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or Awakened India



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Prabuddha Bharata

**A Monthly Journal of the
Ramakrishna Order**

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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CONTENTS

Divine Wisdom	481
Prayers: Do They Work?—II				
—(Editorial)	482
Swami Vivekananda's Bharat Parikrama and his participation in the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago (1893)				
—Dr. Shankar Dayal Sarma	...	...	...	489
Reminiscences of The Holy Mother				
—Kumud Bandhu Sen	...	...	...	494
Mysticism in The Vakhs of Lal Ded				
—A. N. Dhar	...	...	...	500
A Review Article				
—Visvanath Chatterjee	...	...	...	505
In Search				
—Tove Majumdar	...	...	...	508
An Instructive Parable				
—A. W. Joshi	...	...	...	513
Waiting for The Sea				
—C. P. Ghosh	...	...	...	515
News and Reports	...	...	...	516
Reviews and Notices	...	...	...	519
For Seekers of Spirituality	...	...	...	520

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत

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

Prabuddha Bharata

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N.o 12

Divine Wisdom

A MEDITATION ON SRI SARADA DEVI

ध्यायेद्दहृत्कमलमध्ये हेमवर्णा सुखासनाम् ।
आलुलायितकेशार्धवक्षस्थलाभिमण्डिताम् ॥

Sri Sarada Devi, the grantor of all knowledge, of golden hue, sitting at ease with her hair dishevelled falling on half of her breast ;

स्वेतवस्त्रावृताघ्राङ्गां हेमालङ्कारभूषिताम् ।
स्वक्रोडन्यस्तहस्ताञ्च द्विभुजां स्थिरलोचनाम् ॥

Dressed in white cloth, adorned with gold ornaments, with two arms and fixed eyes, and her hands resting on her lap ;

प्रसन्नवदनां जीवदुःखगलितचेतसाम् ।
शुभ्रज्योतिर्मयीं देवीं वरदां सर्वमङ्गलाम् ॥

Ever having a contented or pleased look and her heart melting at the miseries of creatures (Jivas), full of resplendent light, the Effulgent One who ever grants boons, and is ever auspicious ;

रामकृष्णगतप्राणां तन्नामश्रवणप्रियाम् ।
तद्भावरञ्जिताकारां विद्वन्मातृस्वरूपिणीम् ॥

Whose soul is dedicated to Sri Ramakrishna, who is fond of hearing His name, the embodiment, as it were, of His thoughts, and who is the Mother of the universe ;

स्नेहमयीं शिवां शान्तां भक्तिमुक्तिप्रदायिनीम् ।
सर्वजीवत्राणकर्त्रीं सारदां ज्ञानदायिनीम् ॥

Full of affection, the Auspicious One, ever calm, the grantor of Bhakti (devotion) and Mukti (liberation), and the protectress of all creatures ;

Thus should one meditate on her (Devi Sarada) in the lotus of one's heart.

Swami Abhedananda

Prayers: Do They Work?—II

To the question whether all our prayers become fruitful, the answer will be in the negative. Many of our prayers, if not most of the subtle longings of our heart, are absurd, narrow, destructive and utterly selfish. If all our prayers were fulfilled, both our individual lives and world affairs would be in total chaos. How often do we clearly see what is good for us and for others? Our many limitations and our short-sightedness blind our true vision and befuddle our minds. A few years ago a thing that we considered necessary and indispensable and which we prayed for with all earnestness today is no longer needed. On the contrary, now we may be praying to God to free us from it. Our concept of what is good for us is always changing because we ourselves are always changing. The "good" is not static, but changing all the time for all human beings. Thus we pray to the Lord to give us something and after a time to take it away. Our petitions to God seem to range from the most frivolous to the truly beneficial. Therefore Swami Brahmananda once advised: "Pray constantly with a pure, sincere heart, 'O Lord, I don't know what is good and what is bad for me. I am entirely dependent on You. Grant me everything I need for spiritual life. Take me along the path that will bring me the greatest good. Give me the faith and strength to remember You and meditate on You constantly.'"

But in a breath we usually descend from the sublime to the ridiculous in our prayers. Think of sports fans praying for their respective favourite teams to win. During the Iraq-Iran war, both the Muslim countries

prayed that Allah would destroy their enemies and vouchsafe victory to themselves. In the midst of the recent Gulf-war, it is reported that both the president and the dictator were appealing to God to favour their respective sides and bring victory. It was also reported in the newspapers that most of the *mullas* in Pakistan sent in their petitions to the Almighty to ensure the triumph of the dictator over his enemies. A pious lady, after the second world war said, "God was very good to us. We prayed and prayed, so all the bombs fell on the other side of the city." Think of the gangs of the Indian Thugs of the 17th and 18th centuries. These professional assassins would win the confidence of unwary wayfarers and, when a favourable opportunity occurred, strangle them by throwing a handkerchief or noose round their necks. They then robbed their persons and buried them. All this was done according to certain prescribed religious rites and elaborate worship of Kali! Some fierce dacoits in India worshipped and prayed to the Goddess before they went for their looting and killing sprees. A blackmarketeer, drug smuggler or swindler, before he embarks on his nefarious work, craves for God's protection and favour. All these pathos-filled dramas of real life remind one of the primitive peoples who while fighting among themselves believed that they were being instigated by their respective bloodthirsty tribal gods who were fighting with each other for supremacy. Can we of the modern world really boast that we have left behind our primitive instincts? Beneath a veneer of our so called civilization there lurks a savage. As we are, so is our conception of God. God

is a despot up in the sky ready to destroy our enemies and play with our instincts of greed, hatred and jealousy. We project our baser motives on Omnipresent Spirit and expect It to tow the line of our debased desires. If our wild wishes are not appeased, we become atheists and agnostics.

There is a funny story: In Belfast, a Catholic priest, a Protestant minister and a Jewish rabbi were engaged in a heated theological discussion. Suddenly an Angel appeared in their midst and said to them. "God sends you His blessings. Make one wish for Peace and your wish will be granted by the Almighty. The minister said, "Let every Catholic disappear from our lovely island. Then peace will reign supreme." The priest said, "Let there not be a single Protestant left on our Irish soil. That will bring peace to this island."

"And what about you, Rabbi?" said the Angel. "Do you have no wish of your own?"

"No," said the rabbi. "Just attend to the wishes of these two gentlemen and I shall be well pleased."¹ Every denomination has its own God who takes care of its respective followers. He is believed to represent the peculiar attitudes, idiosyncracies and behaviour of that race. Priests, preachers, and religious bigots are there in profusion to encourage and shore up such ideas. Everyone is anchored by the doctrines and dogmas of this or that Institution. "I cannot imagine," poignantly remarked Einstein, "a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modelled after our own—a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty."²

1. Anthony de Mello, *The Prayer of the Frog* (Gujarat: Sahitya Prakash Anand: 1989) p. 103.

2. Albert Einstein, *I Believe* (London: Unwin Books, 1969) p. 28.

In this connection the teachings of the Lord in *The Bhāgavata* (Skandha II, Ch. 29, verses 21-27)³ are worth remembering. The Lord said: "I abide in all beings as their innermost soul. Disregarding My presence within them, men make a show of worshipping Me through images. (21) If one disregards Me present in all as their soul and Lord, but ignorantly offers worship only to images, such worship is as ineffective as sacrificial offerings made in ashes. (22) A man who persecutes Me residing in others, who is proud and haughty, who looks upon God as the other—such a person will never attain peace of mind. (23) If a man disregards and persecutes fellow beings, but worships Me in images with numerous rituals and rich offerings, I am not at all pleased with him for proffering such worship. (24) A man should, however, worship Me in images, side by side with discharging his duties, which include the love of all beings, until he actually realizes My presence in himself (*svahṛdi*) and in all living beings (*sarva-bhūteṣu avasthitam*). (25) As long as man

3. Swāmi Tapasyananda, *Srimad Bhagavata*, Vol. I (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mysore, 1980) p. 279.

अहं सर्वेषु भूतेषु भूतात्मावस्थितः सदा ।
 तमवज्ञाय मां मर्त्यः कुरुतेऽर्चाविडम्बनम् ॥
 यो मां सर्वेषु भूतेषु सन्तमात्मानमीश्वरम् ।
 हित्वा र्चा भजते मोढयाद्भस्मन्येव जुहोति सः ॥
 द्विषतः परकाये मां मानिनो भिन्नदर्शिनः ।
 भूतेषु बद्धवैरस्य नमनः शान्तिमृच्छति ॥
 अहमुच्चावर्चद्रव्यैः क्रिययोत्पन्नाघे ।
 नैव तुष्येऽर्चितोऽर्चायां भूतग्रामवमानिनः ॥
 अर्चादावर्चयेत्तावदीश्वरं मां स्वकर्मकृत् ।
 यावन्न वेद स्वहृदि सर्वभूतेष्ववस्थितम् ॥
 आत्मनश्च परस्यापि यः करोत्यन्तरोदरम् ।
 तस्य भिन्नदृशोः मृत्युर्विदधे भयमुल्बणम् ॥
 अथ मां सर्वभूतेषु भूतात्मानं कृतालयम् ।
 अहंयेहानमनाभ्यां मैत्र्याभिन्नेन चक्षुषा ॥

is self-centred and makes an absolute distinction between himself and others (without recognizing the unity of all in Me, the Inner Pervader), he will be subject to the great fear of Death (including every form of deprivation of self-interest). (26) So overcoming the separateness of a self-centred life, one should serve all beings with gifts, honour and love, recognizing that service is really blind, rendered to Me who reside in all beings as their innermost soul. (27)"

Prayer often turns into a 'deal', a bargain with God. "God grant me this and in return I will offer you something. I will worship you with much grandeur; I will fast on certain days, or will go on a pilgrimage". To most of us God is a wealthy supplier of worldly goods and His store is inexhaustible. This dominant note runs through all petty prayers. A priest asked a little boy: "Do you say your prayers every night?" "No Sir," replied the boy. "Some nights I don't want anything." This attitude of the child is also reflected in the prayers of grown-ups. Swamiji said, "He who wants to enter the realms of light must first give up this buying and selling, this 'shopkeeping' religion, and then enter the gates. It is not that you do not get what you pray for; you get everything but such praying is a beggar's religion."⁴ Here is an example of shopkeeping religion: A greedy miser prayed to the Lord: "If the All-Merciful God gives me fifty thousand rupees, I will give ten thousand in charities. I promise." After a pause he further added, "If the Merciful One does not trust me, let him deduct ten thousand in advance and send me the balance."

Our prayers mirror petty greed, jealousy and malice rather than wisdom and altruism.

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. IV, p. 38.

Man prays for everything except wisdom which he so badly needs. Human beings have brought the sublime ideal of prayer to a ridiculous state. When we do not know what is worthless for our and others' well-being, then prayers are reduced to mere words, cunningly arranged phrases to flatter God. The ardent heart which is aspiring for a ray of light does not resort to cleverness of articulation. The silent prayer is heard in silence. Every pulsation of heart is known to the Cosmic Intelligence. There is a humorous anecdote, told about that wise man, Mulla Nasruddin. One day Mulla Nasruddin saw the village school master leading a group of children towards the mosque. "What are you taking them for?" he asked. "There is a drought in the land," said the teacher, "and we trust that the cries of the innocent will move the heart of the Almighty." "It is not the cries, whether innocent or criminal that count," said the Mulla, "but wisdom and awareness." "How dare you make such a blasphemous statement in the presence of these children!" cried the teacher. "Prove what you have said or you shall be denounced as a heretic." "Easy enough," said Nasruddin. "If the prayers of children counted for anything, there wouldn't be a school teacher in all the lands, for there is nothing they so detest as going to school. The reason you have survived those prayers is that we, who know better than the children, have kept you where you are."⁵

It has, by some scientists, been unravelled that prayer plays a positive role in the process of healing and curing diseases. The scientific findings of cardiologist Randolph Byrd have revealed startling results of prayers on coronary patients. The patients admitted to the coronary care unit at San Francisco General Hospital were divided into two

5. Anthony de Mello, p. 19.

groups: One group was prayed for, for their recovery and the other group was not prayed for. The patients were randomly selected from these two groups and their names were given to outside persons who prayed for them. Neither the patients, nurses, nor the doctors in the experiment knew which group the patients were in. In the end what the cardiologist found was a remarkable improvement in the condition of prayed-for heart patients. They required less antibiotics, were found less likely to develop pulmonary edema (lungs filling with fluid due to the improper functioning of heart); they did not require endotracheal intubation (support of the mechanical ventilator), and there were fewer deaths.

Physicians the world over are still skeptical about the therapeutic value of the powers of prayer. Convincing evidence, however, is slowly surfacing. A day may come when doctors' prescriptions may contain, in addition to the usual drugs, some instructions about prayer therapy too. Science has yet to discover many aspects of the mystery of Reality about which Swamiji spoke nearly a century ago.

"This mind is a part of the universal mind. And each mind, wherever it is located, is in actual communication with the whole world."⁶ According to Vedanta, mind is the causal agent, and all causation first begins in the mind. Physical effects are nothing but the result of this cause. The physical forces which are manifested on the physical plane can be governed by will-power. Will-power is the first expression of the mind. Though mind is subtle matter on the higher plane, still it can control the forces on the gross physical plane. Every mental change brings about its corresponding physical change. Prayers are nothing

but the expression of intense desires. When these intense desires first arise in our minds they have tremendous power to change the physical conditions, and also the external environments. Thought is a force and it acts on the external environment. The greater the intensity of concentration, the more powerful the force, and the greater will be its impact. Moreover, the individual mind is in communication with the whole world. We are all interdependent and interconnected. Therefore, intense prayer not only affects the supplicant, but the one for whom he prays. The idea behind the mass-prayers for world peace underscores the same principle.

In a remarkable series of experiments to measure the effects of prayer on biological systems, such as sprouting seeds, the researchers of Spindrift, an organization in Salem, Ore., U.S.A., have added a new dimension. Some of the following experiments have been quoted by Dr. Larry Dossey in his latest absorbing book, *Recovering the Soul*. The researchers desired to know that if a person prayed for one group of germinating seeds and not for another, how would the process of germination be affected, if at all.

In one test, rye seeds were divided into two groups of equal number, and a string was placed between them designating them group A and group B. The seeds on one side were prayed for and the others were not. After the seeds had sprouted, the slender rye shoots were counted. Results consistently indicated that there were significantly more rye shoots in the prayed-for side than in the control side. This test, repeated many times, showed the same results.

We pray for both healthy and unhealthy persons. So, the researchers went one step further to experiment on the effect of prayer on unhealthy seeds. They added salt water to

6. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 13.

the seed container, and kept the rest of the experiment as mentioned above. The results of prayers were even more striking. The ratio of the prayed-for group to the not-prayed-for shoots increased sharply, indicating that prayer worked better when the subject was under stress.

The question they asked was: "What if the seeds were put in a more stressful state? Would prayer still work?" The experimenters put more and more salt water, and the result was more seeds germinated when prayed for. This suggested that prayer works best when physical conditions are worse instead of better. In their subsequent tests the experimenters used a variety of seeds instead of rye seeds, and controlled temperature and humidity to create more stress. The outcome demonstrated that in such cases also prayer worked effectively.

In the next test they examined the duration of prayer. One container with soybeans was prayed for twice, and another only once. The rate of germination indicated that the container prayed for two times showed more growth than the container prayed for only once. Further tests conducted revealed another amazing aspect of prayer. If a person knows more about his subject, in other words, for whom he is praying, the greater will be the effect of his prayer. The experimenters also observed that the experienced practitioner of prayer produced more powerful outcomes than the inexperienced one. Between the two techniques, *directed*—that is, with a specific goal in mind, and *non-directed*—without any specific outcome in mind, which is more effective? The researchers of Spindrift have shown that the *non-directed*, without demanding any specific result, is more potent.⁷ A

person who prays does not know what is the best or the right thing for him, or for another. Desiring a preferred outcome, or jumping to immediate solutions, limits the efficacy of prayer. The Quran rightly says, "Man prays for evil as he prays for good; for man is ever hasty." Therefore many of our prayers are not answered and they do not work. The best approach is: "Thy will be done and not my will be done." "My will be done" is fraught with haste and imprudence. Those desires which are in harmony with the laws of nature are surely fulfilled sooner or later. The 13th century German mystic, Mechthild of Magdeburg, wrote: "That prayer has great power which a person makes with all his might. It makes a sour heart sweet, a sad heart merry, a poor heart rich, a foolish heart wise, a timid heart brave, a sick heart well, a blind heart full of sight, a cold heart ardent. It draws down the great God into the little heart, it drives the hungry soul up into the fullness of God, it brings together two lovers—God and the soul, in a wondrous place where they speak much of love."

Swami Turiyananda narrated a touching incident. "Once a gentleman came to Sri Ramakrishna from Jabalpur. He was a scholar, an M.A., and was very frank, but he had an agnostic turn of mind. So he had much discussion with Sri Ramakrishna. He confessed that he had great mental unrest, but he would not pray to God, because he said, there was no proof of his existence! Sri Ramakrishna said to him, "Well, I suppose you have no objection to praying like this: 'If Thou really *art*, then listen to my prayer.' If you pray like this, it will do you good." The gentleman thought over it and then said that he had no objection to that sort of prayer. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to follow the advice and come to him again. The gentleman came again. He was a changed man. Touching the

7. Larry Dossey, *Recovering the Soul* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989) pp. 55-62.

Master's feet, he wept as he said, 'You have saved me!'"⁸ On another occasion, to a devotee's question, "How can I take delight in God's name?" Sri Ramakrishna said, "Pray to God with a yearning heart that you may take delight in His name. He will certainly fulfill your heart's desire."

Once Yogin (Swami Yogananda) asked Sri Ramakrishna how he could get rid of the sex-idea. When the Master said that it could be easily done by prayer to God, this simple process did not appeal to him. He thought that there were so many persons who prayed to God, but nevertheless there came no change in their lives. Yogin had expected to learn from the Master some yogic practice, but was disappointed, and came to the conclusion that this prescription of a simple remedy was the outcome of Sri Ramakrishna's ignorance of any other better means. Yogin, later, was dissuaded by the Master from learning yogic exercises from a hatha-yogi who came to Dakshineswar, with an advice that with such practice his whole thought would be concentrated on the body and not on God. Yogin followed the suggestion of Sri Ramakrishna and tried the simple remedy of prayer. To his surprise he found wonderful results.⁹

Once Swamiji told a story of one of his classmates, to illustrate the great powers of the Upaniṣadic mantras. The said classmate was suffering from a disease that baffled the doctors. Naturally, he lost hope of recovery and zest for life, and turned to religion and thoughts of dispassion. He knew that his friend was a monk and sent for him to come, if only once. Swamiji did so; and as he sat at the patient's bedside, there came to

his mind a verse from the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka*, "Him the Brāhmaṇa conquers, who thinks that he is separate from the Brāhmaṇa, Him the Kṣatriya conquers, who thinks that he is separate from the Kṣatriya. And him the universe conquers, who thinks that he is separate from the universe." Curiously, this acted like a charm on the sick man. The effect was miraculous. He grasped the theme with only the recitation of the passage, felt new strength in the body, and made a quick recovery.¹⁰

Prayer can move the elements of nature. An incident in the life of Sri Sarada Devi amply demonstrates the powers of prayer:

Owing to the continuous drought, the crops in the fields of Jayrambati and the neighbouring villages were being scorched away. The helpless and scared farmers told the Mother, "This year, Mother, there is no hope of keeping our children alive—all will have to die of hunger." Their distress moved her, and she went with them to look at the fields. There she could not control her feeling of dismay, and supplicated with extreme humility, "Alas, Master! What's this that you have done! Should everyone die of starvation, after all?" That very night rain poured down in torrents and the crop was so good that year that the peasants had no such happy memory for many years past.¹¹

Trials and tribulations beset everyone, none can escape them. When all help and sympathy from our fellow beings fail we naturally turn to the Supreme Being for succour and hope. In such situation the

8. *Spiritual Talks* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983) p. 215.

9. Swami Gambhirananda, *Apostles of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1982) p. 152.

10. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda, by His Eastern and Western Disciples*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1981) p. 358.

11. Swami Gambhirananda, *Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1969) p. 447.

prayer that works well is to leave the ultimate outcome to God, instead of clinging fixedly to our own preferred results. This requires courage, faith and holding the desire in abeyance. We know desires are limited and often misleading. "...Intentions, aspirations mine, leaving results to Thee." These words of Walt Whitman should form the basis of all prayers. *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas a Kempis, also teaches one the right attitude. It says, "O lord, be Thy Name Forever, who hast been pleased that this trial and tribulation should come upon me. I cannot escape from it, but must of necessity come to Thee, so that Thou mayest help me, and turn it to my good." Sri Ramakrishna gives an example of a lawyer: the lawyer gives all the arguments and finishes his pleading by saying to the judge that he has said all he has to say. Now the decision rests with His Honour. In true prayer an afflicted person places his difficulties before the Universal Love and Wisdom, and invokes Its intercession. He does not enforce his will on the Supreme Lord.

Holy Mother one day was conversing with many devotees. During the conversation she passed onto an important topic and said, "Well, let me see if you can tell what object is to be prayed for from God?" One of them replied, "why, wisdom, devotion, and objects that make one happy in life, all these are to be prayed for." The Holy Mother said, "To say in one word, we must pray for *Nir-vāsanā*, freedom from desire. Desire is at the root of all sorrows, the cause of repeated births and deaths, and the main obstacle on the path of freedom."

Therefore we must pray to the Lord ardently, "O Lord! make my mind free from all impurities like passion, greed, jealousy and hatred."¹² Such prayer is ennobling and enlightening, and all other prayers for this thing or that binds the soul to the world thereby entangling it in deep sorrows.

12. कामादि दोषरहितं कुरु मानसं च ।

O Devi, we bow before you, who are Yourself good fortune in the dwellings of the virtuous, and ill-fortune in those of the vicious; intelligence in the hearts of the learned, faith in the hearts of the good, and modesty in the hearts of the high-born. May You protect the universe!

Prayer from the Candī

Swami Vivekananda's Bharat Parikrama and his participation in the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago (1893)*

DR. SHANKAR DAYAL SARMA

This beautiful address by the esteemed President of India impressively speaks of the magnetic personality and soul-stirring message of Swami Vivekananda that 'set in motion a process of national rejuvenation and regeneration'. Pointing out the relevance of Swamiji's message to the pressing problems of India and the world today, Dr. Sarma exhorts all, 'particularly our children and our youth', to 'try to emulate the shining example of Swami Vivekananda in successfully accomplishing the challenging tasks of national reconstruction and social change that lie ahead'.

It gives me immense pleasure to be with you for the Centenary Celebrations of the Bhārat Parikramā of India's widely revered saint, Swami Vivekananda, who ranks with the greatest religious seekers, spiritual teachers and social reformers of all time. A truly outstanding son of our country, Swamiji was of a uniquely magnetic personality exuding vibrant energy and indomitable strength.

Swami Vivekananda's broad vision encompassed several fields and he packed into his short life a range of activities which would have taken others many decades to perform. He was a source of inspiration for those illustrious sons and daughters of India, old and young, whose sacrifices in the national cause led to political independence. Our

great country has since made impressive strides in various sectors of economic development and all of us are engaged in the grand task of building a glorious India which Swami Vivekananda foresaw and dreamt of.

We have gathered here today also to commemorate the Centenary of Swamiji's participation in the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893. What greater satisfaction can an admirer of Swami Vivekananda derive, than recalling his monumental work for the uplift of human society through a sustained inculcation of moral and ethical values and his historic contribution to the emergence of a modern and secular India. I have been attracted to Swami Vivekananda's personality and teachings since my early days and I express my sincere thanks to the members of the Centenary Celebrations Committee and to all the organizers for having invited me to this memorable function.

The spirit of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda is one of universal religion, embodying the principles of a truly spiritual life. During his last illness in 1886, Sri

* Inaugural Address delivered at the Celebration of the Centenary of Swami Vivekananda's Bhārat Parikramā (Itinerary in India) and Swamiji's participation in the 1893 Chicago Parliament of Religions organized by Sri Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady, and Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Cochin Kendra, on the 28th October, 1992 at Ernakulam, Cochin. We are indebted to the President of the above Ashrama, for having kindly given us the text of the illuminating speech for publication in the Prabuddha Bharata.

Ramakrishna passed on to his young disciple a divine mission in the fulfilment of which Swami Vivekananda undertook the Bhārat Parikramā and travelled extensively abroad. He set in motion a process of national rejuvenation and regeneration directed at ridding society of archaic and obscurantist practices and spreading the knowledge of Vedanta. He believed in building on the foundations of the past, shorn of its shortcomings, and in the power of the spirit which alone can give the fuel for the successful operation of institutions and legislation, and the strength and purity of individual character that alone can give life to the building up of a new society.

Swamiji travelled to Varanasi and the "tīrthās" in the Himalayas and to Dwaraka, holy with the memories and legends of Sri Kṛṣṇa. At Pune, he was the guest of a towering hero of our freedom struggle, Lokmanya Tilak. A report on his stay in Kerala at that time says: "He had the wonderful faculty of answering many men and many questions at one and the same time. It might be a talk on Spencer, or some thought of Shakespeare or Kalidasa, Darwin's Theory of Evolution, the Jewish history, the growth of Aryan civilization, the Vedas, Islam or Christianity—whatever the question, the Swami was ready with an appropriate answer."¹

I think that many of us present here would be interested to know that when Swami Vivekananda reached the house of his host, he was accompanied by a Muslim peon who had been sent to escort him. Swamiji insisted on the peon being first served with food, even though he himself had partaken of only a little milk in the

last two days. The local citizens found him to be extremely liberal in his views. He wanted women and the members of all classes to receive education and determine their status in the light of the enlightened perception of their own needs and requirements. From Trivandrum, he went on to Rameswaram and to Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of the sub-continent, thus completing his great pilgrimage. And it was there, while reflecting and meditating on his beloved motherland, that he received the enlightenment which gave him his mission in the service of humanity and his place in the history of mankind.

Both in India and abroad, Swamiji upheld the validity of all religions and their right to independent existence. He once concluded a discussion on the universality of religion with the following words:

Our watchword, will be acceptance, and not exclusion. Not only toleration but acceptance. Toleration means that I think that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. I believe in acceptance. I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him....Salutation to all the Prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present and to all that are to come in the future!²

Swami Vivekananda was steeped in the lore and learning of India. He knew of the ancient basis of our approach to life and of our achievements and he explained these to the people in a language which they understood easily. But he did not limit himself to India and it was because of this that his voice was listened to with great attention in other countries as well. He said,

1. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples, 6th Ed. Vol. 1, pp. 337-338.

2. Adapted from *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1991), Vol. II, pp. 373-374.

"We should give positive ideas. Negative thoughts only weaken men.... If you can give them positive ideas, people will grow up to be men and learn to stand on their own legs. In language and literature, in poetry and arts, in everything we must point out not the mistakes that people are making in their thoughts and actions, but the way in which they will gradually be able to do these things better...."³

At the Parliament of Religions, Swamiji, explained how Hinduism was itself a Parliament of Religions and held in equal esteem different paths to God. In the United States, leading newspapers wrote eloquently about him, the 'New York Herald' commenting, "He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions..."⁴ It was now to be his mission to help all men rise to their heights by spiritual education and strive to alleviate the sufferings and remove the ignorance of his own countrymen.

Dr. Annie Besant has thus described her meeting with Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions:

"A striking figure, clad in yellow and orange, shining like the sun of India in the midst of the heavy atmosphere of Chicago, a lion head, piercing eyes, mobile lips, movements swift and abrupt—such was my first impression of Swami Vivekananda, as I met him in one of the rooms set apart for the use of the delegates in the Parliament of Religions.... Purposeful, virile, strong, he stood out, man among men, able to hold his own."⁵

3. Adapted from *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1991), Vol. VII, p. 170.

4. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by His Eastern and Western Disciples, 6th Ed. Vol. 1, p. 428.

5. *ibid*, p. 429.

The news of Swamiji's thundering success at the Parliament was slow in reaching India but once it became known, it created an outburst of joy and national pride. Many recalled the old prophecy of Sri Ramakrishna: "Naren will shake the world to its foundations."

We must remember that Swamiji did not stop with preaching the Vedanta which has its origins in the ancient Hindu scriptures but also called other religions to his aid. He had, when speaking of 'My Life and Mission' in California in January, 1900, described as to how he and his brother-disciples received their ideas from Sri Ramakrishna and together agreed that this ideal had to be spread. He continued: "And not only spread, but made practical. That is to say, we must show the spirituality of the Hindus, the mercifulness of the Buddhists, the activity of the Christians and the brotherhood of the Mohammedans, by our practical lives."⁶

Swami Vivekananda clearly saw the need to employ education as an instrument for social and economic progress. But he scoffed at mere book-learning and memory-training, saying "...We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas...If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world and encyclopaedias are the Rishis."⁷ He was also an ardent champion of women's education and often quoted Manu: "Daughters should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons."⁸

Swamiji realized that the foremost quality which a people require is strength and the

6. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (1991), Vol. VIII, pp. 79-80.

7. *ibid*, Vol. III, p. 302.

8. *ibid*, Vol. V, p. 26.

lesson that he imparted, especially to the youth and the children of India, was the lesson of strength. Some years later, Mahatma Gandhi taught us the same lesson, namely that we should remain fearless. I believe that today, more than ever before, our young men and women have to become more and more familiar with the teachings of Swami Vivekananda and draw inspiration from them. We have to read what he taught and wrote and learn from his teachings. And if we do so, I have no doubt that the difficult problems which face our country will become easier of solution.

I would like to invite your attention to the fact that Swami Vivekananda was, politically, far ahead of his time in the importance he attached to the masses, the indignation he displayed on their exploitation, the pride he showed in India's ancient culture and religion and his burning desire for the country to receive the benefit of western science and technology, without falling into the trap of slavish imitation. I feel that the ideas which he propounded were indeed revolutionary for the India of his day and age and had a tremendous impact on subsequent political thinking and action in our country. He often used to say: "One ounce of practice is worth 20,000 tons of big talk."⁹

Secularism and socialism are not the only fields in which Swami Vivekananda helped the climate that obtains in modern India. His understanding of Vedanta and of different religions made him an inveterate opponent of the terrible practice of untouchability which he strongly denounced. He was also quick to realize that the peace which came from satiation with activity was qualitatively quite different from that which came from helplessness and despair. He,

therefore, stood for all such activity as would result in increase in production and the removal of poverty. To him, however, material development was only a transitional stage towards spiritual development and not a substitute for it. Like Gandhiji, he was in favour of a limitation of material requirements; if he wanted material development, he did so especially for the masses so that they were able to meet their essential needs. Gandhiji wrote about him in 1941: "Surely Swami Vivekananda's writings need no introduction from anybody. They make their own irresistible appeal."

On this occasion, I am reminded also of Swamiji's stirring call to humanity: "Unfurl the banner of love," he thundered, "Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached."¹⁰ The goal, he told his disciples, was the recognition of one's identity with the Universal Reality and, as such, with the identity of everyone else. 'If you want to help others' he told them, 'your little self must go.... In this age, as on the one hand people have to be immensely practical, so on the other hand they have to acquire deep spiritual knowledge.' I believe that by saying so, Swami Vivekananda anticipated Acharya Vinoba Bhave who also worked for combining science with spirituality in the modern world.

Swamiji's acute concern for the poor stood out when he said: "...Let each one of us pray day and night for the down-trodden millions of India who are held fast by poverty, priestcraft and tyranny—pray day and night for them. I care more to preach to them than to the high and the rich.... Him I call a Mahatman who feels for the poor...."¹¹

⁹. *ibid*, Vol. III, p. 212.

¹⁰. *ibid*, p. 430.

¹¹. *ibid*, Vol. V, p. 58.

Centuries earlier, in Maharashtra, Saint Tukaram had sung:

जे का रंजले गांजले,
ह्यांसी म्हणे जो आपूले ।
तोची साधू ओलखावा,
देव तेवेची जाणावा ॥

—तुकाराम गाथा

Translation

Know him who looks upon the afflicted and tormented as his own, to be a sage, a veritable manifestation of God.

In this Centenary Year of Swamiji's Bhārat Parikramā during the course of which he stood on this very soil of Kerala and of his brilliant participation in the Parliament of Religions, we do well to recall his teachings and his life's work in the service of humanity. Just as the Parikramā helped to weave the threads of our cultural unity into a harmonizing pattern and became an important link in the re-awakening of our national consciousness, so also, at Chicago, Swamiji gave a new perspective of Religion and introduced India to the West, indeed to Indians themselves.

But it is not enough to only revere the person Vivekananda, it is the ideas, the principles Swami Vivekananda put before us that need to be understood, accepted and implemented. Only then would we have truly paid homage to Swamiji's hallowed memory and done justice to his legacy.

Let us, therefore, resolve anew to act upon Swami Vivekananda's inspiring message and endeavour to become strong of heart, strong of mind and have the strength never to submit to injustice and wrong-doing. It is my prayer and fervent hope that our countrymen of today and tomorrow, particularly our children and our youth, will try to emulate the shining example of Swami Vivekananda in successfully accomplishing the challenging tasks of national re-construction and social change that lie ahead.

May I also once again express my gratitude to the Centenary Celebrations Committee and the numerous devotees and admirers of Swami Vivekananda who are present today and thank them for their kind invitation. I extend my greetings and felicitation to all of you and pray for your success and happiness in the years to come.

JAI HIND

On the eve of his departure an English friend asked, "Swami, how do you like now your motherland after four years' experience of the luxurious, glorious, powerful West?" His significant reply was: "India I loved before I came away. Now the very dust of India has become holy to me, the very air is now to me holy; it is now the holy land, the place of pilgrimage, the 'irtha!'"

Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern & Western disciples,
Edition VI, Vol. 2, p. 152.

Reminiscences of The Holy Mother

KUMUD BANDHU SEN

This article first appeared in this journal in April 1952. The author's memories have refreshing and moving appeal of their own.

It was a memorable day in my life when for the first time I had the privilege of coming in contact with the Holy Mother (Saradamani Devi) in Calcutta. I was then a schoolboy preparing for the Entrance examination. It was about the middle of 1895.

I would frequently go to Swami Yogananda who then resided at Balaram Bose's house at 57, Ramkanta Bose's Street, Baghbazar, in the northern part of Calcutta. He occupied the room where Sri Ramakrishna used to take rest whenever he came there from Dakshineswar to meet his disciples and devotees. This room had been converted as the bedroom of Swami Yogananda, who used to sit in the hall adjoining it and give spiritual talks to the devotees and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna who came to visit him there. This hall was sometimes occupied by the Sannyasins of the Math which was then situated at Alambazar. The hall was also used as a parlour by Ramakrishna Bose, the son of Balaram Bose. It is needless to mention that the whole family of Ramakrishna Bose was devoted to Sri Ramakrishna and his Sannyasin disciples. Sri Ramakrishna used to mention Balaram Bose as one of his *rasad-dārs* (suppliers of his needs). His piety, devotion, and love, his munificence and his sincere eagerness for serving the Master and his beloved disciples, his pure, noble, and ideal character are well known to the readers of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and *Srī Rāmākṛṣṇa Līlā-prasānga*. Out of reverence for Balaram Bose, people called the house as 'Balaram Mandir', sanctified by Sri Ramakrishna and also by his spiritual consort—the Holy

Mother, by Swami Vivekananda and his Gurubhais and their disciples and devotees. The hall, together with the said room, is now used as a sanctuary—the room as a temple of Sri Ramakrishna and the hall as a place for holding religious discourses, devotional songs, and *kīrtan*.

It was from Swami Yogananda that I first came to know that the Holy Mother had come to Calcutta and was residing at the house of one Sarat Sarkar, a young devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. The house was situated in a narrow lane just to the west of Balaram Mandir.

Next day, in the morning, after taking a dip in the Ganges, I went there, with some flowers—mainly red lotuses—and sweets. At the entrance of the house was standing Sarat Sarkar, who led me to a big room on the upper storey and told me to wait as the Holy Mother was then performing Puja. He then sent one of his relations to inform the Holy Mother about my having come for her *darśan*. Within a quarter of an hour I was asked by Golap Mā to come and meet the Holy Mother. Golap Ma had been standing at the threshold of a room situated to the north of and adjoining that where I had been waiting.

With a throbbing heart, filled with emotion, I slowly advanced towards the room, after handing over the sweets to Golap Ma (whom I did not know till then but came to know afterwards from Sarat Sarkar). I saw the Holy Mother standing by the side of Golap Ma. A white sheet of cloth covered her entire body, but her

feet were uncovered. I reverently placed all the flowers at her feet, and made obeisance, with deep veneration. Absolute silence prevailed all round and I was quite a stranger to both of them. In silence the Holy Mother placed her hand on my head as a blessing. It was a divine touch of affection and benediction which enthralled me. I felt in her presence a thrill, an elevating influence, the depth of which, as a boy, I could not fathom then; but nevertheless I was conscious of a sense of sublimity which that solemn atmosphere had instilled into me. There was no talk between us and she put no questions about me. In a few minutes when Mother had gone away, Golop Ma offered me some fruits and sweets as *prasād*. I went downstairs, with great exultation, and met Swami Trigunatitananda, who was then entering the house. He smilingly told me, "Oh, I see that you are a very clever boy! In my absence you quietly came and saw the Holy Mother."

It will not be inconsistent to mention here that Swami Trigunatitananda used to stay at that house then in order to look after the Holy Mother and attend to the comforts of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna who came there for her *darśan*. Swami Yogananda too took special care to look after the comforts of the Mother. I considered myself fortunate that I first saw the Mother through the kindness of Swami Yogananda.

Since then I used to go to see the Mother almost every day. After taking my bath in the Ganges, I would go with flowers to Sarat Sarkar's house for Mother's *darśan*. The Holy Mother stayed there for about a month and then went to Jayrambati. Though my name only had been mentioned to her, she never enquired who or what I was. Whenever I went to her she was gracious enough to appear before me, with Golap Ma or some other woman attendant, and to allow me to

offer flowers at her feet. There would be no talk, no searching enquiry as to who I was or whence I came. I used to offer flowers at her feet, like a worshipper would before his divine image. Yes, an Image—not made of clay, stone, or bronze, but a living, ideal, human being. Undisturbed silence would prevail during my visits, but this silence was not dumb or mute. It was far more communicative than spoken words. This silence was sublime, solemn, purifying, and penetrating. It glistened with grace and a sweet tenderness springing from the perennial flow of the living kindness of the divine Mother. Even as a boy I felt this silence was neither a natural shyness before a stranger or a mere formality of social convention, but a sacred silent communication which touched the innermost recess of one's heart and stirred up a feeling of hope and security. In my boyish sentiment I imagined that as the secrets of God are hidden, even so the unbounded grace and affection of the Holy Mother were hidden under the cover of her person. Her great and powerful presence cleansed the thoughts of my heart and inspired me with elevating ideas and lofty ideals. During these silent interviews with the Mother I cannot recollect even a single day when I was not blessed with a new inspiration of hope and peace and I always felt inwardly that I came to one who was more than my parents.

Swami Trigunatitananda often took me to task for going frequently to the Swamis at Balaram Mandir and Alambazar Math and thereby neglecting my studies. He reproachfully told me, "Well, boy, you must read your school text-books attentively. Do you think that realization of God is an easy matter? One who cannot concentrate his mind on his studies can never do so in prayer and meditation. It is far more difficult than the passing of examinations. First acquire knowledge through books and lead a pure

and clean life which will help you in meditation and prayer." I remained silent and listened to his advice with reverence. As I used to go there almost every day for meeting the Holy Mother, Swami Trigunatitananda was very kind and gave me a Stotra on Holy Mother composed by him in Sanskrit after the manner of the *Caṇḍī*. He advised me to recite it every day early in the morning. It was a fairly long Stotra, and unfortunately it was lost by a neighbour of mine who took it from me.

Manindra Krishna Gupta, a lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and a good friend and nextdoor neighbour of mine, was the grand-nephew of the illustrious poet of Bengal, Iswara Chandra Gupta, who was also a great literary genius. Iswara Chandra edited a Bengali daily, and Manindra continued to edit and manage the paper. When Swami Vivekananda returned from the West in 1897, Manindra was in extreme financial stringency. Swamiji heard all about it from his Gurubhais. One day he called him and helped him privately with a sum of one thousand rupees as a gift. The Swamis of the Math and other devotees used to come to Manindra's house occasionally. They all looked upon him as one of their Gurubhais and called him Khokā or Mani. In the course of conversation, the Holy Mother once told me, "Manindra was a mere boy when he came to Thakur (meaning Sri Ramakrishna). During his illness Manindra and another boy of the same age were fanning him on *Dol-yātrā* (Holi) day. Many others were playing outside with coloured water as is usual on that occasion. Thakur insisted on their going and joining the merry festival. But they did not move and continued to fan him. At this, Thakur, with tears in his eyes, exclaimed, 'Ah, my Rāmlālā is serving me through these boys. They are my Rāmlālā'."

One day, in our presence, Swami Trigunatitananda read out to Mother a letter from Swami Vivekananda. It was addressed to his Gurubhais in the Math and Swamiji enquired therein how the expenses of the Mother were being met. He had asked them all to read the letter and also to have it read before the Holy Mother, Golap Ma, and Yogin Ma, and had appealed to his Gurubhais to preach the message of Sri Ramakrishna and devote their lives for doing good to others, even at the cost of sacrificing everything for that ideal. All were silent and felt inspired with the high ideal of Sri Ramakrishna as put by Swamiji. After a few minutes Golap Ma, addressing Swami Trigunatitananda, said, "Well, Sārādā (that was his pre-monastic name), Mother says, 'Naren is an instrument of Thakur who makes him write these words for inspiring his children and devotees for doing his work, for doing good to all in the world. What Naren writes is true and must take effect hereafter'." All present were delighted to hear these words of the Mother, giving vent as it were to their own feelings which were surging within their hearts, but could not be expressed in words. That day was a blessed day indeed!

A thrilling sensation passed through my veins in that solemn atmosphere. We all returned home with a unique fullness in our hearts and unbounded reverence and admiration for Swamiji, bearing in our minds the pertinent remarks of the Holy Mother. Referring to this stay of the Mother in the house of Sarat Sarkar, his friends and others would say, "Sarat, you have performed Durga Puja for about a month where people do it for three days only. Whereas they worship a clay image, you have worshipped a living image of the Divine Mother."

It was November 1895, during which month the Holy Mother performed the Jagaddhātri Puja, as she used to do every

year. Though I could not go to Jayrambati (where Mother was staying at the time) for the occasion, owing to special circumstances, other friends who went there came back and related to me graphic descriptions of the place and its charming surroundings. Mother was so kind and affectionate that she looked after them as her own children and they all were comfortable and happy. In one voice they told me that they never experienced such motherly care and affection even in their own homes.

A middle-aged gentleman who came back with the above party from Jayrambati and stayed with Manindra for two or three days, had a keen desire for obtaining the blessings of a Guru who could help him in the path of spiritual practice for reaching the desired goal. He could not attend to his normal duties as usual, and always felt eager how he could proceed onward in spiritual life. One night he saw in a dream a brilliantly radiant figure whom he could at once recognize as Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna pointed to him a woman with equal brilliance and commanded him to go to Jayrambati. The gentleman at once started alone for the place. He reached Jayrambati and saw the Holy Mother. He was received by the Mother with great warmth of affection and kindness. On the day of the Jagaddhātri Puja he was initiated by the Mother. He told me that he was surprised when he saw the Mother—exactly the same as he had seen in his dream. In this connection Manindra also remarked that he had heard Sri Ramakrishna say, during his illness, “My work has been half done and she (meaning his spiritual consort, the Holy Mother) will do the rest for the good of humanity.”

* * *

“Whose blessed son are you ?”

“I am thy son, Mother.”

That was the first time in my life I heard the voice of the Holy Mother who addressed me with a question in an affectionate tone and my reply to her query seemed to please her. This took place in a house (generally known as *haludgudām-bāḍī*, meaning ‘a godown for storing turmeric’) situated in the northern quarter of Calcutta, within Baghbazar area. The house was a three-storeyed one, the ground-floor of which was used as a godown and the two upper floors had been let out for residential purposes. In the eastern block of the house, on the first floor, were two rooms, with an open space between them. In the eastern corner of this open space there was a short staircase for going to the second floor, where the Holy Mother used to reside with Golap-Ma, and where Gopaler-Ma and other women devotees used to come and live for a few days at frequent intervals. There were three rooms facing a wide, covered veranda on the south ; on the west was an open, spacious roof wherefrom the Holy Mother used to have a clear view of the Ganges for which she possessed a special love and regard even from her early days.

On hearing my reply, Gopaler-Ma, who was standing near by, said to the Holy Mother, “My Gopal will bring many beautiful children to you by His magical fascination.” Mother stood before me at the moment without covering her face, unlike what she generally used to do when appearing before strangers, and I had her *darśan* with unspeakable joy at heart. Her calm compassionate, and gracious look, her face beaming with a radiant glow of divine mercy and loving-kindness, and her tender and affectionate maternal majesty inspired within me a feeling of hope and trust in her and illumined my mind with the vision of the Divine which alone is our refuge and strength. I offered flowers at her feet. Mother asked

me where I lived and whether my parents were alive. I replied, "No, Mother, there is none. I have lost both of my parents within a year." In a sympathetic and affectionate voice, Mother said to me, "Oh, what a misery! But, child, don't be worried. These earthly ties are transitory; today they seem the be-all and end-all of life and tomorrow they vanish. Your real tie is with God—with Thakur (meaning Sri Ramakrishna). Come here frequently and take *prasād*." With deep emotion and tears in my eyes, I addressed her saying, "Mother, I have got you—the Divine Mother—as my true mother; this is my great consolation. I want only your blessings and grace." Mother said, "Thakur has already showered his blessings on you, my boy. Whenever there is a holiday at your school, come and stay here. Now, take this *prasād* and go to Yogen and Rakhai whose holy company will elevate you and dispel all grief and sorrow from your mind." I immediately went downstairs with the fruits and sweets which the Holy Mother had given me with her own hands.

Swami Yogananda was very much pleased to hear from me my conversation with the Mother. He gave me some advice as to how I should attend to my studies and at the same time practise control of mind. In the meantime, Swami Brahmananda came near and said to me, "Well, do you take regular physical exercise in the morning and afternoon? Both the mind and the body should be developed simultaneously. Stick to cleanliness. Don't hobnob with those boys who neglect their studies and who drag you into profitless pastimes. There are also mischievous boys who indulge in telling lies. They tempt other boys into evil ways. Shun them altogether. Don't even talk to them. You must be truthful. You may come here after school-hours and listen to our words of advice. That will help you to acquire

knowledge and become more spiritual-minded. Remember that during student-life the ideal must be *brahmacarya*. You must be pure in body, mind, and speech." These words were very illuminating and impressed me much.

Master Mahāshaya ('M.', the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*) used to come to this place every Saturday afternoon and stay on till Sunday evening, and sometimes even till Monday morning. I too would stay there often during the night with Master Mahāshaya. He used to relate to us many inspiring anecdotes about Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. All her devotees used to come there for *darśan* and a few aspirants got initiation from the Mother. One day I heard her say to a woman disciple, "Sometimes people of little faith and of unsteady mind come for initiation. I mentally read their past history from their very appearance and behaviour and ask them whether they were previously initiated by someone else. When they reply in the affirmative, I tell them, 'Strange! You have come again for initiation! You have no faith in the *mantra* already given by your Guru! What is the *mantra* but the holy name of God. Why have you come for initiation again?' Then they beg to be forgiven and again implore me with tears in their eyes. I cannot bear anybody's tears. I pray to Thakur for strengthening their faith and through his direction I give them initiation in addition to the *mantra* already received by them. This additional *mantra* is given for fresh stimulus and strength in order to increase their faith in the name of God." The woman disciple observed, "Through your grace and blessing they will be saved." Mother immediately said, "No, no; I am nobody. It is Thakur who graciously blesses them. I am only his instrument."

Once I went to the Mother's place in the

evening for *darśan*. Instead of going to meet the Mother first, I sat listening to Swami Yogananda's absorbing conversation with Devendra Nath Mazumdar, a lay disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Yogananda said: "Thakur was wisdom personified. He often told us that the Divine Mother had taught him everything. His teachings and parables show his power of keen observation, deep thinking, and subtle reasoning. They throw new light on and illumine the mind and dispel all doubts and problems. We did not understand him then. But, now, as time goes on, we are getting glimpses of the infinite knowledge and unbounded love that the human form (of the Master) enshrined. Even his ordinary utterances and actions seemed to us to have a deep meaning. Truly, the Vaiṣṇava devotees say of Chaitanya that whatever he did in deep ecstasy and inebriation of God was a divine dispensation (*līlā*). We know this now about Thakur through our own experiences. Even from his early childhood he was a God-intoxicated man. His wisdom, character, and unique personality drew people to him from the highest to the lowest rank of society. We never saw him despise anybody, be he a sinner or a saint. Ordinary people will not be able to fathom the depth of the meaning of his teachings and message, of his wonderful life, unstained purity and infinite love, of his all-embracing spiritual realization, and of his unprecedented *tapasyā* and renunciation. His life is a demonstration of all the spiritual truths expressed in the scriptures and realized by prophets and *Avatāras*. Naren (Swami Vivekananda) was specially brought by him from the *sapta-ṛṣi-maṇḍala* for preaching his lofty ideals, for the elevation of the masses, and for the good of humanity." Devendra Nath Mazumdar also spoke on Sri Ramakrishna and emphasized the grace and kindness he showered on him at a time when he had resolved to renounce the world.

Thakur reminded Devendra of his grief-stricken old mother by way of consolation and said, "Your brother Surendra is dead and it is your religious duty to look after the mother who is to you a living 'Mother of the Universe'. Renunciation arising from grief and misery does not last long. Live in the world and serve your mother—this is your primary duty and religion. Do it sincerely and you will be able to advance in the path of spirituality." I listened to these talks with rapt attention. As it became late at night, Devendra Nath Mazumdar went away. Immediately after his departure it struck me that I had not yet seen the Holy Mother though I had come there specially for her *darśan*. I told Swami Yogananda about it. He called Golap-Ma and told her to inform the Holy Mother about me. But Golap-Ma replied, "Mother has gone to bed." Seeing me dejected and disappointed, Swami Yogananda told me, "There is no help now. Mother is asleep. Come tomorrow." As soon as he finished saying this, Golap-Ma called me and said, "Mother is waiting for you, come immediately." My heart leapt with joy and I at once went upstairs and was fortunate in touching the feet of the Holy Mother. Mother asked me, "Why did you delay so long?" I replied, "Mother, I was listening to the conversation between Yogen Maharaj and Deven Mazumdar so attentively that I forgot everything else for the time being." Mother smiled and blessed me saying, "Oh, I see you were with Thakur and enjoying his divine *līlā*, so you forgot your Mother!" I remained speechless as I could not find any suitable reply. Mother told me softly, "Go home now; it is already late at night." With a joyful heart I went downstairs and took leave of the Swamis living there. I then thought within myself what deep affection and kindness were shown to me by the Holy Mother! She came out, leaving her bed at night, only to grant me *darśan*.

Mysticism in The Vakhs of Lal Ded

A. N. DHAR

(Continued from the previous issue)

Lalla expresses her aspiration for the Divine through the metaphor of one's being ferried across the "ocean of *samsāra*". Through its use in several of her *vākhs*, which are often recited and sung to musical accompaniment in Kashmir, the metaphor has assumed the character of a loaded symbol—a highly suggestive image that continues to impress the popular imagination. The *vākh* given below employs this image in a crucial context, conveying a spiritual longing of great intensity:

I am towing my boat on the sea
With a slender thread ;
Would that God heard my prayer
And ferried me across !
Like water vanishing
In plates of unbaked clay,
All my striving is proving futile ;
How I pine to get back home !

The *vākh* expresses Lalla's sense of futility of human efforts in general ; in particular it conveys her desperate feeling that her striving for union with God is bearing no fruit. Out of total dependence on Him, she cries for divine help for the fulfilment of her aspiration. In a state of deep anguish she longs for her safe return "home" to her soul's real abode. The image of being taken across the ocean in a boat occurs in another *vākh* where Lalla brings in the related motif of paying the fare to the boatman: "*Atha nav taras dim kya ba.*"¹⁰ In yet another *vākh* which closes with the

line: "*kibal tasudaya toruka nad,*"¹¹ the concept represented by the metaphor "crossing the ocean" is linked with that of "divine call"—suggesting that God's will is the supreme factor in the seeker's spiritual accomplishment. As we read Lalla's *vākhs* making use of the boat image, directly or through suggestion, our familiarity with the *Rāmāyana* at once brings to our mind the episode of Kevat and Lord Rāma, in which Kevat prays to the Lord to grant him a safe passage across *samsār*. Tennyson's lyric, entitled "Crossing the Bar," which expresses a longing similar to Lalla's, could also come to mind: for safe spiritual voyage back to the soul's permanent abode in heaven. The imagery involving the idea of crossing the ocean of *samsāra*, suggesting release from the allurements and dangers that the sensory world holds for the seeker, is specially pervasive in Indian mystical literature. Lalla has very deftly woven it into the texture of her *vākhs* in appropriate contexts, investing the images with fresh significance.

As the reader surmises, during what probably was a phase of intense longing for God in Lalla's life, she must have passed through the agony of separation like the great bhaktas of other times. One is reminded of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's experience about a century ago—an experience of extreme mortification, of the kind gone through by great seekers when they feel alienated from God and pine for union, which is characterized in Christian mysticism

10. For the full text of the *vākh*, see Kotru's *Lal Ded*, page 3.

11. *Ibid.*, page 15.

as "the dark night of the soul." We thus hear a note of intense pain in the vākh of Lalla:

I ground my heart in the mortar of love,
Roasted and burnt it, then ate it up;
Evil desires left me, and I remained calm,
Yet hardly do I know
If, for all this, I shall die or live!

On the one hand, we notice here that Lalla gives us an account of the determination with which she pursued the Beloved, suffering silently (aptly conveyed by the phrase in English: "eat one's heart out") as the bhaktas do when they feel alienated from God; the more they suffer, the more intense grows their longing for the Divine. On the other hand, Lalla is not here sure of attaining her goal; she is in a state of uncertainty which is in itself a torture. Such is often the state of the true mystic, who experiences divine despair in its extreme form. This "despair" actually heralds for him "spiritual dawn"—a mystical state of joy that inevitably follows the dark night of the soul.

In this vākh, Lalla uses appropriate metaphors drawn from the butcher's trade and the culinary art: mincing and pounding of meat before it is roasted and eaten up. Lalla lived at a time when non-vegetarianism must have been in vogue in Kashmir; she gives us an accurate description of the process involved in preparing a non-vegetarian dish. Like the metaphysical poet, Donne, she does not hesitate using images drawn from areas of experience remote from the meaning she actually wants to communicate and illuminate. Here an important phase in her spiritual life is suggested through images bordering on the gruesome. Lalla paints her situation as unbearably painful, which indicates how advanced she was in her devotion to God, matching the questing spirit of a great explorer.

In line 2 of the foregoing vākh, Lalla tells us that evil thoughts left her: "*kvakala cajim...*"; in the remaining lines she conveys the great pain she had gone through in God's quest. The ideas and images are repeated (and are reinforced) in the vākh that follows:

I burned the dross of my mind,
Killed my heart;
My fame as Lalla spread afar
When, in total surrender,
I spread the borders of my clothes
At His feet.

Thus Lalla refers to her inward control and purification achieved through self-mortification. As her devotion gained in intensity she mastered the discipline of self-surrender, which brings calm of mind. In the process her doors of perception were cleansed and she was now fit for "illumination". This is confirmed by lines three and four of another vākh of hers, which are given below:

*Lolki nar sati valija bujum,
śakara lobum tamiya sutiya*

wherein Lalla reiterates that she "roasted" her heart in the fire of love whereby she found Śaṅkara.

In the remaining part of the present essay, I shall discuss a sizeable number of Lalla's vākhs in which we have clear evidence of her accomplishment as an advanced yoginī. It is on the strength of her own realization that she instructs the listener—the potential pupil or aspirant—to undertake the arduous "journey" to the Abode of the Lord, describing the "steps" through appropriate images and metaphors when the meaning would not otherwise be accessible, and at times through simple and straightforward words when she need not be oblique or "difficult" in her manner. Invariably, her tone is

confident when she communicates the doctrine to us as a spiritual teacher. As we read or listen to her vākhs, her words come home to us as much as they stir our hearts. We feel convinced that Lalla has seen the Divine close at hand, found Him within her soul and realized His presence around her. She often speaks of the Deity as dwelling within the human frame itself and, at the same time, does not forget to tell us that Śiva is all-pervasive. Her spiritual doctrine is consistently theistic, and as maintained earlier, it is seen to be no different essentially from the doctrine of Advaita Vedānta or that of the Trika, and it also parallels the monotheism of Islam. The important point to note is that Lalla's vākhs characterize the Divine as attainable purely through contemplation and self-discipline, and not reachable only by the elect. The reader can see that all that Lalla has to say about *sādhana* is based on her own experience, there being nothing derivative about the wisdom her utterances embody. Lalla is a Master in her own right. Her aspiration for the Divine, revealed in the vākhs we examined earlier, is intense and unmistakable indeed; at the same time, her sense of fulfilment is equally positive and convincing. It comes out triumphantly in many of her vākhs which constitute, together with the vākhs of the type examined hitherto, as illustrative of her aspiration for the Divine, what I spoke of in the introduction as the poetry of direct mystical experience.

When we take into account the implications of the self-discipline emphasized in a number of Lalla's vākhs, we inevitably conclude that the goal of spirituality is but attainable through the *hard* way—a fact universally acknowledged by seers and saints. Yet this is to state only half the truth. There is another aspect of spirituality—the fact of Grace, what the Indian sages characterize as *anugraha*. Lalla, the

devotee, does talk about it in connection with her spiritual quest. The bhaktas are known to experience divine favour at the "appointed" time, when their devotion attains the right intensity. Having found the Divine at hand, thus basking in His glory, the Masters have spoken of Him as easily reachable too, if the seeker is all sincere, firmly resolved and totally dedicated. For such a seeker, the spiritual path, often described as "difficult", turns out to be smooth and straight. In several of Lalla's vākhs, we find the tone very reassuring, holding out prospects of an immediate fulfilment to the aspiring devotee.

We shall first turn to the vākhs which stress self-control as the essential element of *sādhana*. In the following vākh Lalla tells us of the state of purity she attained, in which she was indifferent to praise and blame alike:

Let them abuse me or call me names,
Let them say what they like,
Let them worship me with flowers;
Taintless as I am, this would do them
no good.

The inference that we draw from this vākh is that Lalla, during her wanderings as a God-intoxicated yoginī, received kindness and adoration from some people, taunts and jeers from others, while there must have been still others who did not take any notice of her at all. In her state of spiritual exaltation, she must have paid little attention to how she was being treated by the people she came across, ignoring alike their words of praise and of blame. Here is another vākh, uttered almost in the same vein as the preceding one. Lalla speaks herein of her resolve to put up with abuses and not allow anything to disturb her mental poise:

Let abuses be heaped upon me,
I shall not feel hurt in mind

A Review Article

VISVANATH CHATTERJEE

THE WAY TO GOD: As Taught By Sri Ramakrishna, by Swami Lokeswarananda. Published by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta, 700-029. 457 pages plus xv: Rs. 75/-.

Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) is one of religion's all-time greats—a *sādhaka* and *dharmaguru* par excellence. In him we have a modern incarnation of Lord Krishna, Who promised to be born anew in every age to give succour to the innocent, to destroy the wicked, and to establish the rule of righteousness. Sri Ramakrishna believed in the principle of plain living and high thinking and lived and preached this ideal. He led his disciples on the path of the spirit and showed them the way to God. In his heartening message to humanity he made no distinction between Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others, which stands out clearly in the pages of *Srī Rāmākṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta*, (translated into English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*).

Swami Loweswarananda is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, a prolific author and a persuasive speaker. In the book under review: *The Way to God: As Taught By Sri Ramakrishna*, Swami Lokeswarananda has written a lucid commentary on Ramakrishna and his teachings. It is as remarkable for its spiritual insights as for its mass of relevant detail about the Master and his disciples, and as well, the Indian religious and mystical tradition in general. Small wonder then, that the book offers inspiration and practical guidance in such an abundant measure to all spiritual seekers, irrespective of their religious affiliation or nationality.

The language of the *Ramakrishna Gospel* has been rightly described as deceptively

simple. The Master could convey the profoundest thoughts in the language of everyday life. Like Shakespeare, he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read truth; he looked inwards and found it there.

The author explains what Sri Ramakrishna wants us to do to attain God. The more serious and universal implications of Sri Ramakrishna's precepts are effectively brought out by him and these are placed in their philosophical perspectives. He makes it easier for the enlightened reader to appreciate the Master's message better and to derive greater benefit from it.

The Way To God As Taught By Sri Ramakrishna, in English, is the very satisfactory translation of Swami Lokeswarananda's *Tava Kathāmṛtam* by Mrs. Susan Walters. The original Bengali book has already been recognised as a valuable addition to spiritual literature both by scholarly assessment and by popular acclaim. It was drawn from the Swami's lectures on *The Kathāmṛta* delivered at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta which received accolades from a large and perceptive audience. The present English translation makes it possible for a wider circle to read the discourses with profit and pleasure.

The seminal passages of the *Ramakrishna Gospel* have been chosen and discussed by the Swami with loving care. The topics have been selected because of the importance

given to them by Sri Ramakrishna himself. These topics lead us to the steps of the Celestial Temple on the Delectable Mountains on which the Master often waxed eloquent when talking to M. and other disciples.

The Introduction gives the story of Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary life in a nutshell. It is followed by an equally well-written chapter on M. and *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. The following eighteen illuminating chapters open up vistas of spiritual exploration. Certainly the way to God-realization as taught by Sri Ramakrishna is no easy path strewn with roses. Those who want to set out on the path of the Spirit have to develop not only holiness, but also patience and fortitude. The path is as difficult to traverse as 'the razor's edge', to use a well-known Upaniṣadic expression, and one has to take courage in both hands if one is to be a voyager on the sea of eternity.

Sri Ramakrishna has asked us not to forget the goal of human life, which according to him is the realization of God. We have to try our level best to achieve this goal. As for the 'knowledge' of Brahman or the Supreme Reality, the less we bother about it the better. Who can adequately know the infinite God? Is it not enough to know only that much of Him which will enable us to love, and so realize, Him? Nor should we make vain attempts to describe the Absolute, Who is essentially ineffable. He is also the Supreme Reality, everything else is illusory.

God, Sri Ramakrishna teaches, is the indivisible *Sacchidānanda*. The author pertinently reminds us of Swami Vivekananda's definition of this term as 'Existence-Absolute, Knowledge-Absolute, and Bliss-Absolute'. Sri Ramakrishna draws our attention to the *Viśvarūpa* universal form of

God when he asserts: "It is He who has become the universe and its living beings." In fact, all that we see is nothing but the manifestation of God's Energy. This Energy alone enables a man to do anything.

Sri Ramakrishna's celebrated distinction between the 'Unripe I' (our limited self) and the "Ripe I" (our God-centred self) has naturally reminded the learned author of the *dvā suparṇā* (the two birds) passage of the *Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad*. The 'Ripe I' knows that this shrine of the body should not be left dark; rather, it should be illumined with the lamp of Wisdom. Sri Ramakrishna assures us that we are not weak or miserable; nor are we sinners. We are not only pure, perfect and infinite, but are also endowed with infinite power. There is a song in the *Ramakrishna Gospel*: "Dwell, O mind, within yourself; / Enter no other's home. / If you but seek there, you will find / All you are searching for." The well-read author draws our attention to a similar idea in Shelley's "Stanzas Written in Dejection, near Naples": "...that content surpassing wealth / The sage in meditation found / And walked with inward glory crowned."

Truthfulness, to Sri Ramakrishna, was the supreme virtue, and no wonder that his greatest and most famous disciple said: "Everything can be sacrificed for truth, but truth cannot be sacrificed for anything." One can be rooted in truth even if one is a householder. As for the choice between the householder's life and that of the monk, the Master said: "I tell people that there is nothing wrong in the life of the world. But they must live in the world as a maidservant lives in her master's house." Householders should not only practise detachment, but should adopt the habit of regularity in the worship and thought of God. One may even regard the Divine Lord of the Universe with the attitude of

conjugal love, like that of a lover for her beloved, of Radha for her eternal consort, Sri Krishna, or of Mīra for her Giridhārī-Nāgara. As the author rightly points out, there is nothing impure in the story of Radha and Krishna. Radha represents the *jīvātman*, the individual soul, and Krishna is the *Paramātman*, the Supreme Soul. She symbolizes the intense human longing for union with the Godhead. The name *Rādhā* itself means "running towards God" and the word *Kṛṣṇa* comes from the Sanskrit root *kṛṣ*, meaning "to attract." Many Sufi mystical poets have also looked upon God as the Divine Beloved.

Sri Ramakrishna said, "If you must be mad, be mad for God alone." True knowledge, which is the knowledge of Oneness, the Vedantic knowledge of Non-duality, leads us to the acceptance of the world as a manifestation of Brahman. This realization can only increase our 'fine frenzy', our divine ecstasy in God-communion. Even

our ordinary worldly activities cannot be an obstruction in the spiritual path, provided they are performed unselfishly and in devotion to God. As for Sri Ramakrishna, he was often seen in ecstasy or in the state of *samādhi*, "that blessed mood," in the words of Wordsworth, when "we are laid asleep, / In body, and become a living soul." During these strange fits of divine absorption, the Master's entire body used to be filled with an extraordinary splendour.

Reading *The Way To God* has been an experience for the reviewer and he, who has sometimes been fortunate enough to listen to some of the author's discourses, could almost hear the living voice of the author in the pages of this book. There is not the least doubt that the book will be regarded as a valuable contribution to religious literature. For the reader-devotee, it will serve as a sort of Jacob's ladder whereon his soul can attempt to ascend to God.

Some sing of Him as at once the nearest and the most remote, there is no end to His description. Countless have tried to describe Him, but He still stands beyond description.

—Guru Nanak

In Search

TOVE MAJUMDAR

The author reflects on her early spiritual struggle and how, at last, she was providentially directed to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. She describes the rigours of church-going in her childhood in the early twenties. Mrs. Majumdar was born in Denmark and at present lives in Sweden.

Persons known to me ask this question: "We want to know how you became interested in spirituality, Indian culture and philosophy. Please tell us why you have been roaming about India for months together searching for Sadhus, Yogis, and holy-men. We want to hear about your experiences."

I was born into the Church of Denmark which is Protestant Lutheran. In practice, this meant being baptized as a baby and being confirmed at the age of around fourteen. I was taught the prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven...", and also to pray to God whenever I wanted something. I remember trying out this system a couple of times when I was about seven years old. I was not quite convinced of the existence of God at that time. At school we were taught religion. This consisted of learning some psalms by heart and reading from the Old and New Testament. Off and on I was dragged to church, especially on Christmas and Easter holidays. I found church extremely boring and had no idea of what was going on, or what the priest was talking about. I remember the following story which I once read, and which summed up my own feelings about church-going fully. A little boy called Pieter had been to church with his grandmother for the first time in his life. When he returned home, his mother asked him: "Well, little Pieter, what was church like? How did you like it?"

"You see," said the little boy to his mother, "I sat on a bench, and many others also sat on benches. A man in a black dress with a white collar stood high up in a box. We didn't do anything nasty; nevertheless, this man scolded everybody and said all the time that we were great sinners."

It is said: "The first impression is the lasting impression." True or not, never in my life have I found any consolation or comfort either through churches or priests. On the other hand, however, I'm fully convinced that real peace and happiness can be found in one's own Self alone, while certain solitary chapels and holy hermitages can help us to a certain extent.

At the age of sixteen, I was sent to a French Convent School in Belgium. Although the purpose was primarily to learn French, the nuns showed more interest and spent more time in what they thought was important, namely, saving our souls and converting us to Catholicism—the one and only religion from their point of view. We were all Scandinavians, and most of us disliked their indoctrination and narrow outlook regarding religious freedom and belief. We had to wear uniforms with long sleeves in summer and winter alike. Sunbathing was out of the question as it was considered a sin to expose any part of the body. All these, I thought to be nonsensical and even ridiculous.

We were forced to go to church on Sundays. The Catholic Church is more ceremonious in its system of worship and belief. In the Protestant Church, for instance, there is no praying to the Virgin Mary or to the saints, no burning of candles or dipping of fingers in holy water. There is no making of the cross, or using rosaries, or kneeling down.

We were given instructions on how to behave in church. I always wanted to know the whys and why-nots of everything, but was always brushed off with, because it was a sin to do otherwise. No one explained why it was a sin. At my questioning I was told it was a sin even to ask too much. Why we absolutely had to cover our heads in church, I failed to understand. Why we had to kneel down just because everyone else did so, did not make any sense either; it could hardly make any difference to God.

Surely, He is not concerned in the least about what we wear, or what we eat and what religion we follow. Surely, He is also not concerned with what caste, colour, creed and nationality we belong to. What really matters is our purity of heart. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." The purer we are, the nearer we come to God, and true religion is being and becoming one with the Almighty who is our true existence. Then and then alone does one become truly spiritual. Doctrines and dogmas, temples and churches, rituals and forms are not indispensable to spiritual life; although in so far as they help us grow spiritually, we may of course accept them.

One Sunday I arrived purposely late for church, without wearing anything on my head and also remained seated when everybody else knelt down. The result was, besides a good scolding, confinement to my

room for three days. "That will give you time to reflect on and repent your sins. It's God's punishment," the nun told me.

"God's punishment?" I retorted. "No, definitely not. It's you who punish me."

I tried sincerely, however, to understand their teachings and the differences in faith. I wondered how grown-up people who ought to know better, accused each other of having the wrong faith. I decided to find out for myself just who was right and who was wrong. I discussed and talked with a number of nuns, priests and scholars, and even with the local people in the village. But the more I heard and saw, the more dejected I felt. I found much more suppression and much less freedom in the Catholic church than in the Protestant one. It seemed to me that in spite of so many prayers, kneeling down and making the cross, repetition of rosaries and muttering of holy names, those Catholics did not live up to the ideals of Christ any more than the Protestants did. Their hearts were set on meaningless details, the non-essentials of religion.

Years later when I lived in Italy shortly after the war, I was shocked to see the extreme poverty. For the first time in my life, I saw beggars—children as well as adults. I saw people lying in the street and other people passing by without casting a single glance at them. In Rome, I saw priests from the Vatican driving around in huge American cars while poor people ate sand-outs on the steps of St. Peter's. I thought of the treasures that belong to the Church, of which they give only a fraction to the needy, although they kept on accumulating more and more. What would Christ say if he returned to earth today? Surely, he would tell the church to distribute all their riches among the poor. If everybody, who represents the church, were

like Saint Francis of Assisi or Padre Pio, who was even persecuted by the Church, I'm sure that fewer would stray from the Catholic faith than is the case in Italy today.

Later when I returned to Denmark, I was, over the years, to talk and discuss with the missionaries who stood in the streets of Copenhagen and preached. I went to churches of different denominations such as Christian Scientists, American Mormons, the Spiritualistic Church, etc. Wherever I went, I was left with the same empty feeling. In none of these places did I feel or obtain the peace of mind by which to say, "Here I can stop and be content for ever."

I wondered what to believe in in all this confusion of opinions where everyone was content with what he knew best, each accusing the other of being wrong. Who was right, and who was wrong? Why did they all contradict not only one another but also themselves? My reaction was one big confusion. I was like searching in a labyrinth where one doesn't know whether he should turn right or left; what direction one should choose and follow in order to find the way out and reach one's goal.

I read and studied a number of philosophers, hoping for guidance and clarification. Who said what, where, and when, I hardly remember today except what I absorbed, based on what made sense to me through my own experiences in life. One sentence which clearly made an impression on me was from Spinoza. He said: "If a triangle could speak, it would say that God is a triangle." Yes, I thought, this was it. A triangle can only see and understand God as a triangle. Similarly, we can only understand God from our level of understanding as human beings, which is limited. Because of this lack of understanding there are so many theories about God, so much

discussion and even dispute. The fact is we do not know what God is. God can never be known because God is not an object to be known; and the greatest blunder is to think we know God when we do not know, and then impose our own limited conceptions on others. I also suddenly understood why I had felt no comfort in any church. No one spoke with conviction; how could they when they themselves had not experienced what God is? I kept on reading and searching, however, hoping to find some enlightenment and a meaning to the mystery of life.

Once in Paris, I met a Moroccan student of philosophy called Thami. We conversed much on religious matters. He was a Muslim and told me about his religion. I still remember some beautiful and encouraging words of Muhammad which he told me: "Treat your body as if you would live forever and your soul as if you would die this moment." One day Thami presented me with a book by Rabindranath Tagore, and another day he brought me a book which explained clearly the Indian philosophy of Reincarnation and the theory of Karma. I was quite delighted; these seemed acceptable compared with the ideas of creation and life-after-death which the Christians believed in. The word Yoga seemed to have a magical effect on me. I had a feeling that I knew it from somewhere before. Yoga means the union of the individual soul and the Universal Soul. It also stands for the method by which this union is realized. For the first time I felt I was on the right path. But how to proceed with it and realize God was the big question.

Nowadays there is great interest and increasing demand in the West for Indian and Eastern philosophy. There are uncountable books on the market, many unfortunately written by people with little or only mediocre

knowledge of the subject. These books are often more misleading than not. There are numerous people in all walks of life who have suddenly taken to Yoga and meditation. These self-appointed teachers spread their own limited views and understanding, or rather lack of it, in superior tones on radio and television, in lectures and discourses, although they would do a better service to their surroundings and the world at large by shutting themselves up entirely. Then there are people who exploit the orange garb, the symbol of renunciation of the world and of complete dedication and surrender to God. They waste no time taking advantage of the West's growing interest in Yoga.

However, an honest seeker with the help of common sense and discrimination can, while searching with sincerity, find proper guidance and help. In my youth it was difficult, if not impossible, to know where to turn for help. The word Yoga made people laugh and at that time one was considered a little crazy if one even spoke about the subject. Living in Italy for some years at that period made things even less easy, as certain books were "prohibited for the faithful"; which meant any book that might influence a catholic to think for oneself.

However, whatever I did in life, this quest followed me like a shadow. I found a book here, another there, that explained and clarified things. The books of Paul Brunton were brought to my attention. Later, I came to know about one or two others. One time it was a film on a religious festival in Ceylon that made me wonder. It showed strange phenomena, such as walking on fire without being burnt, needles piercing into any part of the body without causing harm, infection, or bleeding—all unexplained by medical experts and scientists, and enough to marvel

over and realize that there are many things between heaven and earth that human mind cannot grasp and explain. My interest never slackened, rather it increased. By collecting small grains of wisdom over the years a little heap at least was gathered.

In the spring of 1955, I immigrated to the United States. The thought that I could find in America, that had been rare in Europe, namely, great possibilities for learning and expanding my knowledge of Yoga, was a happy one. I was bound for New York, but hoped in time to go to California where, I was told, there was the greatest possibility in this regard. It never materialized, however; I remained stuck in New York.

I travelled by the *Queen Mary* from England to the States. This gave me the opportunity of meeting an old friend, an Indian diplomat, in London. He suggested that I visit the Ramakrishna Mission in New York and read the works of Swami Vivekananda, the most distinguished disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This was my first introduction to these great and wonderful personalities who were to create so great an influence on my life thereafter.

On the second day of my stay in New York, I visited the Ramakrishna Mission and listened to some speeches. Again and again I went there and heard their sermons, but that did not satisfy my thirst for more. Sermons and speeches do have their importance, but one has to go beyond them to find spiritual peace. What others spoke I could read; I felt no particular uplift.

I read Swami Vivekananda's book on the Yogas: *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, and *Jñāna Yoga*. After reading the works of Swami Vivekananda, Romain Rolland had said: "I cannot touch these sayings of his without receiving a thrill going through my body like an electric shock." They had the

same effect on me. I found his words revealing, inspiring, elevating and encouraging—just what I needed.

I also found the book *Religion and Philosophy*, by Swami Abhedananda, a co-disciple of Swami Vivekananda, equally fascinating and great. Here were scientifically and logically sound explanations with regard to *karma* and reincarnation, and clarification of questions on the mind of anyone seeking the meaning of life. After reading these books I felt I had found a

source of precious knowledge, the essence, the nectar. Why hadn't I heard about these great personalities long before? Why had I to take this roundabout way, reading, searching, enquiring, discarding and accepting when everything was so clearly explained right here? I felt I had taken so many unnecessary steps, made so many detours, wasted so much time. But, may be all this was necessary in order to grow, and come in touch with Truth. Even a butterfly has to go through a process, through many stages in order to unfold itself fully.

MYSTICISM IN THE VAKHS OF LAL DED

(Continued from page 504)

identifies the Lord here as the embodiment of Consciousness and Bliss (*Cit-ānanda*). This conviction is also affirmed in other vākhs, as in such lines as "Śiva is very much here, i.e. within; don't stray thence" and "I saw the Paṇḍit in my own house." These experiences are brought to a sharp focus in the vākh below, which tells us of Lalla's practice of breath-control as part of her *sādhana* which enabled her to recognize her true Self:

I regularly controlled my breath in the
Bellows-pipe (of my throat);
Then the flame of the Lamp shone
(within me),
Revealing to me my True Nature.
I seized Him in the darkness (of my soul),
Shedding inner Light outwards.

rigorous physical and spiritual practice she undertook with a view to attaining divine illumination leading to Union. From several vākhs discussed above we could gather that the body has a crucial role in *sādhana*. In the present vākh we are given a direct account of the experience of the Divine through the metaphor of the flame of a lamp. Training in breath-control and simultaneous disciplining of the mind brought quick results for Lalla—Illumination, and immediate experience of being lit up with Divinity, within and without. She realized God as the Indwelling-deity and as pervading "The world of sense". She could not contain herself and she burst out, disseminating her divine knowledge through her vākhs.

Lalla continues to tell us here of the

(to be continued)

An Instructive Parable

A. W. JOSHI

Abstruse ideas have an unerring appeal when clothed in homely parables. Such a parable is explained by the author, who is a professor of Physics at the University of Poona in Maharashtra.

Five blind men were moving around and they suddenly came upon an elephant, an animal with whom they were not familiar. These blind men happened to touch different parts of the elephant at the same time. "What is it?" they exclaimed. Somebody nearby said it was an elephant. This was an entirely new experience to them and they were thrilled that there was an addition to their knowledge.

They were comparing notes later in the evening. The blind man who had caught the elephant's tail said the elephant was like a piece of rope. The one who had caught hold of a leg said the animal was like a pillar. The third one had come upon its tusk and he vouched that an elephant was like a sharp piercing instrument. The fourth one had come upon its trunk and said the elephant was like a python. The fifth one had caught hold of its ear and insisted that the elephant was like a large grain-flap.

Here the story ends when the audience consists of children. The children as well as the story-teller enjoy a wry laugh at the ignorance of the blind men.

But take another look at the story and try to discover the hidden morals in it. Time and again, it has been established that our ancient Rsis had an uncanny knack of couching the highest truths and valuable morals in the form of the simplest parables. Let us see what we can uncover.

Moral 1: Even if they were blind, those five men could have obtained much better

knowledge about the elephant with a bit of patience. Each individual could have probed the different parts of the animal and obtained a better picture of the 'new phenomenon'. Each one could have asked the others to 'see' what he had 'seen'. This would have certainly made their accounts more coherent. To use phrases which are in vogue in science and philosophy of science, the *subjective* description of each individual (which differs from person to person) would have become an *objective* account (agreed upon by all the five observers).

Moral 2: A person with normal eyes thinks that he has a better knowledge of the elephant because he can see it as a whole, in addition to possessing other senses in common with the blind men. But it is only *better* knowledge, not *complete* knowledge. It is only a knowledge of the external form. We possess five senses of knowledge and each of them is sensitive to one stimulus. But there may be thousands of stimuli flowing in the universe, passing near us, and yet our body is able to catch only five of those stimuli. An elephant may be emanating some unknown stimuli which we are unable to catch, but other elephants (and possibly other animals and a rare individual) are able to understand.

Moral 3: The parable indicates that the picture of the universe depends on our senses and our intellect. Both of these, our senses and intellect, are highly limited. What we see is not 'the universe', but a 'picture' of

the universe. One may replace the word 'universe' in the above sentence by any other word, such as an 'elephant'. Visible rays from the elephant, that too only those radiating towards us, reach our eyes, they suffer refraction in the lens of our eye, are focussed at the retina at the rear of the eyeball, and this gives rise to electric pulses which travel to the brain through the optic nerve. Nobody yet knows what exactly happens to these pulses in the brain, but we suddenly think that we have gained some knowledge. The brain transmits some other pulses to our vocal cords, and we shout, "Oh, there's an elephant!" This is only a very simple account of extremely complex processes.

There are numerous snags and pitfalls in the above lines. The elephant emits many kinds of radiation, out of which our eyes are able to catch only the visible radiation. Further, only radiation from parts of the elephant facing us reach our eyes. But we don't deny the existence of the complete elephant. This is nature's lesson to us that at every step we have to make extrapolations. Then the rays travel through the air, are refracted in the lenses of our eyes and create an image in the retina. At each step in the process, there are losses and distortion. Further, what if my eye-lens is not normal? What if my retina or optic nerve is damaged? In such cases, the 'picture' of the elephant is all the more distorted.

This is like the picture of an event or a landscape which appears different on TV screens at many different places—one TV shows an excess of green colour, another TV an excess of red, and a third one of blue. A person on one TV screen appears to have a bright face while another screen shows a darker face. We can even control these parameters by means of a few knobs,

and yet every person in every house thinks that the picture on his screen is the correct picture, nay, it is in fact the real scene.

Moral 4: The parable also indicates that just as our senses and our intellect are our limiting factors, so also our language and our capacity to think are other great obstacles in our progress towards higher reaches of consciousness. The blind men did not have the word 'elephant' in their vocabulary nor its picture in their consciousness. So they had to express the new experience by saying that it is 'like a rope', or 'like a pillar', etc. Those blind men knew that it was not a rope or a pillar, but 'like' it. They used that word from their vocabulary whose associations they found to be the nearest to the new experience.

Let us illustrate a familiar example to bring home the limitations of language. There are many things which taste sweet, such as sugar, molasses, saccharine, fruits, etc. Yet there is a difference in the sweetness of each one of them. We may use the comparative degree by saying that 'this is less sweet', and 'that is sweeter', but we are unable to express the difference any better than this. Many Indian sweets can be made from sugar as well as from molasses, but as soon as we put the thing in our mouth, we are able to identify the sweet ingredient because we can *distinguish* between the sweetness of sugar and molasses. We are unable to give further details of the difference, except to say that we know the difference.

Our intellect and thinking are similarly limited by our past experiences. It would be sheer arrogance to think that human intellect can grasp and understand everything that is happening in the universe.

(Continued on page 515)

Waiting for The Sea

C. P. GHOSH

From a high solemn mountain cascades fall,
And from here a river gushes,
From highlands to the plains below.
How then? The constant surge endless rushes,
As blended become pools of weal and woe.
Our hearts ache too, like the river in spate or ebb;
Oft times wrung of sap like the sun dried fruit;
We straddle the jolting and rugged steed of Time
Over and through many a rocky rill, hurdle and chute,
Treading the winding path, as over the risky stream.
Yet for me shines Thy hallowed Face or sweet bell chimes.
Here birds sing, flowers smile, leaves tremble—
(Bewitching belles, golden coins in coffer jingle.)
Astray I often wander, forgetting my pilgrimage to Thee
Alack, it's same with the river too.
But to her mission she's very resolute;
This very thought stirs within my mortal fire—
Winkless, I wait for the call of Sea or Thine!

AN INSTRUCTIVE PARABLE

(Continued from page 514)

We coin words and then expect our surroundings to be limited by those words! We impose definitions on words to make them appear more and more objective, and then expect our experiences to follow those definitions!! We frame laws of nature and then expect nature to behave according to the man-made laws!!!

method. According to this, we should try to obtain as much objectivity as we can. The other morals indicate the limits of this method. The scientific method can take us up to a point, but not beyond. We should not decry subjective, individual experiences. We should not develop a false ego that we can understand everything in the universe. Really speaking, nobody knows the real and complete elephant!

Moral 5: Moral 1 indicates the scientific complete elephant!

News and Reports

OBITUARY

SWAMI NITYASWARUPANANDA

We are sorry to announce the passing away of Swami Nityaswarupananda at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Calcutta, on the 22nd October, 1992, at 12:30 p.m. His body was cremated at the Belur Math premises on the bank of the Ganga the same day at night. He was 93. He was hospitalised four months ago for a period of nine weeks as he was suffering from various ailments.

Swami Nityaswarupananda was initiated into spiritual life by the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi. He joined the Ramakrishna Order of monks at Belur Math in 1925 and received Sannyasa in 1927 from Srimat Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He was also fortunate to have holy association of some of the other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

During the period from 1925 to 1933 he was a monastic member of the Advaita Ashrama staying at Mayavati or its branch centre in Calcutta. During the years from 1935 to 1937 he was engaged in works relating to the celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Centenary.

At the instance of the authorities of the Ramakrishna Mission he founded the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, in 1938 and was appointed its Secretary. He served the institute in that capacity for long twenty-eight years.

From its humble beginning, the institute has since developed into an eminent institution of international repute with various departments of study, classes and lectures, and research fostering the unity of mankind, intercultural appreciation and understanding.

The Swami was also the head of the Ramakrishnan Math, Baghbazar, for a few years. Though he retired from active life in 1973, he continued as a Trustee of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, till the end.

He was well-known for his meticulous way of doing things. He was a good conversationist. His translation of the 'Aṣṭāvakra Samhitā' into English with thought-provoking explanatory notes is highly appreciated among scholars. He has also a few other books to his credit.

May his soul rest in peace.

A UNIVERSAL PRAYER AT MIT

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology of Boston, U.S.A., or popularly known as MIT, is a world famous institution. Twelve thousand students from different parts of the world study here under the guidance of more than two thousand faculty members and teaching staff. It's a joy to witness the Commencement Exercises of such a prestigious institution. This year Commencement was held on June 1, 1992 at 10 A.M. and the writer had the opportunity to be present there with Swami Sarvagatananda, the Minister-in-charge of the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Boston. Swami Sarvagatananda came to this country in 1954 as an assistant to Swami Akhilananda who founded the Vedanta Societies of Boston and Providence. In 1955 the two Swamis were invited by Dr. Killian, then the President of MIT, to conduct regular services at the MIT chapel. Since that time Swami Sarvagatananda has been connected with MIT, and after the passing away of Swami Akhilananda in 1962, he became a member of the MIT Chaplaincy. During the past three decades, the Swami has been on familiar terms with most of MIT's Presidents, who love him dearly for his honesty and simple Sadhu life. Moreover the Swami has been conducting a regular class on Srimad Bhagavad Gita once a week at the MIT chapel, and counselling the students—particularly those Indian students who get in some sort of trouble, mental or otherwise, during their course of study. MIT has a Students' Council with its own office and the Swami sits there as one of its members to talk to such students sent by the

Dean to him for necessary guidance. He saved the careers of many students by his wise counselling during this long period of selfless service and thus endeared himself to many, including the Presidents of the Institute.

Swami Sarvagatananda was requested by the new President of MIT, Dr. Charles Vest, to participate in the Commencement Exercises this year and to invoke prayers that may be universal and befitting for this solemn occasion. We reached MIT quite early that day so that the Swami will have sufficient time to put on his Gerua Robe before entering the commencement hall with other dignitaries in a procession led by the Chief Marshall. Two devotees of our centre, Dr. Cyrus Mehta and his wife took us there in their car. Dr. Mehta obtained his Ph.D. from MIT in 1973 and is a Professor at the Harvard University. Being well-acquainted with these two famous institutions, he is quite helpful to the Swami to render his dedicated service both at MIT and Harvard. I'd like to mention here that Swami Sarvagatananda is also one of the members of the United Ministry of the Harvard University and very often joins its meetings being invited by them.

The Commencement Exercises began at 10 A.M. by which time the faculty, teaching staff, and several thousand new graduates had already occupied the seats allotted to them in different rows, according to gradations. Everything was well arranged and very neat and clean. The opening of the Commencement was declared by Dr. Paul Gray, the Chairman of the MIT Corporation, followed by the National Anthem, by the MIT music group. Then the Invocation was given by Swami Sarvagatananda with the following words:

May the Lord of all creation, the embodiment of Love and Wisdom, inspire and guide our steps so that we may combine in our lives scientific knowledge with moral and spiritual values. Science and Technology have shortened distances in the world and made us neighbours. Now we must learn to live together as brothers and sisters. O Lord, bless us all so that we may feel the whole World as our home and all of Humanity as our family. May we love,

respect and cooperate with all without discrimination.

The following is the advice given by our ancient saintly teachers to their students:

Satyān na pramaditavyam. Dharmān na pramaditavyam.

Kusalān na pramaditavyam. Bhūtyai na pramaditavyam.

Svādhyāya-pravacanābhyām na pramaditavyam.

Yānyanavadyāni karmāṇi, tāni sevitavyāni, no itarāṇi.

Yānyasmākam sucaritāni, tāni tvayopāsyāni, no itarāṇi.

Om Śāntih Śāntih Śāntih.

Let there be no neglect of Truth. Let there be no neglect of Virtue.

Let there be no neglect of Propriety. Let there be no neglect of Prosperity.

Let there be no neglect of Learning and Teaching.

Whatever deeds are blameless, they are to be done, and not others.

Whatever good practices there are among us, they are to be adopted, and not others.

May He who is Father in heaven of the Christians, Holy One of the Jews Allah of the Muslims, Buddha of the Buddhists, Tao of the Chinese. Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians, and Brahman of the Hindus, lead us from the unreal to the Real, from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality. May the All-Loving Being manifest Himself unto us, and grant us abiding understanding and all-consuming divine love.

Peace, peace, peace be unto all.

The guest speaker, Dr. Les Aspin (U.S. Representative from the State of Wisconsin), and the President of MIT congratulated the fresh graduates and reminded them of their responsibilities as scientists and engineers in different fields of activity in society. A closing song in praise of MIT was sung, and then the presentation of Degrees followed.

Swami Sarvagatananda was invited to join the luncheon party by the Chairman of the MIT Corporation. Myself and Dr. Cyrus Mehta accompanied him. It was a nice occasion for the Swami to meet and talk to old friends who are associated with MIT

for the last three decades. The guest speaker, Chief Marshall and the Chairman had lunch together with the Swami at the same table. Most of the high officials of MIT were present there. Both the President and the Chairman thanked Swami Sarvagat-ananda for his participation in the Commencement and for his Invocation, which they liked very much.

Reported by *Swami Sarvatmananda*

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

With an eye to promoting fraternity amongst all and for service to humanity, an all-India Seminar was conducted at the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar on 1st and 2nd February, 1992. The topic was: "*The Role of the Alumni of the Ramakrishna Mission Institutions in the Present Day Society.*" The Seminar was inaugurated by the then General Secretary, Revered Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, and was attended by a number of revered monks, including Swami Lokeswaranandaji, and quite a large number of alumni from all parts of India.

At the instance of the revered monks, it has been unanimously proposed during the Seminar to form an all-India Inter-alumni association to be named "The Ramakrishna Mission Alumni Association." As advised by the Ramakrishna Mission Headquarters, the formation of a steering Committee of

the same and the evaluation of the aims and objectives of the Association are in process. It has been proposed that at present its office will be at Deoghar.

The Association will surely prove to be a body of the ex-students of all Ramakrishna Mission Institutions in India and abroad, and is expected to disseminate, in theory and in practice, the ennobling ideas and ideals of the age: namely, "Serve man, serve God", "One World", "*Jata mat, tata path*", etc.

Prior to the Seminar, Revered President Maharaj, Srimat Swami Bhuteshanandaji in his message with blessings for the undertaking said:

"The objective of the Ramakrishna Mission is not to impart secular education, but to train up its students along the ideals of Swami Vivekananda into morally and spiritually gifted members of society. These days, when there is moral decadence everywhere, a strong band of such trained men is needed to strengthen society. Our alumni, who are serving in many respectable positions in India and abroad, can come together and do much good to our countrymen. It is therefore high time that such reunions are organized, because they will help recall the ideas and exchange views necessary for proper implementation of thoughts. I congratulate the ex-students and organizers for their worthy venture."

By truth we attain the fruits of work. Through truth everything is attained.
In truth everything is established.

Swami Vivekananda

REVIEWS & NOTICES

JOURNEY WITHIN THE SELF, By Deepa Kodikal (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1992) 310 pages; Rs. 105/-.

Swami Vivekananda, extolling the high spiritual status of women of India, once said, "You will find that in the Vedic and Upanishadic age Maitreyi, Gargi, and other ladies of revered memory have taken the places of rishis through their skill in discussing about Brahman. What has happened once can certainly happen again." The unusual book under review fulfils that prophesy. A splendid spiritual odyssey for an unsuspecting housewife begins suddenly, jostling her, as it were, from her placid but uneventful life. It was a breathtaking and unending voyage which opens vista after vista of splendour of the inner world. The whirlwind that takes possession of the author sweeps aside all resistances and doubts till it accomplishes its purpose, giving her an Advaitic vision. It is a fascinating story of awe, fear, pain and ecstasy, one overlapping the others.

Mrs. Deepa Kodikal of Bombay is a well educated housewife with four daughters. Before her transformation she felt well-contented with her little world, harbouring no ambition for anything else. Neither had she taken any interest in mysticism, nor tried to meditate, nor sought any help from spiritual teachers. However, inspired by Swami Vivekananda's books she made a feeble attempt to try to meditate. She had lived, so to say, an ordinary life like all of us. Why did God choose her, when she herself consciously did not seek Him? Once a question was put to Sri Sarada Devi, "Some seek but do not get, while others do not seek but get. What does it mean?"

In reply to this she said, "God has the nature of a child. Some beg but He does not give them, while others do not want, and He asks them to accept. Perhaps the latter had many meritorious acts to their credit from births. Therefore God's grace descends on them."

As the author points out in the Introduction, that underneath her contentment was peace and desirelessness. What is noteworthy is that she never succumbed to the unbridled worldly desires, even from her tender age. These qualities were there in her life from childhood—unrecognized. There is no need to recognize that which is innate. When she was smoothly floating with the events of her family life, it was on the eve of Christmas in 1983, portals to life divine burst open. To quote her words, "I could sense an aura of enchantment, tranquillity and permanence. There seemed a definite purpose to life and the world seemed still with an inner peace." From that day onwards rare mystical experiences, one after another rapidly began to occur. She kept a diary and recorded all her inmost thoughts, struggles and profound insights. Through the efforts of her husband, Mr. Raja Kodikal, this extraordinary diary has come to be published. The rich contents of the book and the elegant graceful style of its presentation are going to leave a lasting impression in the minds of readers. The book stokes the fires of detachment and dispassion. It brings us an awareness that a care-worn life, a little puddle, is not one's ultimate destination. Our real nature is limitlessness. A rare book that should not be missed by spiritual aspirants.

S.M.

FOR SEEKERS OF SPIRITUALITY

CONVERSATIONS WITH SRI SARADA DEVI

DISCIPLE: Can all get rid of desires ?

MOTHER: If they could, then this creation would have come to an end. The creation is going on because all cannot be free of desires. People with desires take their births again and again.

DISCIPLE: Suppose a man gives up his body standing in the waters of the Ganges.

MOTHER: Freedom from birth is possible only when there is no trace of desire. Otherwise, nothing else is of any avail. If one does not get rid of desires, what will one gain, even if this be one's last birth in this world ?

DISCIPLE: Well, Mother, we hear that some seek but do not get, while others do not seek but get. What does this mean ?

MOTHER: God has the nature of a child. Some beg but He does not give them, while others do not want but He asks them to accept. Perhaps the latter had many meritorious acts to their credit in their past births. Therefore God's grace descends on them.

DISCIPLE: Then is there discrimination even in the grace of God ?

MOTHER: Yes, that's true. Everything depends upon Karma (one's past actions). The moment one's Karma comes to an end, one realizes God. That is one's last birth.

DISCIPLE: I admit that the cessation of actions (*Karma-kṣaya*), spiritual disciplines and time are the factors in the attainment of spiritual knowledge and consciousness. But if God be our very 'own', then can't He reveal Himself to His devotees by His mere will ?

MOTHER: That is right. But who has this faith that He is one's 'own' ? All practise these or those disciplines because they think it their duty to do so. But how many seek God ?

DISCIPLE: Once I said to you that the child does not recognize even its own mother, if it is deprived of her care and love.

MOTHER: Yes, you have spoken truly. How can one love another unless one sees him ? You see, you have seen me. I am your Mother and you are my child.

DISCIPLE: You initiate the devotee because you desire to do so.

MOTHER: No, I do so out of compassion. They won't leave me. They weep. I feel compassion for them. Out of kindness I give them initiation. Besides, what do I gain by it ? When I initiate devotees, I have to accept their sins. Then I think, "Well, this body will die anyway ; let them realize the Truth."

DISCIPLE: Whatever you may say, Mother, renunciation and dispassion are the chief things. Shall we ever acquire them ?

MOTHER: Certainly, you will gain everything if you but take refuge in the Master. Renunciation alone was his splendour. We utter his name and eat and enjoy things because he renounced all. People think that his devotees also must be very great, as he was a man of such complete renunciation....

The Master told me, "I am being subjected to all the sufferings that there can be ; none of you need have it again. I have taken upon myself the miseries of the whole world." The Master's disease was due to taking upon himself the sins of Girish.

All our sufferings are on this earth. Is there anything elsewhere ? People suffer from endless miseries on account of their egoism and at last they say, "Not I, not I ; it is Thou, O God ! It is Thou !"

From the Gospel of the Holy Mother