K. Venkateswaran, Prof. Hal French, Mr. John Dobson, and Mr. John Schlenck.

The principal host of the Convention was Swami Bhashyananda, Head of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago, and Vivekananda Monastery and Retreat, Ganges, Michigan, USA. He was assisted by the swamis of the Chicago Centre and Ganges Monastery.

The purpose of the Convention was to examine the impact of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement in the West up to the present, to take stock of the present activities and trends, and to project future directions for the Vedanta movement in the context of the constantly changing socio-cultural scenario in the western hemisphere.

An important aim of the Convention was to scrutinize the relevance of Vedantic ideals to the modern Western temperament which is highly influenced by the spirit of scientific inquiry and by tremendous technological advances.

A further aim of the Convention was to propose broad outlines for the furtherance of Vedanta in a challenging environment characterized by cultural pluralism and a predominantly materialistic outlook.

The deliberations of the Convention were

conducted through three Panels. The meetings of the three panels were held simultaneously in different locations within the Ganges Monastery Complex. Participants were free to attend the Panel sessions of their choice.

The Panel on the 'Spirit of Harmony' discussed the following themes: The spread of the message of Vedanta in the West, Swami Vivekananda's plans for Vedanta in the West, The relation of Ramakrishna Vedanta tradition to Hinduism; The concept of 'Avatara Varishtha'; The meaning of 'Truth is One'; The relevance of Indian customs and rituals to the West; The future of Vedanta in the West. The Panel members were Swamis Sarvagatananda, Damodarananda, Bhaskarananda, Sarveshananda, Varadananda, Prof. Hal French and Prof. T. K. Venkateswaran.

The Panel on the 'Spirit of Service' discussed the following issues: Swami Vivekananda's ideas of selfless action; The role of the householder in the Vedanta movement; The significance of 'Service to man as God' in the Western context; Vedanta and social issues (e.g. world peace, environmental concerns, the individual in the nuclear age, etc.)

The Panel on the 'Spirit of Enquiry' examined the relevance of the principles of Vedanta to seekers of truth in the western milieu dominated by a spirit of scientific inquiry and materialistic values. It also discussed at length the relation between Vedanta and science, and touched on the following topics: The Holy Mother as a Role Model for Women in the West; Vedanta and western behavioural science; The foundation of principles and the superstructure of rituals and theology. The Panel members were Swamis Ranganathananda, Bhashyananda, Prabuddhananda, Kalikananda, Asitananda, Yogeshananda, Atmavratana and Mr. John Dobson.

On Friday (August 7, 1987) after registration, the participants met informally with the various visiting swamis and guests. A large number of people took the opportunity to meet with Rev. Swami Nityaswarupanandaji who attended the Convention as a representative from the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, and Rev. Swami Aseshanandaji of Vedanta Society of Portland, Oregon, USA.

The keynote addresses on the theme, 'The Ramakrishna Vedanta Movement in the West' were given by the following speakers in a general meeting attended by all the speakers and participants at 2.00 p.m. on Saturday, 8 August 1987: Swami Bhashyananda, Rev. Swami Ranganathanandaji, Swami Pramathananda, and Prof. Hal French. Rev. Swami Asheshanandaji, Swami

Damodarananda and Swami Vidyatmananda.

On Saturday, 8 August 1987, at 8.30 a.m. Rev. Swami Aseshanandaji Maharaj conducted a worship service and homa ceremony in the shrine; later that morning he dedicated a new auditorium with a seating capacity for 250 people at the Ganges Monastery.

On Saturday beginning at 8.00 p.m. the following three events took place simultaneously: Slide presentation by Archie and Nina Stark on 'Vedanta in the West'; Slide presentation by Mr. John Dobson on 'Coasting and Falling Around the Sun'; and Music programmes by John Schlenck and others.

While summarizing the deliberations of the Panel on 'Spirit of Harmony' Prof. T.K. Venkateswaran said: 'Harmony does not mean uniformity. While Vedanta emphasizes the unity of the essence of all scriptures and the identity of mystical experience in all religions, it does not mandate uniformity. Harmony does not preclude differences in theology, rituals, and the language of religion.'

Swami Vidyatmananda presenting a summary of the deliberations of the Panel on 'Spirit of Service' said: 'The early years of the Vedanta movement in the West were beset with difficulties. The swamis worked laboriously to spread the idea of service as a path to Self-Realization, largely through their personal relationships with individuals. At the present, the ideals of Vedanta are permeating into diverse branches of human endeavour such as art, education, and ecology.' The Panel discussed the all-important question of the qualification of leaders of the Vedanta movement: How necessary and feasible is it to insist that only 'realized persons' lead the Vedanta activities in Western centres? The general consensus of the Panel members and participants seemed to be that serving one's fellow-beings in a spirit of selfless dedication (keeping as ideals the characteristics of the Person of Steady Wisdom as portrayed in the second chapter of the Bhagavad-gita) would eventually lead one to Self-realization.

Summarizing the discussions of the Panel on 'Spirit of Inquiry' Swami Kalikananda reminded Swami Vivekananda's assertion that Christians, Moslems, and people of other faiths need not, and should not, become Hindus, but should sincerely pursue the principles of their own religion. This is the true spirit of Vedanta. The practice of the principles leads one to perfection; One does not become a better person by squabbling over rituals, beliefs, theology, language and other secondary details of religion. The Panel members felt that the basic principles and spirit of dispassionate

inquiry were common to both religion and science. Hence the two were not mutually antagonistic. At the highest levels of understanding, religion and science converge into a process of intensely dispassionate inquiry and realization.

Following presentations of Panel summaries, several swamis addressed the Plenary Session. Swami Nityaswarupananda, in his speech, delineated the principles of Vedanta based on spiritual unity and their relevance and imperative to modern life. He expressed deep appreciation of the work done by Swami Bhashyananda and his associates and devotees, using the resources and

dynamism of the American people for the spread of Vedanta in the West as envisioned by Swami Vivekananda.

After the concluding speeches by Swamis Sarvagatananda, Prabuddhananda, Bhaskarananda, Tathagatananda, Asitananda and Mr. John Dobson, Swami Atmalokananda proposed a vote of thanks to all the visiting swamis and guests and to all those who attended and participated in the Convention.

The Convention concluded on Sunday 9 August 1987.

PRACTICAL HINTS ON SPIRITUAL LIFE

Holy company and Guru

You should retire into solitude only when you have attained some growth in the spiritual life. True solitude lies beyond the mind and intellect. It is identical with the Most Tranquil. Therefore, it is better for a beginner to live in the company of holy men.

It is said that unless one is a holy man one cannot know a holy man, just as a vegetable-seller cannot know the value of a diamond... A holy man is judged according to the worth of his appraiser... From the company of advanced souls you will gather many valuable hints, and your efforts will be simplified... (But) merely to keep the company of the holy is not enough. You must open your heart and ask them to solve your doubts. You must carefully observe their lives and imitate their example.

Service to the Guru is necessary at the preliminary stage, but later the mind itself plays the part of the Guru. The Guru must not be looked upon as an ordinary human being. His physical body is the temple of God; if one can serve the Guru with this idea always in mind, one acquires an intense love for him, which later develops into an intense love for God.

—Swami Brahmananda

The association of the holy is the only remedy for worldliness; for a holy man is the living manifestation of God...

—Swami Premananda.

Try to live with those who have mastered the mind. If you cannot live with them, think of them. Mind controls mind. With whatever evil tendencies one may come, one is sure to improve in holy company. When you go into a perfume shop, the scent will enter your nostrils, whether you will it or not.

—Swami Turiyananda.

Discussions and perusal of books, dry arguments, will only confuse your head. You must live in the company of men who have realized God or have made some progress in that direction.

—Swami Shivananda.

In India, for everything, we want a Guru. Books, we Hindus are persuaded, are only outlines. The living secrets must be handed down from Guru to disciple, in every art, in every science, much more so in religion.

'No knowledge is possible without a teacher'. There is no way to the attainment of knowledge unless it is transmitted through an apostolic succession from disciple to disciple, unless it comes through the mercy of the Guru and direct from his mouth.

—Swami Vivekananda.

'He who knows the Supreme attains the highest.'—Tait. Upa II.1.1

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GEMS FROM KRISHNAKARNAMRITA*

1. Ah, on the banks of the Jumuna, to be myself that blessed flute, will it ever be; how infinitely rich and enviable its position—so near the lips of the Lord.

2. May the beautiful form of that shepherd boy—who is the end and aim of all the worlds—fulfil our desires—the form which you can see at the head of the Vedas, or in the heart of the Yogis in meditation or at the lotus feet of the beautiful shepherd-lasses (the Gopis).

3. Oh, ye who are weary of wandering in vain in the wilderness of Sastras, search for the Meaning of the Upanishads (Sri Krishna) in the cottages of the shepherdesses, where It is tied down to a mortar.

4. 'Mamma!' 'Well, Yadunatha'; 'Please give me the cup'; 'What for?' 'To drink milk'; 'There is no milk now'. 'When can it be had, then?' 'At night'; 'When will that be?' 'When the darkness sets in'. Krishna thereupon closed his own two eyes and pressed for milk saying that the night had come! May such Krishna protect us.

5. 'Krishna, while out on play, ate a large quantity of mud'. 'Mamma!' 'Is it a fact, Krishna?' (asked the mother); 'Who told you like that?' 'Balarama'; 'It is all false, please see my mouth, Mamma'. May Kesava into whose mouth, the mother (seeing for the mud) saw all the worlds, to her great astonishment, protect us.

6. 'Who are you, child?' 'Brother of Bala'; 'But, what have you got to do here' 'I thought it was my house'. 'But, why put your hand into the butter cup?' 'Don't be offended, Mamma. I am searching for a missing calf!' May Krishna who readily answered thus to a shepherdess protect us.

7. Ah, the glorious music of the child's flute. It maddens all the worlds; it voices forth the meaning of the Vedas; hearing which, the trees rejoice, the mountains melt, the deer and the cows lose themselves in rapture; a music which sets the *munis* contemplating, which sound the seven notes and gives out the meaning of OM.

* A very popular poem in praise of Sri Krishna by a poet named Lilasuka.