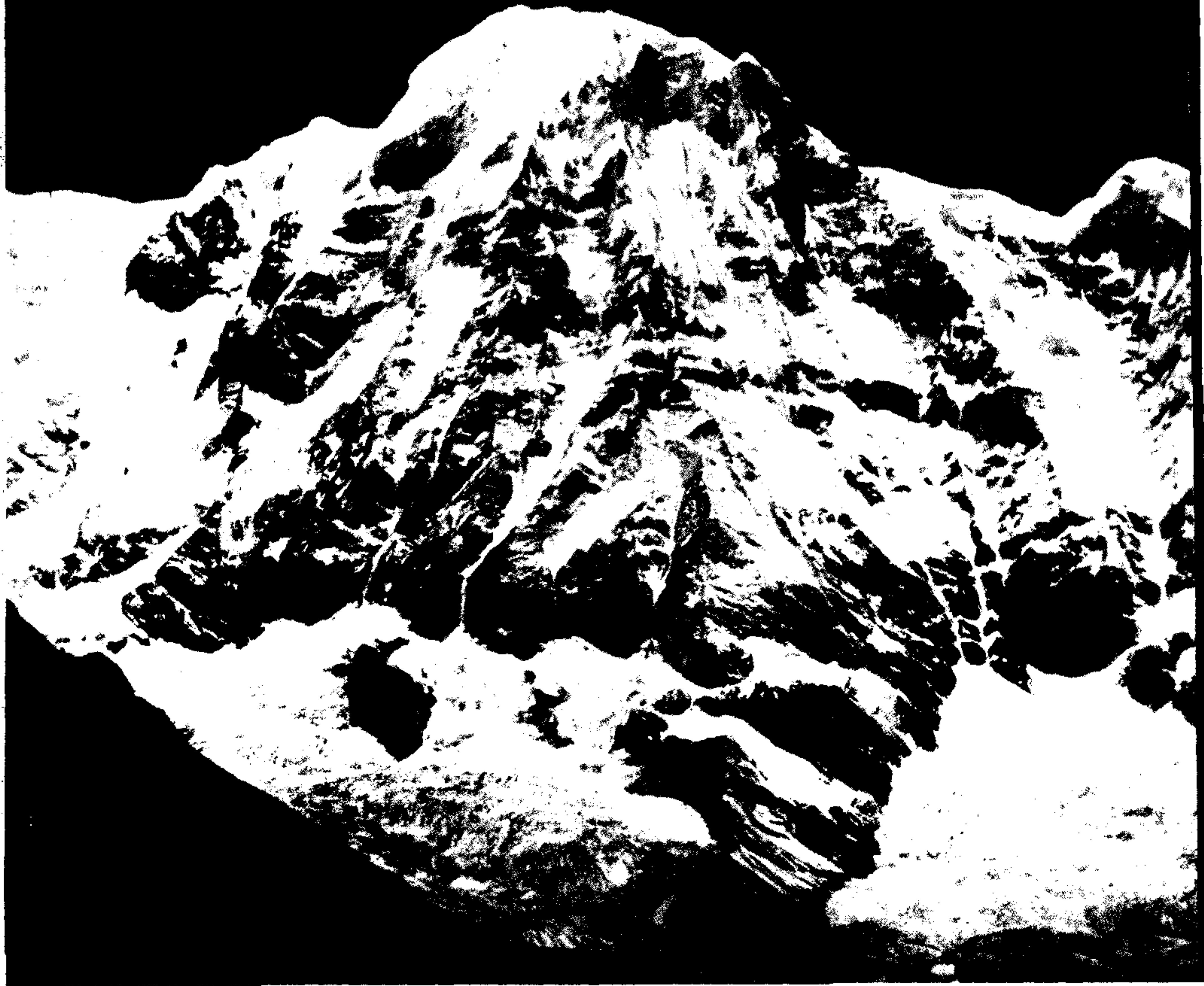


# Prabuddha Bharata

or Awakened India



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*Cover:* Annapurna Peak,  
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# Prabuddha Bharata

A Monthly Journal of the  
Ramakrishna Order

*Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896*

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MARCH 1992

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उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत

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

# Prabuddha Bharata

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No. 3

## Divine Wisdom

SRI RAMAKRISHNA

One day while living at Dakshineswar I made a big garland of seven strands with some jasmine and red flowers (rangan or ixora). I soaked the garland in water in a stone bowl and the buds quickly turned into full blossoms. I then sent the garland to the Kali temple to adorn the image of the Divine Mother. The Master came to the temple. He at once fell into an ecstatic mood seeing the beauty of Kali so much enhanced by the flowers. Again and again he said: "Ah! These flowers are nicely set off against the dark complexion of the Divine Mother! Who made the garland?" Someone mentioned me. He said, "Go and bring her to the temple." ...I entered the temple and found the Master singing, his voice trembling with love and devotion.

*Sri Sarada Devi*

It is impossible to give others any idea of the ineffable joy we derived from the presence of the Master. It is really beyond our understanding how he could train us, with-

out our knowing it, through fun and play, and thus mould our spiritual life. As the master wrestler proceeds with great caution and restraint with the beginner—now overpowering him in the struggle with great difficulty, as it were, and again allowing himself to be defeated to strengthen the pupil's self-confidence—in exactly the same manner did Sri Ramakrishna handle us. Realizing that the Atman (Self), the source of infinite strength, exists in every individual, pigmy though he might be, he was able to see the potential giant in all. He could clearly discern the latent spiritual power which would in the fullness of time manifest itself. Holding up that bright picture to view, he would speak highly of us and encourage us. Again he would warn us lest we should obstruct this future consummation by becoming entangled in worldly desires, and moreover he would keep us under control by carefully observing even the minute details of our life. All this was done silently and unobtrusively. That was the secret of his training of the disciples and of his moulding of their lives.

*Swami Vivekananda*

## Religion Without Frontiers

The interconnectedness and interdependence of all human beings have, since the last century, taken hold of the global consciousness. Isolation for any nation has well-nigh become an impossibility. The world has since been sharing the fruits of its labour collectively. Anything good or bad in any part of the world soon affects all the rest of humanity. Science to a great extent has been able to break down the barriers that have stood for so many ages between nations and peoples. The modern world is shrinking still at an extraordinary pace. Scientific breakthroughs have immensely benefited humanity, so also has the rich experience of abundance in economically advanced countries. It is an undeniable fact that each nation plays its part either big or small, in the total scheme for the well being of man. No nation, therefore, can be condemned anymore as useless or a burden on the rest of humanity. Every society has, for thousands of years, been working out its own destiny, enriching and expanding its own culture and civilization, however peculiar it may be. It can be said that each culture represents a unique strand in the multicoloured fabric of the global society. This wonderful variety woven into unity is the charm and beauty of man's heritage on earth. No strand has the right to claim that it is the whole of the fabric. Without the whole it has no independent existence, as without all the strands there can be no fabric. In the past, there have been races, and nations that sought to hold themselves apart in a special place, away from the rest of the world, but in the long run the consequences were disastrous. Exclusiveness taught its costly lessons, through the experience of great

sufferings. Till now there has been growing awareness that there will be no way to peace, security, and well-being for any, unless all learn to share with others the problems as well as the blessings of living together.

In spite of the great achievement, however, of all nations coming closer to one another, the true spirit of universal brotherhood and the feeling that we all belong to one global family is still a far cry from most of us. And though historic ideologies such as those under the banners of communism or capitalism, which have been keeping us divided, recently seemed to lose their cutting edges, and though none may now fear the threat of behemoth communism, there is once again arising the old spectre of religious fundamentalism spawning groups labouring under the old illusion that have an exclusive claim on the conscience of mankind. Some claim that they alone possess the key to the realm of spiritual blessedness and holy Truth. Though it appears ridiculous to mature people, it is still the consuming passion of some closed minds for forcing their views on the rest of the world by hook or by crook. Today, the earth is riddle with violent confrontations and the shedding of blood under the exclusively righteous banners of this and that religious faith. All feel the sorrow and shame of it. It is true that there is a small number of good people who are working for unity and harmony on the basis of the fundamental spiritual aim behind religion, but there are others who are erecting walls of disunity and separation. Human society all over the globe, however, seems poised on the threshold of a new age, where hope surges on the one hand and a catastrophe threatens it on the other.



It is paradoxical that all religions preach equality and brotherhood of man, but in actual practice come nowhere near realizing the ideal of their own professed principles. The yawning hiatus between precept and practice is disconcerting. Nearly a century ago Vivekananda related an anecdote. It is still relevant for us today:

"In India," said he, "taking wine is considered very bad. There were two brothers, who wished, one night, to drink wine secretly, and their uncle, who was a very orthodox man, was sleeping in a room quite close to theirs. So, before they began to drink, they said to each other, 'We must be very silent, or uncle will wake up.' When they were drinking they continued, repeating to each other 'Silence! Uncle will wake up', each trying to shout the other down. And, as the shouting increased, the uncle woke up, came into the room, and discovered the whole thing. Now, we all shout like these drunken men, 'Universal brotherhood! We are all equal, therefore let us make a sect.' As soon as you make a sect you protest against equality, and equality is no more. Mohammedans talk of universal brotherhood, but what comes out of that in reality? Why, anybody who is not a Mohammedan will not be admitted into the brotherhood; he will more likely have his throat cut. Christians talk of universal brotherhood; but anyone who is not a Christian must go to that place where he will be eternally barbecued."<sup>1</sup>

Neither can Hindus escape the fire of criticism. Vedanta, the essence of Hinduism, proclaims the Oneness of all life and the divinity of each soul. But in practice we drift far away from this high ideal. Still there are people who abhor others for the mere fact that they belong to certain castes or

religious sects. To be convinced of this, it is enough to merely glance at a newspaper. Then, if the individual citizen's perplexity is not enough, politicians join the fray to exploit the emotions of the people for their selfish gains. The caste system in the old days might have served some economic purpose, but there is no gainsaying its obsolescence in the present. All religious leaders and social reformers have fought tooth and nail to root out this virus from the Hindu society. In every thought and act, Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda exemplified the truth that we are all children of God. But being swayed by mass hysteria, foolish men are slow to learn. The world will have to go on enduring, it seems, the thrusts of pain inflicted by them. The religion of the Hindus will shine in all its glory the day the average man can completely free himself from crowd hysteria, caste, and other prejudices.

When we trace the origin of religions we find that every prophet was born to fulfil the spiritual aspirations of a certain section of people. When a particular religion could not satisfy the large majority of humanity, as a natural corollary many sects were born to fulfil their needs at different stages of spiritual evolution. As individuals, we are not equal. In physical strength, in brain power, or our outlook, we differ vastly from one another. People have their own conceptions of life, the world, and God. Our journey begins as individuals and as we grow we transcend the illusoriness of the small personality. Variety is the key characteristic of all creation. Therefore, we find the rise of so many sects and in the future they will become more. In Hinduism, in Islam, and in Christianity there are hundreds of sects. There is nothing unnatural or alarming about the appearance of different points of view arising within a religious fold. As all people are not physically of the same strength and capacity, so there are differences in their

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. II, 379-80.



moral and spiritual powers too. Some are superior, spiritually more mature, and intelligent than others. Some are just beginners. The same kindergarten lessons do not satisfy all. Each should find help in religion and be lifted up from where he is. That should be the purpose of true religion. According to Sri Ramakrishna, no one's faith should be disturbed or destroyed, and none should be forced to swallow a set of prefabricated doctrines. Inebriated fanatics, spearheading so-called religious institutions, have done more disservice to religion than good. To them, what matters is the growth of power of their own denomination rather than the uplift of the individual's spiritual consciousness. The blossoming of spirituality in all human beings is of far greater importance than the survival of any religion or organization. A person may be highly spiritual without belonging to any denomination, in fact. And conversely, a pretender in religion may be a spiritual dwarf.

A bundle of doctrines and dogmas has never satisfied the deep spiritual urge of the people *en masse*, and can never do so. Give every person freedom to choose his own path, from his babyhood. Remove the obstacles, if possible, to his spiritual growth. If not, stand aside and leave him grow according to his nature. That is the true religious spirit. Names and forms, and organization in religion are of lesser importance. That nameless Universal Spirit is called by different names. As Sri Ramakrishna said, that Thing—God, is the same, but is called variously by the wise. It is not reasonable to expect in this world of infinite variety, that all the people should worship That Reality in the same way or call It by the same name. Pointing to this grave error of many, Swamiji warned: "Unity and sameness can come only when this universe is destroyed, otherwise such a thing is impossible. Not only so, it would be

dangerous to have it. We must not wish that all of us should think alike. There would be then no thought to think. We should be all alike, as the Egyptian mummies in a museum, looking at each other, without a thought to think. It is this difference, this differentiation, this losing of the balance between us, which is the very soul of our progress, the soul of all our thought. This must always be."<sup>2</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna came to the world for this purpose: to show us how to respect the apparent differences among people and religions. It is not tolerance that we want mostly—tolerance comes out of one's false sense of magnanimity—it is genuine respect for all. To Sri Ramakrishna, a direct realization of God, direct perception of Truth, is the essence and goal of religion. Follow any path, he urged, take up any method, but the destination should be the realization of God. Quarrels and squabbles only arise when this real objective of religion is ignored. Sri Ramakrishna's extraordinary life was a tremendous spiritual saga. In the words of the famous historian Arnold Toynbee, "His religious activity and experience were, in fact, comprehensive to a degree that had perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius, in India or elsewhere."<sup>3</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual power was such that by his mere presence all the barriers of jealousy or egoism that stood between man and man or religion and religion were dissolved. The infinite spiritual Consciousness was his natural playground and the universe was his home. So great is he that any yard stick or philosophical system is incapable of measuring him. To try to reduce

2. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

3. Swami Ghanananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Unique Message* (London: Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, 1970) p. vii, Foreword.

his life and teachings to a creed or doctrine would be nothing but blasphemy. His incarnation was not meant for any particular religious community, nor specially for one country, nor for a contemporary generation. His life and teachings are timeless and universal. His spiritual experiences are the precious wealth of all human society. Wherever earnest souls, in any part of the world yearn for God, Sri Ramakrishna is there to lift them. His grace and unbounded compassion for all living beings still flows. To him all living beings are verily the manifestations of God. Max Mueller wrote of him, "He was a wonderful mixture of God and man. In his ordinary state he would talk of himself as the servant of all men and women. He looked upon them all as God. He himself never liked to be addressed as Guru (master) or teacher. Never would he claim for himself any high position. He would touch the ground reverently where his disciples trodden. But every now and then strange fits of God-consciousness came upon him. He then became changed into a different being altogether. He then spoke of himself as being able to do and know everything. He spoke as if he had the power of giving anything to anybody."<sup>4</sup>

Illiterate persons, pandits, the wealthy, the poor, believers, skeptics, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians—all came to this God-man for love and light. He did not belittle a single soul, nor did he disturb anyone's faith. For everyone he had encouraging and healing words. He was a great knower of the human mind. To each according to his abilities and faith, he imparted spiritual instruction. Therefore, an Advaitin, or a staunch believer in image-worship, or even a non believer, felt joyful and blessed in the

company of Sri Ramakrishna. What he could not stand was arrogance or hypocrisy. Dogmatism or bigotry is masked ignorance. Such pretension could never remain concealed under any vesture before his wonderful insight. Peoples' hearts were an open book to him. Those who visited Sri Ramakrishna often did not know what they sought. But he knew and with utmost ease and gentleness he turned their consciousness towards God.

It is in the form of Sri Ramakrishna that the Divine has enacted its *Līlā* on the banks of the sacred Ganga. Never before had the Lord spoken in such simple words, touching so directly the life of the modern man. The great *magnum opus* of Sri 'M', which contains the direct words of the Divine Incarnation of our times, answers all our questions, clears all our doubts. How wonderfully the Master broadens our understanding and puts an end forever to our narrowness and desire to hide ourselves behind the facades of old dogmas and unquestioning blind beliefs.

#### *Does God exist?*

"Not all, by any means, believe in God. They simply talk. The worldly minded have heard from someone that God exists and that everything happens by His will; but it is not their inner belief."

"The inferior devotee says, 'God exists, but He is very far off, up there in heaven.' The mediocre devotee says, 'God exists in all beings as life and consciousness.' The superior devotee says: 'It is God Himself who has become everything; whatever I see is only a form of God. It is He alone who has become māyā, the universe and all living beings. Nothing exists but God'.<sup>5</sup>

4. F. Max Mueller, *Ramakrishna, His Life and Sayings*, ed. Nanda Mookerjee (Calcutta: S. Gupta & Brothers, 1978) p. 27.

5. 'M', *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1985) p. 265.



*Can one see God ?*

“God can indeed be seen ; what is more, one can talk to Him.”<sup>6</sup>

“He who seeks with a longing heart can see Him, talk to Him as I am talking to you. Believe my words when I say that God can be seen. But oh! To whom am I saying these words ? Who will believe me ?”<sup>7</sup>

*Is God male or female ?*

“A man once saw the image of the Divine Mother wearing a sacred thread. He said to the worshipper: ‘What ? You have put the sacred thread on the Mother’s neck!’ The worshipper said: ‘Brother, I see that you have truly known the Mother. But I have not yet been able to find out whether She is male or female ; that is why I have put the sacred thread on Her image.’”<sup>8</sup>

*Has God form or is He formless ?*

“No one can say with finality that God is only ‘this’ and nothing else. He is formless, and again He has forms. For the bhakta He assumes forms. But He is formless for the jñāni, that is for him who looks on the world as a mere dream. The bhakta feels that He is one entity and the world another. Therefore God reveals Himself to him as a person.”<sup>9</sup>

“Once upon a time a sannyāsi entered the temple of Jagannāth. As he looked at the holy image he debated within himself whether God had a form or was formless. He passed his staff from left to right to feel whether it touched the image. The staff touched nothing. He understood that there was no image before him ; he concluded

that God was formless. Next he passed the staff from right to left. It touched the image. The sannyāsi understood that God had form. Thus he realized that God has form and, again, is formless.”<sup>10</sup>

*Are different religions necessary ?*

“You must know that there are different tastes. There are also different powers of digestion. God has made different religions and creeds to suit different aspirants.”<sup>11</sup>

“It is not good to feel that one’s own religion alone is true and all others are false. God is one only, and not two. Different people call Him by different names: Some as Allah, some as God, and others as Krishna, Siva and Brahman.”<sup>12</sup>

“Don’t turn up your nose in hatred and say: Oh, this man believes in God with form and not in the formless God. That man believes in the formless God and not in God with form. This man is a Christian. This man is a Hindu. And this man is a Mussalman. It is God alone who makes people see things in different ways. Know that people have different natures. Realize this and mix with them as much as you can. And love all.”<sup>13</sup>

The Uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna is that he did not found a special religion to perpetuate his name. Other religions have their founders and they bear their names. Sri Ramakrishna always dwelled on such a high spiritual plane of God-consciousness that often it was difficult for him to bring down his mind to the level of matters personal. From the standpoint of mind, he was not a person at all, but limitless pure consciousness.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 344.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 625.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 271.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 858.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 486.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 637.



Vivekananda sums up the greatness of his Master: "This is the message of Sri Ramakrishna to the modern world: 'Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogmas, or sects, or churches, or temples ; they count for very little compared with the essence of existence in each man, which is spirituality ; and the more this is developed in a man, the more powerful is he for good. Earn that first, acquire that, and criticise no one, for all doctrines and creeds have some good in them. Show by your lives that religion does not mean words or names, or sects, but that it means spiritual realisation. Only those can understand who have felt. Only those who have attained to spirituality can communicate it to others, can be great teachers of mankind. They alone are the powers of light.'"<sup>14</sup>

14. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, p. 187.

For the followers of Sri Ramakrishna there is only one eternal religion and the realization of God is the essence of it. In reality, all the great world religions are part and parcel of this eternal religion. Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings are a religion without frontiers, an irrefutable testament of truth itself. No religion has any special claim over truth or God. It is futile to quarrel about the special merits of one or the other of the great religions. Each is capable of leading earnest aspirants to the direct experience of the Supreme Reality. Arbitrarily abusing religions not our own, or changing from one faith to another because of powerful influence or propaganda is an exercise in futility. In the light of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teachings, proselytization or forced conversion to another religion only betrays the singular ignorance of a zealot's bravado.

We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran ; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.

—*Letters of Swami Vivekananda*  
9th Ed. p. 454

# Memoirs of Swami Brahmananda

SWAMI SARADESHANANDA

*Behind the great power of his personality and his solemn exterior, Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, possessed not only a tender heart like a mother, but was a lover of fun and frolic. This is an eyewitness account by the late senior monk, a highly evolved soul. Swami Saradeshananda passed away at 94 in December 1988.*

Possibly it was at the time of the birth anniversary of Sri Thakur in the month of Phalgun, 1319 (Feb.-March, 1912), during my first visit to the Belur Math, that I had the good fortune of meeting Revered Raja Maharaj for the first time. But even then I did not have the opportunity to become acquainted with him or talk with him. Of course, I did not have the courage to approach him because of fear, wonder and shyness, along with respectful devotion due to his extraordinary ecstasies, which I had learned about from reading the Gospel and the devotees' descriptions of him. As I was below twenty years old and was born in a rural areas, I felt a bit panicky during my first visit to the Math. In later years when I had the opportunity to stay there and talk to him without any reservation, I became surprised and overpowered by the nectar-fountain of his affection lying behind his mountain-like towering personality. But I was deprived of drinking that nectar to my heart's content because of his passing away from this world shortly after I had found the source of it. I still bear that grief within my heart.

I am also relating the reason why I felt fear and shyness to mix freely with him. I heard from my friends that Maharaj was a great lover of fun, and it was difficult to

apprehend beforehand as to when, how, or centering upon whom, he would create fun. Naturally I avoided approaching people; moreover, I could not go near an assembly of big dignitaries. But, I had the privilege of seeing Maharaj wherever he used to stay, either in the Math, or in the Udbodhan, or in Balaram Mandira. I used to find him always encircled by persons much revered by me. I found them busy in conversation. Sitting in a corner behind, I would listen to their talking and then take leave. I heard from Dr. Binodebandhu Gupta, a disciple of Holy Mother, about Swami Brahmanandaji's liking for practical jokes. For instance, this incident probably occurred in 1915/1916, when Dr. Binodebandhu was a medical student in Calcutta. On the birth anniversary of Sri Thakur, Binode went to Belur Math in the morning. There was a little crowd in the Math. As soon as he offered salutation to Raja Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), Maharaj pointed out with his finger to one gentleman sitting nearby, and asked him, "Go to him and ask about the whereabouts of Swami Shivananda." As ordered by Swami Brahmananda, he approached the gentleman, who answered gravely, "Who knows where he is now; tell Maharaj that I do not know anything." Persons sitting around this gentleman all burst into laughter. Binode Babu was surprised and taken aback. He had seen Revered Mahapurush Maharaj (Swami Shivananda) on an earlier occasion. Hearing the reply of that gentleman and the



laughter of the people around, he looked at the face of the gentleman again and thought doubtfully, "Is he Mahapurusha?" Anyway, when he related the reply of the gentleman to Swami Brahmananda, there too arose another peal of laughter. Being completely abashed, Binode Babu observed all that fun and later on came to know from others that as a joke Raja Maharaj had told Mahapurush Maharaj to put on white clothes like a Babu. Binode Babu told us this funny incident.

One of our friends, Sri Jatindranath Dutta, a disciple of Holy Mother, with another friend, went to Balaram Mandir in the afternoon to see Raja Maharaj. In the drawing room Maharaj was encircled by many visitors. After they took their seats, having come to know that their place of origin was Sylhet, Maharaj said with eagerness, "Both of you please talk in the dialect of Sylhet." Being urged again and again, hesitatingly they exchanged a few words in their East Bengal dialect. Hearing those words hard to understand with peculiar pronunciation, everyone expressed surprise and astonishment. Swami Brahmanandaji enjoyed the fun and became very much pleased, while on the other side, the visitors hailing from Sylhet shrank with embarrassment.

I myself also had to face a similar predicament. Maharaj was in the office room of the ground floor of Udbodhan (now this is *Gadi-ghar* situated on the ground floor of Mother's House). Revered Holy Mother was upstairs. She was staying in the shrine room (*Thakur-ghar*). In the company of the Mother the son's heart was full of fun and mirth. I was not aware of this child-like behaviour of Maharaj. Last night I came from Jayrambati and next morning I went to visit Maharaj in his room. Maharaj was wearing a small *dhoti* (lower garment) and a loose shirt, moving about inside the room

like a restless child and occasionally making fun with his attendants, monks, and novices by his bantering wit and humour. Just after reaching the front door I saw this scene and became stupefied with wonder. One known *sadhu* (monk) introduced me and told Maharaj that I had been staying at Jayrambati for sometime, and now I came from that place. Hearing this Maharaj looked at me, when I approached him with salutation and stood before him with all humility. Then Maharaj came very near to my face and smilingly spoke: "Why did you go there? You wanted to become a devotee?" (Now he pronounced the Bengali words with distorted intonations, peculiar to the East Bengal people, which sounded ridiculous and evoked laughter.) Anyway, I somehow parried Maharaj's teasing questions and evaded the situation. After that so long as I stayed at Udbodhan I tried to stay out of sight and I avoided facing Maharaj lest I should fall into another difficult situation. Now I repent so much for this. Later on, I had the privilege of hearing from other *sadhus* who were eye-witnesses, how much was the inexpressible bliss that used to fill up the heart of her affectionate child when he used to be in the presence of the Most Revered Holy Mother. Then the queer habits and conduct of Swami Brahmananda became understandable to me to some extent. When he would visit Holy Mother and bow down to her with pranams, his appearance and way of talking would seem to us to transform the personality of Maharaj into the very image of Balagopala (the Child Sri Krishna). The Goddess of the Universe too, being filled up with affection for the child at heart, used to touch his chin in the manner in which a Bengali Mother caresses her child. With great affection she used to ask about his welfare, "How are you my child?" Many years back, Maharaj once went to visit Holy Mother at Jayrambati. Filled with ecstatic joy, he danced like Gopala in the



drawing room of Mother's eldest maternal uncle—how he danced was shown to us later on by the seniors. We had the good fortune of staying inside that room and our hearts were lifted up as we remembered the incidents that took place there. Later on, the present owner of the house demolished the room and the old devotees felt very much aggrieved.

Sri Ramakrishna Deva, the Incarnation of the Age, handed over the minutest seed of the future Sri Ramakrishna Sangha to his chief companion Narendranath, later known as Swami Vivekananda, at Cossipore. Narendranath sprouted the seed and passed away after handing it over to the spiritual son of his Gurudeva, Swami Brahmananda, Rakhai Raja, who preserved it under his great care. Only a little was found expression among the people and recognized, how Maharaj integrated the brother disciples, devotees, and admirers into a body, and with what amount of diligence, patient forbearance, extraordinary intelligence, and wisdom and collective effort he nurtured the small seedling to grow up into a big tree. We were sometimes surprised when we heard about some of the events from the seniors. Because when we met him it transpired to us that he was handing over to the juniors the responsibilities of the work after making them properly trained, himself being a witness to it. At times of course he used to offer them necessary advice, but he was specially interested in their spiritual upliftment. We did not have the opportunity to observe his extraordinary skilful endeavour in performing the work of guiding the Order of all-renouncing monks. A few of the things I have heard about it I am writing.

Revered Swamiji, being very much anxious to procure a permanent plot of land for the Math, despite having entrusted Maharaj with the task, used to enquire from others too

regarding land and buildings for this purpose. But so far, Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) had not seen anything meeting his approval. So it became a very hard job to keep Swamiji free from anxiety and at the same time locate a suitably beautiful and spacious plot of land somewhere on the bank of the Ganga. With great patience and diligence Maharaj was able to find the present delightful spot at the Belur Math. But there were many legal uncertainties in regard to the ownership of this piece of land. After gathering all sorts of information about it, and settling all the prevailing disputes and questions with the help of lawyers and experienced men of the world, when Maharaj purchased and acquired the plot, Swamiji and the brother disciples, and all the devotees were exceedingly pleased. The adroit and painstaking labour Maharaj did during this time was later described by a senior monk: "Maharaj used to go out on foot with all legal documents after taking his bath and eating some flattened rice early in the morning. For the whole day he used to move from door to door visiting the lawyers and their clients who had interest in the settlement, and his helping advisers. He would return to the Math, some days in the afternoon, and some days in the evening after attending the court-office and being extremely tired and exhausted. Sometimes he could have his meal at the house of either a devotee or some other known person, or sometimes he could not have food at all. Sometimes on his return in the evening he would take cold rice or flattened rice soaked in water, and sometimes he would take a good meal after a day's fasting. But none heard from him anything which indicated that he was ever disturbed or fatigued, depressed, or despondent.

Another senior monk described Maharaj's great ability and efficiency in constructing

*(Continued on page 136)*



# Japa : Repetition of A Sacred Word

SWAMI ADISWARANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

(vi) KEEPING COUNT OF THE NUMBER OF REPETITIONS. Generally speaking, a seeker is advised by the teacher to perform japa by repeating the sacred word for a specific number of times. Japa is done in three ways: on the fingers, with a rosary, and in the mind. The purpose of a rosary is to keep count as a support for concentration. Rosaries may be made from rudraksha seeds ; bhadraakshya seeds ; beads made from the tulasi plant, the bel tree, or the sandalwood tree ; lotus seeds ; crystal beads ; or coral beads. Some sects have even used the dry bones of different animals or humans for the making of beads. The nature of the sacred word determines the type of beads to be used by the seeker. The rosary consists of either one hundred eight or fifty-four beads. The rosary used by a seeker for repeating a particular sacred word should be restricted to that word and used by him alone. It should not be worn and should never be discarded or changed.

Regarding the number of repetitions, Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, says the following: "A mantra becomes conscious (awakened) when you repeat it one hundred thousand times. The utterance of the mantra in a proper spirit even once purifies the mind. Instantly the mind becomes delighted and blissful....Repeat it one hundred thousand times or even ten thousand times according to your capacity. Even five thousand times is good if the mantra is a big one, or even two thousand times if the mantra is too big a one."<sup>16</sup>

16. *Spiritual Talks*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1968, p. 378.

During the time of japa the rosary is held in the right hand and by the middle finger. About the position of the hand, Swami Saradananda advises: "It is better to make japa by keeping the rosary down by the breast. Some say that the rosary should not be lowered down to the navel. If that is inconvenient for you, you may spread the edge of your wrapper or some other thing over your hand and then do it."<sup>17</sup> Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, observes: "Repeat the Name of God, whether your mind is concentrated or not. It will be good for you if you can repeat the Name of God for a fixed number of times daily."<sup>18</sup>

(vii) SEAT. Traditionally, japa is practised in a seated posture on a prayer seat or rug. The Bhagavad Gita prescribes the preferred materials for the seat: "In a clean spot having fixed his seat—a firm seat, neither too low—and having spread over it kusa-grass, and then a deer skin, and then a cloth, and sitting there, he should practise yoga for the purification of the self, restraining the activities of his mind and senses, and bringing his thoughts to a point."<sup>19</sup> According to sacred traditions, the preferred material for the seat is wool or cotton. The Kālikā Purāṇa says that one should never use seats made of iron, brass or lead. The

17. *Glimpses of a Great Soul*, by Swami Aseshananda, Vedanta Press, Hollywood, 1982, p. 165.

18. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1983, p. 44.

19. *The Bhagavad Gita*, (VI. 11-12), trans. by Swami Nīkhilananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1979, p. 165.

Gandharva Tantra states that the seat should not be too low, too high or broken. Further, according to the Kamadhenu Tantra, all japa and worship become fruitless to a seeker who spreads a seat in a place of pilgrimage and performs japa sitting on that seat. The rug or prayer seat which is used for daily practice of japa and meditation absorbs the holy vibrations and is therefore to be preserved. The seeker's seat is very personal and sacred to him, and should not be used by anyone else.

(viii) PACE OF REPETITION. Japa should be performed with an even tempo. The repetition should be neither too slow nor too fast. Furthermore, the repetition should be in keeping with the rhythm of the seeker's personality. Every seeker has his own rhythm, determined by his heartbeat, breathing, pace of walking, and manner of speaking. In his repetition he must abide by this principle of rhythm.

(ix) ALERTNESS OF MIND. Repetition of the sacred word should be done consciously. The seeker must know and feel that he is repeating the sacred word. Unconscious repetition is mechanical and has little effect over the mind. Lacking in mental alertness, the seeker slips into a state of inertia, an obstacle in concentration described by the sacred texts as "laya," which is a mild form of sleep. Conscious repetition, with alertness of mind, overcomes this obstacle. In the words of Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother: "Repeating the Name of God once, with the mind controlled, is equivalent to a million repetitions with the mind away from God. You may repeat the Name for the whole day, but if the mind is elsewhere, that does not produce much result. The repetition must be accompanied by concentration. Then alone one gets the grace of God."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup>. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1983, pp. 50-51.

(x) REFLECTION ON THE MEANING. The traditional view is that the sacred word is to be repeated with meditation on its meaning. Patanjali, the author of the Yoga Aphorisms, stresses this point and says, "The repetition of this (Om) and meditating on its meaning [is the way]."<sup>21</sup> Here the meaning is not the etymological meaning of the word, but the thought signified by it. Speaking about japa of the sacred word Om, the Chhandogya Upanishad says: "[It may be contended] that he who knows this [true meaning of the syllable Om] and he who does not, perform the same sacrifice [and therefore must reap the same fruit]. But [this is not so]. [The results of] knowledge and ignorance are different. Work that is done with knowledge, faith, and the Upanishad (i.e. meditation on the deities) produces the more powerful fruit."<sup>22</sup> The Mahānirvāṇa Tantra says, "If the worshipper does not realize the meaning and the virtues of the formula (sacred word) he utters, it would be absolutely futile for him, were he to chant it ten million times."<sup>23</sup> Yaska in his Nirukta says: "He who repeats a Vedic Mantra without understanding its meaning is like an ass carrying a load of sandal wood; it knows only the weight of the load but does not enjoy the fragrance."<sup>24</sup> The view of these sacred texts is that japa becomes spiritually effective when performed with a combination of devotion, faith, and understanding. According to Tantra, the Ultimate Reality

<sup>21</sup>. *Raja-Yoga*, (Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali, I. 28), by Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1982, p. 124.

<sup>22</sup>. *The Upanishads: Vol. IV*, (Chhandogya Upanishad, I. i. 10), trans. by Swami Nikhilananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1979, p. 116.

<sup>23</sup>. *Mahanirvana Tantra* (Ullasa III, Sutra 31), Quoted in *Bhaktiyoga*, by Aswini Kumar Datta, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1971, p. 167.

<sup>24</sup>. Quoted in *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, trans. by Swami Tyagisananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1972, p. 188.



has two aspects: the Absolute and the relative. The Absolute is designated as Shiva, the ever-tranquil, auspicious, and nondual Reality, while the relative is designated as Shakti, the dynamic manifestation of the Ultimate. Success comes only with the union of Shiva and Shakti. Shakti is looked upon as the form of japa and Shiva as that of meditation. So Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, says, "One should meditate on one's chosen Deity as one goes on making Japa".<sup>25</sup>

There is, however, another view which strongly holds that if the seeker is sincere in devotion, the effect of japa is infallible, even if performed mechanically or without proper pronunciation, faith, or knowledge of the meaning of the sacred word. According to this view, the sacred word, if repeated for some time, is capable of creating devotion even in a stony heart. Through the power of japa, faith in the sacred word and the knowledge of its meaning are bound to come.

(xi) **LOYALTY TO THE SACRED WORD.** The seeker is asked to be one-pointed and absolutely loyal to the sacred word he receives from his teacher. He must never change or alter it, or pass it to another person. This loyalty brings about attachment to the sacred word, which leads to devotion, concentration and the experience of the spiritual mood during the practice of japa. Devotion and concentration grow only when the seeker's japa, meditation, and worship are all directed to the specific aspect of the Godhead, selected for him as his Chosen Ideal by the teacher. Other aspects of the Godhead are to be looked upon and adored as the different facets of his own Chosen Ideal. But while practising japa and meditation, his concentration and devotion should flow only toward one, that is to his own Chosen Ideal.

<sup>25</sup>. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1983, p. 46.

(xii) **ADHERENCE TO A FIXED CENTRE OF CONSCIOUSNESS.** While practising japa and meditation, the seeker is advised to hold the mind at a fixed centre of his consciousness. The three centres generally chosen for spiritual practices are: the heart centre, the centre between the eyebrows, and the crown of the head. The centre of consciousness at which the seeker practises daily concentration and japa must remain unchanged. Any change can disturb the development of concentration.

### SUCCESS IN JAPA

Success in japa has been described by some sacred texts as "mantra-siddhi." Some of the signs of mantra-siddhi are: the mantra, or sacred word, when repeated by the seeker, may appear before his mind's eye in letters of fire; he may experience that the mantra is being constantly repeated within himself, even when he is not uttering it; as he repeats the sacred word, he may feel he is being filled with purity and holiness; he may experience the rising of spiritual consciousness (Kundalini) within himself; he may feel the living presence of his Ishtam, or Chosen Ideal, in the sacred word; being filled with spiritual emotion, he may shed tears, tremble, or his hair may stand on end. According to the path of devotion, a seeker is to be considered a siddha, or adept, in japa only when he has acquired ecstatic love for his Chosen Ideal and when in his presence others are inspired to repeat the name of the Lord spontaneously.

### POWER OF JAPA

According to Tantra, japa alone has the power to bring about spiritual fulfillment. It does not matter whether the seeker practises meditation with japa or not. Japa itself is the surest way of subduing the restless mind. The sacred word, when repeated with

faith and devotion, instantly purifies the body and mind. The sacred texts unanimously maintain that no spirituality is possible without brahmacharya, or continence, and only an adept in the practice of japa can attain success in this respect. Japa is the most effective way of overcoming lustfulness. According to *Bhakti Ratnāvali*, an anthology from the *Bhagavata*: "For those who seek salvation, there is nothing so effective in uprooting the sinful tendencies of the heart as the chanting of the Names of the supremely holy Lord."<sup>26</sup> Once a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna asked the Master how he could overcome lustful tendencies. The Master instructed him to simply repeat a specific name of the Lord. The advice was simple but the remedy proved decisive.

Japa brings the awakening of Kundalini, or inner consciousness. In answer to the question of a disciple on how the Kundalini could be awakened, Swami Brahmananda replies: "According to some, there are special exercises by which the kundalini can be awakened, but I believe it can best be awakened by the practice of japam and meditation<sup>27</sup>....It is sufficient if you will repeat the name of the Lord. Through the practice of japam and meditation you will reach the stage of kumbhaka without risking the dangers which may easily come from the practice of breathing exercises."<sup>28</sup> Japa annuls even the inexorable law of karma. According to this law, one has to experience the effects of one's actions. None can escape it. But japa minimizes the severity of the consequences. As Holy Mother, Sri Sarada

Devi, says, "One has to suffer the consequences of one's deeds. But by repeating the Name of God, you can lessen its intensity. If you were destined to have a wound as wide as a ploughshare, you will get a pinprick at least. The effect of Karma can be counteracted to a great extent by japa and austerities."<sup>29</sup>

### VIOLATIONS IN THE PRACTICE OF JAPA

According to a sacred text, *Haribhaktivilāsa*,<sup>30</sup> the practice of japa becomes flawed and does not bear fruit if the seeker neglects ten factors. These are: (1) looking upon the Chosen Ideals as different from His name and form, (2) regarding the glory of the sacred word as described by the sacred scriptures as mere praise, (3) speaking disrespectfully of the sacred texts, (4) disobeying the spiritual teacher, (5) disparaging the devotees of the Lord, (6) considering the sacred word as no more than an arrangement of letters, (7) imparting the sacred word to unworthy persons, (8) doubting the efficacy of japa, (9) regarding japa as equal to other spiritual practices, and (10) repeatedly committing sinful acts being strengthened by the power of japa. According to the *Padmapurāṇa*, these violations in japa are to be rectified by japa alone.

### THE SACRED TEXTS AND THE GREAT TEACHERS ON JAPA

"A spiritual man attains his goal through japa alone, whatever else he may or may not perform."<sup>31</sup> —Manu

"That which does away with the sins

26. *Bhakti Ratnavali*, trans. by Swami Tapasyananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1979, p. 180.

27. *The Eternal Companion*, by Swami Prabhavananda, Vedanta Press, Hollywood, 1970, p. 208.

28. *Ibid.* p. 227.

29. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi The Holy Mother*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1983, p. 41.

30. *Haribhaktivilasa* (2.11.521-4).

31. Quoted in *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, trans. by Swami Tyagisananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1972, p. 179.



committed in one's whole lifetime is japa. Japa is said to be the foremost of all Dharmas."<sup>32</sup> —Mahabharata

"Of words I am the monosyllable 'Om'. Of sacrifices I am the sacrifice of japa."<sup>33</sup>  
—The Bhagavad Gita

"A Spiritual aspirant intent on japa will get the result of all sacrifices."<sup>34</sup>

—Tantrasara

"By the repetition of the mantra comes the realization of the Chosen Deity."<sup>35</sup>

—Patanjali

"The Names of the Lord, be they uttered with or without the knowledge of their power and holiness, destroy the sins of man, as fire consumes fuel. A potent drug, even when used casually without any awareness of its powers, manifests its inherent curative quality; even so does the utterance of a Mantra (the Lord's Name)."<sup>36</sup>

—Srimad Bhagavatam

"Once you take that name all your sin vanishes. You repeat it a second time and Sri Krishna is yours."<sup>37</sup> —Sri Chaitanya

"I drink no ordinary wine, but Wine of Everlasting Bliss, as I repeat my Mother Kali's name; it so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk! First my guru gives me molasses for the making of the

Wine; my longing is the ferment to transform it. Knowledge, the maker of the Wine, prepares it for me then; and when it is done, my mind imbibes it from the bottle of the mantra, taking the Mother's name to make it pure. Drink of this Wine, says Ramprasad, and the four fruits of life are yours."<sup>38</sup> —Ramprasad

"Repeat His name, and sins will disappear. Thus you will destroy lust, anger, the desire for creature comforts, and so on"<sup>38</sup> "By repeating the name of God secretly and in solitude one receives divine grace. Then comes His vision. Suppose there is a big piece of timber lying under water and fastened to the land with a chain; by proceeding along the chain, link by link, you will at last touch the timber"<sup>40</sup> "Pray to God with a yearning heart that you may take delight in His name. He will certainly fulfill your heart's desire."<sup>41</sup> "A typhoid patient has very little chance of recovery if he loses all taste for food; but his life need not be despaired of if he enjoys food even a little. That is why one should cultivate a taste for God's name. Any name will do —Durga, Krishna, or Siva. Then if, through the chanting of the name, one's attachment to God grows day by day, and joy fills the soul, one has nothing to fear. The delirium will certainly disappear; the grace of God will certainly descend."<sup>42</sup> "There is great power in the seed of God's name. It destroys ignorance. A seed is tender, and the sprout soft; still it pierces the hard ground. The ground breaks and makes way for the sprout."<sup>43</sup> —Sri Ramakrishna

"If meditation is not possible, do japa.

36. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. by Swami Nikhilananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1984, p. 95.

39. *Ibid.* p. 203.

40. *Ibid.* p. 588.

41. *Ibid.* p. 203.

42. *Ibid.* p. 204.

43. *Ibid.* p. 210.

32. Quoted in *Hinduism and Modern Science*, by M.A. Kamath, Bangalore, 1956, p. 167.

33. *The Bhagavad Gita*, (X. 25), trans. by Swami Nikhilananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1979, p. 246.

34. Quoted in *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, trans. by Swami Tyagisananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1978, p. 179.

35. *Raja-Yoga*, (Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali, II. 44), by Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, New York, 1982, p. 178.

36. *Bhakti Ratnavali*, trans. by Swami Tapsyananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1979, p. 178.

37. Quoted in *Bhaktiyoga*, by Aswini Kumar Datta, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay, 1971, p. 165.

Realization will come through japa."<sup>44</sup> "Whether you jump into water or get pushed into it your cloth will get drenched."<sup>45</sup> (That is, the effect of japa is infallible whether practiced with devotion or not.) "The mantra purifies the body. A man becomes pure by repeating the mantra of God."<sup>46</sup> "As wind removes a cloud, so does the name of God disperse the cloud of worldliness."<sup>47</sup> "[The mind will be steadied of itself] if one repeats the Name fifteen or twenty thousand times each day. I have seen it actually happen."<sup>48</sup>

—Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi

"Japa is repeating the Holy Name ;

44. *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi the Holy Mother*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1983, p. 48.

45. *Ibid.* p. 48.

46. *Ibid.* p. 39.

47. *Ibid.* p. 39.

48. *Ibid.* p. 42.

through this the devotee rises to the Infinite."<sup>49</sup> "There are certain sacred words, called Mantras, which have power, when repeated under proper conditions, to produce these extraordinary powers."<sup>50</sup> "The Guru passes the thought power, the Mantra, that he has received from those before him ; and nothing can be done without a Guru. In fact, great danger ensues. Usually without a Guru, these Yoga practices lead to lust ; but with one, this seldom happens. Each Ishta has a Mantra. The Ishta is the ideal peculiar to the particular worshipper ; the Mantra is the external word to express it. Constant repetition of the word helps to fix the ideal firmly in the mind."<sup>51</sup>

—Swami Vivekananda

49. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*: Vol. VII, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1969, p. 37.

50. *Ibid.* Vol I, 1970, p. 290.

51. *Ibid.* Vol. VII, 1969, p. 63.

## MEMORIES OF SWAMI BRAHMANANDA

(Continued from page 130)

the *ghat* (broad stairway) leading down to the water of the Ganga in front of Belur Math. Everyone who has seen that old ghat appreciated unequivocally the skilfulness, efficiency and beauty with which it was constructed. Sitting on its steps with the river in spate, or sitting there on moonlit nights, one used to feel as if he was sitting on an island of the heavenly river Mandakini, outside this phenomenal world. In course of time the spacious landing stages at the water's edge have suffered damage (due to the strong current of the river), but we still remember the efficiency of Maharaj at work. Maharaj himself did the planning of the *ghat*, and Dinu Maharaj (Swami Sacchidananda), who was expert in masonry, executed the plan and brought it into actual shape.

Due to want of money it was decided that all available funds would be given towards the purchase of materials only. The sadhus and brahmacharins would volunteer their labour as workers and helpers. The work was very difficult. Construction could be carried out only at the time of ebb-tide, which occurs at shifting times of night and day. Moreover the work was difficult by its nature for laymen to do. That is why Maharaj used to get all to assemble together and explain everything in detail with the help of Dinu Maharaj, and allot their jobs along with different timings, and tell each crew how long it could be engaged before flood-tide again brought things to a halt.

(To be continued)



# Image as Discourse in Ramakrishna

M. SIVARAMKRISHNA

*The masterly power of Sri Ramakrishna as a teacher and Guru was a wonderful phenomenon. He gave concrete expression to his profound spiritual experiences by means of memorable images and figures of speech. The gifted author, Professor in the Department of English at Osmania University, Hyderabad, shares with us his insightful observations.*

## I

Ramakrishna is *samanvaya murti*; the prophet of harmony, the very image of synthesis and concord. He validated all the faiths as equally viable. Their plurality reflects, for him, the diversity of human nature seeking the Ultimate Reality in terms of implicit temperamental idiosyncracies. Thus, Ramakrishna is an exemplar of affirmation, inclusive of even the apparently grotesque, the ostensibly aberrant.

Given this affirmative, all-encompassing nature, Ramakrishna blurred absolutist distinctions between the 'sacred' and the 'profane'. Accordingly, the pathological dichotomizing between the religious and the secular, the worldly and the spiritual, never cast its crippling shadow on his life and sensibility. In his unique perception, physical objects lost their rugged physicality and inward experiences never remained abstractions. Both constituted complex intertexts illuminating each other. If, for instance, the inanimate is alive, the animate, through his transfiguring vision, transcended the merely physical dimension. He, therefore, gave every experience and object, whether interior or exterior, an orientation which exemplified or reflected some truth of inner life.

This is strikingly evident in Ramakrishna's complex art of concretizing the truths of interior (implicitly secular) life in and

through memorable images. This paper is, as it were, a *dhyana* on the far-ranging subtleties of the Master's protean significance.

## II

Idiolect—whether verbal or visual—is the invariable instrument moulded by one's basic *darshana*: one's idiosyncratic perception of the world. But Ramakrishna's is *darshana* in every sense of the word. He literally *saw* the complex of spiritual truths which, for empiricists, are either psychic projections or fond verbal constructs. In a moment of extraordinary epiphany, Ramakrishna declared: "God talked to me. It was not merely His vision. Yes, He talked to me. Under the banyan tree I saw Him coming from the Ganges. Then we laughed so much! By way of playing with me He cracked my fingers. Then He talked. Yes, He talked to me."<sup>1</sup>

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\* I wish to express my gratitude to Katharine Whitmarsh whose incredibly meticulous *Concordance to the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Santa Barbara, Calif.; The Vedanta Society of Southern California, 1985) revealed to me the amazing richness behind the Master's artless simplicity. Her 'structure' gave the initial impetus for my piece.

1. M., *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* Swami Nikhilananda, tr. (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1986), P. 830. All subsequent references to *The Gospel* are given in parenthesis in the text of the essay itself.

Given this unique perception, it is almost predictable that Ramakrishna should illumine interior perceptions through images of exterior objects. His extensive—bewilderingly far-ranging—images are reflective of this insistent tendency to concretise everything in ordinary, often superficially banal, but easily perceived/perceivable images. If a sense of wonder is basic to mystical experience, this *adbhuta* finds its expressive richness in the evocation of the extraordinary implicit in the ordinary and the ordinary as potentially extraordinary. Thus everything gets transfigured by the presence—shot through with the *chaitanya*—of God.

From this perspective, the Upanishadic insight—“All this—whatever exists in the changing universe—should be covered by the Lord”<sup>2</sup>—acquires in the case of Ramakrishna validity with a variation. It is a case not of *should be* but *is* covered by the Lord. The subsequent injunction, “protect the self by renunciation”, meant for Ramakrishna, not so much ‘covering’ or ‘renouncing’ as ‘recycling’ whatever exists so that the potential wholeness is actualized. This impels Ramakrishna’s idiolect of the visual reinforcing the verbal so that objects are recycled, experiences refracted, and lifted out of their constricting contexts to function as revelatory reflectors and rhythms of a vast range of spiritual truths. Obviously, Ramakrishna’s pastoral ethos and his unerring eye which, like a meticulous, extremely sharp lens, registered every object and activity in that ethos, created, together, the complexity of visuals enchanting the reader on almost every page/passage of *The Gospel*.

### III

A pervasive, highly fascinating facet of

2. Swami Nikhilananda, tr., *The Upanishads* Vol. I (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta Center, 1977), P. 201.

this complexity is Ramakrishna’s ‘magical’ manouvering, a uniquely creative shuffling, of the same image/analogy in disparate contexts transforming its meaning in unexpectedly multiple ways. The vast range of meanings for which the image becomes a referent initiates a dynamic interplay between a fixed object/image and fluid meanings. The resulting plurality of significance rescues the recurrence of the same image from an otherwise predictable aesthetic monotony. In effect, an image recurs but with varied frames of reference. If Ramakrishna’s significance lies in validating the plurality of approaches to inner life, his imagistic idiolect firmly tethered to an object but free in the operative resonance of its significance is an extension, merely, of this pluralism.

### IV

Against this backdrop let us examine one of Ramakrishna’s recurrent imagistic analogues for what is crucial to all inner quest, the mind. The image in question is that of the elephant. (It is also significant that the elephant is a pervasive image in Buddhist parables).

On the physical level—the primary one—its enormous size is, for Ramakrishna, a pointer to an important, although paradoxical, truth: the dissociation of the elephant’s impressive physique from any awareness of the indwelling spirit. This is in contrast to man. Citing a conversation between Rama and Lakshmana (thus psychologizing what one would be inclined to discredit as the mumbo-jumbo of myth), Ramakrishna says: “Fire exists in all things; but its presence is felt more in wood. Rama said to Lakshmana: ‘Look at the elephant, brother. He is such a big animal, but he cannot think of God.’” (*The Gospel*, p. 432).

But, then, man does think, though not necessarily of God. Even when he is impelled



to think of God, this is not easy, nor is it always adequate. This is comparable, says Ramakrishna, to "a mad elephant", and the madness is one of craving for 'woman and gold'.

Madness, however, is not invariably negative: if properly recycled with viable orientations its intensity and energy can lead to liberation. In terms of the imagistic significance, what is needed is a blend of the colossal energy of the elephant and the discriminating subtlety of the human mind. In effect, if the physical is recycled through proper psychic orientations, "the mad elephant" of the mind is controlled. In a creative shuffling of the image, Ramakrishna says: "The Divine Mother, Jagaddhatri, reveals herself in the heart of one who can control the mind, which may be compared to an elephant". And 'the lion, the carrier of the Divine Mother, keeps it under control." (p. 270).

We already notice, by the varied contextuality of the image, a reversal of the negative by linking it to a positive. Thus the energy and the enormous size of the elephant are not dismissed but lifted to a higher level. The recurrence of the image but with a different association alerts the mind and one looks out for further variations. Negating the negative, in another context, Ramakrishna says: "What is the use of giving an elephant a bath? It will cover itself with dirt and dust again and becomes its former self. But if someone removes the dust from its body and gives it a bath just before it enters the stable, then the elephant remains clean." (p. 190).

Extensions of the image occur, again, underlining further truths. "One must strike the elephant on the head with the goad; that is the elephant's most sensitive spot". (p. 540). Similarly, implicitly suggesting the

need for discrimination—for "the goad"—Ramakrishna says: "The moment an elephant stretches out its trunk to eat a plantain tree, it gets a blow from the iron goad of the driver". (p. 97).

Recapitulating, at this stage, the echoes emanating from the complex interplay of the single image of the elephant, we notice/infer two interlocking truths of interior life: the existence of physical and psychic energy and the possibility of controlling both. Two images of control and restraint figure, the lion (from the animal level) and the driver (from the human level). One recalls, also, through association, the (Katha) upanishadic analogy: "A man with discrimination for his charioteer, holds the reins of the mind firmly, reaches the end of the road."<sup>3</sup>

Once we take "discrimination" as the key, we can unlock qualities on which this discrimination rests as inhering, interestingly enough, in the other facets of the same image of the elephant, as ordered by Ramakrishna. Two qualities are highlighted: first, indifference of worldly people for whom interior pilgrimage is an object of derisive ridicule; second, matching the word with intention, an absolute commitment to truth.

These two are associative motifs, for Ramakrishna, of the elephant. He says: "Worldly people say all kinds of things about the spiritually minded. But look here: When an elephant moves along the street, any number of curs and other small animals may bark and cry after it but the elephant doesn't even look back at them" (p. 84). Similarly, emphasising the vital need for telling the truth, he affirms: "A man gives his word and doesn't take it back! 'The words of a man are like the tusks of the elephant: they come out but do not go back'. A man must be true to his word". (p. 264).

3. *Ibid.*, P. 150.

Loyalty to one's word, if it exemplifies truthfulness at one end, at another it could, through doctrinaire distortion, lead to fundamentalist intolerance of another's "word", in effect, another's faith. Dogmatic adherence to one's *ishta*, one's *mārga*, is spiritual myopia resulting in a dismembering of the holistic presence. The image symbolic of this distortion is, again, for Ramakrishna, the elephant. The blind men trying to describe it by touching its different parts, leg, ear, etc., are *right* but only when they *put together* their impressions; otherwise, what they assume as totality is, in effect, fragmentation.

Transcendence of this predicament is possible but not for all. In another amazingly skilful manouver of the image of the elephant, Ramakrishna suggests the distinction between an ordinary *sādhaka*, committed to and overwhelmed by one aspect of Godhead—which he mistakes for the whole, and the deep emotion of one who can contain several layers of far-ranging realizations (exemplified obviously by his own case). "A big lake does not become disturbed when an elephant enters it; but when the elephant enters a pool, one sees tremendous confusion and the water splashes on the banks." (p. 737).

Finally, if one remembers that in Ramakrishna's all embracing, far-ranging sweep, there is nothing that is exempt from the presence of God—at, of course, different levels of evolutionary manifestation—then the elephant is no exception. This ecological truth of the inclusive presence of the Divine is dramatised by Ramakrishna in the entrancing parable of the disciple who didn't heed the Mahut Narayan's warning. (p. 84).

## V

Though only one image/analogy has been

examined, it is obvious that this is just the tip of a vast imagistic iceberg in *The Gospel*. An amazing variety of images—specially those from angling and archery—is available for the delight and profit of the diligent.

We can, nevertheless, conclude our attempt by inferring several implications of this kind of analysis.

For Ramakrishna the negative and the positive are fluid, synergic. Hence an object or an experience has multiple layers of significance capable of being decoded according to the individual's level of awareness. Thus, there is nothing random or contingent in the ecosystem each has its own identity and function but these are capable of transcending their limitations pointing to the holistic network of which they are a part. Above all, no object is exempt from the pervasive presence of the inherent spark of self-awareness (which is only another name for the theologian's God!).

Structurally, the randomness and contingency of the discourse are only apparent and have, it seems, a crucial function. Thus, itemised baldly, the example of the elephant figuring at different points of Ramakrishna's discourse is likely to be regarded as an avoidable repetition or a facile listing of different facets of the same object. If, however, we disregard the surface (and the inherent traps of narratives based on and using images/symbols) the depth suggests a pattern subsuming the entire spectrum of the inward quest. In other words, once we shuffle the contingent, random contexts and perceive the 'depth' structure, in Ramakrishna's words, "if we dive deep" we notice that the image of the elephant (by implication the other images too) are subtly used by Ramakrishna to illumine almost all the facets of the spiritual quest: its aims, condi-

(Continued on page 151)



# Swami Vivekananda's Imitation of Christ

## PRAVRAJIKA BRAHMAPRANA

(Continued from January issue)

*Like Christ, Vivekananda's ministry was short, yet within that brief time, he, like Christ, transmitted purity and peace to thousands—writes the learned author, a nun of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, U.S.A.*

In his lecture "Christ, the Messenger," Swami Vivekananda said, "The best commentary on the life of a great teacher is his own life."<sup>1</sup> For a Vivekananda, one such commentary was the imitation of Christ. "Man is the greatest being that ever can be," he explained to his band of students at Thousand Island Park:

The highest worship there is, is to worship man as Krishna, Buddha, Christ. What you want, you create.<sup>2</sup>

Swamiji's imitation of Christ was cataclysmic. True to his nature, the "cyclonic" Swami relentlessly drove home the truth of his dynamic religion like a torrential rain, beating down on the Western world till its flood waters capsized the familiar landmarks of a comfortable religion and washed away the narrow roadways of conformity. "The Church tries to fit Christ into it," the Swami preached, "not the Church into Christ";

so only those writings were preserved that suited the purpose in hand. Thus the books are not to be depended upon and book-worship is the worst kind of idolatry to bind our feet. All has to conform to the book—science, religion, philosophy; it is the most horrible tyranny, this tyranny of the Protestant Bible.<sup>3</sup>

In simple language, Swamiji raised the looking glass for Westerners to behold their own undisguised superstitions and blatant misconceptions. "Every man in Christian countries has a huge cathedral on his head," Swamiji mused, "and on top of that a book, and yet man lives and grows! Does not this prove that man is God?"<sup>4</sup>

Swamiji's cleansing storm came at a time when there was already a widening rift between Christian dogma and modern scientific discovery. For the thinking class of the West, the spiritual climate was favourable for an infusion of Eastern philosophy into Christianity. For this reason came Swami Vivekananda. He restored order to Christianity by exhorting Christians to return to Christ's teachings, as explained and emulated in the light of yoga-Vedanta. "I found Truth," preached the Swami, "because I had it in my heart already."

Do not deceive yourselves. Do not imagine you will find it in one creed or another. It is within you. Your creed will not give it to you, *you* must give it to your creed.... You have it within yourself, this pearl of great price. That which exists is one. Listen: "Thou art That!"<sup>5</sup>

As the floodwaters receded, what remained were the angry wails of Christian diehards,

1. *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 145.

2. *The Complete Works*, "Inspired Talks," Vol. VII, p. 76.

3. *Ibid*, p. 30.

4. *Loc. cit.*

5. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 101.

denouncing the "Hindoo" Swami who had dared to challenge their Church, their theology, their "good works," and their bigotry.

Mrs. Fincke was just a college student when Swami Vivekananda came to her home in Northampton, Massachusetts, to verbally trounce the Christian ministers and professors who met with him there. "In a corner of the living-room," Mrs. Fincke later reminisced, "we girls sat as quiet as mice and listened eagerly to the discussion that followed."

To texts from the Bible, the Swami replied by other and more apposite ones from the same book. In upholding his side of the argument he quoted English philosophers and writers on religious subjects. Even the poets he seemed to know thoroughly, quoting Wordsworth and Thomas Grey.... Why were my sympathies not with those of my own world? Why did I exult in the air of freedom that blew through the room as the swami broadened the scope of Religion till it embraced all mankind? Was it that his words found an echo in my own longings, or was it merely the magic of his personality? I cannot tell, I only know that I felt triumphant with him. ... To me that night he personified Power.<sup>6</sup>

What, in fact, was Swami Vivekananda's power that gained him ingress into a Christian world to champion Vedanta—India's Eternal Religion? What was his appeal that could win the hearts of Westerners, even against their own will? Without doubt, Swamiji's love and imitation of Christ was what the West first saw and recognized in this Hindu, whose breadth of spiritual insight was like an irresistible magnet drawing them to Eastern thought. Absence of body cons-

sciousness, purity, renunciation, and self-sacrifice—Christ virtues that were recurring themes in Swamiji's lectures, classes and writings—also found expression in his life.

"That [the Swami] maintained the meditative habit throughout his Western life was remarkable," we read in the authoritative *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, "for disturbances were innumerable."

[A]part from his meditation practices and meditative states, he was often lost to the outer world. His face often took on that far-off look, showing his mind withdrawn from all mortal concerns and merged in the thought of the Absolute. While those about him would be talking vivaciously, it would be noticed that his eyes would grow fixed, his breath would come slower till there would be a pause, and then a gradual return to consciousness of his environment.<sup>7</sup>

Even in everyday life, Swamiji's natural recollectedness and lack of body consciousness were obvious to those around him.

If he walked into the house to pay a call and forgot to speak, or if he was found in a room, in silence, no one disturbed him, though he would sometimes rise and render assistance to an intruder, without breaking the train of thought. Thus his interest lay within, and not without.<sup>8</sup>

Swamiji's purity was so tangible that it convinced others. However, this trait like others evolved as he did. "At twenty," Swamiji admitted,

I was the most unsympathetic, uncompromising fanatic; I would not walk on the footpath on the theatre-side of the streets in Calcutta. At thirty-three I can live in

6. *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries: His Prophetic Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1984), Vol. 2, pp. 26-9.

7. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 11.

8. *Ibid*, pp. 11-12.



the same house with prostitutes and never think of saying a word of reproach to them. Is it degenerate? Or is it that I am broadening out into that Universal Love which is the Lord himself?<sup>9</sup>

Sister Nivedita recalled that it was a nautch-girl of Khetri that elevated the Swami's pre-Western days of wandering in India, he came to stay briefly with the Raja of Khetri. One evening, the Raja, who was being entertained by the music of a nautch-girl, sent an invitation for the Swami to join him. But instead, Swamiji sent word back that as a sannyasi, he could not come. Upon hearing this, the nautch-girl was so deeply hurt that she sang in reply a song by Surdas, the words of which, carried by her melodious voice, reached the Swami's ears:

O Lord, look not upon my evil qualities.  
Thy Name, O Lord, is Same-sightedness....

The Swami was deeply moved. The nautch-girl's song lifted him to a higher level of consciousness—the realization that all is Brahman, the same divinity dwelling in all creatures. He immediately joined the Raja's party.

Swamiji, like Christ, transmitted purity and peace to others. After returning from the West, the Swami travelled through northern India with a party of swamis and Western women disciples, including Sister Nivedita, Josephine MacLeod and Mrs Ole Bull. Once, in Naini Tal, during a visit to the temple of the Divine Mother, his Western women disciples became engaged in broken conversation with two nautch-girls.

In their simplicity and ignorance the Westerners took them for respectable women. The dancing girls enquired where they could find the Swami; and on their

way home they came to where he was staying. They begged to be admitted to his presence, so as to receive his blessings. The Swami refused to have them turned away. This immediately caused a storm of disapproval among his listeners, but he ignored it and allowed them to come to him. He blessed the women and spoke to them such words of power, full of kindness and with no trace of reproach, that the hearts of all present were touched.<sup>10</sup>

It was perhaps on this occasion that the Swami first told Sister Nivedita and others the story of the nautch-girl of Khetri. And perhaps on this occasion, Swamiji's Western disciples were reminded of Swamiji's Christ—how a certain woman had come to wash his feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair, kiss them and annoint them with ointment. And then Christ had said to Mary Magdalene: "Thy sins are forgiven," and "Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace"<sup>11</sup>

Swamiji's purity, like Christ's, had the power to transform lives. Such a divine attribute was empowered by the spiritual law governing it, shocking knowledge to those whom Swamiji enlightened. "It is not so easy to be good," Swami explained in his lecture "Hints on Practical Spirituality," delivered in Los Angeles:

What are you but mere machines until you are free? Should you be proud because you are good? Certainly not. You are good because you cannot help it. Another is bad because he cannot help it. If you were in his position, who knows what you would have been? The woman in the street, or the thief in the jail, is the Christ that is being sacrificed that you may be a good man. Such is the law of balance.

9. Ibid, p. 106.

10. Ibid, pp. 334-5.

11. Luke 7:37-50:

... They are all my Christ. I may curse one and yet benefit by his failings ; I may bless another and benefit by his good deeds. This is as true as I stand here. I have to sneer at the woman walking in the street, because society wants it! She, my Saviour, she whose street-walking is the cause of the chastity of other women! Think of that! Think, men and women, of this question in your mind. It is truth—a bare, bold truth!<sup>12</sup>

We can trace Swami Vivekananda's renunciation from his Baranagore days of dire poverty, when he and his brother monks had each only a few possessions—a loin cloth, a mat for a bed, a rosary, a few holy pictures and books, and food what chance might bring. By worldly standards, even the Swami's "poshest" days in America were a period of renunciation—when as a wandering sannyasin, with a gruelling workload, he endured bitter criticism and slander, irregularity of food and sleep, and the insults of American bigots who turned him out of decent hotels. Without doubt, Swami Vivekananda's compassion for mankind shortened his life.

Like Christ, Swami Vivekananda's ministry was short, yet within that brief time frame his mission was monumental. He had a divine message, and like Christ he gave that message to the world. In a letter to Alasinga, dated February 17, 1896, the Swami outlined his immense task:

To put the Hindu ideas into English and then make out of dry philosophy and intricate mythology and queer startling psychology, a religion which shall be easy, simple, popular, and at the same time meet the requirements of the highest minds—is a task which only those can understand who have attempted it. The abstract

Advaita must become living—poetic—in everyday life ; out of hopelessly intricate mythology must come concrete moral forms ; and out of bewildering yogism must come the most scientific and practical psychology—and all this must be put into a form so that a child may grasp it. That is my life's work. The Lord only knows how far I shall succeed. ... It is hard work, my boy, hard work!<sup>13</sup>

Even before the Parliament of Religions in 1888, Swamiji wrote to the renowned pandit Pramadas Mitra of Varanasi questions that penetrated deep into India's philosophical systems. Shortly afterwards, Swamiji set himself to the task of collecting Sanskrit and Indian philosophy books in order to make available to the modern world an understandable synthesis of this ancient Vedanta Philosophy. The result was the four yogas—a brilliant compilation of the Swami's lectures and writings, published by the New York Vedanta Society.

Christ said "No man knoweth the Father except through the Son."<sup>14</sup> So also Swami Brahmananda said of his beloved brother-disciple Swami Vivekananda:

Sri Ramakrishna was revealed to the world at large through Swamiji. Know that their words and teachings are not different. Sri Ramakrishna was too great for the average mind to grasp ; it was Swami Vivekananda who made his life and teachings understandable to all.<sup>15</sup>

Then in emphatic language, Maharaj asserted to a young monk:

Study Swamiji's works carefully, for unless

12. *The Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 34.

13. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 82.

14. Matthew 11:25.

15. Prabhavananda, Swami, *The Eternal Companion* (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1970), p. 182.



you understand his teachings it is useless to try to understand Sri Ramakrishna.<sup>16</sup>

Swami Vivekananda not only preached the Sanatana Dharma to the world at large, but he revitalized Hinduism as well. Just as Christ took religion away from the Pharisees and Saducees and gave it back to the people, so also Swamiji rescued Hinduism from its elitism—perpetrated by money-hungry priests and blinding orthodoxies. “No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism,” Swamiji said at one time,

and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism. The Lord has shown me that religion is not in fault, but it is the Pharisees and Saducees in Hinduism, hypocrites, who invent all sorts of engines of tyranny in the shape of doctrines....<sup>17</sup>

The Swami's battle cry was against India's “Don't Touchism.” “The kitchen is their temple, and cooking-pots their object of worship,” he cried:

This state of things must go. The sooner it is given up, the better for our religion. Let the Upanishads shine in their glory, and, at the same time, let not quarrels exist among the different sects.<sup>18</sup>

Though Swamiji sought to liberate Hinduism from its conflicting sects, he did not hesitate to decry religious hypocrites in India—Buddhists, Theosophists, or Christians—who tried “to fawn and flatter him,” though behind his back they reviled him out of jealousy.

16. Loc. cit.

17. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 527.

18. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 299.

To overhaul the consciousness of his country was no small task. In order to tie his Eastern and Western disciples together, he deliberately and publicly defied caste restrictions by eating and drinking with his Western disciples. Swamiji made further inroads into orthodoxy by eating the food that Westerners cooked for him, and making his brother-monks do the same, and imparting knowledge of the Hindu sacred scriptures to his Western audiences. Ignoring race, caste, colour, or creed, he boldly referred to his Western disciples as true Brahmanas and Kshatriyas.<sup>19</sup>

In raising India from her sick-bed, Swamiji sought to elevate the masses, remove untouchability, relieve in any way possible the sufferings of those besieged by famine, flood, or fire, educate the women, encourage the technological development of India, and give freedom to society for its development.<sup>20</sup>

As an instrument of his mission to serve God in man, Swami Vivekananda established a new Order of monasticism against all odds. At first even his own brother-monks challenged him to prove how the service of the Ramakrishna Mission could be reconciled with Sri Ramakrishna's emphasis on meditation, cultivation of bhakti, and other spiritual practices. One day these objections were silenced once and for all. “What do you understand of religion?” Swamiji retorted to their criticism:

You are babies. You are only good at praying with folded hands: ‘O Lord! how beautiful your nose is, how sweet your eyes are’, and such nonsense. And you think your salvation is secured, that Sri Ramakrishna will come at the final hour

19. Ibid, p. 324.

20. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, pp. 530-1.

and take you up by the hand to the highest heaven. ..."<sup>21</sup>

Swamiji's brother disciples were stunned as their brother-monk thundered on:

You think you understand Sri Ramakrishna better than myself! You think Jnana is dry knowledge to be attained by a desert path, killing out the tenderest faculties of the heart. ... Hands off! ... Who cares for your Bhakti and Mukti? ... I will go to hell cheerfully a thousand times, if I can rouse my countrymen. ... I am not a servant of Ramakrishna or any one, but of him only who serves and helps others, without caring for his own Mukti.<sup>22</sup>

Swamiji's voice became choked, his body shook, and tears streamed from his eyes. Unable to contain himself any longer, he fled from the room. His brother disciples were seized with fear, and moments later quietly entered his bedroom. There they found Swamiji seated in meditation—"body stiff, tears flowing from his half-closed eyes, and body-hair standing on end." After nearly an hour, Swamiji's *bhava samadhi* came to an end. He rose from meditation, washed his face, and came out to the apartment where his brothers were waiting. At last he spoke:

When one attains Bhakti, one's heart and nerves become so soft and delicate that they cannot bear even the touch of a flower. ... I cannot think or talk of Sri Ramakrishna long, without being overwhelmed. So I am trying and trying always to keep down the rush of Bhakti welling within me. I am trying to bind and bind myself with the iron chains of Jnana, for

still my work to my motherland is unfinished, and my message to the world not fully delivered. ... Oh, I have work to do! I am a slave of Ramakrishna, who left his work to be done by me, and will not give me rest till I have finished it! And, oh, how shall I speak of him! Oh, his love for me!<sup>23</sup>

It was his own depth of Bhakti that gave Swamiji his deep understanding for other forms of Bhakti. Once he admitted that the stigmata was a "natural result of an agonizing love of God."<sup>24</sup>

Like Christ, Swamiji was a divine being subject to divine moods. In *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, Swami Saradananda, a direct disciple of the Master, explained Christ's higher levels of consciousness in the context of Eastern revelation. When Jesus went to the Temple of Jerusalem, Saradananda wrote, he was in *bhavamukha*, the spiritual realm between the relative world and the Absolute. Though outside the temple gates, merchants busied themselves in trying to extract money from the temple pilgrims, Jesus was oblivious, "filled with spiritual emotion." Swami Saradananda further described:

Going straight into the temple and having the vision of the Deity, [Jesus] was beside himself with joy to see that He was within him as the Life of his life and the Self of his self. He began to feel that the temple and all the persons and things in it were more than his own; for it was on coming here that he was blessed with the vision of the source and solace of his life.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup>. Ibid, p. 253.

<sup>24</sup>. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 408.

<sup>25</sup>. Saradananda, Swami, *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*, Jagadananda, Swami, ed. (Madras: Jupiter Press Private Ltd., 1952). III. 5.10.

<sup>21</sup>. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 252.

<sup>22</sup>. Loc. cit.



When, however, Christ saw that the inner mood of the priests and shop-keepers around him were fixed on lust and greed, "his heart was then filled with despair." He thought, "Why are worldly activities going on here of all places, where there is an especial manifestation of God?" Swami Saradananda wrote:

Thinking thus, [Jesus] was seized with divine anger and he assumed a terrible appearance and with a cane in hand drove off all the shopkeepers and others out of the temple by force. Having got a momentary awakening of the spirit from his words, they also went out without offering any resistance whatsoever, thinking that they had indeed been committing misdeeds.<sup>26</sup>

We are reminded here of the fiery lecture Swamiji delivered in New York, on "My Master." According to *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, when Swamiji came to the platform to deliver his lecture, he looked out over the audience and saw that it was "composed, for the most part, of worldly-minded men and women lacking in spiritual sympathy and earnestness."

So, instead, [the Swami] launched out on a terrible denunciation of the vulgar physical and materialistic ideas which underlay the whole of western civilization. Hundreds of people left the hall abruptly, but in no way affected, he went on to the end.<sup>27</sup>

The next morning, when Swamiji read the reports in the newspaper—some favourable and others critical, "but all commenting on his fearlessness, sincerity and frankness"—he wept bitterly and said:

26. Loc. cit.

27. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 92.

My Master never condemned anything or anybody. But while I was speaking of him I criticized the people of America for their dollar-worshipping spirit. That day I learnt the lesson that I am not yet fit to talk of him.<sup>28</sup>

Swamiji's moods ranged from divine anger or calm detachment to ecstasies or towering heights of *nirvikalpa samadhi*—his poems, lectures, and letters conveying the unmistakable ring of his spiritual *bhava*. "Kali the Mother," written during Swamiji's 1898 pilgrimage to Kshir Bhavani, in Kashmir, is one such expression of his divine mood. Sister Nivedita, who accompanied the Swami, later wrote:

His brain was teeming with thoughts, he said one day, and his fingers would not rest till they were written down. It was that same evening that he came back to our house-boat from some expedition, and found waiting for us, where he had called and left them, his manuscript lines on "Kali the Mother." Writing in a fever of inspiration, he had fallen on the floor, when he had finished—as we learnt afterwards—exhausted with his own intensity.<sup>29</sup>

In his July 6, 1896 letter to Mr. Francis Leggett Swamiji gives expression to another characteristically ecstatic mood. "Some days I get into a sort of ecstasy," he confessed to his friend and disciple:

I feel that I must bless every one, everything, love and embrace everything, and I do see that evil is delusion. I am in one of these moods now, dear Francis,

28. Burke, Marie Louise, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries: The World Teacher* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1985), Vol. 3, p. 520.

29. Vivekananda, Swami, *In Search of God and Other Poems*, Advaita Ashrama, ed. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968), p. 89.

and I am actually shedding tears of joy at the thought of your and Mrs. Leggett's love and kindness to me.

The letter continues in ecstatic waves of joy:

There is neither rhyme nor reason in the Universe! What reason binds Him? He the Playful One is playing these tears and laughters over all parts of the play! ... It is a funny world and the funniest chap you ever saw is He—the Beloved Infinite! Fun, is it not?...

“They want explanantions,” Swamiji continues:

but how can you explain Him? He is brainless, nor has He any reason. He is fooling us with little brains and reason, but this time He won't find me napping. I have learnt a thing or two: beyond, beyond reason and learning and talking is the feeling, the “Love”, the “Beloved”. Aye, saki, fill up the cup and we will be mad.

Yours ever in madness,  
Vivekananda<sup>30</sup>

Once Swamiji told Shanti Hansbrough, “You have heard that Christ said, ‘My words are spirit and they are life.’” He pointed his finger at his disciple and continued:

So are my words spirit and life; they will burn their way into your brain and you will never get away from them!<sup>31</sup>

Swamiji further disclosed the secret of this divine power. In his “Addresses on

Bhakti Yoga,” he explained: ‘Blessed are the pure in heart’, that lives today.”

These words are a gigantic magazine of power—inexhaustible. So long as the human mind lasts, so long as the name of God is not forgotten, these words will roll on and on and never cease to be. These are the powers Jesus taught, and the powers he had. The power of purity; it is a definite power.<sup>32</sup>

In *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* one disciple recalled Swamiji's expression of this divine power and how he communicated it to others:

[W]hen he spoke in all seriousness and intensity—though it seems wellnigh incredible—there were some among his hearers who were literally exhausted. The subtlety of his thoughts and arguments swept them off their feet. In one case I know of a man who was forced to rest in bed for three days as the result of a nervous shock received by a discussion with the Swami. His personality was at once awe-inspiring and sublime. He had the faculty of literally annihilating one if he so chose.<sup>33</sup>

Swami Vivekananda's spiritual power was such that he, like Christ, could transmit spirituality with a touch, a look, or a wish. Once upon his return to India in 1897, Swamiji was received by a throng of people at Kumbakonam, South India. By chance, the Swami recognized in the crowd a ghost-charmer, Govinda Chetti, whom he had met four years before, so he sent word for Govinda to meet him later. When Govinda came, Swamiji asked him, “I know you have

30. Vedanta Society of Southern California archives.

31. *Swami Vivekananda's Second Visit to the West*, p. 451.

32. *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 33.

33. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, pp. 89-90.



psychic power. It has given you money and honour ; but from the spiritual point of view, are you not where you started ? Has your mind progressed towards God ?” The man replied, “No, it has not progressed.” Then the Swami said to him: “If that has not happened, what have you gained by this psychic power ? Once you taste the bliss of God, you will see that all these things are nothing.” Upon saying this, the Swami embraced Govinda. From that day forth, his psychic power had left him, and in its place was such a deep yearning for God, that Govinda later renounced the world.<sup>34</sup>

Incidents such as this proved Sri Ramakrishna's prophecy, when, in the words of Sister Nivedita, he “told his disciples that the day would come when his beloved ‘Naren’ would manifest his own great gift of bestowing knowledge with a touch.”<sup>35</sup>

Madame Calve, the world famous opera singer was another recipient of Swami Vivekananda's divine power. From the strange and unaccounted events in Calvé's life that eventually drew her to the Swami, it seems indeed that he had chosen her before she ever decided to stand before him. “Calvé, the toast of two continents,” Marie Louise Burke disclosed in her book *New Discoveries*, “was possessed of a temperament that rarely makes for happiness.”

Tempestuous, headstrong, and sensuous, she was, it would seem, frequently involved in emotional attachments. The most recent and most deeply felt of these had just come to an unhappy end, leaving her desolate.<sup>36</sup>

34. Ibid, p. 185.

35. Ibid, p. 337.

36. Burke, Marie Louise, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries: His Prophetic Mission*, Vol. I (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), p. 484.

According to Calvé's autobiography:

[Swamiji] was lecturing in Chicago one year when I was there ; and as I was at that time greatly depressed in mind and body, I decided to go to him.<sup>37</sup>

Where Madame Calvé leaves off, Madame Verdier, her close friend, recalls in greater detail. Madame Calvé had been performing *Carmen*:

During the first intermission [Madame Verdier wrote] she suddenly felt terribly depressed and thought she could not continue the second act. Right after the second act, coming back to her dressing room she almost collapsed and asked the manager to announce she was ill. She was more depressed than before and had difficulty in breathing. The manager and people around her insisted so, that finally she continued and was almost carried to the stage for the last act. She told me that at that minute she made the greatest effort of her life to finish the performance. She also said that it was the day she sang her best and the public gave her a tremendous ovation. She ran to her dressing room without waiting for the applause, and when she saw several people and the manager waiting for her with sad faces, she knew something tragic had happened.<sup>38</sup>

Madame Verdier continued:

The tragedy was that her daughter, who had been in the house of a friend that evening, was dead, having been burned to death during the performance of *Carmen*. Calvé collapsed.<sup>39</sup>

Days afterwards Calve longed to commit suicide. Her friend begged her instead to

37. Ibid, p. 484.

38. Ibid, pp. 484-5.

39. Ibid, p. 485.

come to her house to see Swami Vivekananda. Calvé refused. But when she would become possessed with the thought of ending her life by throwing herself in the lake, "each time," Madame Verdier wrote:

as though in a daze she found herself on the road to Swamiji's house. Finally, the fourth or fifth time, she found herself on the threshold of her friend's house, the butler opening the door. She went in and sat in a deep chair in the living room. She was there for a while as in a dream, she said, when she heard a voice coming from the next room saying, "Come, my child. Don't be afraid." And automatically she got up and entered into the study where Swamiji was sitting behind a large table-desk.<sup>40</sup>

"Before going I had been told not to speak until he addressed me," Calvé related in her autobiography.

When I entered the room, I stood before him in silence for a moment. He was seated in a noble attitude of meditation, his robe of saffron yellow falling in straight lines to the floor, his head swathed in a turban bent forward, his eyes on the ground. After a pause he spoke without looking up. "My child," he said, "What a troubled atmosphere you have about you. Be calm. It is essential."<sup>41</sup>

"Then in a quiet voice, untroubled and aloof, this man who did not even know my name," Calvé recounted, "talked to me of my secret problems and anxieties."

He spoke of things that I thought were unknown even to my nearest friends. It seemed miraculous, supernatural. "How

do you know all this?" I asked at last. "Who has talked of me to you?"

He looked at me with his quiet smile as though I were a child who had asked a foolish question.

"No one has talked to me," he answered gently. "Do you think that it is necessary? I read in you as in an open book."<sup>42</sup>

Finally it was time for Calvé to take her leave. "'You must forget,'" he said as I rose.

"Become gay and happy again. Build up your health. Do not dwell in silence upon your sorrows. Transmute your emotions into some form of external expression. Your spiritual health requires it. Your art demands it."<sup>43</sup>

"I left him," Calvé wrote, "deeply impressed by his words and his personality"

He seemed to have emptied my brain of all its feverish complexities and placed there instead his clear and calming thoughts. ... It was the strength of his character, the purity and intensity of his purpose that carried conviction.<sup>44</sup>

Not only did Swami Vivekananda exhibit Christ attributes, at times he seemed to embody Christ. As Swamiji's San Francisco devotees so aptly expressed in their written tribute to him after his passing: "He is to us what Jesus Christ is to many devout Christians."<sup>45</sup> Miss Josephine MacLeod, Swamiji's friend, disciple, and lady missionary, had her own experience of his Christlike

40. Loc. cit.

41. Loc. cit.

42. Ibid, pp. 485-6.

43. Ibid, p. 486.

44. Loc. cit.

45. Burke, Marie Louise, *Swami Vivekananda in the West, New Discoveries: A New Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1987), Vol. 6, p. 221.



divinity. "Swami lectured a great number of times at the Home of Truth and in various halls," Miss MacLeod wrote in her memoirs, "but perhaps the most outstanding lecture I ever heard was his talk on 'Jesus of Nazareth,' when he seemed to radiate a white light from head to foot, so lost was he in the wonder and the power of Christ."<sup>46</sup>

Swamiji's last words to the people of southern California was a familiar theme. In his lecture "The Great Teachers of the World," Swamiji stirred his audience:

46. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964), p. 246.

Each one of these Teachers has been great; each one has left something for us; they have been our Gods. We salute them, we are their servants; and, all the same, we salute ourselves; for if they have been Prophets and children of God, we also are the same. They reached their perfection, and we are going to attain ours now. Remember the words of Jesus: 'The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!' This very moment let every one of us make a staunch resolution: 'I will become a Prophet, I will become a messenger of Light. I will become a child of God, nay, I will become a God!'<sup>47</sup>

47. *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, 134.

## IMAGE AS DISCOURSE IN RAMAKRISHNA

(Continued from page 140)

tions, inherent risks and the modes of activating energies both physical and psychic.

But, then, Ramakrishna's is not just a clever creative sensibility, because such cleverness usually does not transcend the level of effective surprise stemming from the blending of discordant objects and emotions. For Ramakrishna, however, an image, even the one rooted in the physicality of clay, is charged with the primal energy of undifferentiated consciousness, its physicality potential with the revelatory sweep of transcendence. (Hence his admonition to M who was sceptical about 'meditating on clay images': "Why clay? These images are the embodiments of consciousness". P. 127). In effect, perceived carefully, Ramakrishna's extraordinary ordering of images offers

correctives to purely literalist, aesthetic approaches to Reality. In this sense, almost all the images in Ramakrishna are physiological precursors and symbolic correlatives for the eventual emergence of that psychological focussing which in its full sophisticated interiorization is *dhyana*, meditation.

For the *sādhaka*, in these terms, the effort at integrating the apparently disconnected contexts is wresting order out of chaos. This process is in itself emblematic of, though not fully identical with, the meditative, contemplative modes. To launch on such an integrated study is, as it were, to define for oneself an important component of all *sāadhanā*, *swādhyāya*: the discovery of the truth of study based not so much on sight as interior, 'imagistic' *in-sight*.

# The Unique Space-Time and Historical Sense of The Hindus

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

## 2. Hindu Tradition and Practice of Timing and Recording Events

In all civilizations the past or future events are fixed by some method of recording the date and time. Though eras based on some significant event in national life, or associated with the birth or some notable act of a great person, have been used as fixed points for recording past or future events, mankind has to depend ultimately on the understanding of the actual or apparent movements of the earth, moon, sun, and stars, in relation to each other, which act as an astronomical clock, for the calculation of time such as days, months, years, etc., and on some artificial device to note the time of the day or night in detail, and more or less accurately, such as the hour glass, etc.; and we have the modern mechanical clock now. Calendars of events, rituals, festivals, etc. and the programmes of activities and other functions, have to take recourse to the astronomical clock to fix the date and time, whatever be the era.

In non-Hindu civilizations, the astronomical clock has played only a limited role for calculating the days, months, and the year, whereas the different eras have played the

major and important role for recording the date of events—such as the Christian Era, the Hijri Era, etc.<sup>7</sup> The calendars of festivals and sacred functions have been based on significant events in the life of the nation or of the founder of the particular religion, which themselves are related to terrestrial dating.

On the other hand, in India from the early Vedic times all the Vedic *Yāga-s* and *Yajña-s* (religious sacrifices) and other sacred rites were related to the movement and position of the earth and the heavenly bodies such as the moon, sun, and the stars, so much so, an astronomical work of c. 13th century B.C. (*Vedānga-Jyotiṣa*) was considered as a subsidiary limb of the Vedas. Even up to the present day, many of the holy days of the Hindus are related to the astronomical positions of the heavenly bodies and the date and time of the observances connected with great persons etc. also are fixed on the basis of astronomical factors and not by the civil date. The digits of the moon in the bright and dark fortnights, the position of the moon in the different *Nakṣatra-s* (lunar asterisms), the position of the sun in the different *Rāśi-s* (the Signs of the Zodiac), the periods of the solstices and equinoxes, and the seasons as related to the sun's position, etc.—all these factors or several of them play their part in determining the date and time of the sacrifices, rituals, and the festivals. This astronomical clock provided the Hindus a natural and impersonal standard that is universally applicable.

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7. Before the Christian Era, there were other eras, both in the West and the East, such as that of the Olympiad Era of the Greeks beginning from 776 B.C. The Chinese, Jews, and the Romans too probably had their own eras for dating events from early times. We shall deal with the Hindu eras later.



If we should use a figure, of this astronomical clock or *Kālacakra* (Wheel of Time),<sup>8</sup> the ecliptic (*Krānti-cakra*) is the celestial 'circle' along which are the 12 *Rāśi*-s, the stellar constellations or the Signs of the Zodiac, which are the numbers indicating the twelve solar months of the year. The sun and the moon are the two hands of the clock and the earth is the centre. The diurnal movement of the earth, from sun-rise to sun-rise, gives the solar days (*Dina* or *Divasa*) and the digits of the moon give the lunar days (*Tithi*-s), and the duration from full-moon to full-moon, which courses through the 27 luni-solar asterisms along the ecliptic, gives the lunar month (*Māsa*); such 12 *Māsa*-s give the lunar year. The apparent position of the sun in the *Rāśi*-s as seen from the earth give the solar months. The position of the solstices and the equinoxes give the seasons. The equinoctial point gives the *Viśuvan* or the central day of the sacrificial year.

The precession of the equinoxes is the most important factor which helps the determination of the age of past events, for it takes place at the rate of around 72 years (at present) per degree, the ecliptic being divided into 360°.<sup>9</sup> Since the lunar asterisms,

8. Time, like Space, is not linear. Being integrally associated with Space as its dynamic power, time rolls in cycles which we designate as day and night, months, years, etc. Hence the phenomenon is designated *Kāla-Cakra* or the 'Wheel of Time'. In religious symbolism, it is one of the all-powerful weapons (*Sudarsana-Cakra*) in the hand of Lord Viṣṇu, the personalized representation of the All-pervading Reality, called *Viṣṇu* in the Vedas.

9. In the Vedic times, the ecliptic was not yet divided into 360°, but into the 12 *Rāśi*s as well as into the 27 luni-solar asterisms. Each asterism-distance was divided into 4 parts called *Nakṣatra-padas*, and the precessions were calculated on that basis. With some further adjustments, this would give a close approximation though not quite exact reading.

27 in number, are fixed in their relation to the ecliptic, the sliding back of the equinox from one lunar asterism (*Nakṣatra*) to another, or from one *Rāśi* to another (or part of the way in terms of degrees), gives the number of years that have elapsed between the past event that occurred when the equinox was in a particular *Nakṣatra* or *Rāśi* and its present position.

The Hindus depended on this highly reliable natural astronomical clock, the source of all other types of clocks, to record all their events in ancient times, probably exclusively till the end of the Mahābhārata War. In due course, for the convenience of the vastly growing population, several eras were also introduced along with it, such as the impersonal Kali-yuga Era (when most of the planets are said to have been in near conjunction—*Yuga* means also conjunction) beginning with 3102 B.C. (February 18th);<sup>10</sup> the

10. Besides the fact of precession of the equinoxes, in the Vedic times there were also some other devices to reckon the time of events all of which are not now known. There was the Chatur-Yuga idea of 10,000 years, with each Yuga running probably equally up to 2,500 years. There was also the Saptarṣi-Cakra of 1,000 years cycle, and a five-year cycle for smaller ritualistic reckonings. How these were put to use seems to have been forgotten, just as in the case of the Brahmi-script in later times.

The Kali-Yuga, according to the early Vedic conception of the Yugas, was said to have begun very soon after the Mahābhārata War. Now the date of the Mahābhārata War is not yet definitely settled by modern scholars who have differing opinions which run between 1,500 B.C. to 1,000 B.C. in round numbers. Accordingly the beginning of the Kali-Yuga is also placed between this period. V. Gopala Aiyer, in his book on '*The Chronology of Ancient India*' (Madras, 1901); has given several cogent historical arguments, including from the Puraṇas, to place the War in 1193 B.C. and the beginning of Kali-Yuga in 1176-7 B.C. However, most of the orthodox scholars, with astronomical and other arguments, stick to the 3,102 B.C. as the beginning of Kali-Yuga and



Yudhiṣṭira Era, commencing after the Mahābhārata War, with Yudhiṣṭira's coronation, and that of King Vikramāditya in 56 B.C. and King Sālivāhana in 78 A.D., besides several other regional eras. The Kali-Yuga era, the Vikrama Samvat, and the Sāivāhana Śaka are used to the present day in all Hindu functions and calculations in association with the astronomical factors. These days the Yudhiṣṭira era is not much in vogue. Yudhiṣṭira was a great personality of the Mahābhārata times, well known for his devotion to Dharma (virtuous conduct) and was called Dharma-rāja. Vikramāditya and Sālivāhana were great heroes who vanquished the enemies and saved the country.

hold that the Mahābhārata War took place in 3,138 B.C. since it is stated in the Purāṇas that the Kali-Yuga set in when Sri Krishna passed away 36 years after the War. Until Sri Krishna was alive it was Dvāpara-Yuga.

Whatever be the correct position with regard to the date of the Mahābhārata War and the actual beginning of the Kali-Yuga as per the old system, it is a fact that *as an era* for dating events 3,102 (or 3101) B.C. has been conventionally widely adopted, probably after Aryabhatta (b. 476 A.D.), the greatest astronomer of the ancient world, who propounded for the first time the diurnal motion of the earth on its axis and that the earth moved round the sun. It is held by some that he fixed the beginning of the Kali-Yuga *as an era* on the basis of the conjunction of several planets on that date. The Purāṇas had evolved a few centuries before the new system or reckoning the Yuga etc. in celestial years, i.e. 360 human years as equal to 1 year of the gods. Aryabhatta fixed it perhaps to harmonize the old Yuga system with the Purāṇas. Previously the Kali-Yuga was not used as an era. The Yugas were used for the calculation of periods, and years were mentioned in terms of the Mahābhārata War or the Yudhiṣṭira Era. There has been confusion because of the two systems and the commonness of nomenclature, though the connotations are different in the two systems. An understanding of the distinction between the two will help clear the confusion. After the new Kali-Yuga Era came into vogue, the Yudhistira Era gradually came into disuse.

In the Vedic literature, and in the *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Mahābhārata*, and the *Purāṇas*, we find a large number of events and happenings recorded by the ancient astronomical method. During the establishment of the British rule, the Western method of dating came into vogue in the administrative field and for civil purposes, but for all religious purposes and in orthodox circles the ancient method is widely used to the present day. The astronomical factors are laid down in the almanacs called *Pañchānga*-s. The Hindu year begins astronomically, and is not arbitrarily fixed.

### 3. *Reasons for the Choice of the Astronomical Clock*

It is a wonder why the Hindus made the natural and universal astronomical clock the central factor and guide for all their calculations and for fixing of time for their religious as well as secular purposes, whereas all other nations made some great person or event their starting point and centre. While the former is related, as it were, to eternity, or the very beginning of the manifestation of the universe, *the supremely greatest event and the source of all life and history*, the latter have a terrestrial standard limited to an event or personality of very recent times on earth. Even archaeologically, a discipline adopted very recently, it does not go very far back. This circumscription of history seems to be the result of the limited and popular views about the creation of the universe,<sup>11</sup> its nature, and the nature of life

11. As A. S. Sayce says, "As far as man was concerned his history was still limited by the dates in the margin of our Bibles. Even today the old idea of his recent appearance still prevails in quarters where we should least expect to find it, and the so-called critical historians still occupy themselves in endeavouring to reduce the dates of his early history."

"To a generation which had been brought up



and beings, especially man. The Hindu view of creation has been that it is eternal and cyclical, and integral and evolutionary.<sup>12</sup> All material and vital, mental and moral, intellectual and intuitional, and aesthetic and spiritual manifestation in the physical universe and beyond it, either gross or subtle, is traced to one Supreme Infinite Self-sentient Existence, which is Trans-Personal and of the nature of Absolute Consciousness, which is at the core of all entities and beings. The universe is a projection (*Sṛiṣṭi*) or manifestation of that Existence (*Sat*), and not Creation out of nothing. It does not countenance the concept of creation out of nothing at a particular time by the fiat of an almighty Person called God in Heaven, or from mere insentient *matter/energy* postulated by persons who themselves are sentient. This inherent natural trend of the Hindu mind to penetrate beyond the

material veil and seek the spiritual, the eternal, the integral, and the universal from the very beginning, which later on manifested in grand systems of philosophy to inculcate it, must have been the inwardly guiding factor, like a mango seed in which is involved the potency and the urge for producing a mango tree and mangoes, in all their thought forms and sacred and secular activities, including the mode of recording historical events. Hence, perhaps, their choice of the natural and universal astronomical method. It is also a well known fact that the Hindu mind had keen perception and versatile genius.

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to believe that in 4,004 B.C. or thereabout the world was being created, the idea that man himself went back to 100,000 years ago was both incredible and inconceivable." (Quoted by K. N. Kapoor, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60).

"The Western scholar, even if he was not a staunch Christian, was impressed by the Bible. He was brought up from his very childhood in that atmosphere. According to the margins in the Bible, God created the Universe 4,004 years before Christ. Accordingly, the entire history of the world was to be squeezed into 4,000 years." (*ibid.*, p. 59).

<sup>12</sup>. The Sāṃkhya and the Vedānta systems propound the evolution of the universe, in its inanimate and animate aspects, more comprehensively than modern science does; Vedānta derives it from Primal Divine Energy or Śakti, and Sāṃkhya from Proto-Nature or *Prakṛti*. As Sir Monier Williams has pointed out, "Indeed the Hindus were Spinozists 2,000 years before the birth of Spinoza, Darwinians centuries before the birth of Darwin, and evolutionists many centuries before the doctrine of evolution had been accepted by the Huxleys of our time, and before any word like evolution existed in any language of the world." (In a speech in the 1880-s) See also F.N. Nos. 23 and 24.

Another probable reason, which is at present only a circumstantial hypothesis based on literary sources and cannot be factually substantiated, is the frequent description in the Sanskrit literature from ancient times of the Himalayan region north of Kashmir as the *Meru* or the North Pole. Two of the names of the Himalayas are *Meru* and *Sumeru*. (cf. also the present Pamir, which may be a corruption from *Pra-meru*). In the early Vedic literature there are numerous descriptions and allusions to the phenomena which can be witnessed only in the polar and arctic regions; e.g. the several weeks long dawns and twilights, the six monthly day and night, or very long nights from two to four months; the sun, moon, and the stars moving round and round overhead like an umbrella instead of rising and setting, etc.<sup>13</sup> Naturally, all this wonderful phenomena in the firmament will engage the attention, and the mind begins to work in that direction. Much of the Vedic mythology and later mythical conceptions are also based on the astronomical phenomena, or rather often the astro-

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<sup>13</sup>. For a detailed description, see '*The Arctic Home in the Vedas*', by B. G. Tilak, published by Tilak Brothers, Pune, 1st ed. 1903.

nomical phenomena were clothed in the language of myths.

Whether at any time the North Pole was located in the Himalayan region, or the Vedic people resided in the present polar and arctic regions, is a moot point, but the descriptions are there in the Vedas of the polar phenomena, and in Sanskrit literature the Himalayan region is often described as the Meru. One may refer to B.G. Tilak's '*Arctic Home in the Vedas*', '*The Orion*', and other works for a detailed treatment in this respect, and consequently also for the dating of the early Vedic literature. There are works by some Western authors also which seek to interpret Vedic mythology as well as those which propound a polar home of the Aryan peoples of India and Europe, if not of humanity itself. Some of these are quoted by Tilak. Be that as it may, the evident fact is that the entire religious life of the Vedic Hindus and their rituals and sacrifices were guided entirely by the astronomical phenomena and the movement of heavenly bodies.

There were round the year and year-long sacrifices (*Sattra-s*) (during which the ancient lore and historical events were recited, which later on developed into the well known Purāṇas), so much so the year and the sacrifice (*Samvatsara* and *Yajña*) came to be identified, and often the *Yajña* itself was called the *Samvatsara*. The equinoctial day (*Viśuvan*) represented the central day in the year long sacrifice. Thus *Yajña* became a concrete ritualistic expression of the year with all the astronomical phenomena during the year reflected in its various rites. From this stage, the application of the astronomical phenomena to determine or record the time of all sacred and secular events are only the natural psychological and logical steps, even though the scene of activities shifted to the lower latitudes in India. Further on, this trend gave rise to the conception of celestial or divine years and the new system of Yuga-chronology based on it.

(to be concluded)

The sum-total of all the energy that is in the universe remains always the same ; it neither waxes nor wanes, nor is it annihilated. It has, however, modifications, or changes, and is transformed in various ways—that is all. Nothing whatever of all that we do or think, good or bad, is lost ; it continues to be active in a subtle manner, or is stored up and becomes active as soon as the opportune moment arrives. Thus, we ourselves have to reap the fruits, good or bad, of our Karma, or work. Not only that ; this stored-up thought or action of one also influences others and causes them either suffering or happiness.



## REVIEWS & NOTICES

**PRABUDDHA NAGARIKATA** (Hindi). Published by The Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, 110-055. 460 pages ; Rs. 45/-.

The book under review is a Hindi translation of the original **ENLIGHTENED CITIZENSHIP** in English, which was the result of a seminar organized on this subject by the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi. We are immensely grateful to Late Swami Budhananda who thought of the unique project of inviting a select group of very eminent men in different fields of our national life to speak on this important subject and then to publish their lectures in book form for wider circulation.

The book is divided into two sections. *Section I* is an introduction which contains relevant extracts on "good life" from the great books of the East and West. *Section II* contains the papers of sixteen distinguished speakers who include such men as Swami Ranganathananda, Y. B. Chandrachud, Dr. Raja Ramanna, the late L. K. Jha, S. Sahay, and others. In 17th-18th century Europe, philosophers propagated the concept of enlightened self-interest and created a tremendous impact on the intelligentsia. Later this concept flowered into the ideal of good citizenship in European democracies. In our country, we have been practising a formal democracy for four decades but our national life shows glaring deficiencies everywhere, be it politics, administration, business or education. It was in this context that Ramakrishna Mission, Delhi thought of highlighting the concept of enlightened citizenship.

The book is a serious attempt at understanding the basic deficiencies of our body-politic, and at highlighting the various facets of enlightened citizenship. Building up a good society requires a high degree of self-discipline on the part of the citizens and also a real concern for the well-being of our fellow men. In this context, the importance of ensuring the minimum basic needs to all the citizens and special consideration for those who have remained deprived and

neglected for long cannot be exaggerated. It is the duty of the privileged classes (be it in respect of economic and political power, learning, or culture) to share their privileges with their less fortunate fellow-citizens and create a socio-political environment in which all citizens feel as equal partners in building a new social order. This book deserves to be read, discussed and assimilated by all those fellow-citizens who are eager and enthusiastic about creating an enlightened social democracy in India.

With its elegant get-up and printing, the volume under review is an excellent translation. The translator, Sri S. Ramchandra of Hindi Bhavan, Gujarat Vidyapith, Ahmedabad has done a marvellous job in translating a serious text into straight, simple and chaste Hindi. Priced at Rs. 45/- only, in these days of spiralling prices, the book on such an important subject is a good buy.

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**THE JAPJI**—O.P. Ghai. Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi 110-016 ; 1991. Pp. ix plus 89 ; Rs. 75/-.

The *Japji*—the celebrated inspired poem, forms the opening text of the *Sri Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred scripture not only of the Sikhs, but of the world. It contains thirty-eight stanzas in Punjabi, the outpourings of the great soul Sri Guru Nanak. The present volume is the simple, lucid translation in English. Sikhs of all denominations, in the early hours of the morning recite this holy text and meditate on it. It illumines the spiritual path for a sādḥaka to realize the Life Divine. The illusory attractions of the world, the vanity of the ego, the importance of the virtuous life, the indescribable nature of God, and His Grace are some of the topics the *Japji* explains. Various steps leading to the realization of the Supreme Truth and the pitfalls one faces on the difficult terrain are explained by a great saint



who knew every inch of the way. Therefore every word rings with an extraordinary authority.

*Japji* is a book that everyone should read. The English translation-exposition has character and grace of its own. The author deserves our congratulations for his pioneering effort and innovative spirit in rekindling interest in such invaluable texts. One feels, however, that instead of Gurumukhi the translator might have given Devanagari script. Readers who do not know Gurumukhi would have derived more benefit from reading the original text in Devanagari. The printing and get-up are handsome.

S.M.

**HINDU OUTLOOK**, by Nitya Narayan Banerjee. Published by Hindutva Publications, 6A, Avenue House, 107 Southern Avenue, Calcutta 700-029. pages 168; Rs. 30/-.

This book is an anthology of the writings and speeches of the octogenarian Sri Banerjee who was a close associate of the Late Dr. Shyamaprasad Mukherjee.

The book is divided into four parts, the first dealing with the concept of Dharma, methods of Hindu worship, image worship, the concept of Brahman, Śakti worship and so on. It will be helpful to those who need basic knowledge of these concepts. In the next two chapters: "On Sociology" and "On Politics" we meet with a dogmatic Hindu. All those who criticize politicians for giving excessive concessions to a certain community seem to ignore or conveniently forget that those who demand such concessions are also politicians. A large majority of the particular community are impoverished and too busy trying to make the two ends meet to bother about or utilize whatever concessions might have been offered to them as a religious minority.

Mr. Banerjee says (p. 110) that in the name of democracy, "Christian states like Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, etc. have been conceded." This statement is incorrect ;

no state in India has been formed on religious grounds. The special privileges granted to these states are only given on the basis of their being tribal states. If a large majority of their population has been converted to Christianity, who is to be blamed for it but the Caste Hindus who never bothered about the welfare of the people who were on the fringe of the Hindu Society ?

It is to India's glory that adhering to her great national heritage, she has chosen to be a secular nation and thus afford a free choice to all its people of any mode of worship. The author's statement (p. 114) that "All civilized states of the world today...have a State Religion" is false and misleading. All the true democracies of the world are secular, and going by the author's statement one will have to brand the U.S. and many European nations as uncivilized.

The author's contention (p. 114) that only Hindus consider India to be their motherland and only they are "her sons and others, settlers" expresses communalistic opinionation at its worst. Indian Christians and Muslims, like the Parsis and Sikhs, may maintain a separate religious identity, but it is wrong to say they maintain a separate national identity. It is surprising that Sri Banerjee is ready to consider the Parsis, who maintain a fiercely separate religious identity, as Indians but not the Muslims. On the other hand, the Hindu emigrants maintained a separate religious and national identity and have paid the price for it in East Africa, Fiji and Sri Lanka. What do people like Sri Banerjee have to say for it ?

This book presents a biased outlook. One should remember the words of the great Muslim freedom-fighter, Bharata Ratna Khan Abdul Gaffar Khan—"There are two ways to national progress—one is the path of religion, and the other is the road of patriotism. If we are on the road to ruin, it is because we have neither the true spirit of religion, nor the true spirit of patriotism, nor love for our nation."

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**IQBAL AND RADHAKRISHNAN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY** By Nazeer Siddiqi. Sterling Publishers, New Delhi, 1989. pages 122; Rs. 125/-.

Comparative studies—notably in the areas of literature and philosophy—are now receiving accelerated attention. While this is to be welcomed, often these studies are not so much comparisons as bald, often banal, juxtapositions of apparently similar ideas. There is little by way of studying the dynamic interplay of ideas—though international amity and meaningful dialogue do require some kind of intelligent, discriminating, comparative study.

Viewed from this perspective, Nazeer Siddiqi's book seems promising. The task of comparing these two significant thinkers is, indeed, a daunting one. The author himself admits to "a lack of space" and therefore the comparison is more an intention than an achievement. Moreover, the balance which any authentic comparison involves is jeopardised by the disproportionate space given to Radhakrishnan on the plea that "Iqbal has been more written about (both in English and Urdu) than Radhakrishnan". This is all the more regrettable because Siddiqi has several insights which he could have developed with greater subtlety—as the one, for instance, that distinguishes nationalism and patriotism.

Similarly, the author gives extensive quotations from the speeches and writings of both (those from Radhakrishnan are

often too long). The implications of these quotations are not, by and large, identified effectively—though a minor merit of the quotations is that they give first-hand knowledge of the writings of these to readers who had no previous exposure to either of them.

Finally, the author occasionally writes in a laudatory, highly impressionistic rather than critical tone. For instance, when he writes that "if the Indians forget all their Vedas and all that has been written by their greatest philosophers and remember only what has been said and written by Radhakrishnan, if they imbibe his teachings they would turn out to be the best and the greatest nation of the world, both morally and politically", one wonders whether the author expects the readers to take it as more than what it obviously (and pointlessly) is: plain, simple denigration of others to elevate one's hero/mentor. Since the author calls his book "a labour of love", one can only feel that such generalisations are valid since, ostensibly, all is fair in love and war. Similarly, the author's statement about having "discovered a new dimension for the study of Iqbal" is a claim but not a demonstrable one.

In effect, the book is promising enough in its intention but lacks actual achievement. A collage of a lot of material, it lacks a focussing centre.

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# FOR SEEKERS OF SPIRITUALITY

DEVOTEE (*to Sri Ramakrishna*): "Sir, can one realize God while leading the life of a householder?"

MASTER (*with a smile*): "Why not? Live in the world like a mud-fish. The mud-fish lives in the mud but itself remains unstained. Or live in the world like a loose woman. She attends to her household duties, but her mind is always on her sweetheart. Do your duties in the world, fixing your mind on God. But this is extremely difficult.

A DEVOTEE: "What then is the way, sir?"

MASTER: "There is a way. One succeeds if one develops a strong spirit of renunciation. Give up at once, with determination, what you know to be unreal. Once, when I was seriously ill, I was taken to the physician Gangaprasad Sen. He said to me: 'I shall give you a medicine, but you mustn't drink any water. You may take pomegranate juice.' Everyone wondered how I could live without water; but I was determined not to drink it. I said to myself: 'I shall drink only milk'.

"You have to spend a few days in solitude...Turn yourself into gold and then live wherever you please. After realizing God and divine love in solitude, one may live in the world as well. That is why I ask the youngsters to stay with me; for they will develop love of God by staying here a few days. After that they can very well lead the life of a householder."

DEVOTEE: "If God is responsible for every thing, then why should people speak of good and evil, virtue and vice? One commits sin also by the will of God, isn't that so?"

ANOTHER DEVOTEE: "How can we understand the will of God?"

MASTER: "There is no doubt that virtue and vice exist in the world; but God Himself

is unattached to them. There may be good and bad smells in the air, but the air is not attached to them. The very nature of God's creation is that good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, will always exist in the world....The conversation again turned to the life of the householder.

MASTER (*to the devotees*): "You see, by leading a householder's life a man needlessly dissipates his mental powers. The loss he thus incurs can be made up, if he takes to monastic life. The first birth is a gift of the father; then comes the second birth, when one is invested with the sacred thread. There is still another birth at the time of being initiated into monastic life. The two obstacles to spiritual life are 'woman' and 'gold' (i.e. lust and greed). Attachment to 'woman' diverts one from the way leading to God. Man doesn't know what it is that causes his downfall. Once, while going to the Fort (in Calcutta), I couldn't see at all that I was driving down a sloping road; but when the carriage went inside the Fort, I realized how far down I had come. Alas! Women keep men deluded. Captain says, 'My wife is full of wisdom.' The man possessed by a ghost does not realize it. He says, 'Why, I am all right!'" The devotees listened to these words in deep silence.

A DEVOTEE: "I find it extremely difficult for a householder to realize God. How few people can lead the life you prescribe for them! I haven't found any."

MASTER: "Why should that be so? I have heard of a deputy magistrate named Pratap Singh. He is a great man. He has many virtues: compassion and devotion to God. He meditates on God. Once he sent for me. Certainly there are people like him.

*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*