



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

# Prabuddha Bharata

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## The Divine Message

### In a Pharisee's House

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was sitting at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?" "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

*The Bible*

## ABOUT THIS ISSUE

□ This month's EDITORIAL is on: MIND AND THE WORLD.

□ TWO FAMOUS UTTERANCES, a thought-provoking article by Sri Sumitora Noma, of Japan, discusses the profound relationship between a great Guru and his great disciple—Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita.

□ Dr. S. B. P. Sinha, D. Litt., in his paper, APPLIED PHILOSOPHY OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA, explains that the true aim of Philosophy is not the pleasure of dry intellectualism, but to help men and women live purposefully. The teachings of Sri Ramakrishna fill a vacuum in that regard. The author is a Professor of Philosophy at Bihar University, Muzaffarpur.

□ SRI SARADA DEVI, AN IDEAL FOR MODERN WOMEN, is a timely essay. The author emphasizes the fact that the exemplary life of the Mother can help modern women avoid confusion amidst the turmoil of changing society. The writer, Dr. Chetana Mandavia, is a plant-physiologist at Junagad University, Junagad, Gujarat.

□ The pure inventions of science are being thoughtlessly used for greed and gain, often for destructive purposes. The role of religion is to awaken conscience and self-awareness in man. The authors, Dr. S. N. Ghosh, D. Sc., formerly Professor of Applied Physics at Calcutta University, and Prof. A. Mitra, of Yogamaya Devi College at Calcutta, elucidate the point in their short paper SCIENCE AND RELIGION.

□ Dr. N. Jayashanmukham, Ph. D., in his article, THE JIVANMUKTA, enunciates an attitude of the liberated soul towards his body and activity in the world—according to Sankara's Vedantic text, *Viveka-Cūdāmaṇi*. The author is Director of Studies at Mother's Service Society, Pondicherry.

□ The essay on SPIRITUAL PRACTICES OF THE HOLY MOTHER contains a clear exposition of the spiritual achievements of the Mother, as outlined in *Jñāna* and *Rājā Yogas*. The author, Swami Brahmeshananda, is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order at Varanasi.

□ In HE TEACHES HIS OWN MESSAGE, Swami Deshikatmananda discusses interestingly how the Lord gets His Own work done in the world in mysterious ways. The writer is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order, Vishakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.

□ In the interesting poem, SMASH THY CAGE—AND FLY, Dr. S. K. Chakrabarty vividly describes how mind succumbs and gets ensnared in the fatal lures of the world. The author is a professor at the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta.



## Mind And The World

It was 15th June and the year was 1912. Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, after decorating the portrait of Sri Ramakrishna with fragrant garlands made by her own hand, finished the Master's worship. After the worship (it was afternoon) the sweets offered to Sri Ramakrishna, now prasāda, were distributed to the visitors and to all the household. The Mother returned and took her seat with the assembled women devotees. These women had come to unburden their minds to Holy Mother, to tell of their worries and troubles—sometimes to share some good humour, but more often, to hear from the Mother a few words of solace and wisdom. Everyone used to feel her presence soothing to mind and heart. The worldly life was too burdensome for words to express.

One lady visitor, a newcomer, said: "Mother, I have five daughters. I cannot find suitable bridegrooms for them. I am so anxious about them."

MOTHER: "Why do you worry about their marriages? If you cannot find suitable bridegrooms for them, please send them to the Sister Nivedita Girls' School. They will be trained there. They will be happy in the school."

ANOTHER LADY DEVOTEE (to the lady): "If you have faith in the Holy Mother, then do as she asks you to do. That will be for your good. If you listen to her, you will have no worry."

Unfortunately, the mother of the five girls could hardly appreciate the advice.

THIRD DEVOTEE: "It is very difficult to find suitable bridegrooms nowadays. Many boys refuse to marry."

MOTHER: "Yes, boys have learnt how to discriminate. They are gradually realizing

that the happiness of the world is transitory. *The less you become attached to the world, the more you enjoy peace of mind.*"<sup>1</sup>

The less our mind gets involved in the world, the more it experiences bliss and peace. What a profound statement in simple words! A glance at the history of humanity reveals that millenia after millenia, people have come and gone, always in quest of peace and happiness. This interminable seeking has led, in different climes and cultures, to development of literature, art and music, through declines and renaissance, through amassing of wealth and powers time without number. In spite of the repetitions of history, man now finds himself in essentially the same condition. With the modern avalanche of printed books and high-tech gadgetry, modern man does not know where to turn to find contentment. To the child, the world is a garden of pleasure. The young man is lost in his future dreams, plans and hopes. The old are left brooding over their sorrows, and fate gone against their wishes. Bruised and battered, they are unable to extricate themselves from the whirlpool of the world. Their bodies may be worn out, but the strength of old memories, after long years of interaction with the world, makes the mind more active. The fickle play of memory does not leave them in peace. They lapse back involuntarily into the vortex of past joys and sorrows, hurts and insults, and are barely aware of the surrounding reality. They live, as it were, in another dimension.

Weak or strong, learned or illiterate, affluent or poor, all are struggling to free themselves from clawing worries and anxieties to get some peace. Rich people go to every corner of the world to escape from

1. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother* (Madras: Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1984) p. 10.

the acute vacuum they feel in their lives. As for the poor, their struggle for survival dries up their fountain of energy, leaving them half dazed. They also feel that if they had had enough money, they could have led peaceful, carefree lives. People living in villages think that city-dwellers lead much more peaceful and joyful lives, with entertainments galore and ease-giving conveniences. Educated urbanites from less affluent countries rush to the West, imagining that it is heaven. But, on the other hand, in ashramas and monasteries of India, Japan and other eastern countries, one finds more and more Westerners patiently learning techniques of meditation. Why do they spend so much money to come to India, sacrificing some of their physical comforts, to lead a relatively simple life? The answer one gets is: "Our Western society is sitting on the volcano. Society is ruthless and competitive. Life is torn by constant tension, anxiety, uncertainty and fear. We are estranged from each other and suspicious of everyone. In family life we do not have peace, nor do we find it in our work and possessions. To us life appears like a battlefield, without rest or pause. Our mantra is 'more money and more success'. Children do not trust their parents, nor parents have faith in their offspring. Relationships are so fragile that a little misunderstanding results in separation of wife and husband. This country is so peaceful. We think we will get something here that we have missed in our countries."

This bottomless cavity in the heart of man never seems to get filled. Despite many attainments, that unnamable ache, that ungraspable *absence of something* persists throughout one's life. It is peace. It is not the silence of the grave or the temporary lull between fights; nor is it sleep, or the numbness that comes after a shock. In fact, that eternally sought-for peace does not depend on any external events. External

peace and quietness, we know. When during a festival the blare of loudspeakers cease, a soothing calm follows. After hectic activity comes a rest. Or in the early morning before the world wakes, in the forest a tranquil atmosphere reigns. This serenity outside is a sign to us that in stillness lies happiness. There is no gainsaying that noise affects our organic system and disturbs the mind. The recent reports published by the World Health Organization have pointed out that noise pollution has an adverse effect on our health. The shocking caption of the book, *Airport Noise and the Lunatic Asylum*, a W.H.O. publication, describes what deplorable conditions we have created on our planet. In India, temples and market places sometimes share a resemblance. Thronging crowds do not allow the gods to take rest. So, tranquility of the outer world is temporary and can be disturbed in no time. One cannot take it for granted. On an agitated mind, even a serene atmosphere fails to produce a salutary effect. Silence, to the majority, is frightening as it exposes them to their deeper subconscious fears, insecurity and problems. Therefore, they try to drown these in the tide of activity and noise. People do not have patience to sit quietly. Hardly a moment passes before they become fidgety. The tyrannical restless mind does not allow anyone respite.

Incessant movement of body and mind are due to the absence of internal peace. The mind is always buzzing and making noise. Every one of us has savoured an experience of stillness, though momentarily, when we have found a solution to a vexing problem, or got free from a nagging worry. When a terrible hunger or thirst is appeased, or when a desire is fulfilled, we feel a kind of euphoria, and a great relief. That very moment our mind is peaceful and unruffled. There is peace till the next worry comes—as if it had been waiting in the wings to occupy centre stage. This short interval



between two of our worries, or thoughts, is the period of our stillness. But its duration is short and nobody takes any cognizance of it. We suffer, having entrusted our lives to our unreliable mind. Most of us blindly trust its dictates and succumb to its whims without the slightest hesitation or tiniest doubt. Wise ones have warned that the mind is a good servant but a bad master. As long as we do not question its motives and doubt its drives, we are in constant risk of ending up in ruins.

The ordinary stillness and peace we know is fleeting and tenuous. It can be swept off by any trifling thing. How can that peace be invited, of which it is said, "passeth the understanding"—which is still like the deep-rooted mountain or like the depths of the boundless sea. Even the tempests and storms, however furious, cannot dislodge it from our hearts. Without such peace, life is like a scrap of leaf caught in the wind, or a tiny boat tossed by the wave.

To those who are firmly established in peace, life is a play and merriment. We have the urge to ground ourselves in that peace transcendental, but the means we employ to secure it are wrong. They take us away from the goal. Our composure depends on certain favourable conditions and circumstances. The moment there is slight change, our peace also is shattered and destroyed. Real peace cannot arise from the vagaries of the mind or from restless changing of circumstances. There is no easy method. The only way open to us is to go beyond slavish dependence on the world.

The Holy Mother said, "The less you become attached to the world, the more you enjoy peace of mind." We find in her statement there are two entities. One is the mind and the other, the world. The world doesn't show any attachment for us; on the contrary, we say it knows not of our existence—whether we come or go, the world is not affected. It is we who cling to the world

and try to hold it with bearhugs. The nearest thing to us is our mind. Closer than relatives, wives, husbands and children, it is the nearest. Our experiencing miseries and joys, and all our interactions with the world are through this mind only. Though it is nearest, yet it is very far. Through its help we try to understand everything, but about itself we know so little. We have little knowledge of it, its refractory processes and mysterious behaviour. Books and psychiatrists are equally baffled and move only on the surface, midst theories and possible clues to the truth. After all is said and done, common sense tells, the individual is better off examining his own mind, introspecting, observing the mind through the lens of the mind itself—unceasingly and untiringly. Our focus of attention is always turned towards the external world, and as a result the mental world inside receives comparatively scant notice. It is tragic when a person becomes either neurotic or psychotic, and the unhinged mind has to be handed over to the care of the psychiatrists. Infatuated as we are, we vainly knock at every door, travel to every corner of the earth, and exhaust all means in search of elusive peace. Yet peace is an internal state; it cannot be found in the world or the market places. The world is a bewildering phenomena of many mysteries and contradictions. Our efforts to find tranquility outside ourselves only heaps more disturbance and frustration on our own heads. There is a Zen story: Three young pupils approach a Master, who instructs them that they must spend a time in complete silence if they are to win enlightenment. "Remember, not a word from any of you," he admonished. Immediately, the first pupil said: "I shall not speak at all." "How stupid you are," said the second. "Why did you talk?" "I am the only one who is not talking," said the third. Through noise silence never comes.

Desire for the things of the world sets the

mind in motion. Desires are born when the mind, coming in contact with things and persons says, "I must have them." Thinking of objects, attachment grows for them, says the *Gītā* (II. 62). Lessening the pain of attachments does not result from eschewing objects of enjoyment, but continuing to dwell in our minds upon them. For objects are everywhere, and anyhow, it is thought which binds the man. When we examine our own minds we find all its layers are permeated by the world. While 'the world' is used in the abstract sense, abstract does not mean innocuous. 'World' means objects and persons, the constant perceiving of which forms thought. During waking hours and in dreams, without any interruption, this work—that is to say thinking, goes on. Till in the end, attached to the five senses, it carries away the indiscriminate intelligence like the uncontrolled vicious horses of a charioteer. Possessed as it were by a ghost, a man can no longer say that his life is his life. The warp and woof of thinking are images and words. With the help of *rūpa* and *nāma*, the mind functions. In this universe limited by space and time, every object has a form—*rūpa*, and a name—*nāma*. So the Advaita text, *Pañcadaśī*, says: "The nature of the world is name and form."<sup>2</sup> We are able to recognize and store objective knowledge with the help of these two. Whenever images flash in the mind the associated words are also subliminally uttered, and vice-versa. As two persons engage in dialogue, the 'I-image' talk to other images perceived in the brain. What the image is what is actually perceived from outside plus whatever the mind interprets it to be on the basis of past knowledge and impressions. If one examines his mind for awhile, one can listen to its incessant talking to itself. But this monologue tires the brain and exhausts the energy.

Thoughts are troublesome. A person's

mind is an arena of thoughts. There appears to be no end of its perennial flow. The moment we try to stop them, they come back with redoubled energy. The content of our thoughts are mostly gross objects and quasi-real figures. To the 'I' as subject, everything else is an object. And as persons, we exist as objects in others' minds. Each mind builds its own subjective world with the material of sense impressions from outside. Each experience, either pleasant or painful, modifies, adding or subtracting something from mental world. The mental world of young people and old people differs vastly. The aged do not expect too much from the world. Because of long and strongly established habit, they are unable to disassociate or forget the mental world, even for a short duration. The mind deeply anchored in thoughts moves in its own limited space.

The relatives, name, power and wealth on which we now depend will slip away at any moment from our clenched fists, plunging us into the web of nightmares. Everything is so uncertain in the world. Depending on the world for one's peace is nothing but courting disaster. The moods of our mind vary according to favourable and unfavourable circumstances. External conditions are not static, but are always changing according to their own law—not as one desires them to be. The objects in the world have no intrinsic value of their own, but only the value we attribute to them. The deaths of thousands in senseless wars, or due to natural calamities, are more dreadful than the death of one person who is dear to us, but still we take it otherwise. Each considers his loss and gain, and experiences pain and pleasure in relation to his mental world. "Men are disturbed not by things, but by the view that they take of things," said the Roman sage Epictetus. "Things are dead in themselves," remarked Swami Vivekananda, "only we give them life, then like fools we

2. *Pañcadaśī*, XIII-62



turn round and are afraid of them or enjoy them!"<sup>3</sup>

The world is, therefore, neither a horror nor a paradise. It depends on our thinking. It looks as we desire to look at it. If we run after it with a beggar's bowl, it humiliates us. On the other hand, if we do not care for it and cultivate indifference, it falls at our feet. The Vedanta says that the world has no real existence. It exists in relation to the individual mind. Explaining, Swamiji said, "We see this world with the five senses, but if we had another sense, we would see in it something more. If we had another sense the world would be different. It has, therefore, no real existence; it has no unchangeable, immovable, infinite existence. Nor can it be called non-existent, seeing that it exists, and we have to work in and through it. It is a mixture of existence and non-existence."<sup>4</sup>

The world exists in our mind. As the *Pañcadaśī* says: *Cittameva hi saṃsārah*, the mind indeed is the world (XI. 113). The statement sounds strange on first hearing. It is, however, within the common experience of all that the world exists for us only when we are awake to it. Its presence is felt only during the waking period, but not in the states of sleep and swoon. How does the world enter in our minds? Through images and words—by thought. One has got to conclude that for all practical purposes, when one stops thinking about the world, shuts it out—it ceases to exist. In the absence of thoughts, the world is also absent, and so is the thinker or egoistic self. The thinker rises forth from every thought, and is sustained by thought. If thought vanishes, so does the idea of plurality. Therefore, the Holy Mother, great exemplar and teacher of mankind that she was, said, "Think less about

the world." As a natural corollary, one is led on the path to "peace that passeth understanding".

Our common experience tells us that if we think continuously about a person or a thing, after some time it gets firmly lodged in our mind. Nourished by thoughts of various kinds, it grows to become a source of worry and misery to us. This is attachment.

Life itself teaches us not to depend on this contradictory world. It is a mixture of good and bad. What is sweet today turns sour tomorrow; what is a smile now will change to tears the next day. Happiness and misery alternate with each other. What an awful thing it is to trust the world and invest all our hopes and energies in it! To alert and observant persons, awakening to this comes earlier, to immature ones, after much tribulation. For him who feels he has had enough of the tiring hide-and-seek games of children, for him renunciation has begun. In one of his sonnets William Wordsworth pointed out the disease of the worldly:

The world is too much with us; late  
and soon,  
Getting and spending, we lay waste our  
powers:  
Little we see in nature that is ours;  
We have given our hearts away, a sordid  
boon!<sup>5</sup>

The way to peace and bliss lies in stopping the intrusion of thoughts by means of self-efforts. When the mind is crowded with the frivolous thoughts of the world, we cannot see anything beyond them. Yonder lies the limitless ocean of peace and bliss—pure consciousness. Do we have the courage to let go the world? Swami Turiyananda told this story:

There was a king and he had a friend—a holy man. The king would very often say to his friend:

3. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. p.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

5. *Wordsworth's Poetical Works* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1917) p. 259.

"Just release me from this worldly bondage, just make me free." The holy man would give him instructions. But yet the king was persistent in his request: "Just make me free." One day the holy man firmly caught hold of a pillar and repeatedly began to request the king, "Friend, just disentangle me!" The king said, "Why don't you let go the hold?" The holy man replied, "No, you must disentangle me!" The king replied, "A great fun indeed! You yourself have clasped the pillar tightly and at will you can leave it; but no, you will request me to come to your rescue. Why don't you yourself give it up?" The holy man let go the pillar and said to the king: "It is the same case with you. You yourself are clasping the world and yet you constantly request me to release you from it. Why don't you yourself give it up?" The king understood.<sup>6</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother advised often that true renunciation was mental and not physical. The Holy Mother never renounced the world but lived with a large number of her relatives—but absolutely unattached. Her life is a living sermon. People often mistake that renunciation means giving up things gradually one by one. First, they stop eating sugar or salt or meat and later try to give up anger, greed, and so on. Nobody can succeed giving up thoughts one by one. There is a funny story. There was once a miser. He was on the death-bed and the priest came to 'save' him. Being greedy the priest decided to save him limb by limb and charge certain fee per every part saved. When he finally came to the right leg, the priest thought he would charge the miser a lot as he was escaping them. So he said aloud to the miser: "Now I am going to ask a large sum for your right leg." The dying man, who had a very calculating mind, summoned all his strength and said: "But, Father, that is a wooden leg."

6. *Spiritual Talks* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983) p. 311.

A devotee once asked Sri Ramana Maharshi, "...so we must rid ourselves of lust (*kāma*), anger (*krodha*), etc.?" To that the sage replied: "Give up thoughts. You need not give up anything else."<sup>7</sup> To lessen the flood of thoughts, Sri Sarada Devi suggested the efficacy of repetition of God's name. She said: "Repetition of His Name leads to the goal. Even when your mind does not become concentrated, you can repeat the holy Name thousands of times."<sup>8</sup> She said emphatically on many occasions: "Man achieves the highest goal through the practice of *Japa*, repeating the holy name. *Japa* leads to success. ...Yes, *Japa* leads to success!"<sup>9</sup> The advice given by Nisargadatta Maharaj and by Ramana Maharshi is also efficacious in subduing the restless mind, quelling useless thoughts. Nisargadatta Maharaj used to tell people: "Instead of remembering other things, remember yourself always. *You are*, all the time—the sense of 'I am' is constant." Maharshi's potent method of stilling the restless mind is to keep the unwavering attention on the 'I-thought' and enquire, "Who am I?" Because with the arising of the 'I-thought', all other thoughts—the world itself arises.

The means of slowing thought waves, according to Patañjali, is by practice and non-attachment (*Abhyāsa vairāgyabhyām tannirodah*), *Yogasūtras* (1.12). In the *Gītā*, the Lord gives the same advice: *Abhyāsena tu kaunteya vairāgyena ca grhyate*—through practice and renunciation, O son of Kunti, the mind can be controlled (6.35).

To counteract the strong habit which we have unknowingly cultivated, there is no other soft option.

7. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* (Tirucannamalai: Sri Ramana Ashrama, 1968) p. 45.

8. *The Gospel of the Holy Mother*, p. 217.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 227.



# Two Famous Utterances

SUMITORA NOMA

It was in Brittany, France in September of 1900 that Sister Nivedita and Swami Vivekananda were each preparing to depart—Swamiji for India, via Constantinople and Egypt, and Nivedita for England. Swamiji was exhausted from years of his heavy work spreading the ideas of Vedanta, and was soon to lay down his life. Before parting, on the last evening, he called Sister Nivedita to him and gave her his blessing. He said, "When a great man has prepared his workers, he must go to another place, for he cannot make them free in his own presence. I am nothing more for you. I have handed over to you the power that I possessed; now I am only a wandering monk...now, go forth into the world, and there, if I made you, be destroyed. If the Divine Mother made you, live."<sup>1</sup>

It was something like this also that Abū Bakr spoke to the faithful who had gathered in the mosque at Al Madinah upon hearing of the death of the Prophet. Abū Bakr was Mohammed's appointed successor. He said: "If there are any among you who worshipped Mohammed, he is dead. But if it is God you worship, He lives forever." Thus Abū Bakr killed at one stroke the attempt on the part of some of Mohammed's followers to deify him.<sup>2</sup> We shall try to uncover the meaning of these two celebrated utterances and what we can learn from them.

The substance of Abū Bakr's exhortation seems to be: Do not make a god out of man, however great. Mohammed is God's

(in this context, Allāh's) Prophet, but he is not God. (Do not confuse the Prophet for God.) For God there is no death or birth, but for man there is. That is why a time came for Mohammed to die—but God lives forever; otherwise He would not be God.

According to Islam's creed, man is man and God is God, and only One. Man, however great and glorious, cannot be equated with God. On the attempt to deify Mohammed it was necessary to impress upon Mohammed's followers the distinction between the Prophet and God—and this Mohammed's successor did, swiftly and successfully, and for all time.

No doubt, Abū Bakr was speaking of Mohammed and not of himself, although of course, what he said obviously applied equally well, if not more so, to himself and to all Muslims. (If Mohammed is not God, what about me and other fellow Muslims?—is what Abū Bakr said in effect, and in fact.) There is, therefore great humility in his statement. In a similar manner, Swamiji exhorted Sister Nivedita: "...if I made you, be destroyed. If the Divine Mother made you, live." Here also we see exemplary humility.

Mohammed's life and work are well known. Therefore, one does not have to 'prove' his greatness in order to get the full impact of Abū Bakr's fiery words. I suppose, however, Swamiji's life and work are not that well known, especially vis-a-vis Sister Nivedita, whom he blessed thus. What we are to do is to narrate some salient facts concerning both Sister Nivedita and Swami Vivekananda, so that we can have a better appreciation and understanding of Swamiji's great utterance. Suffice it to say, admirers of Swami Vivekananda in general, and readers of Ramakrishna- Vivekananda literature

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1. Pravrajika Atmaprana, *Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Sister Nivedita Girls' School, 1961) p. 116.

2. Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: New American Library of World Literature, Inc., 1961) p. 218.

particularly, are no doubt aware of what a brilliant and outstanding intellectual and spiritual giant Vivekananda was, and how profoundly he influenced the great leaders of India of his time; also how many people in all walks of life in various parts of the world have been—and will continue to be—inspired by his life and teachings. There is probably no further need to expand upon this claim. Of Sister Nivedita—and Swamiji's influence on her—however, we should delineate more, though rather briefly.

Nivedita was a great intellect in her own right. She, like her Master, was a tremendous source of inspiration to thousands of Indians, young and old, known and unknown—especially to the youth of India. Practically all of the national leaders of India thought very highly of her, and she had close and intimate contact with many of them. All of them may not have agreed with her views, but nonetheless, they valued her opinions on the various issues that faced the country during the difficult times following the Partition of Bengal.

It is on record that even Gandhiji, who had become the conscience of India—to have *darśan* of whom, thousands upon thousands of people would flock—would go to meet Nivedita when he was in Calcutta. Just think of it! And what made Gandhiji and the other national leaders hold Nivedita in such high esteem—except her love for India and dedicated service? Although born in the West, she lived a simple and austere life, turning away from the amenities and comforts commonly enjoyed by other English people in India. Inspired herself, and ever inspiring Indians to work for the regeneration of the Motherland by her fiery speeches and writings, Nivedita set a glorious example for others. Great indeed was the love and esteem which Nivedita 'commanded' from the national leaders of India. But what was her relation with her Guru, Swami Vivekananda? Here, she was an example of utter

loyalty and self-surrender. It still surprises one, how a person—and a woman at that—who was born and brought up in a cultured family of Europe, and who was already a social reformer and leader in her own society, could dedicate herself so fully to the spiritual ideals of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and work for India's political freedom.

Swami Vivekananda, as we know, was unyielding and steadfast to the high principles of Vedanta, and this was at first very hard for Nivedita to accept, but after her long struggle, once she accepted him as her spiritual guide, she made his Ideal her own, and longed to serve India. Swami Vivekananda warned her of the difficulties she would have to endure, but welcomed her once she had made her decision. Nivedita's desire after that was to follow the Swami: "...to live by his side, to help him, to do his work...but at the same time, she was afraid of that objective conception of the world which, according to him, was the essential condition for useful labor."<sup>3</sup>

She was, in the beginning overwhelmed to see the intense spirit of detachment and self-sacrifice of her Guru, and to imagine that the same would be required of her, too, as a disciple. But she envisaged a way out of this personal crisis:

...for her that meant complete self-effacement, and she had embraced this...with all the Christian abnegation that could be desired, and with burning sincerity. But it was just this that Swami Vivekananda could not accept. He had no use for a disciple who mutilated her mental powers and contracted her own personality. What he needed was a woman, radiating with infinite freedom, who had developed her talents to the limit of their capacity, who had amassed gifts which could be used later like helpful tools.<sup>4</sup>

To this Sister Nivedita somehow adjusted

3. Lizelle Reymond, *The Dedicated, A Biography of Nivedita*, (Madras: Samata Books, 1985) p. 52.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 52.



herself. Yet her personal training by Swamiji was full of pain and anguish. We cannot do better than to quote what Romain Rolland has said about it:

He had not the slightest respect for her instinctive national loyalty, for her habits or her dislikes as a Westerner; he constantly humiliated her proud and logical English character. Perhaps in this way he wished to defend himself and her against the passionate adoration she had for him; although Nivedita's feelings for him were always absolutely pure, he perhaps saw their danger. He snubbed her mercilessly and found fault with all she did. ...She came back to her companions overwhelmed and in tears. Eventually they remonstrated with Vivekananda for his excessive severity.<sup>5</sup>

That Nivedita was able to accept the universal principles in the Hindu religion, and a new way of life and work in India, knowing as she did beforehand that all her previous ideas and training would have to be uprooted and readjusted, bespeaks her nobility of character. She never cherished resentment against Swamiji, but in fact worshipped him all her life. Such was Nivedita's loyalty and love for the Master.

Sister Nivedita herself, in her own inimitable language, has confided to us and to posterity how and why she became a disciple of Swami Vivekananda:

I had recognized the heroic fibre of the man, and desired to make myself the servant of his love for his own people. But it was his character to which I had thus done obeisance. As a religious teacher, I saw that although he had a system of thought to offer, nothing in that system would claim him for a moment, if he found that truth led elsewhere. And to the extent that this recognition implies, I became his disciple. For the rest, I studied his teaching sufficiently to become convinced of its coherence, but never till I had had experiences that authenticated them, did I inwardly cast in my lot with the final justifi-

5. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1953) p. 139,

fication of the things he came to say. Nor did I at that time, though deeply attracted by his personality, dream of the immense distance which I was afterwards to see, as between his development and that of any other thinker or man of genius whom I could name.<sup>6</sup>

Since she did not break with Swamiji, as we know, we may be sure that Nivedita never had cause to be sorry for casting her lot with him—which makes the Master and his worthy disciple all the more dear to us. The heart is touched to read her words which bespoke her mind:

"...now there was no struggle of intellectual unrest—no tremor of novelty: This man who stood there held my life in the hollow of his hand—and as he once in a while looked my way, I read in his glance what I too felt in my heart. Complete faith and abiding comprehension of purpose—better than any feeling!<sup>7</sup>

From the foregoing, we are able to appreciate something of the Guru-disciple relationship between Sister Nivedita and Swami Vivekananda. Something we get also of how the supposedly impossible meeting of East and West becomes possible, with dignity, integrity and creative meaning for all. More insight into the life of the Sister in her classic book, *The Master As I Saw Him*, is available to us. In recognition of the great value of her book, Prof. T. K. Cheyne wrote in the *Hibbert Journal*: "It may be placed among the choicest religious classics, below the various Scriptures, but on the same shelf with the 'Confessions of St. Augustine' and Sabatier's 'Life of Saint Francis.'"<sup>8</sup>

Sister Nivedita has indeed revealed the life of a saint in her memoirs of the Patriot-sannyāsī Vivekananda. Her own life adds still further testimony...And who could

6. Pravrajika Atmaprana, *Sister Nivedita*, p. 14.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

understand a saint except another with some of his own qualities ?

Abū Bakr would have nothing to do with deification—either of the Prophet Mohammed or of himself—including other Moslems as well. One of God's gifts to humanity is to show the Paths to Himself. Humility, one of the eternal virtues of all dharmas and

religions, was revealed by God Himself to the Prophet and to Vivekananda. By Swami Vivekananda it was expressed: "...if I made you, be destroyed. If the Divine Mother made you, live." That explains, perhaps, why Sister Nivedita does indeed live in the heart of all Indians and the rest of humanity, even today.

## Applied Philosophy And Sri Ramakrishna

DR. S. B. P. SINHA

It is proposed to highlight the importance of the Great Master, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, as an applied philosopher in this brief and critical article. It is considered appropriate in view of the fact that during recent times, philosophy has become divorced from life, having become merely a subject of academic interest even to academicians. The Moderns, have lost sight of Philosophy's original purpose of throwing light on the nature and meaning of life and it is now mostly preoccupied with linguistic analysis as it did earlier with logical positivism.

As a school, linguistic or logical analysis came into prominence after the rise of Logical Positivism in the early part of the twentieth century. It is neither possible nor necessary here to discuss in detail the development of Logical Positivism, but it may be just mentioned that it started as a movement to make Philosophy more concerned with analysis of things than with metaphysical speculation. Its advocates were influenced by the tremendous advances in scientific knowledge and sought to make philosophy merely the logical language of science, to clarify its concepts. It was also seen, unfortunately that they placed philosophy after science and looked to science alone as the

custodian of knowledge. Philosophy was no longer concerned directly with the knowledge of Reality, but regarded only as a handmaid of science. The importance of old traditional Philosophy was, of course, neglected. Linguistic, or logical analysis resulted in the formalistic approach to philosophical problems. Saying all this we do not mean to underrate the due importance of the School or their approach as a historical development, but it would certainly be unfortunate, and unfair to continue to equate all philosophy, particularly Indian philosophy, with linguistic analysis.

Linguistic analysis can at best be regarded as a branch of Philosophy. Prof. H. H. Price rightly esteems it as a branch of Philosophy like epistemology.<sup>1</sup> We have also humbly maintained that linguistic analysis should keep its proper place compatible with old Philosophy and in spiritual or religious philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Prof. Max Mueller, Prof.

1. Price, H. H., *Clarity is not Enough*, Ed. H.D.I. Lewis (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1963) p. 31.

2. Sinha, Dr. S.B.P., "Indian Philosophy, Linguistic Analysis and Metaphysics", from *Philosophy and Language*, Edited by Dr. R. Choudhary (Delhi: Capital Publishing House, 1984) pp. 20-21.



Hiriyanna and others have stressed this point and have rightly held that the study of philosophy is recommended in India for those who wish to attain the highest goals man can strive for in his life. The spirit of Indian philosophy is grand and free, and is meant to lead man to absolute freedom. So philosophical enquiry should not be confined to mere intellectualism, formalism, linguistics or logic. It is rightly called 'the lamp of all sciences' by Kautilya in his celebrated *Artha-śāstra*, and 'the foundation of all knowledge' (*sarva-vidyā-pratiṣṭha*) in the *Upaniṣads*. Naturally it would be desirable for all to appreciate philosophy in its wider and comprehensive sense. When philosophy becomes practical in the everyday life of men, it attains its glory.

Philosophy has to become naturally and rightly connected with life. It has to be the light and guide of our lives at every stage. This humble suggestion of ours is quite in tune with the spirit of Prof. Santosh Sen Gupta in his learned article, "Is Philosophy a Theoretical or a Practical Study?", when he describes Indian Philosophy as *generally and predominantly* practical.<sup>3</sup> In this modern era when man is groping in the dark and needs a balanced, comprehensive and axiological approach to life, meaningful study of philosophy can be very useful. Science has contributed greatly to our life. But, though providing man with conveniences and amenities we could not have imagined a few years ago, still human life is not happy. Man cannot be happy without philosophy and spirituality. Science has its limitations. As Sri S. Ramakrishnan has pointed out: "Science has glorified the external man. In the progress, it has denigrated the inner man. This has spurred man and woman to

a neurotic pursuit of external pleasures and generated grisly greed for rights without duties."<sup>4</sup> It is high time that philosophy should be appreciated and practised in the true sense of the term. This will be in the larger interest of the modern world where things are not so bright.

Now coming to the great life of Sri Ramakrishna, it is not needed here to present every detail of his wonderful teaching and philosophy, but can be mentioned only that he is widely accepted as an extraordinary divine person who came to this earth to propagate the ideals of virtue or *dharma* in this era, which is in urgent need of it. It has been rightly pointed out:

Sri Ramakrishna...by his life and teachings, fortified the foundations of Dharma in what-ever-sense the word may be understood. Therefore, Swami Vivekananda unhesitatingly called him 'Dharmasthapaka', the reinstator of Dharma... [and] *Sarvadharmasvarupin*' (the embodiment of all Dharmas), indicating that apart from the different angles from which it can be viewed, Dharma itself can be of various types and Sri Ramakrishna is the embodiment of all these types and subtypes of Dharma.<sup>5</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna really tried to preach and propagate the ideals of virtue and faith in God to modern man caught up in the net of sense enjoyment and the glamour of science. Naturally, modern man cannot be expected to believe in something without sufficient evidence and proof. Sri Ramakrishna tried to convince the modern man realistically and scientifically, in that he actually lived up to the principles he taught. Swami Vireswarananda highlighted the matter thus:

In these days man has learnt to deliberate

3. Gupta, Santosh Sen, "Is Philosophy a Theoretical or a Practical Study?" from *Philosophy: Theory and Practice*, Edited by Prof. T.M.P. Mahadevan (Madras: Centre for Advanced Study in Philosophy, Univ. of Madras, 1974) p. 571.

4. Ramakrishnan, S., "Science and Spirituality: Need of Synthesis", *Bhavan's Journal*, August 1981, Annual No. p. 24.

5. Swami Brahmeshananda, "Dharmasthapaka Sri Ramakrishna" *Vedanta Kesari*, Vol. LXXI Nov. and Dec. 1984, p. 405.

according to the scientific method. As a result it has become difficult for him to have faith in the existence of God. Our old platitudes about religion can no longer stand the scrutiny of the modern scientific outlook. That is why, being unable to ascertain whether God exists or not, man is losing faith in Him. But, what are the consequences of losing the faith? Man is suffering from mental afflictions, his mind is filled with agonizing restlessness and he feels that he has lost a great deal. He has no idea about the aim or goal of human life. Who will solve all these problems? Who will reinstate faith in God in the hearts of the people by proving His existence to them? This is a special problem of the modern age...<sup>6</sup>

So the Great Master, by his own exemplary life and teachings was able to kindle faith in man about the existence of God and the ultimate Goal of human life. In an article of *The Vedanta Kesari* this has been clearly put:

Ramakrishna took always a strongly rationalistic and experimental approach to religion. Reason and experience were the foundation of the entire religious life of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. When a western disciple of Vivekananda asked him if religion and reason can go together Vivekananda's answer was emphatic. "Remember, the superconscious never contradicts reason," said Vivekananda... "It transcends it but contradicts never." One must follow truth, as Vivekananda used to say, to the utmost bound of human thought and never be afraid to face reason. Instinct matures into reason and reason ultimately matures into intuition.<sup>7</sup>

Many more things can be said about this human-cum-divine being, Sri Ramakrishna. It is well known that he experimented with different paths and ultimately demonstrated their essential unity. So he has come to be regarded as the prophet of harmony of diffe-

rent religions and sects. His reverence for, and accepting attitude towards all religions, based on his own experience of their validity, is of tremendous importance and needs to be preached and propagated in this age when people are fighting in the name of religion.

Sri Ramakrishna was a philosopher in the real and creative sense of the term. Once having learnt the import of philosophy in the Vedas and Vedānta, he forthwith realized that Truth, practised it in his life, and demonstrated to the world Its Oneness. All religions are true, he said, when their tenets are sincerely followed for realizing Truth. His life is an eloquent testimony to this fact. Mahatma Gandhi aptly remarked:

The story of Ramakrishna Paramahansa's life is a story of religion in practice. His life enables us to see God face to face. No one can read the story of his life without being convinced that God alone is real and that all else is an illusion. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of godliness. His sayings are not those of a mere learned man but they are pages from the Book of Life. They are revelations of his own experiences. They, therefore, leave on the reader an impression which he cannot resist. In this age of scepticism Ramakrishna presents an example of a bright and living faith which gives solace to thousands of men and women who would otherwise have remained without spiritual light...<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Ramakrishna Paramahansa really lived philosophy. His illuminating talks in the celebrated *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* testify to the fact. He discusses various problems of philosophy and religion in a very simple and convincing manner. He talks about the Personal God and the Impersonal Brahman. He has really synthesized monism and theism in his own simple and convincing way—that is by his direct

6. Swami Vireswarananda, *Spiritual Ideals for the Modern Age* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1980), p. 7.

7. Swami Jitatananda, "Sri Ramakrishna and the Modern Times" *Vedanta Kesari*, Vol. LXXII, Nov. and Dec. 1985, pp. 474-75.

8. Gandhi, M.K., Foreword in the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1955).



perception. Like the water of the Ocean when calm or in waves, for him God, Brahman and Divine Mother are one and the same Reality.

Sri Ramakrishna and his celebrated disciples, such as Swami Vivekananda and others have clearly and categorically preached the validity and unity of the various paths of yoga, namely those of knowledge, devotion, selfless work and meditation. They all lead to the same goal—Truth, which should be the *summum bonum* of our life. So his philosophy or approach to Truth is quite practical and universal. There is no room for narrowness and sectarianism.

His teachings and life are comparable to those of the Godmen like Lord Krishna, Christ, Buddha and others. They have got their universal importance and application for all times and all places. Thus, Sri Ramakrishna is unique in more than one sense. Concluding, we quote the following lines which appeared recently in *Prabuddha Bharata*:

...Though his teachings are simple,...they are universal. From naive persons to great intellectuals, from the penniless to the opulent, from simple believers to sharp agnostics, from the deeply entrenched householders to homeless mendicants...from the bigoted to the enlightened ...Sri Ramakrishna's compassion brings solace and succour. None was turned away while he lived. As his personality and teachings were not bound by time, even now everyone finds a place within the luminous orbit of his love and kindness.<sup>9</sup>

So, really Sri Ramakrishna is regarded as a bridge between divinity and humanity, and it is proper that we should try to acquaint ourselves with the sublime ideas and ideals of this Great Master who lived philosophy in the truest sense. It is high time that we should realize the importance of his great mission in the larger interest of the present world which is confronted with various problems.

9. "Sri Ramakrishna—Bridge Between Divinity and Humanity" (Editorial) *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol. 95, Feb. 1990, p. 83.

Nevertheless it is true that some of the disciples' sins are visited upon the Guru. For it is often seen that, if many are given Mantra-Dikshā (initiation) without discrimination and scrutiny about their moral nature and fitness, some mortal illness takes possession of the physical frame of the pure, sinless Guru and shortens his life. But urged by the impetus of doing good to others and of leading them Godward, the selfless, eminent Guru of boundless mercy, despite full knowledge of this, takes no thought for his own body and lays down his life by inches for the welfare of the disciples. Incarnations of God take upon themselves the burden of others' sins, and so they too have to suffer from various diseases on that score. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "This disease (cancer in the throat) with which my body is afflicted is due to my taking upon me the sins of Girish."—(His great dramatist disciple).

From *Towards the Goal Supreme*  
by Swami Virajananda



## Sri Sarada Devi, An Ideal For Modern Women

DR. CHETNA MANDAVIA

Modern society is changing rapidly, and all over, the woman's world is expanding. Women's interests, their life-styles and activities are becoming diversified. They have joined their male counterparts in almost every profession. New diversified roles have imparted greater confidence to women and with the march of humanity towards the twenty-first century, a greater scope lies opening ahead for them to shine out and accomplish much. As Alvin Toffler has remarked, "The Third Wave (a new critical transition to civilization and social form...) is producing a 'cognitariat'—a group based on *knowing*, on the use of mind rather than muscle."<sup>1</sup> So there seems little doubt that there is great scope of women's further development.

But, as every development brings confusion and turmoil along with it, the progress of women has also generated confusion and a series of concomitant problems. Present day women are at a crossroads. The stress and strains generated by the changes in their attitudes and roles have rendered them non-plussed as to which way to turn for true fulfilment. Their main struggle is in respect to their progressive thinking and newly

gained independence, and how to decide if they will play *new roles* in society, or just play the *old roles in a new way*. Admittedly, society remains largely conservative. What many wish is a new definition of men's and women's roles and a thorough-going reconstruction of the existing social structure, so that women can be given more freedom and recognition as individuals. Their demands seem to be completely justified, though it may also appear to others that individuality and self-centred interests are stressed only *in the name of freedom*. If so, and the latter is true, intellectual sharpness without mental, emotional and spiritual training in right direction may lead women nowhere, because there is every likelihood that they may just assimilate the old forms—the greed, jealousy, competition and corruption around them and continue to be exploited economically, intellectually and emotionally just as in the past.

There is an urgent need of an ideal for modern women who are trying to balance their steps on the ladder of revolutionary and transitional evolution. Among India's ideal feminine characters, there are Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, Gargi and others...and there is Sarada Devi. Which is best equipped to serve the need of the present age? Without doubt, it is Sri Sarada Devi who

1. Alvin Toffler, *Previews and Premises* ((New Lork: Bantam, 1985) p. 121.



can serve as a perfect ideal for present day women—eastern and western.

The study of Sri Sarada Devi's life reveals the requisite stature of great purity, full of peace, profound understanding, excellence and perfection, duty-consciousness, and dynamic spirituality infused with philosophical wisdom. Outwardly a simple village woman, there was a perfect blend of strength and mellowness, in her heart a sympathy for all, a progressive outlook with patience and wisdom, organizing capacity with loving disposition, and freedom with resolution and selflessness. To avoid alienation from self, home and society, modern women should imbibe from the Holy Mother these traits of her personality. In one sense these noble qualities of character may be latent in all, but something more is required—and that is training and education. To Gwendolyn Thomas, Sarada Devi appeared as a torch-bearer of the cause of women everywhere. The historical proximity of her life is of great importance since it proves the reality of the lives of all previous *satis* and the validity of the Madonna ideal in modern times.<sup>2</sup>

Let us try to see how the character of the Holy Mother provides an immaculate and perfect ideal for modern women.

### *Strength of character*

Once Swami Premananda said, "She [Sarada Devi] is the embodiment of Power, and how well she controls it! Sri Ramakrishna could not do so, though he tried."<sup>3</sup> Her message, "Do not find fault with others

if you want peace of mind," bears testimony to her strong character.<sup>4</sup> Fault-finding and criticizing others only brings bitterness and betrays weakness in our own character by which we deprive ourselves of the higher path in life. Her power to forbear was revealed in every day of her life. She always said, "My son, forbearance is a great virtue; there is no other like it."<sup>5</sup>

Though almost unlettered (Holy Mother used to read the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*), she commanded the respect of an intellectual giant like Swami Vivekananda. To him she was Mother. Once, during the organization of relief operations during the plague epidemic, Swamiji thought to sell the Math property if necessity arose, to raise money. When nobody could dare intervene, it was the Mother who prevented Swamiji from further considering such a drastic step. Her mere wish was a command to him. Through many bold decisions her strength of character showed forth. Overriding Golap Ma's sentiments and some others' protests, Holy Mother gave initiation to a thirteen year old boy, and gave the *gerua* cloth of *sannyāsa* to a married man who decided to renounce the worldly life, for she knew that he had chosen the right path and would be a great sadhu, which actually turned out to be so.<sup>7+8</sup> In her early life, when she knew her husband was ill at Dakshineswar, she walked all the way from Jayrambati to be with him. And upon learning that his state of mind was not madness but was spiritual exaltation, she at once adapted herself to

2. Gwendolyn Thomas, in *Sri Sarada Devi, The Great Wonder* compiled by Swami Hiranmayananda (New Delhi, Sri Ramakrishna Mission, 1984) p. 319.

3. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962) p. 261.

4. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1983) p. 97.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

6. *Prabuddha Bharata*, Vol. 89, January, 1984 (Calcutta Advaita Ashrama) p. 17.

7. Swami Ishanananda, in *Sri Sarada Devi, the Great Wonder*, p. 53.

8. Swami Vireshwarananda, in *Sri Sarada Devi, the Great Wonder* p. 40.

his way of living, and herself became a spiritual giant. What power of thought and will she had!

#### *Administrative intelligence*

In a survey to find out why women are lagging behind in managerial careers, it is pointed out that they need to learn to cope with stress, and to combine and organize family responsibilities and office work effectively—and to relax as well as be efficient. Numbers of women should achieve credibility as being sensible, practical-minded, and learn to take risks. Also, they should learn to inspire others working for them.<sup>9</sup> For all this, confidence, love, respect for people, openness and assertiveness are required. All these qualities needed for the effective management of a large and demanding household were manifested in the Holy Mother's life, and they are an unfailing source of inspiration to modern women. Holy Mother, while an ideal nun, continued to live the life of a simple woman while managing her huge household and nurturing the young Order of Sri Ramakrishna monks for thirty-three years. Holy Mother was instrumental in integrating the whole Order through her keen insight and active interest in all its activities. Yet even in the midst of most depressing and trying situations she managed to be her calm poised, magnanimous, and spiritually puissant self, and take bold incisive decisions. But in fact she was always a Mother. Her universal and expansive sympathy always tempered her sense of discipline and propriety.

Holy Mother's practicality and managerial ability was reflected most obviously in her personal life. She used to get up at three o'clock in the morning for her prayer and japa and during the whole day kept busy

with household chores like dressing vegetables, cooking, serving the food, and looking after her household, and the large number of devotees and people who came to her for spiritual counsel. She consoled bereaved people and was a constant source of encouragement to village men and women who needed advice and sympathy. Withal, she gave spiritual *dīkṣā* (initiation) to a great many, and guided the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. She visited various centres of the Math and Mission in India, and dictated replies to letters. Everything was done by her with utmost perfection. She supported a large number of her relatives and made the necessary arrangements for the marriages of her foster daughter, nieces and nephews. Purposelessness or laziness were utterly absent in her life. When confronted with some delicate questions, which even the great monks and seniors of the Order could not solve, the Mother would invariably express the most clear-cut and appropriate decisions, which only a divinely illumined and yet practical-minded soul like her could do.<sup>10</sup> When at one time a few of the monks wanted to keep a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna for dualistic worship in the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati, a dispute arose about the propriety of it. Clearly it was against the rules of that particular ashrama devoted to Advaita, but some of the monks missed having a shrine to perform worship. When Mother's mediation and advice was sought, she wrote: No need to place a picture "...One who is our guru [ Sri Ramakrishna ] he is Advaita. Since you are all his disciples, you too are Advaitins." The matter was thus settled that Mayavati was for Advaita alone. It was indicative of Holy Mother's spiritual acumen and practical firmness of character that she comprehended the problem and brought back the

9. *University News*, (Association of Indian Universities) February 26, 1990, p. 3.

10. Swami Yatiswarananda, in *Sri Sarada Devi, the Great Wonder*, p. 126.



harmony in a most convincing and pleasing manner.<sup>11</sup>

### *Progressive and liberal outlook*

Modernity connotes a progressive and liberal outlook. It is not the calculating, hesitant or conservative mind that is needed to shine out in life; but the mind that is endowed with courage and openness and that can adjust. Sri Sarada Devi held the power in her character to create a new and progressive India. Though apparently she was an orthodox widow attached to old ways and customs, she clearly saw that improvement in the country and emancipation of women could best be achieved through plenty of education. Holy Mother's relationship with Sister Nivedita was particularly revealing. She gave her whole-hearted blessing to Sister, and was besides a fountainhead of inspiration behind the starting of Nivedita's girls' school in Calcutta. Nivedita was overjoyed and happy.<sup>12</sup> She wrote in a letter: "She [the Holy Mother] tasted food with Mrs. Bull and Miss Macleod (American disciples of Swamiji). This gave us all a dignity and made my future work possible. She really is one of the strongest and greatest of women."<sup>13</sup> Holy Mother's benediction was also felt by another western devotee when she visited Nivedita's School. Marion Code was highly impressed by the teachers of the School and spoke of them as "...a highly educated type of young womanhood."<sup>14</sup>

Once when a lady came to Sarada Devi

11. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern & Western Disciples* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981) Vol. II, pp. 571-72.

12. *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1967) Vol. II, p. 453.

13. Quoted in Pravrajika Atmaprana, *My India, My People—Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1985) p. 23.

14. Marion Code, in *Sri Sarada Devi, the Great Wonder*, p. 323.

with the request that the Mother should order her daughter to marry, Holy Mother replied, "If one is not inclined to lead a married life, one should not be forced into it. She should be encouraged to lead a celibate life."<sup>15</sup> Many a time she exhorted: "Why people worry so much about their daughters' marriages instead of sending them to the Nivedita Girls' School?"<sup>16</sup> What a bold outlook! We can hardly expect this, even now, from the educated free and progressive women trying to enter the twenty-first century! The Mother managed to educate her nieces and many other women and girls of that locality.<sup>17</sup> Excellence in any kind of work of the girls brought praise from the Mother.

Again, seeing the reign of terror over the people by British rule Holy Mother felt sorrow in her heart and wanted an end to it. But for the English people as individuals, or for their religious bodies she had no antipathy.<sup>18</sup>

The Mother took no time to welcome the idea of Swami Vivekananda's starting the Ramakrishna Mission in the Master's name. She said, "It is much better to work than to allow the mind to be lazy. Noticing this, my Naren introduced work without motive."<sup>19</sup>

### *Purity, patience and love*

Swami Vivekananda said, "I want our women to be free, but not at the cost of their purity." Sri Sarada Devi was the very personification of purity, patience and love. Swami Abhedananda described her thus as *Pavitrata-swarupini*. Her life teaches us

15. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother*, p. 75.

16. Swami Vireshwarananda, in *Sri Sarada Devi, the Great Wonder*, p. 41.

17. Swami Saradeshananda, in *Sri Sarada Devi, the Great Wonder*, p. 61.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

19. Swami Ishanananda, *Ibid.*, p. 58.

that freedom means to save one's Self from every wrong identification and self-limitation. Freedom is a state of mind which is very clean about all notions, filled with truth, love and compassion. These are our rightful inheritance from Holy Mother, particularly relevant in this age of women's emancipation. Holy Mother showed through her life that the manifestation of feminine virtues is something different from aggressive womanhood which is a mere copy of masculine behaviour. Strength need not always be for display and aggression. Its silent presence, however, is the secret of success in all family and social life as well as it is for the individual. Gentle love governed the Mother's entire being and she embraced all—men, women, birds and beasts, saints and dacoits alike. Sister Nivedita wrote, "Dear Mother! You are full of love! And it is not a flushed and violent love like ours, but a gentle peace, a golden radiance that brings good to everyone and wishes ill to none."<sup>20</sup> Her life gives us a clear definition of love. That love is infinite and indivisible and is absolute Eternal Truth itself.

With unswerving patience Sri Sarada moulded the character of her disciples. She said: "To err is human. But only a few know how to lead an erring man."<sup>21</sup> To serve and uplift everyone patiently was her mission and she commanded respect and reverence from thousands of men and women. There could be no more fitting tribute than paid by Dorothy Kruger, a Western sister, long associated with the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York. Dorothy writes: "We are enchanted by the beauty of her face. For the first time we want to be feminine. ...Amongst ourselves we are

co-operating, instead of competing; giving instead of grasping; becoming passive instead of aggressive. We are learning to use, instead of abuse our freedom out of the complexity of our lives. She is leading us into our heritage, and into that femininity we are taking with us all the masculine strength of mind. Whichever way we turn there are the avenues of purpose. Salutation to the Holy Mother."<sup>22</sup>

### *Spirituality*

Contemporary women are in search of self-fulfilment in the midst of confusion generated from some of the newly defined roles. There is only a single way to emerge out from this confusion, that is to acquire true knowledge of one's self—to become spiritual and to be convinced that without self-knowledge, self-fulfilment is nothing but ego-perpetuation. Sri Sarada Devi is a perfect model of a realized soul who led outwardly an ordinary, yet inwardly an intense, meaningful life. Her life reflects the highest Truth—and therefore she is a model of 'practical spirituality', an ideal not only for women but for a society suffering from spiritual malnutrition and material surfeits—from selfishness and egocentricity. Sri Sarada Devi conveys the spirit of sacrifice and self-abnegation. Her life is a live commentary of philosophical wisdom put into practice. Her personality integrated the Universal Consciousness into her own. That is the reason she always used to say, "Everybody is your own. Nobody is a stranger here." These are not mere words, but the realization of a person who has the knowledge of ONE—the Pure Spirit pervading everything. Really speaking, her spirituality is the source of her universal motherhood, purity, strength and all the other qualities

*Continued on page 506)*

20. Pravrajika Atmaprana, *The Story of Sister Nivedita* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1967) pp. 63-64.

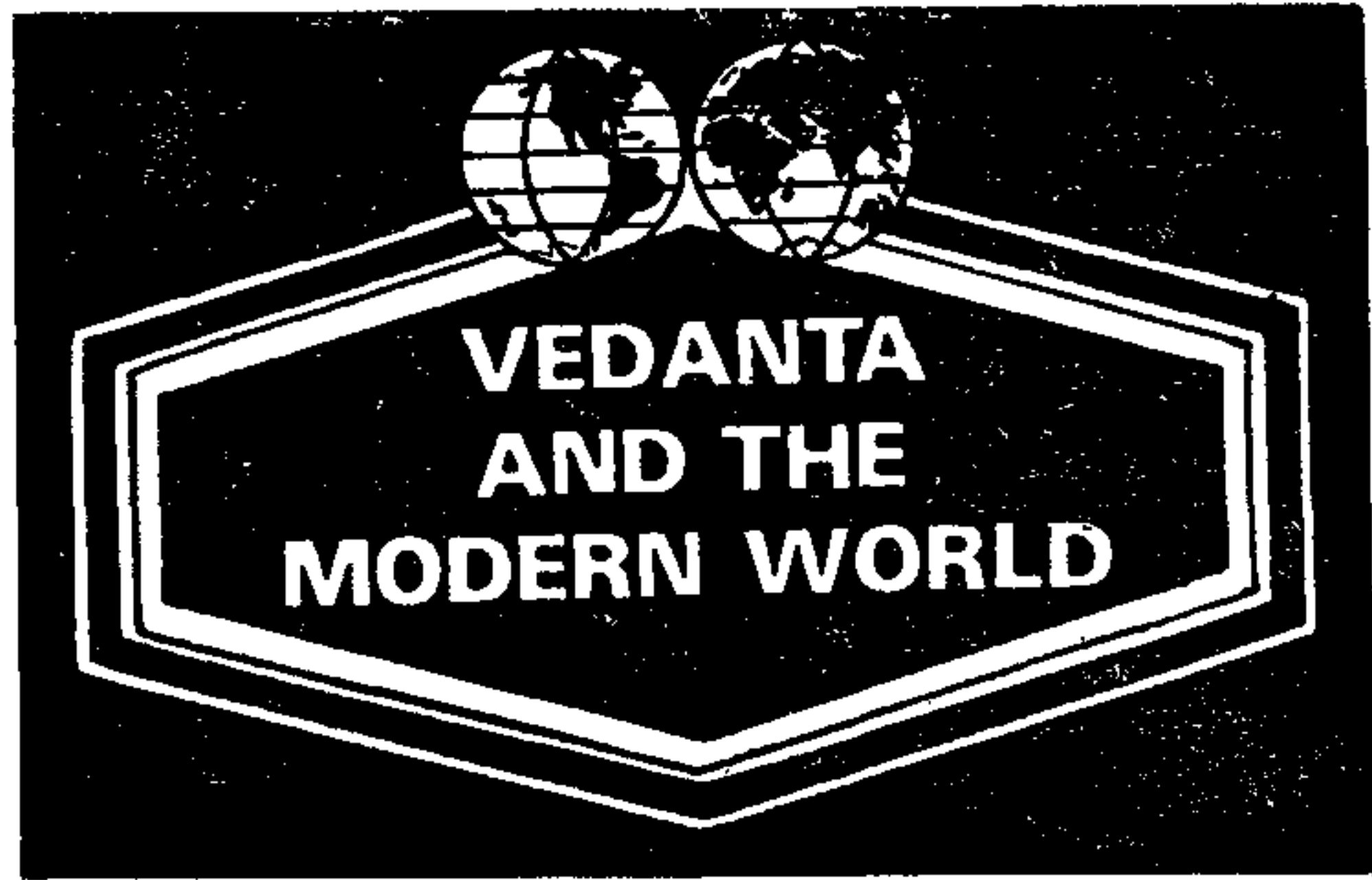
21. Swami Gambhirananda, in *Sri Sarada Devi, the Great Wonder*, p. 154.

22. *Vedanta Kesari*, Vol. 65, May 1978, pp. 176-77. (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore).



# Science And Religion

S. N. GHOSH AND  
A. MITRA



It is sometimes said that science and religion are irreconcilables. They belong to different categories whose frontiers may not meet and mingle. Bertrand Russel once said, "The absence of finality is the essence of science." In other words, science does not believe in the absolutes while religion deals with the eternal verities. Religion *reveals*, but science *unravels*. In the heyday of its success, the attitude of science to religion is at best one of tolerant, if not amused scepticism. When looking over the vast expanse of human history, it is ironic that due to triumphs in technology the twentieth century is called the age of science. Science (or better say technology) seems to keep religion at bay.

Physical sciences are dependent upon the experimental method. They must physically test and verify the natural processes in an objective impersonal manner. So science is radically different from the spirit of religion, not only in the object of its endeavour, but in its manner and ethos. In contrast to religion seeking 'to know' absolute Truth, science constantly strives for the exploration of truth in the phenomenal world—the so-called natural truths. All explorations and discoveries need experimental confirmation before being accepted as Truths or Laws. The principle of verification is the basic impulse and life-breath, so to say, of all true scientific activities. This is also the glory and pride of science.

Scientific verification, to be effective, re-

quires instrumentation. There are cases where no instrument exists for the verification of some result, and yet the result under scrutiny appears to be true. For example, one may cite the laws of the General Theory of Relativity, which according to some scientists are not yet verified unambiguously experimentally. The Special Theory of Relativity, which holds for particular kind of motion, has been fully tested experimentally. But the extension of the Special Theory to the General Theory, which deals with any kind of motion has not been experimentally verified. Yet from the logical standpoint the latter seems to be true.

This observation points to two important facts: First, there are fields in science where no verification is possible experimentally, and this is the 'Achilles Heel' of science. Secondly, in the absence of experimental verification, science employs the pure logic of mathematics; and pure logic, like Pure Consciousness, is a mode of the Absolute. We thus try to emphasize the dilemma of science—when its instruments are neither enormous enough to investigate the Cosmos, nor fine enough to delve into the microcosm, it finally relies on pure logic and intuition. While at once proclaiming itself rigorously objective and experimental, science becomes self-contradictory, and inadvertently tends to become speculative and in search of the absolute; which it all along describes as the special province of religion.

We may try to resolve this self-contradictory predicament of science. Truth is both immanent and transcendent. The truth-in-object is not only in the object but must also be one with the truth pervading the whole Cosmos—else it would not be Truth. Science fragments the truth for its worldly mission and takes recourse to the one-truth attainable by the mathematical logic. This is where the eternal experience of religion creeps in: Truth differentiated is one with Eternal Truth.<sup>1</sup>

To return to the Einsteinian formula  $E = mc^2$ , we observe not only its pure impeccable logic but also its neat and elegant form. Pure logic that is *Satyam* becomes one with its harmonious equation, that is *Sundaram*. The formula points to the oneness of truth and beauty. To reinforce the truth of this identity we could give a negative instance of Einstein's Field Theory, which is complicated and runs into several

1. Cf. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 1, p. 433*:

This is a fact that variation exists...This is also a fact that in and through these variations unity must be perceived...The whole universe is a play of unity in variety, and variety in unity. The whole universe is a play of differentiation and oneness.

pages. Disharmony is a perversion of truth.

We think religion can still be a potent force in the modern world. It can warn science of the dangers it is prone to. The messianic role of religion lies precisely in this warning. Truth is not only beautiful, but also good, as enunciated in the Hindu Truth formula:

Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram  
(The Truth) (The Good) (The Beautiful)

The identity between Truth and God has an operative role in the modern world. The phenomenal development of nuclear weapons and the manufacturing of devastating bombs are all true only as scientific milestones or achievements; for every invention is a pure and disinterested creation, but when there is a question of their uses, we pass on from science to technology. We pass from purity of knowledge and invention to the sullied motivation of greed and gain. *Truth* here is not one with *Good*, and thus distinguishing the *good* from the *truth*, we must create a religious climate which will foster and appeal to the global conscience, asking man to discriminate and be self-controlled, and not to destroy. This discrimination can save the world from destruction and this discrimination can really be the meeting place of Science and Religion.

## SRI SARADA DEVI, AN IDEAL FOR MODERN WOMEN

(Continued from page 504)

which enabled her to fulfil the mighty role of *Sanghajanani*, the Mother of the Ramakrishna Movement, with ease and grace. Her calmness and poise, as well as spirit of renunciation and service expressed in her day-to-day life in the midst of the extremely distracting world environment speaks of her spirituality. She towered over everything, everywhere and everybody around like a beacon lamp of spiritual consciousness.

The message of Sri Sarada Devi to modern

women is clear: That a real sense of fulfilment comes from living for a higher ideal; from looking upon all duties, however varied, as opportunities for greater self-development, instead of fighting for rights. Without losing their inherent femininity, women can be strong, be successful and be happy. For all, there She stands—a great shining, immaculate ideal; a consummate manifestation of spirit, within reach of humanity.



# The Jivanmukta

DR. N. JAYASHANMUKHAM

## *Bondage and Freedom*

According to an early school of thought, man is practically a 'soul of desires', *kāmātmā*. He lives for desires and works for their fulfilment. But in the end he realizes that desires bring him neither peace nor permanence. In answer to the question why peace and permanence elude him, the Vedānta says that these can be obtained only by rejecting the desires. Then is he not a soul of desires? The Vedānta teaches that man is essentially the Supreme Self, which is immobile, eternal, infinite, and blissful *Paramātmā*. Once he ceases to be a soul of desires and becomes the true Self, he realizes that by possessing the true Self he is in possession of peace and permanence, for they are the qualities of the Self.

Truly speaking, man believes that he is nothing but his body, *dehātma*. He thinks that he is a product of the material world and cannot survive without the material support of the world. It is this original misidentification that accounts for his identification with desires, ego, and intellect, all of which operate in the subtle part of the body. But how does he come to identify himself with the body? It is due to the ignorance of the true Self of which the body is an instrument of action, *dharma sādhanam*. With the elimination of this ignorance he becomes free and is no longer bound by his body; with the cessation of this bondage his other bondages also cease, bondages created by his identification with desires, ego, and intellect. He in whom these bondages have been dissolved, he who is thus absolutely free while in the body and acts here, even as others act in the world, is referred to in the Vedānta as one who is liberated in this very life, a Jivanmukta.

## *The Jivanmukta: His body and works in the world*

*The Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, a work attributed to Śaṅkara, is considered to be an important treatise on the subject of spiritual emancipation. A systematic presentation of the ultimate aim of human life according to the school of Advaita Vedānta, it gives us an authentic account of the Jivanmukta from several points of view. In view of our limited aim, we shall describe as briefly as possible one aspect about the Jivanmukta as expounded in the Text—his attitude towards his body and works in the world.

A Jivanmukta is one who is established in the true Self, *nitya svarūpam*, which is not different from the Supreme Being, *Paramārtha Bhūtam*. He sees that the living body does not really belong to his Self, for the body is a form superimposed by the mind, *buddhi kalpita* (296).

In order not to identify oneself with the body, one has to remove the limitations of one's mind: the ego, the desire for external objects, and desire-born works. As long as the mind is subject to these limitations, it does not see the true Self but sees it as the not-self, does not seek the bliss of the Self, but goes out in search of enjoyment in external objects, does not remain Self-possessed but is carried away by impulses to possess the sense objects. With the elimination of these limitations, the mind becomes pure and is able to see the Self as it is. When knowledge of the Self arises, the mind itself ceases to exist, because there is no more deviation from the Self, *svasthitimuṣi* (305).

But the process of removing the limitations of the mind is indeed very difficult and

involves a long and steady practice. There are two methods by which the mind is taught to overcome its limitations: the first method is to give up contact with the sense-objects, *parihṛtya bāhyam* (334); and the second one is to see the Self in all moving and unmoving objects as their substratum, *Ātmanādhāratayā vilokya* (338). Mastery in this practice comes when the mind ceases to regard the body as an instrument of action, *jadarūpa* (414).

We shall now come to the other aspect of the Jīvanmukta's works in the world. Since works mark the culminating point in the process of mistaking the Self for the body, all works are renounced as a first step in reversing this process, *sannyasya sarvakarmāṇi* (10). Works arise from past impressions left by the action of the mind and other instruments in the subtle body. When manifest, works serve to keep these impressions alive and effective. Thus works and past impressions grow and multiply by mutual support and influence, *vāsanāvṛddhitāḥ kāryam kāryavṛddhyā ca vāsanā* (313). When works are renounced, the effects of past impressions are destroyed; when the effects are thus destroyed, their cause, viz. the impressions are also destroyed, *kārya-nāśād bījanāśaḥ* (312). Once the impressions are totally eliminated, there is no need at all to give up works, because works simply cease to exist, *nāsti kriyā* (282). Not only works but the action of the subtle instruments like *buddhi* also does not exist, because in the absence of past impressions these instruments fall into disuse and finally disappear. Strictly speaking, when past impressions are totally destroyed one is liberated in this very life, *vāsanāprakṣayo mokṣaḥ* (317). Thus dissolution of works leads to the dissolution of bondage to the body. Therefore, for the enlightened souls, works are an obstacle and serve no purpose.

Paradoxically, the liberated soul, though free from all works, does not hesitate to help

others in distress and confer upon them freedom from bondage, *bandhavimokṣaṇam* (32). Very willingly he undertakes the work of helping others to cross the ocean of birth and death as he has himself crossed it, *tīrṇāḥ svayam* (37). He is full of compassion and concern for those who seek his protection. His help is spontaneous and without any motive. He is compared to the spring season and the full moon, for they serve without any ulterior motive. Like the spring he brings happiness to everyone; like the moon he removes sufferings from all living beings.\*

What is of interest to us here is that the enlightened soul does not see any difficulty in looking upon suffering humanity with compassion, *nirīkṣya kāruṇyarasārdraḍṣṭyā* (41), and ferrying it across the ocean of birth and death, *tārayantaḥ* (37), as if the body's instrumentation were possible for this purpose, regardless of the fact that the original nature of subtle instruments, *antḥkāraṇa*, which willed and moved the body to envisage goals in the world, has ceased to exist following the dissolution of past impressions, *mano naśyati yoginaḥ* (277). If the body's instrumentation is possible in this circumstance, then we have to find a suitable explanation for this unique phenomenon.

#### *The Jīvanmukta's body and its instrumentation*

In order to liberate the Self from its bondage to the body, the body of the sage remains motionless except for actions necessary for its maintenance. It is brought to the level of a near inert object, *jadāt-makaḥ* (509). With the destruction of the original nature which constantly directs the body through its subtle instruments towards envisaged goals, the knot in the body is

\* Though he is thus engaged in work, there is no deviation from the Self which is without work, *api kurvannakurvāṇaḥ* (544).



loosened and the Self attains liberation. Once liberated, the Jivanmukta cannot remain unconcerned at the sight of the sufferings of his fellow men. He therefore undertakes the work of helping others in distress.\*\* When he dedicates himself to this work the instrumentation of the body becomes indispensable. His body becomes once again an instrument of action, but now under a completely different circumstance. The original nature of subtle instruments which willed the body to do envisaged works in the world does not exist now, but yet the body is moved from within. What is it that moves the body from within? One possibility is that it must be a new nature which has come into existence in place of the nature of subtle instruments.

Before we proceed further we have to pause a little and answer an important objection: *Since the instrumentation of the body can be attributed to the action of the purified form of the original nature, it is not necessary to suppose that a new nature comes into existence.* We admit that owing to a rigorous inner discipline, *prayatnena* (181), there is an abundant increase of *sattva* followed by a proportionate decrease in *rajas* and *tamas* in the original nature. We cannot, however, say that this purified nature is capable of moving the Jivanmukta's body for two reasons: (1) In its purified form the original nature is a power of illumination and understanding rather than a power which moves and produces impulse to action. Hence the body's instrumentation cannot be attributed to the action of this purified nature. (2) Even if it is possible, the purified nature cannot get rid of the influence of ego to which, like the other two *guṇas*, it is inextricably tied. This is the reason why *sattva* is regarded as an impurity like *tamas*

and *rajas*, *sattvarajastamomalam* (361). Therefore when the body is moved by this purified nature to do the work of saving others from ego, how can such a work be accomplished at all? So our supposition that the Jivanmukta's body is moved by a new nature is inevitable.

#### *Textual evidence for the new nature*

We shall now turn to the text in question and see if there is any evidence in support of our argument. There are two verses in the text which come to our help. In verse 37 it is said that the help rendered by great souls is unique. Two expressions are used to stress this point—*na hetu*, (without any motive) and *nānyānapi* (not for the sake of anything else). What exactly is intended by a repeated reference to the same point? It is obvious: the intention is to forcefully bring out the fact that the work of the great souls is absolutely devoid of ego. In verse 38, the same point is brought out from another point of view. The text says that they move towards removing others' distress on their own accord, *svata eva*. There must be some special reason for this verse to go back to the same point and emphasize it affirmatively now. One may think that the service rendered by great souls to humanity issues out of a nature which is abundantly *sāttvic*. As we have already seen, a nature full of *sāttvic* quality may be pure, but yet is impure because it is not free from ego. The text therefore wants us to understand that their compassion and service are not *sāttvic* in origin, but belong to an entirely different nature which is absolutely free from ego. Is there any evidence in the text which refers to this unique nature which is different from a nature of *sāttvic* quality achieved by one's effort, *prayatnena*? Fortunately, the text (38) makes a pointed reference to this unique nature of great souls—*ayam svabhāvaḥ mahānām* (this is

\*\* The *Sruti* describes him as the doer of good deeds, *Brahmavid punyakṛt* (*Bṛhad-āraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.9).

the Mahatma's own nature). It is not a nature of *sattva* attainable by one's effort, but a unique nature which is one's own and independent of effort, *svabhāva*. There is a further evidence for this unique nature in the text (278). The text refers to the existence of a pure nature other than the nature of *sattva* when it says *sattvam śuddhena naśyati* (*sattva* is destroyed by the pure).

That this *svabhāva* is not *sattvic* is indicated in another ancient text also. *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi* (4-69), speaks of the qualities of this nature as those not due to any effort, *ayatnato*. Further it adds that they are not of the nature of means, *na tu sādhanā-*

*rūpiṇaḥ*. Stated in clear terms, this nature is one's own, unlike the *sattvic* nature which is to be acquired by effort. Also, this nature, like the *sāttvic* one, is not a means to the knowledge of Self. Be it noted that these two expressions *ayatnato* and *na tu sādhanā-rūpiṇaḥ* are only used to remove the confusion between the *sāttvic* nature and the *svabhāva* of the great souls.

It is now established that the body of the Jīvanmukta is moved by a nature which is his own as distinguished from the *sāttvic* nature which is the result of his spiritual discipline.

## Spiritual Practices Of The Holy Mother

SWAMI BRAHMESHANANDA

Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda represent three aspects of a common spiritual ideal. There are similarities as well as differences in their lives and teachings, but the differences are not contradictory, they are complementary. Sri Ramakrishna may be likened to the *Veda*, whose commentator, as it were, was Swami Vivekananda. And the Holy Mother's life demonstrated how the lofty teachings of the Vedānta could be put into practice in day to day life. Sri Ramakrishna lived in nearly an unbroken ecstasy of God, almost wholly oblivious of the world. The Holy Mother, on the other hand, remained almost like an ordinary householder, and faced all the minor and major problems of mundane life.

A clear difference is apparent in regard to spiritual practices. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna there was a sharp demarcation between his life as a spiritual aspirant, and

as perfected sage and spiritual teacher. The period from his first eagerness to realize God, till the performance of the *Sodaṣī* worship, was his period of *sāadhanā*. Although he helped a good many persons spiritually during this time, the actual work of spiritual ministration and preaching was done only after he was directly commanded by the Divine Mother to "*Remain in Bhāvamukha*". Moreover, he undertook succeeding disciplines only after he had attained perfection in the earlier ones. He did not practise the various disciplines all at a time.

Did the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, pass through stages of *sāadhanā* similar to Sri Ramakrishna's? Such clear cut demarcations can hardly be noticed in the Holy Mother's life. Her life was spent in an uninterrupted flow of spiritual practice and service to others. As long as Sri Ramakrishna was alive she served him and his



devotees. After his passing away she continued to be both spiritual guide and Mother to the last day of her life, to the innumerable devotees who flocked round her. At Dakshineswar she engaged in spiritual practices under the guidance of Sri Ramakrishna. Much later she performed the *Pañcatapā*, or austerity of 'five fires'. Broadly speaking, the period up to her pilgrimage to Vrindavan after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna and initiating Swami Yogananda, may be considered her period of *sādhana*. During this pilgrimage she often had visions of Sri Ramakrishna and they dispelled from her mind forever the clouds of sorrow and doubt, filling her with peace and total conviction.

What spiritual practices did the Holy Mother do? What specific mode of spiritual discipline did she follow? These questions are even more difficult to answer. Comparatively little information is available regarding her spiritual practice. Unlike Sri Ramakrishna she hardly ever described her spiritual visions in detail. However, if we bear in mind the uniqueness of each one of the three great personalities, we shall not be much disappointed on account of this sparsity of information. The great purport of Sri Ramakrishna's life was to prove the truth of the Divine for ordinary men, and to vindicate the various spiritual paths prevailing in different religions. The great mission of Swami Vivekananda was to interpret the extraordinary life of Sri Ramakrishna in modern thought and language, and spread his message. In the process Swamiji classified the four Yogas, leading to the spiritual ideal, thus presenting a rational and revised system suited to the modern age we live in. And, as we already noted, the great purport of the Holy Mother's life was to demonstrate practically how all the yogas should be practised in everyday life. The Holy Mother's spiritual practices have much deeper significance for those who want to lead a spiritual life even while active

in the world. None can undertake such superhuman spiritual practices as were performed by Sri Ramakrishna, nor are many destined to roam like heroes over the face of the earth preaching Vedānta like Swami Vivekananda. Most of us will have to lead simple lives in the mundane world. Thus we find that the Holy Mother's life is more akin to ours, and it is far easier to look to her for guidance. Hence a deep study of her spiritual practices is immensely beneficial to us all.

Swami Saradananda, the celebrated author of the monumental work on Sri Ramakrishna's life, *The Great Master*, was once asked to write a similar treatise on the life of Holy Mother. Himself a spiritual giant, the Swami had devotedly served the Holy Mother for many years and was eminently qualified to explain the precious facts and significance of Sri Sarada Devi's life in a comprehensive biography. Unfortunately, he declined. We do not know how he would have dealt with the subject of Holy Mother's spiritual practices. We may, however, examine and try to analyze her *sadhānas* in the framework of the four yogas, outlined by Swami Vivekananda. To study the techniques of Yoga from the standard texts is good, but it is far more rewarding to learn how they are put in practice in day to day life. In this respect the Holy Mother's life is the best example.

### *Rāja Yoga*

Of the eight steps or *angas* in the Yoga system of Patañjali, the first is *Yama*, which includes the spiritual practice of adhering to non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence and non-covetousness.<sup>1</sup> Commentator Vyāsa has defined *Ahimsā*, or non-violence, as the absence of enmity towards all crea-

1. *Patañjali's Yoga-sūtras*, II. 30.

tures, always and in every way.<sup>2</sup> The Holy Mother never did anything consciously or unconsciously which hurt or caused slightest pain to any creature. Her overflowing motherly love, and limitless compassion, sought to embrace all beings. Her all-encompassing love was the outcome of her motherhood. *Ahimsā* is based upon the principle of the existence of one soul or *Ātman* in all. And the Holy Mother has provided a new basis for its practice by her love. Her cardinal tenet was, "No one is a stranger, all are your own."<sup>3</sup> In her life the negative aspect of Ahimsa, i.e. not injuring any creature, is emphasized as much as the positive aspect—love and service to all.

Violence is of two types—mental or intentional (*bhāva-himsā*), and overt or actual (*drāvya-himsā*). While both must be avoided for the perfect practice of *Ahimsā*, avoidance of all external forms of violence is rather difficult in human society. Sri Sarada Devi, therefore, emphasized purity of motive and carefulness to avoid causing mental anguish to others and did not attach so much importance to the gross and less important aspects of *ahimsā* such as vegetarianism.

The second discipline of *Yama* is truthfulness. Sri Ramakrishna was fully established in truth. Being his consort, Sri Sarada Devi was also extremely devoted to truth. There was an interesting episode which highlighted her pragmatic attitude. Once during his illness, Sri Ramakrishna was advised not to consume any water. The task of arranging his special diet fell on the Holy Mother. As the Master's stomach was weak, he was much afraid of indigestion and stipulated just the quantities of things

he would be able to take. The Holy Mother was then giving him plenty of milk daily and by boiling it down, she was gradually increasing the amount. Apparently the quantity was the quantity Sri Ramakrishna asked for, but due to the Mother's love it was almost double. Somehow Golap Ma made a slip and Sri Ramakrishna came to know about it. When being questioned about the actual quantity of milk, the Holy Mother had somehow to avoid giving a direct answer. In this she was successful, and she assured the Master that he need not worry. He then consumed whatever was given to him and felt no ill effects. He recovered his health considerably. Referring to this later on, the Holy Mother explained that in following truthfulness, one should look to the welfare of others.<sup>4</sup> This is also in keeping with scriptural injunctions.

The Holy Mother was perfectly established in *brahmacarya*, and although wed in her infancy to the Master, she lived throughout her life as a perfect nun. Sri Ramakrishna himself testified to her immaculate purity.<sup>5</sup> Further, Holy Mother was absolutely non-attached to the world, dwelling on a spiritual plane far above desires for physical enjoyment, not to speak of coveting others' possessions. She did not claim her share of the ancestral property at the time her brothers were eagerly dividing it.<sup>6</sup> She never asked anything from anyone, though when things were offered voluntarily she accepted only that much as was absolutely necessary. Even after the Master's passing, during days of great privation at Kamarpukur, when there was not even salt to season her food, she strictly adhered to the command of Sri Ramakrishna not to stretch forth her hand to anyone.<sup>7</sup> On the contrary, whenever

2. तत्रहिंसा सर्वथा सर्वदा सर्वभूतानाम् नभिद्रोहः ।

Commentary by Vyāsa on Yoga Sūtra II. 30.

3. Cf. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1955) (S. D.) p. 519.

4. Cf. S. D., p. 89.

5. Cf. S. D., p. 47.

6. Cf. S. D., p. 229.

7. Cf. S. D., p. 149.



possible she distributed whatever she possessed to the poor and to devotees. At times Sri Ramakrishna cautioned against this, for it was necessary to keep some articles in store to meet daily requirements.<sup>8</sup> In later life the Holy Mother had to keep money for daily use, but it was never too much, nor did she ever lay it up. She never counted money or kept accounts.<sup>9</sup>

Thus Sri Sarada Devi observed the five *yamas* to perfection. She thus set a marvellous example for householders and world-renouncers alike.

Purity, contentment, austerity, study and surrender to God constitute the *Niyamas*, the second part of Yoga.<sup>10</sup> Looking at the full moon, the Holy Mother used to pray: "O Lord, there are stains even in the moon, but let my mind be absolutely stainless."<sup>11</sup> The Lord did respond to her prayer and made her absolutely pure, like a crystal. Inability to find faults in others is the surest proof of the Holy Mother's purity. For one cannot see others' defects unless they are already present in one's own self. The Holy Mother, however, did not lay undue stress on external purity, which in many becomes an obsession.

Scores of instances may be cited to show that contentment was a natural virtue of Sri Sarada Devi. During the Dakshineswar days she had prepared for her use a pillow out of leftover jute fibres. In old age when sleeping on a soft cotton mattress and pillow, she used to recall her Dakshineswar days and tell that she used to sleep just as soundly on the mat and jute pillow as she was now doing on the soft cotton ones.<sup>12</sup>

Austerities could be external and internal.

Sri Sarada Devi had performed *Pañcatapā*, a difficult physical austerity.<sup>13</sup> She used to repeat *mantra* one hundred thousand times daily.<sup>14</sup> This was an 'internal austerity'. Living in the Nahabat was an austerity imposed by the environment. Living in that small stuffy room for so many years was in itself a great *tapasyā*. Holy Mother had learnt to read and she used to listen with keen interest to the recitations from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, and readings from the newly published *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta*. Besides, she had heard many spiritual instructions from Sri Ramakrishna himself and used to remember those joyful days of the past. Lastly, her taking refuge in the Lord Śiva at Tarakeswar during Sri Ramakrishna's last illness<sup>16</sup> and in Goddess Simhavahini during her own illness are examples of her spirit of surrender to God.<sup>17</sup>

The next step in Rāja-Yoga is the practice of *Āsana* or yogic posture.<sup>18</sup> The Holy Mother could sit motionless in one posture for long hours.<sup>19</sup> It is not known whether she systematically practised *prāṇāyāma*, the next step. But we know that Sri Ramakrishna explained to her the *six lotuses* or psychic centres, and the *kuṇḍalinī-śakti* with the help of a diagram.<sup>20</sup> *Pratyāhāra*, the fifth step, requires withdrawing the mind from external objects. This was undoubtedly accomplished by the Holy Mother by way of her single-minded dedication to the Master. She was, after all, his first disciple. *Dhāranā*, *dhyāna*, and *samādhi* collectively are the three successive stages of mental concentration called *saṁnyama* and are the last climactic steps to Yoga or total absorption in God-conscious-

8. Cf. S. D., p. 84.

9. Cf. S. D., p. 489.

10. Cf. *Patañjali's Yoga-sūtras*, II. 32.

11. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1962) p. 75.

12. Cf. S. D., p. 82.

13. Cf. S. D., pp. 172-73.

14. Cf. S. D., p. 110.

15. Cf. S. D., p. 77.

16. Cf. S. D., p. 134.

17. Cf. S. D., p. 56.

18. Cf. *Patañjali's Yoga-sūtras*, II. 46.

19. Cf. S. D., p. 110.

20. Cf. S. D., p. 106.

ness.<sup>21</sup> Holy Mother regularly bathed and sat for meditation, rising from her bed at three in the morning. We know from her reminiscences that she used to be totally absorbed in her meditation and oblivious of the outer world.<sup>22</sup>

### *Marks of Yogic perfection*

Various *siddhis*, or attainments, are described in the *Yoga-sūtras* of Patañjali. First, there are the special signs of perfection in the preliminary disciplines. When a person gets established in *Ahimsā*, for instance, all creatures give up enmity in his presence.<sup>23</sup> Once Holy Mother, on her way to Dakshineswar from Jayrambati, having dropped behind her companions on the lonely plain of Telo Bhelo, suddenly found herself face to face with a fierce dacoit, one of many who infested the roads at that place. But hardly had he seen her than she addressed him as 'father'. The man's mind totally changed at that moment and he took the young Sarada home to his hut and he along with his wife gave her shelter and food for the night. It is said that later the man came to Dakshineswar to meet Sri Ramakrishna several times. The incident is interpreted in different ways by the devotees, but viewed from the point of Yoga, it can be interpreted as a proof of Sarada Devi's perfection in *Ahimsā*.<sup>24</sup>

By being established in truthfulness, whatever such a yogi speaks comes to pass.<sup>25</sup> The widowed sister-in-law of the Mother, Surabala, was known in the circle of devotees as the 'mad-aunt'. She used to become violent. Once in a frenzy of uncontrolled fury she was about to strike the Holy Mother with a burning stick. In an unguar-

ded moment, the Mother uttered that the hand raised to strike her would wither away. The next moment the Holy Mother expressed great distress that such words should have come from her lips, but nonetheless, it so happened much later that Surabala contracted leprosy and her hand decayed and fell away.<sup>26</sup>

On being established in non-stealing and non-covetousness, all wealth comes to the yogi.<sup>27</sup> This also proved literally true, when on a tour of South India the King of Ramnad ordered the royal treasury to be set open before her. On being established in continence, energy is gained.<sup>28</sup> Once a labourer, living in a slum hut opposite the Holy Mother's house in Calcutta, was beating his wife with kicks and blows. The Holy Mother could not bear the sight. Normally soft-spoken, the Mother, standing on the first floor of her house, simply called these few words in a thundering voice: "I say, you wretch, will you kill your wife outright? Alas, what a pity!" The moment the man saw her and heard her voice he became completely subdued.<sup>29</sup> On attaining perfection in non-covetousness the yogi gets the memory of past lives.<sup>30</sup> The Holy Mother too remembered her past incarnation as Sita when she saw the Rāmeswara Siva *lingam*.<sup>31</sup>

The Holy Mother's life is full of miraculous events which could be considered as evidence of her yogic powers (*siddhis*). Ability to know the whereabouts of devotees, their past and future, their likes and dislikes, and the thoughts stirring in their minds, were wondrous and almost daily occurrences that can be cited as examples. She could correctly ascertain in her meditation the

21. Cf. *Patañjali's Yoga-sūtras*, III. 1-4.

22. Cf. S. D., p. 110.

23. Cf. *Patañjali's Yoga-sūtras*, II. 35.

24. Cf. S. D., p. 70.

25. Cf. *Patañjali's Yoga-sūtras*, II. 36.

26. Cf. S. D., p. 331.

27. Cf. *Patañjali's Yoga-sūtras*, II. 37.

28. Cf. S. D., p. 245; *Holy Mother*, p. 304.

29. Cf. *Patañjali's Yoga-sūtras*, II. 38.

30. Cf. S. D., p. 427.

31. Cf. *Patañjali's Yoga-sūtras*, II. 39.

32. Cf. S. D., p. 246.



nature of the devotee, his *Iṣṭa*, or Chosen Ideal, and the holy *mantra* to be given to him at the time of initiation. Once a devotee was carrying a heavy load on his head, consisting of many articles for the Āśhrama. As he proceeded over the long road he realized that the load was too heavy for him to carry. Suddenly he felt that the burden was feeling lighter. On reaching Jayrambati he found that the Holy Mother was pacing up and down with face flushed and evidently much worried. He then realized that it was the Mother who, by her miraculous power, bore the weight of the load and thus helped him.<sup>33</sup>

Various types of *samādhi* are described in the *Yoga-sūtras*. The visions of gods and goddesses which come to one in *samprajñāta samādhi* were common with Sri Sarada Devi.<sup>34</sup> Again, she experienced *Nirvikalpa* or *Asamprajñāta samādhi* at the old Math, the former garden house of Nilambar Mukherjee.<sup>35</sup> It is thus evident that the Holy Mother not only practised the preparatory disciplines of *Rāja-yoga*, but was a perfect and realized yogi.

### *Jñāna-yoga*

Among the yogas, *Jñāna-yoga* is often considered the most difficult since it demands a relentless intellectual enquiry into the nature of Reality, or *Ātman*, and the unreal ephemeral nature of the world. It is suited only for exceptionally competent aspirants who are distinguished by philosophical bent of mind. It is rare to find such competent persons (*Uttama-ādhikārikas*), and is therefore amazing that despite absence of book-learning, and her being brought up in that rural village of Bengal, the Holy Mother had all the qualifications of an ideal student of Vedānta.

33. Cf. S. D., pp. 444-45.

34. Cf. S. D., p. 164; *Holy Mother*, p. 77.

35. Cf. S. D., p. 165.

The first qualification is *Viveka*, or discrimination between the Real and the unreal.<sup>36</sup> Not only had Sri Ramakrishna taught the method of such discrimination to the Holy Mother, but Sri Sarada Devi herself had realized the transitory nature of the world, having grown up midst her large family. She herself had helped to rear young ones and lamented often the early and unexpected deaths of those she loved. Once the Mother herself nearly died of acute dysentery. She happened one day to see the reflection of her emaciated body, reduced to skin and bones, in the still water of the pond, and discriminated about its impermanence and worthlessness. She thus got over attachment to it.<sup>37</sup> She used to encourage her disciples to have faith in God, saying, "Everything is illusory—husband, wife, even this body. These are the great shackles of *māyā*. Unless you can free yourself from these shackles you will never be able to cross to the other shore of the world. Attachment to the body, this identification of the self with the body, must go."<sup>38</sup>

The second qualification is *Vairāgya*, or renunciation of all clinging to sense enjoyments, here and hereafter.<sup>39</sup> The Holy Mother understood the nature of worldly enjoyments and was absolutely free from desires for them. On being asked about it by Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi frankly said to him that she desired only to serve him and his mission in life and did not wish to drag him down to the life of the world.<sup>40</sup>

The next qualification consists in having intense longing for spiritual liberation (*Mumukṣutva*).<sup>41</sup> Holy Mother's entire life was a saga of religion in practice. Of her deep love for the ideal of spiritual emancip-

36. *Vedānta Sāra*, II. 16.

37. Cf. S. D., p. 55.

38. Cf. *Holy Mother*, p. 217.

39. *Vedānta Sāra*, II. 17.

40. Cf. S. D., p. 46.

41. *Vedānta Sāra*, II. 25.

ation and total renunciation, we may cite numerous examples. Once when one of her woman companions, a householder, became annoyed with a much younger *brahmacārin*, Holy Mother took the side of the *brahmacārin*, saying in an animated voice: "Who is she? A householder, after all. Let her go away if she wants to. The *brahmacārin* is living here after renouncing everything for me.<sup>42</sup> ...Ah, with whom shall I live except those who have renounced the world for God? ...Look here, these are my godly children. They will live in the world, pure as flowers. Can anything be grander than this? When I see the suffering of the householders my very bones are scorched. ...Will a man who has strong desires for worldly pleasures listen to me if I ask him to renounce them? But if a fortunate soul has realized the world to be the sport of *māyā* and God alone to be real, shall I not help him a little? Is there any end to the suffering in the world?"<sup>43</sup>

Restraint of mind and senses, withdrawal of the self, forbearance, concentration and faith in the precepts of the Guru and scriptures constitute the fourth qualification called 'the six virtues' or *satsampatti*.<sup>44</sup> The first of these were much developed in Sarada Devi during her long periods with Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, living in the uncomfortable room of the Nahabat's ground floor, and enduring many other hardships of various kinds. We have already seen while discussing *Rāja-yoga* that the Holy Mother had great power of concentration. Further, she had absolute faith in the instructions of Sri Ramakrishna. She not only obeyed his spiritual precepts, but followed even his advice in secular matters to the letter. We find that all of the requisite

qualifications for the student of Vedānta were highly developed in her.

The essence of the Vedāntic practice, however, is in the power to reflect and meditate upon the great spiritual Texts which declare the identity of the individual soul with the Cosmic Soul, after hearing them from a competent teacher, (*Śravaṇa*—hearing; *Manana*—reflecting; and *Nididhyāsana*—meditation).<sup>45</sup> It is not known whether the Holy Mother was ever initiated into formal *sannyāsa*, traditionally considered essential for the practice of Vedānta, but we do know that with the Master as Guru and guide she was fully acquainted with Vedāntic experience and learning. Many of her utterances testify to her familiarity with the *Vedic* precepts and her own realizations of them.<sup>46</sup>

As we have seen, the Holy Mother experienced *Nirvikalpa samādhi* both within the Master's lifetime and afterward. She lived the rest of her life as a liberated-in-life *Jīvanmukta*, a Perfected Soul. She was always aware of her true nature which she voluntarily concealed by a thin veil of *māyā* in the form of attachment for Radhu, her niece, and continued to live in the world for the good of others.

A *Jīvanmukta*, one liberated in life, it is said in the scriptures, acts either like a child, or a ghoul, or mad person or like an inert thing.<sup>47</sup> The Holy Mother often used to appear like a very young girl. Once she got piqued, like a child, simply because a young boy disciple of hers remarked that she could not roll chapatis properly.<sup>48</sup> In her illness also she seemed like a child. In

45. आत्मा वा अरे द्रष्टव्यः श्रोतव्यो मन्तव्यो निदिध्यासितव्यः ।

*Bṛhad-āranyaka Upaniṣad*, 4:5:6.

46. Cf. S. D., p. 50; 106-12.

47. Cf. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1986) p. 405.

48. Cf. S. D., p. 487.

42. Cf. *Holy Mother*, p. 181.

43. Cf. *Holy Mother*, p. 179-80.

44. *Vedānta Sāra*, II. 18.



*samādhi* she used to become completely absorbed and appeared like someone lifeless. When identified with the terrible aspect of the Divine Mother, she laughed the violent laugh of a mad woman, and stunned and terrified those who saw.<sup>49</sup>

Many utterances and actions of the Holy Mother indicate her realization of the unity of existence and her ability to see God in everything whenever she liked. While instructing a disciple how to take care of the cat, she once remarked that *she* was present in the cat too.<sup>50</sup> On another occasion she fed a parrot the food meant for Sri Ramakrishna's offering because she saw Him in the bird.<sup>51</sup> On yet another occasion she said that in spite of working through so many hands she was unable to cope with work, disclosing her identity with the all-pervading Universal Spirit.<sup>52</sup>

There are a number of the Holy Mother's sayings which express her faith and conviction in non-dualistic Vedānta. To her, God was both Pure Spirit, or Brahman, and also the Universal Energy, or *Śakti*, and Sri Ramakrishna was the Divine Incarnation of modern times, "The Master is the embodiment of all deities and of all mantras," she said. "Really and truly, one can worship through him all gods and goddesses."<sup>53</sup> Again, speaking from a higher philosophical

standpoint she said, "In the course of time God and other such things disappear. After the attainment of knowledge one realizes that the Master and other forms of God are *māyā*. They come and they go."<sup>54</sup> She stated categorically that Sri Ramakrishna and his followers were non dualists. Once Swami Vivekananda, the paragon of non-dualists, said to the Mother that his mind was rising to the level where everything of the world held no attraction and all seemed vanishing away. To that Holy Mother said (with a smile) to take care that she too did not get vanished! To which the Swami said, "Where shall I stand if you vanish? If knowledge effaces the *lotus feet* of the Guru, then what will be its support?" The Mother added, "...then...the Mother alone exists, pervading the whole universe. All differentiation is effaced. This is the simple truth."<sup>55</sup>

Sri Sarada Devi did not consider anyone a stranger. All were her own. She had the same love for a saint as for a sinner; the same for the rich and for the poor, for the learned and for the ignorant, even for birds and animals. This same-sightedness towards all beings is, according to the *Gītā*, one of the signs of perfect knowledge of Brahman.<sup>56</sup> If we interpret the Holy Mother's motherhood towards all creatures from the non-dual Vedāntic standpoint, we cannot but accept her as a woman of the highest Advaitic realization, one who experienced Brahman everywhere and in all things and acted accordingly.

49. Cf. S. D., p. 428.

50. Cf. S. D., p. 362.

51. Cf. quoted in *Śatarūpe Sārada*, (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1987) p. 417.

52. Cf. S. D., p. 429.

53. *Holy Mother*, p. 214.

54. Cf. *Holy Mother*, p. 215.

55. Cf. *Śrī Sri Māyer Kātha*, Part II, (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1363) p. 49.

56. Cf. *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā*, V. 19.

# He Teaches His Own Message

SWAMI DESHIKATMANANDA

When righteousness declines, yielding place to materialism and worldliness, the Lord incarnates Himself to re-establish *dharma*. It is indeed a wonder that with His advent, as if drawn by an invisible force, earnest seekers of truth cluster round Him. The purifying touch of his effulgent human form not only transmutes the lives of His followers, but also shapes the future of humanity. In the case of some Incarnations, their lives have ordinary or humble beginnings; but as they grow their divine powers begin to manifest for the good of humanity. This can be likened to the tiny fish growing gradually and engulfing the whole universe as in the *Matsya Avatāra*. A divine drama thus begins. Everything is planned meticulously, not just for a few decades but for several centuries ahead, concerning who is to be born, when, where and with what mission. This was true of all the incarnations—Sri Rama, Sri Krishna, Christ, Buddha and others. Also in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

Having been completely dispossessed of all his belongings, Kshudiram Chattopadhyay (the father of Sri Ramakrishna) came to live in the remote village of Kamarpukur. Then an insignificant and little-known place, Kamarpukur today has become a great pilgrimage centre for devotees all over the world. It was here that Sri Ramakrishna was born and, as Gadhadhar, began to act in his role of divine player. The curtain raised and the drama began. Every actor was prepared and the role he was to play determined, and all progressed in logical sequence. By the time Gadhadhar came to Calcutta, Rani Rasmani had already built the temple of Mother Bhavatarini at Dakshineswar. No Brahmin was at first willing to perform the consecration of the temple and install

the image of the Mother, but as events unfolded Gadhadhar was the Chosen One for the worship, to establish the Motherhood of God and to revivify the Mother's worship as a means for realizing Truth transcendental.

Then began the Divine Player's great research leading to discoveries unheard of in the religious history of the world. At the appointed hour great teachers, waiting in the wings, began to arrive: the Bhairavi Brahmani, Totapuri, Jatadhari, Wajad Ali Khan.<sup>1</sup> Thus Sri Ramakrishna was helped on his way to follow the different paths of *dharma*: Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism, Tantra, Vedānta, Christianity and Islam. After completing all his sādhanās Sri Ramakrishna came to the understanding that all were but various paths leading to the same goal, and the one God of the world.

Sri Ramakrishna said that 'when the lotus of the heart blooms, the bees must come for honey'. His admirers and future disciples now began to pour into Dakshineswar. The unpretentious and little-known priest, heretofore once thought to have become mad due to restlessness for the vision of God, now meets the most *avant-garde* of Bengali intellectuals, the renowned Keshab Chandra Sen. What a contrast between the two personalities! Keshab, once compared with England's prime minister Gladstone for his wit and oratorical powers, came to meet with a poor young priest who not always thought to keep his cloth wrapped round his body! Keshab was acknowledged as a spiritual ally of Western missions, an evangelist of Christ in the East,

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1. *Prabuddha Bharata*, Mayavati, U.P., Vol. 89, 1984 March p. 105.



yet after their first meeting, to the end of Keshab's life, Keshab remained a staunch admirer of the God-realized Master. He also became one of the chief instruments spreading and popularizing the Master's life and ideals.<sup>2</sup>

Then came the young men who would accept and assimilate Sri Ramakrishna's teaching to worship God and work for the good of the world, who would spread his message within and outside of India. Foremost among them, of course, was Narendranath Dutta, later to become known as Swami Vivekananda. The Parliament of world's religions at Chicago in 1893 came to be held, as it were, for the Swami. It was as if he was Sri Ramakrishna's mouth and voice. Sri Ramakrishna and the *Sanātana Dharma*, the Eternal Religion, were introduced to the world at large. What a dramatic unfoldment! Was the holding of this great Assembly, the Parliament of Religions, a mere coincidence or was it divinely ordained? By the hand of fate the unsophisticated priest of Dakshineswar Kali temple was acclaimed an *Avatāra*, incarnation of God. Not only so, Swami Vivekananda once declared him *Avatāra variṣṭha*, the foremost of the Incarnations.

All that is cherished as high and noble was in Sri Ramakrishna's make-up—his divine character. But in this Incarnation there was no flourish of divine powers or weapons on the battlefield as with Sri Rama; none of the diplomacy and statecraft of Sri Krishna was there; no working of miracles as in the life of Jesus, nor any preaching or itinerancy as in the life of Buddha. Ramakrishna, though possessed of the wisdom of India's ancient *Rṣis*, yet was simple and guileless as a child. By his mere wish he could have gained all the world's honour,

but he was endowed with exceeding renunciation, spontaneous in his nature. The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, once described Sri Ramakrishna saying that renunciation was his 'crest-jewel', the most beautiful ornament of his holy life. The *Viṣṇu Purāna* says that God is addressed as *Bhagavān* because He has six *bhagas* or glories. The greatest of these is the wealth of renunciation. In no other incarnation was this wealth of renunciation so complete or so natural as in Sri Ramakrishna. He was absolutely unable to touch money, and could not lay up even trifling things for future use.

There were miracles in Sri Ramakrishna's life, but they were of an unsuspect nature. Wretched sinners became saints; social derelicts passed the last moments of their lives wrapt in the thought of God; bohemians and drunkards suddenly felt in themselves the power to reform, and afterward led exemplary lives—all due to the ocean of grace and divine influence brought to bear by the Master. Even now the Great Master continues to shape the lives of innumerable devotees. Sometimes the drama heightens when the devoted monks and followers feel that they are special instruments in the Ramakrishna movement; but by his Grace they too come to realize that none is indispensable. The Master's work is progressing silently, inscrutably and unfathomably to the ordinary understanding.

Now and then one pauses to reflect: Where are all the great men of yore; the great kings, emperors, philosophers, nation-builders, men of science, turning on whose achievements the world seemed to revolve for a time? Would the world have come to a standstill without any one of them? One thinks not. The creation would have continued, nothing daunted, with all its variety and vicissitudes. God alone exists, the Substratum, the One Indispensable. He moves and all moves after Him. By His light, all this is lighted. Such was the lustrous

2. Romain Rolland, *The Life of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama) pp. 129, 176.

being who descended on earth in the form of the Dakshineswar Saint.

One finds clues that even before Swami Vivekananda crossed the seas, Sri Ramakrishna had gone abroad already and entered the hearts of a few blessed souls. Swamiji himself attested to this. As he was about to embark from Bombay, he remarked to Hari Maharaj, "...Well, all that preparation that you see going on (in America) is for this (pointing to his own body). My mind tells me so. You will see it verified at no distant date."<sup>3</sup> He had even preceded Swami Akhandananda before his climbing the Himalayas. There are some wonderful narrations which go far to prove that Sri Ramakrishna spreads his own ideas in many silent and unthought of ways.

When Mrs. Wheeler was still a young girl and unmarried, even before Swami Vivekananda's first visit to America, she had a vision in a dream of the radiant face of a man she took to be from India. She did not know who the face belonged to, but the vision impressed and charmed her.<sup>4</sup> She never forgot it and was always watchful for any Hindu visiting America. Time and again she was disappointed at not finding anyone of that radiant countenance. In time, marriage and destiny brought her to Montclair, New Jersey, fifteen or so miles outside of New York. Subsequently her trips to New York to listen to the lectures of Swami Vivekananda awakened in her a great interest in Vedānta. Her home became a peaceful haven for Swamiji's brother disciples. An interesting incident occurred when Swami Saradananda came to visit the Wheelers' home. It was from Swami Saradananda that she heard for the first

3. *Spiritual Talks* (of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna) (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983) p. 246.

4. Swami Ritajananda, *Swami Turiyananda* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1963) pp. 53-54.

time about Sri Ramakrishna. The more she heard the more inspired she became. Seeing her keen and genuine interest, the Swami showed her the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna which he always carried with him. She looked at it in great astonishment and exclaimed, "Oh Swami, it is the same face!" "What do you mean?" asked the Swami. And then she told him about the vision she had years before and of her vain efforts till then to find that face again. Swami Turiyananda who also stayed in the Wheelers' home, said that Mrs. Wheeler was one of the most spiritual women he had ever met.<sup>5</sup>

Here is another instance of how a vision of Sri Ramakrishna unexpectedly changed the life of Laura Franklin Glenn, an American lady, a graduate and a descendant on her mother's side of Benjamin Franklin. Her religious nature led her in youth to become a lay sister in an Episcopalian convent. This did not satisfy her and she too attended the lectures of the Vedanta Society of New York and in 1896 met Swami Vivekananda. Even afterward, her life was lacking in aim and purpose. Finally she shifted to Boston, spending her days in silent seclusion. Then something happened. Let us relate in her own words:

"One afternoon, as I sat alone in my living room, troubling over my aimless future, suddenly two figures stood before me. The face of one shone with a super-earthly smile, which seemed to shed an effulgence over his whole being. In quiet tones he spoke these words, 'Do not grieve. You have work to do for me.' Then both figures vanished, but the sense of their presence lingered for many days.

"In the early spring of 1902, I returned to New York and soon after became a member of the Vedānta Society. ...One afternoon, the Head of the Centre, Swami

5. Swami Atulananda, *With the Swamis in America* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama,) p. 58.



Abhedananda, called me to his private study to talk over a new publication. As I entered the room, my eyes fell upon a photograph hanging over the mantel. I stood there transfixed. It was the figure I had seen in Boston. I walked quickly across to the fireplace and asked almost abruptly, 'Of whom is this a picture?' The Head of the work replied in quiet tones, 'It is my Master, Sri Ramakrishna.'"

This is Sri Ramakrishna's way of charming souls and bringing them peace. Swami Paramananda, whom she recognized as the second figure, later gave religious initiation to Laura Glenn, and with it the name 'Devamata', Mother of the gods.<sup>6</sup>

Once Frank Dvorak, an Austrian artist, saw a saint in a dream. He too took the form to be a man of India. Later he came to read Max Mueller's Booklet, *A Real Mahatman*, on the life and sayings of Sri Ramakrishna quite by accident. It was then that he realized that he had dreamt of Sri Ramakrishna. Looking at Sri Ramakrishna's photograph filled him with joy unbounded. From that time Sri Ramakrishna became the object of his meditations. He wrote to Swamis Abhedananda and Saradananda asking for more pictures of Sri Ramakrishna, and duly received them. One photo of the Master, standing with eyes closed in ecstasy at Keshab Sen's house impressed Mr. Dvorak deeply, and though he regretted not having painted a portrait of the face he had seen in the dream, he decided to paint this one. He mused that if he could paint the Master in the standing posture, but with eyes open, his mental turmoil would be considerably assuaged. Then one day something wonderful happened. As Dvorak was lost in thought of Sri Ramakrishna, he fell into a deep meditation. He saw that an effulgent Sri Rama-

krishna was standing before him with both eyes open wide and radiating compassion, holiness and bliss. Overwhelmed with joy he immediately sketched that blissful form. He wished to paint Sri Ramakrishna's ochre coloured (gerua) cloth and accordingly wrote Swami Abhedananda for a colour sample. The Swami sent him a piece of cloth from his gerua turban. This enabled the painter to complete the portrait, which has now become a popular likeness.<sup>7</sup>

Such extraordinary narrations about the Master's divine presence, abiding now for so many years after his earthly *lilā*, are abundant. But even before, when he lived in the Dakshineswar temple garden, he used to give hints about the future coming of events and devotees, especially to the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. At Jayrambati in 1906, one day she said to Brahmachari Girija: "...The Master entered into spiritual trance very often. One day as he came down from a long *samādhi*, he said, 'Listen, my dear, I went to a land where the people are all white. Ah! How sincere is their devotion!' ...Could I imagine then that these (Mrs. Ole Bull, Sister Nivedita and others) would become devotees? I was at a loss to think who these white people could be."<sup>8</sup>

In the course of his wanderings in the Himalayas, Swami Akhandananda chanced on a picture of Sri Ramakrishna in a tea shop owned by an elderly Mussalman. The shopkeeper had this to say: "I don't know whose picture it is. I had gone to the bazar to purchase things. The things were wrapped in a sheet of paper. When opened, I saw this beautiful picture. His eyes enthralled me and I thought that he should be like our prophet, hence I framed it and

7. Swami Prajnanananda, *Man O Manush* (Bengali) (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Vedanta Math) pp. 203-6.

8. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore,) p. 390.

6. Sara Ann Levinsky, *A Bridge of Dreams*, p. 95.

am keeping it in the shop.”<sup>9</sup> There is yet another story about Sri Ramakrishna’s picture. The incident which occurred while Swami Akhandananda was wandering in Tibet was later narrated by him thus: “At Chhekra, near Kailas, a rich Khamha (gypsy) of Lhasa went into ecstasy and sat, lost to the external world as he held in his hand the Master’s photo that was with me. On coming back to the normal plane he said, ‘Where did you get this portrait? Let it be with me. I shall worship it daily. It must be the likeness of God Himself, or why should I have this state at the mere touch of it? Such facial expression, such eyes! Well, they can never belong to a human being.’” He placed it on the seat of the Buddha and other gods and worshipped it daily by burning incense. It was with him as long as I was there.”<sup>10</sup>

Recently a sannyāsin, while travelling by bus near Rameswaram in South India, observed what he took to odd or unexpected behaviour of the conductor. Whenever he finished attending to the passengers he would recline in his seat and get engrossed in a book which he was carrying. After short periods of work he would invariably settle down again with the book. Before alighting at his destination the Swami asked him what it was he was reading so avidly. The conductor showed the book. It was a *Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna* written in

9. Narrated to the author by the late Rev. Swami Annadanandaji, initiated disciple of Swami Akhandanandaji Maharaj.

10. Swami Akhandananda, *From Holy Wanderings to Service of God in Man* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1979) p. 24.

Tamil. The swami was very much surprised and interested. The conductor further told how he had been a chain smoker once, and addicted to other despicable habits as well. It had been his lot to be always melancholy and depressed, not knowing what peace was. Then by good fortune a friend presented him with that book and it changed his life for good. His bad habits were a thing of the past now, and other conductors and drivers also became interested in the book.

The divine drama that Sri Ramakrishna set in motion when he transformed the lives of Girish Chandra Ghosh, Kalipada Ghosh, Manmathanath, Vinodini and a host of others still runs, only now with more intensity, as we are witnesses. Is this not a super-miracle that many sannyāsins and lay devotees die peacefully in old age with the name of God on their lips? Midst decay of the body and its pain at the time of last moments, can there be a greater achievement or more hopeful memorial to the living?

Sri Ramakrishna did not die with the death of the mortal body. He still lives in the hearts of the faithful and in the books on his life and teachings. His power is all-pervading. Swami Vivekananda said: “Sri Ramakrishna is a force. You should not think that his doctrine is this or that. But he is a power, living even now in his disciples and working in the world. I saw him growing in his ideas. He is still growing. ...From the date that the Ramakrishna Incarnation was born has sprung the *Satya Yuga*, the Golden Age.”<sup>11</sup>

11. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol V, p. 269; Vol. VI, p. 327.



# Smash Thy Cage—And Fly

S. K. CHAKRABORTY

Smash, shatter and sunder—thy cage, shell and veil—and fly.  
But where? To nowhere, and yet everywhere.  
But why? For the sake of thy own love—and of all.  
But how? By eyes shut, tongue held, and in singing silence sunk.  
So—smash thy cage, and fly.

\* \* \*

Lo! Nature, round the bend on the lonely path, like a bountiful child,  
Showers one crimson bud, and then two—as if to caress thy feet.  
Come, think of that! and what dost thou give? Not even a silent tear or two.  
Nature-child smiles celestial, thou art yet wrapped in petty frailties.  
So—smash thy cage, and fly.

\* \* \*

The ceaseless dolorous strain of birds down the deep whistling vale—  
They all sing Thy sweet name day and night—are they not free?  
Or, doth the Lord singeth by them to thee—yet thou heareth not?  
Perhaps both. But alas!—thou caged in and sealed tight.  
So—smash thy cage, and fly.

\* \* \*

That man hurts thee, and this man slights thee,  
And thou bleedest within one dark nook.  
When shall you know this for certain?—none hurts thee ever.  
It is thy venomous vanity, thy evil ego which slashes thee.  
So—smash thy cage, and fly.

\* \* \*

Plunder the blue of the sky, loot the white of the snow;  
Bow to that forlorn benign madonna in the morning moon—  
She blesseth thee from the shore of Infinity.  
Seize and push them all into thy soul's cave and meditate  
So—smash thy cage, and fly.

\* \* \*

Olden times—that veiled maiden—led you softly to the gate of Unlimited ;  
 No guiles, no amorous dalliance—only serene goodwill.  
 Modern times—that sensate siren—cages thee evermore in the limited ;  
 Spinning shimmering webs of endless tinsels for needless needs,  
 So—smash thy cage, and fly.

\* \* \*

That little yellow flower on the winding way—ignored by day, trampled by night ;  
 Yet, while it lives, leaves its tiny heart to seat the Beloved.  
 That big blue lotus in the lake—open by day, shut by night ;  
 It too seeks, all day long, into its petals, the Boundless.  
 So—smash thy cage, and fly.

\* \* \*

Open up Man, open up thy very pores, very cells.  
 Stop Man, stop thy endless whirl in the pool of morbid cares,  
 Futile Man, futile this choking up in the burning smoke of desires.  
 Cleanse thy mansion, open all thy doors, and sing Him in with tears.  
 So—smash thy cage, and fly.

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Never forget that the aim and end of human life is Realisation of God. If you wear out your life in eating, sleeping and sense pleasure, like an animal, and in idle talk, gossip and fruitless activity, your life will pass in vain and you will reap misery. Apply yourself with all your energy, with all your heart and soul, for realising God, as long as you have strength and vigour left in your body and mind. Never for any reason slacken your efforts. “These practices can be done later on, these will be possible only when God wills it so, or is propitious,”—these are the words of do-nothing sluggards, those who never sincerely intend to do anything. Nothing good will ever be achieved by them.

—From *Towards the Goal Supreme*  
 By Swami Virajananda