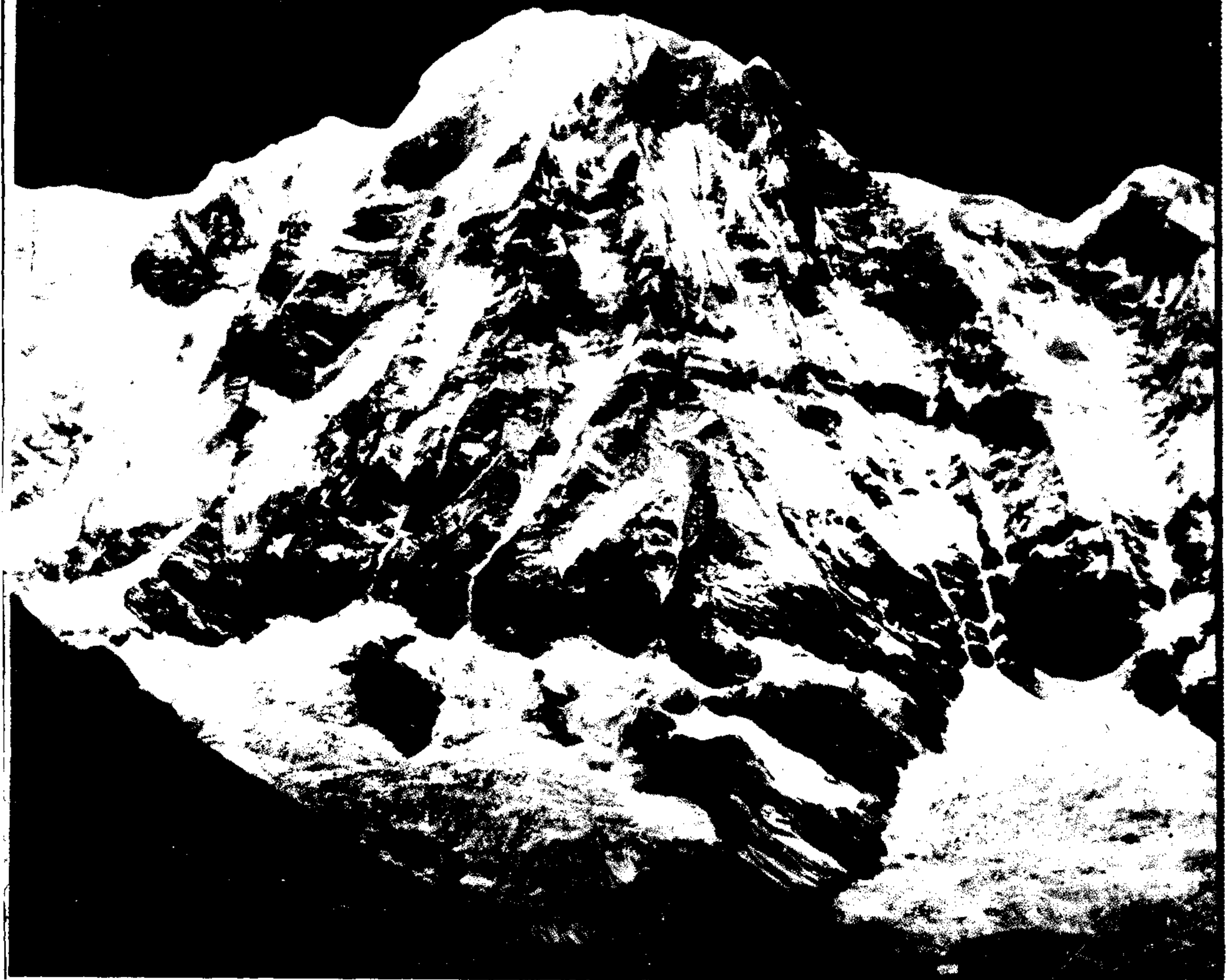


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or Awakened India



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Prabuddha Bharata

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उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत

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

Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. 97

JUNE 1992

No. 6

Divine Wisdom

अनिमित्तनिमित्तेन स्वधर्मेणामलात्मना ।
तीव्रया ययि भक्षया च श्रतसम्भृतया चिरम् ॥
ज्ञानेन दुष्ट तत्त्वेन वैराग्येण बलीयसा ।
तवोयुक्तेन योगेन तीव्रेणात्मसमाधिना ॥
प्रकृतिः पुरुषस्येह दह्यमाना त्वहर्निशम् ।
तिरोभवित्री ज्ञानकैरग्नेर्योनिरिवारणिः ॥
भुक्तभोगा परित्यक्ता दृष्टदोषा च नित्यशः ।
नेश्वरस्याशुभं घत्ते खे महिम्नि स्थितस्य च ॥

The Lord said:

The oppressive bondage of the Purusha by the Prakriti (through the body-mind) can be destroyed by Sadhana or spiritual discipline practised with the help of the body-mind itself. As a fire lit with the help of fuel destroys that very fuel, so spiritual discipline practised with the help of body-mind gradually destroys that very body-mind, the product of Prakriti, by which the Purusha is held in bondage. Some of these disciplines may be cited as follows: One must perform one's duties (*Swadharma*) without any motive other than the service of God through it. One must cultivate purity in body and mind. Through hearing, reading, and meditating

on the Lord's excellences all through life, one must cultivate an intense love for Him. One must seek Knowledge, which is of the nature of actual experience of Truth. One must have intense dispassion for worldly objects and ambitions. One must practise concentration supported by moral disciplines and spiritual aspiration. One must intensely seek absorption in the Divine.

The Jiva who has experienced the joys and sorrows provided by Prakriti (body-mind), has abandoned them as utterly worthless, and has established himself in the glory of the Supreme Being, is never again obsessed by Prakriti.

from the Kapilopadeśa

Freedom from Sorrow—I

The Buddha having unravelled the mystery of misery was eager to share his enlightenment with all fellow beings. He saw in his lifetime how people suffered unnecessarily, not knowing how to escape from suffering. His eagerness to show the way had the force of his felt urgency. It was the urgency of a man who fights to extinguish the fire that is burning down his house. His message points to men the way of life that leads beyond suffering. The Enlightened One put before the world the essence of his wisdom in the form of *Catvāri ariya satyāni*—the Four Noble Truths. The Truths are: 1. *Duḥkha*—Life in the world is full of suffering. 2. *Duḥkha-samudaya*—There is a cause of this suffering. 3. *Duḥkha-nirodha*—It is possible to stop suffering. 4. *Duḥkha-nirodha-marga*—There is a path which leads to the cessation of suffering. All his teachings centre round his discoveries of these Truths.

In one of his discourses to monks in *Anguttar Nikaya* which forms a part of *Sutta Pitaka*, the Buddha said: "If, O monks, there were no enjoyments in the world, beings would not become attached to the world. But as there is enjoyment in the world, beings become attached to it.

"If there were no misery in the world, beings would not be disgusted with the world. But as there is misery in the world, beings become disgusted with it.

"If there were no escape from the world, beings could not make their escape from the world. But as there is an escape from the world, beings can escape from it."

Why is mankind so lured by the world? Why are people ceaselessly-searching for happiness in things and people of the world? Because the world does indeed offer some enjoyment. The memory of that enjoyment impels people to try to secure its repetition. This insatiable drive for repetition of pleasures is the source of misery. Occasional pleasures create an unquenchable thirst in human kind to have still more intense pleasures and for longer time. After a little enjoyment man gets tired of it however, feels bored and dissatisfied. He searches new avenues and for a time feels contented in his new found heavens. But the same inner void, inexplicable distress and loneliness surface menacingly. None can settle down in life comfortably, everyone tries without success. It is like a man tossing about on his bed restlessly to get some sleep. He turns to one side and feels easy for a few minutes. But after some time again he experiences discomfort and turns to the other side. The whole night passes in that way.

In life nobody says he is happy with what he has. Needs and necessities multiply. Many things, though, may not be useful to one, but just the same, to show the world that he is not lagging behind in the race, he goes on accumulating. Everything appears indispensable. This demand for more physical comforts takes its heavy psychological toll. Distress, discontentment, frustration and tiredness follow one another in quick succession. The ladder of worldly success has a beginning, but no end. Goaded by restless ambition a man tries to climb higher

and higher, outstripping his peers but in the end becomes worn out and a mental wreck. The world teaches one and all: 'Have and seek more,' 'compete till your last breath'; and 'consume and accumulate till you burst'. 'Chase honours, name and fame'; 'Get ahead of everybody.' These are the motivations we bequeath to every young child who comes into the world. Having learnt well from his seniors, no sooner does it come of age than it rushes headlong into the whirlpool. Everyone is in a hurry. None actually knows why he behaves so, why he has chosen such a way of life which does not allow him a little time to reflect or to examine closely his own motives.

Leo Tolstoy in his autobiography poignantly remarked, "Search among these people for a man, poor or rich, for whom what he earns secures what he considers necessary according to the world's teaching, and you will find one in a thousand. Everyone struggles with his whole strength to obtain what he does not need, but what is demanded for him by the teaching of the world, and the absence of which therefore makes him unhappy. And as soon as he obtains what is required, something else, and again something else, is demanded of him, and so this work of Sisyphus continues endlessly, ruining the life of man. ...They all have more and more to burden their already overlaid life with work, and devote their life and soul entirely to the service of the world's teaching. ...But perhaps the life itself during which a man does all this is happy?"¹

Well, perhaps this incessant struggle to achieve something gives a sense of purpose and direction to people; without which they think they are lost, rudderless. A little

enjoyment and the hope of securing more keep them alive. In this blind pursuit of pleasure, the things that put a brake, cry halt to people, are despair, anguish and misery. They give everyone a pause, a much needed pause to look beyond the ruins in which they have landed themselves. Perhaps, in the midst of crashing dreams, heart-rending wails, helplessness, a new dawn may brighten the horizon. Sorrow awakens and thaws one from the frozen state.

People, while experiencing acute sufferings, vow that they would not commit the same mistakes again, and will take care in the future. But no sooner the experience passes than they forget all the sufferings and are ready to surrender to the same treadmill once again. Tears and repentances, carelessness and shock, hope and despair follow on the heels of one another. In human life the glimmer of pleasure followed by a pall of gloom appears to be never-ending. Yet in his infatuation or ignorance man never learns a lesson, and steps out of the quagmire in which he has been bogged down. The mass-hypnotism is very strong. Sri Ramakrishna describes the folly of human nature in the following stirring words:

"The bound creatures, entangled in worldliness, will not come to their senses at all. They suffer so much misery and agony, they face so many dangers, and yet they will not wake up.

"The camel loves to eat thorny bushes. The more it eats the thorns, the more blood gushes from its mouth. Still it must eat thorny plants and will never give them up. The man of worldly nature suffers so much sorrow and afflictions but he forgets it all in a few days and begins his old life over again. Suppose a man has lost his wife or she has turned unfaithful. Lo! He marries again.

1. Leo Tolstoy, *A Confession and What I Believe* (London: Oxford University Press, 1927) p. 305-06.

“Or take the instance of a mother: her son dies and she suffers bitter grief; but after a few days she forgets all about it. The mother, so overwhelmed with sorrow a few days before, now attends to her toilet and puts on her jewelry. A father becomes bankrupt through the marriage of his daughters, yet he goes on having children year after year.

“People are ruined by litigation, yet they go to court all the same. There are men who cannot feed the children they have, who cannot clothe them or provide decent shelter for them; yet they have more children every year.

“Again the worldly man is like a snake trying to swallow a mole. The snake can neither swallow the mole nor give it up. The bound soul may have realized that there is no substance to the world—that the world is like a hog plum, only stone and skin—but still he cannot give it up and turn his mind to God.”²

As long as we do not realize that there exists a state of freedom beyond all these petty or deep sorrows, so long we consider our present condition as the ideal one, we believe it is the best state and that there is nothing that can be higher or greater than it. In fact, the majority of human beings undergo the drudgery, live their monotonous lives year after year, but they never question about it. To us our limitations and bondages appear quite natural. Life cannot be more than what we think it to be. We blindly accept our voluntary imprisonment, blissfully oblivious of any other free state. We improve, decorate and try to reform our little prisons, avoiding scrupulously the least disturbance. But those who are fortunate

meet a great Soul who has transcended all these limitations, even of the fear of death. Or, they read his teachings about the state of freedom. A spark is enkindled in the heart. Then slowly they come to know they live a slavish life, weeping and fighting over petty things. Our prison cell, the condition so long regarded as comfortable and suited to us, begins to suffocate us. Enjoyments of life so dear to us once, cease to exercise their magic spell. Old worldly values begin to crumble and the void is filled up by eternal verities. It is spiritual awakening.

Patanjali describes in his *Yoga Sutras* that a deluded man suffers from five-fold afflictions: ignorance (*avidyā*), egoism (*asmita*), anger (*rāga*), aversion (*dvesa*), and the thirst for life (*abhiniveśa*). He suggests one can free oneself from these sufferings or overcome these pain-bearing obstructions when one follows certain spiritual disciplines. The malady is deep-rooted. To get rid of long-cherished wrong ideas and perversity of views can only be possible with the daily practice of spiritual disciplines with all seriousness and enthusiasm. It is a battle to conquer the old and strong tendencies. There is no spiritual remedy which guarantees relief within a few days. Spiritual life is swimming against the current—the current being public opinion, the strong bonds of old beliefs. The whole thinking structure has to undergo a radical transformation. Therefore, many accept spiritual precepts as true, but only a few come forward to practise. The memories of past enjoyments still hold them by tight hooks.

One who is possessed of the ideal of freedom and has become disgusted with sorrows and fleeting pleasures of the world feels the urgency to overcome all his personal limitations and weaknesses. That very earnest feeling uncovers, though for a fleeting

2. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1985) p. 165.

moment, the resplendent face of Truth and thins the veil of *avidyā* and ego. The Ego is the accumulated bundle of mental impressions: aversion, anger, attachment, jealousy and fear. All these obstructions appear in the mind in the various forms of feelings and thoughts. The intense emotions are very painful and have the potency to make one's life miserable. A man harbouring hatred, jealousy and anger seethes with evil vibrations. These disturbing vibrations are inimical to peaceful life. Therefore Patanjali advises to arouse contrary feelings to eject harmful thoughts. *Te pratiprasavaheyāḥ sukṣmāḥ*—the subtle afflictions are conquered by rousing opposite thoughts.³ For instance, when there is a strong feeling of jealousy, we should arouse the feeling of friendliness. We should learn to rejoice at the good fortune of others, but when there arises a feeling of hatred in us we should raise the opposite wave of love. If we are losing temper, getting angry, we should conquer that inimical vibration with the contrary vibrations of peace. We must keep a vigil on our feelings and should practice watchfulness every day. In course of time, the harmful thoughts which come and disturb the peace of mind are subdued and ultimately conquered. Swami Vivekananda gives the following illustration: "Sometimes a mother is very angry with her husband, and while in that state, the baby comes in, and she kisses the baby; the old wave dies out and a new wave arises, love for the child. That supresses the other one."⁴ Aphorism 33 of *Raja Yoga* reiterates the same idea. *Vitarka bhadhane pratipakṣa bhāvanam*—To obstruct thoughts inimical to Yoga, contrary thoughts

should be brought. Our mind should be filled with ennobling thoughts.

The question is why should we fill our mind with good thoughts? It is because thoughts of love, peace, cheerfulness, contentment and friendliness not only expand our consciousness but also protect us from unnecessary suffering. Secondly, anger, hatred, vindictiveness result in wastage of precious energy and they in their turn bring nothing but ruin. Thirdly, it is said 'like attracts like'. Evil tendencies attract all wickedness from the universe. A murderer, a thief, or a liar becomes an easy receptacle for all dark thoughts of the world. Fourthly, good thoughts have the power to draw a current of auspicious and pure thoughts from the universe. Lastly, whatever we send out comes back to us. It is an inexorable law. Any benevolent thought we send out or any benign deed we perform brings a result that is beneficial to us. Wickedness brings endless agony. Therefore yoga warns us to be conscious of our feelings and thoughts, not sporadically, but constantly.

In the next aphorism Patanjali advises, having conquered these manifestations or afflictions, they are to be destroyed by meditation. *Dhyānheyastadvṛttayah* — By meditation, their gross modifications are to be rejected.⁵ The practice of meditation conquers all kinds of modifications of the mind. Vyasa in his commentary says, "As gross dirt is first washed away from a piece of cloth and then its finer impurities are removed by care and effort, so the gross pains are weak obstacles and need little effort whereas the stronger and finer ones need powerful efforts." In meditation we first learn by practice to concentrate our mind and hold it concentrated upon an object for

3. Chapter II, Aphorism 10.

ते प्रतिप्रसवहेयाः सूक्ष्माः ।

4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1989) Vol. I, p. 261.

5. Ch. II, Aphorism 11 —

ध्यानहेयास्तद् वृत्तयः ।

a certain length of time as suggested by *Raja Yoga*. Meditation becomes fruitful when our mind becomes fully concentrated exclusive of all other thoughts, or when it flows in an unbroken current towards that particular object.

“Meditation is the power,” says Swamiji, “which enables us to resist all this [our slavery to nature]. Nature may call us, ‘Look there is a beautiful thing!’ I do not look. Now she says, ‘There is a beautiful smell; smell it!’ I say to my nose, ‘Do not smell it’, and the nose doesn’t. ‘Eyes, do not see!’ Nature does such an awful thing—kills one of my children, and says, ‘Now, rascal, sit down and weep! Go to the depths!’ I say, ‘I don’t have to.’ I jump up. I must be free. Try it sometimes. In meditation, for a moment, you can change this nature. Now, if you had the power in yourself, would not that be heaven, freedom? That is the power of meditation. How is it to be attained? In a dozen different ways. Each temperament has its own way.”⁶

In the first chapter of *Raja Yoga*, in aphorisms 36, 37, 38, and 39, Patanjali suggests different subjects for meditation. *Viśoka va jyotiṣmatī*—Or by meditation on the effulgent light which is beyond all sorrow.⁷ *Vitarāgaviśyam va cittam*—Or by meditating on the pure heart that has given up all attachments to sense objects.⁸ On some great saint whom we revere and know to be perfectly non-attached, we can meditate on him; it will bring complete peace to the mind. *Svapnanidra jnana lambanam va*—Or by meditating on the knowledge that comes

in sleep.⁹ Sometimes spiritual knowledge is gained in a vivid dream. A person dreams he is blessed by a saint, or has the vision of a god or goddess, or hears celestial music, or in a flash has intuitive knowledge of the evanescence of life. One has to remember that dream and dwell on it as real and meditate on its contents. *Yathābhimata dhyānadva*—Or by meditating on anything that appears to one as good.¹⁰ Anything that is holy, pure and uplifting can become the subject of meditation. The meditator’s mind, thus meditating, becomes undisturbed, from the atomic to the Infinite. That is the end result of meditation.

In the next aphorism Patanjali highlights the importance of the Law of Karma. The *Karma* has its roots in five-fold pains. *Kleṣamulaḥ karmasayo dṛṣṭādṛṣṭa janma-vedaniyah*—The vehicle of actions has its roots in these pain-bearing obstructions and is experienced in this visible life or in the unseen life.¹¹ Every time we perform any action, physical or mental, it leaves an impression in the subconscious mind. All experiences of pleasure and pain are stored. Nothing is lost. These bundles of impressions form the character of man. Good and bad actions arise from desire, greed, delusion or anger. What we are today is the result of the sum total of our *karma* of the past. What we shall be in future depends on our present doings. The law of Karma is working underneath the surface and is responsible for the state either pleasant or painful. There

(Continued on page 252)

6. *Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 248.

7. Ch. I, Aphorism 36 —

विशोका वा ज्योतिष्मती ।

8. Ibid., Aphorism 37 —

वीतरागविषयं वा चित्तम् ।

9. Ibid., Aphorism 38 —

स्वप्तनिद्राज्ञानालम्बनं वा ।

10. Ibid., Aphorism 39 —

यथाभिमतध्यानाद्वा ।

11. Ch. II, Aphorism 12 —

क्लेशमूलः कर्मशयो दृष्टादृष्ट जन्मवेदनीयः ।

The Vedantic Concept of Maya

LETA JANE LEWIS

The concept of Maya is the cornerstone of the Vedanta Philosophy. It is profound and yet simple—simple when understood properly. The author's lucid exposition clears cobwebs of misinterpretations. Dr. Leta Jane Lewis is Professor Emeritus of California State University, Fresno, U.S.A.

The concept of *māyā* can be disconcerting when it is first encountered and only partially understood. The sages who expound it seem to teach that life is unreal, that we and the world are *māyā*, which is a type of dream or illusion. But, we reason, if life is a dream, a sort of magician's trick, the illusion can disappear at any moment and all of us with it. Our very lives seem threatened by this strange, frightening concept of *māyā*.

Every normal, rational human being will agree, however, that Longfellow knew what he was talking about when he wrote: "Tell me not, in mournful numbers, life is but an empty dream! ...Life is real! Life is earnest!"¹ Our joys and sorrows are too intense, the ground under our feet too solid, to be passed off as a dream. Experience makes it clear, for instance, that a man who has been seriously injured in an automobile accident will not awaken the next day to discover that none of his bones were broken. Such a "discovery" would be a pure hallucination induced by drugs or pain. Given time and expert care, the accident victim may recover, but the accident itself is irrevocable history. Although we clean away the ash a volcano has spewed upon us, we cannot deny that the volcano did erupt. The world of time and space and all the events

that occur in it are incontestably real. Our bodies are real. They must be fed, clothed, and cared for. To ignore them as nonexistent would be to commit suicide.

Like all normal, thinking people, the sages who expound the concept of *māyā* are aware that this is a real world. They know that we will not wake up as if from a dream and discover that yesterday's events in time and space did not actually occur. They would ridicule the idea that our bodies could vanish into thin air without the usual process of death and decay. Then why do they use the expressions "unreal", "an illusion", and "a dream" to characterize the world and us?

Analysis reveals that dreams are known to be unreal by contrast with the waking state. If there were no more solid reality to which to awaken, a dreamer could logically assume his dream world to be all that there is. And according to Webster an illusion is "a perception which fails to give the true character of the thing perceived."² Because it is a misinterpretation of an actual phenomenon, an illusion has a basis in reality.

Then is there a reality to which we can awaken from life as if from a dream? Upon what reality can we and the world rest as illusions? From a scientific point-of-view

1. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "The Psalm of Life" in *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, and Co., 1870), pp. 2-3.

2. *Webster's New International Dictionary* (Springfield: Merriam Co., 1914), p. 1072.

this is entirely possible. It is well known that our crude senses give us only a superficial idea of the universe. We cannot see or hear the impulses which radio and TV receive. The X-ray penetrates where our sight cannot go. Dogs hear sounds that are beyond our auditory range. Insects pick up stimuli unknown to us. Although scientists don't say that the world is an illusion, they do maintain that it is not what our senses take it to be. Viewed scientifically, even so-called solid matter is energy in almost empty space.

Yes, the sages say, there is a greater reality upon which the world rests as an illusion. There is a greater reality which our senses cannot perceive and by contrast with which the world seems like a dream. The sages know that this reality exists, for they have experienced it living and vivid in their deepest contemplation. They have found it so intensely real that when they returned from it to empirical awareness, they felt as though they were entering an imaginary dream world. But they don't say that the world is an actual dream. They don't say that the world revealed to our senses does not exist. Instead, like the scientists, they say that we do not know the world as it is. We have not developed the spiritual X-ray eyes needed to pierce the surface of things to perceive their real nature.

Scientists claim that energy is the lowest common denominator in the universe. While agreeing with them as far as they go, Vedantic sages submit that there is an even lower common denominator. Having penetrated into the very core of life and matter, they have found that pure consciousness, known in Sanskrit as *Brahman*, is basic to everything, including energy. In their most profound meditation they have seen that this pure consciousness is identical with pure existence, which is also pure bliss

by virtue of its freedom from limitations, and that our ordinary human consciousness is this pure consciousness dulled and restricted by our as yet imperfect human nature. When these illumined souls return from the unitive consciousness in *Brahman* to the normal plane, they enter an intermediate state which is at once empirical and transcendental. Gazing out into the universe, which has become transparent to them, and seeing divine consciousness everywhere they look, they realize that all seemingly material objects are the one and only existence, *Brahman, miraculously manifesting Itself in time and space.*

The divine consciousness and existence underlying the universe will be fully experienced only at the culmination of spiritual life, but we are partially aware of it even now. Swami Prabhavananda elucidates:

Although Brahman is never apparent to our everyday sense perception, there is a manner in which we are aware of the Reality, the inner Self. Brahman, it has been said, is absolute existence, knowledge, and bliss. Only in transcendental consciousness can we know this fully. Yet Brahman is partly apparent to our normal consciousness also. Brahman is Existence, and we all know that we exist. There is no existence apart from Brahman. In this sense, every one of us has an intuitive knowledge of the inner Self (the Atman or "Brahman-within-the-Creature")...³

As Swami Prabhavananda implies, the real Self (the *Ātman*) and *Brahman*, which is absolute consciousness and existence, are one. We are only partly conscious, however, because we obscure the Atman's pure consciousness with a continuous succession of thoughts and sensations. In this we resemble people who are so intent upon watching a motion picture that they don't notice the screen upon which it is being projected.

3. Swami Prabhavananda, *The Spiritual Heritage of India* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1962), pp. 286-7.

To aid us in the comprehension of the concept of *māyā*, the yogis have invented ingenious similes and metaphors, the most famous of which has to do with a rope and a snake. Someone, perhaps a child, is walking nervously through the deep woods at dusk. Suddenly he is startled by what he takes to be a deadly snake on the path in front of him. He leaps away in terror. The next morning he returns along the same path and sees that what he thought was a snake the evening before was only a coiled-up rope. The yogis liken *Brahman* to mother-of-pearl, which is sometimes mistaken for silver. They also compare *māyā* to a cloud, a veil, or a screen hiding a treasure behind it. One of their favourite metaphors has to do with the ocean and a wave. When the wave disappears, nothing is lost because it was only ocean water momentarily taking shape. The yogis compare the divine essence sustaining the universe to clay. When the clay is dissolved, all individual things made of it vanish; only the substance, the clay, remains.

Things are real because their substance is real. To say that a child's castle in the sand is non-existent would be ridiculous. But finite things, like castles in the sand, have a low grade of reality. This is because they are transitory. Heinrich Zimmer points up this idea very nicely:

The Hindu mind associates such ideas as "transitory, ever-changing, elusive, ever-returning," with "unreality," and conversely, "imperishable, changeless, steadfast, and eternal," with "the real." As long as the experiences and sensations that stream through the consciousness of an individual remain untouched by any widening, devaluating vision, the perishable creatures that appear and vanish in the unending cycle of life (*samsāra*, the round of rebirth) are regarded by him as utterly real. But the moment their fleeting character is discerned, they come to seem almost unreal—an illusion or mirage, a deception of the senses, the

dubious figment of a too restricted, ego-centered consciousness.⁴

According to Vedanta, only the absolutely permanent is absolutely real. A thing loses its reality the moment it ceases to exist.

The sages do not pretend to understand why we victims of *māyā* have forgotten (or perhaps never knew) the absolute divine existence, consciousness, and bliss which mysteriously nourish and sustain the universe. Having awakened from the dream that they are finite, they have little interest in what caused the dream. For them the fact that *māyā* can be overcome makes all other facts pale into insignificance. They have realized that nothing in life is truly practical except breaking through *māyā's* hard crust to get at the divine interior. Secure in the knowledge that they are the imperishable Self, which is never born and never dies, they now look back upon the vicissitudes of their lives on earth as upon a nightmare which will never recur. Although these illumined souls may finish their earthly careers in abominable circumstances, they are always serenely aware of their divine identities.

The saint's ecstatic vision pierces through the psycho/physical identities superimposed upon us by *māyā*, and he perceives the divinity within. Although he continues to see our superficial personalities (as one might see a mirage on the desert) he has ceased to identify us with them. His entire being is filled with love of the divine whether he finds it in a heartless criminal or in a saint. This perfect unconditional love has transformed the lives of many persons who, far from being loved by society, were scorned and ostracized for their dissolute behaviour. Instead of condemning them, the

4. Heinrich Zimmer, *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 24.

saint held the mirror of their divinity before them. Seeing only their divinity (which, of course, he could not condemn!), he freed them from the negative self-images, the anger, and the self-hatred, which had been destroying their lives.

By loving and valuing humanity for its innate divinity, the illumined soul liberates those within his sphere of influence from bondage to the superficial values which *māyā* often imposes upon us. Social position, wealth, and prestige mean nothing to the saint, who sorrows to contemplate the suffering that results from pursuing them too passionately. He is saddened and pained, for instance, to learn that men who lost their fortunes during the stock market crash of 1929 had so little self-esteem to sustain them that they committed suicide. He cannot believe that anyone could feel it necessary to "keep up with the Joneses", or to "save face" when the face is, after all, only a mask.

When, as the result of association with a sage, we are blessed with a glimpse of our innate divinity, our ordinary self-images fall away. As we cease to feel that our personal worth depends upon such externals as money, prestige, or physical endowments, the tension created by these hang-ups vanishes from our lives. In the freedom of a new set of values centred in Self-knowledge our hearts expand with love and compassion. Peace and harmony emanate from us, and our lives become a positive force in all of our relationships.

Mahatma Gandhi's political career was animated by the vision of the divinity of man.⁵ He was shocked that the Indians and

5. Gandhi's favourite passage from India's Philosophical scriptures, *The Upanisads*, was: "In the heart of all things, of whatever there is in the universe, dwells the Lord. He alone is the reality." *The Upanisads, Breath of the Eternal*, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester (Hollywood: Vedanta Press, 1947), p. 3.

blacks in South Africa were so overwhelmed by *māyā* that they had become willing victims of prejudice and discrimination. Grieved by their cowed acceptance of injustice, he taught them that they were sons of God, who should hold their heads high and confront denigration with firm self-respect.⁶ His vision of the divinity of man also embraced the oppressors, some of whom were so deeply moved that they became his friends and loyal supporters. Although he was at times ridiculed, beaten, and imprisoned by those in power, Gandhi never wavered in his convictions.

The saint who has pierced the veil of *māyā* and known the divinity of man, can do no deliberate evil. He transcended greed, lust, anger, jealousy, and other negative traits when he cast off his ego identity and found himself in the *Ātman*. He then became so imbued with divine love that he would abhor the thought of injuring or taking advantage of another person.

The divine consciousness is the source of the highest virtue. Nevertheless, there are those who seek to make Vedanta's tenet that *Brahman* is beyond good and evil the excuse for irresponsible living. Misinterpreting it to mean that there is no ultimate difference between good and evil, they indulge in hedonistic behaviour and whatever mischief they may choose. They do not stop to reflect that good and evil, like the other pairs of opposites: hot, cold; high, low; big, little; etc. exist only in the finite realm of *māyā*. Since good and evil are not to be found in the undifferentiated *Brahman*, it is sheer nonsense to contend that there is no difference between them there. On the other hand, good and evil

6. "Harijans," "sons of God" became the epithet which he later applied to the untouchables in India.

will continue their differentiated existence for us as long as we retain our psycho/physical identities outside the divine consciousness, and we must distinguish between them for the sake of our spiritual lives.

Other hedonistic thinkers come to illogical conclusions because they, too, confuse *māyā* with the Absolute. These pseudo-philosophers make the invulnerability of the Atman their excuse for irresponsible living. Since it transcends *māyā* with its pairs of opposites, the Self is unaffected by anything we do. It is impervious to all human devilry. Then why not sin? These pleasure seekers feel that they are perfectly safe, and in one way they are, but not in the way that is most important to them. The divine Self, which they have yet to realize, is secure, but the ego, which is their only personal reality, is subject to pain and frustration. Because they feel that they *are* their egos, they cling tenaciously to them, making every effort to protect and gratify them. They pursue pleasure oblivious of the fact that their egos can be affected in such a way as to jeopardize their future well-being. It makes little difference to them that each foolish grasping deed strengthens a habit which spawns more such deeds. Unfortunately, however, this vicious cycle continually intensifies the spiritual ignorance which alienates them from their higher consciousness. And since the unalloyed bliss they seek is possible only in the higher consciousness, their pursuit of pleasure has the unexpected reverse effect of exposing them to further suffering.

Some rationalists make the mistake of confusing the physical world of *māyā* with the divine existence in matters of health and healing. They reason that, since all human beings are divine, nothing can do irremedial harm to their bodies. Assuming that the human body per se partakes of the divine

invulnerability, they refuse to consult a doctor when someone is ill. It is true, of course, that pure spirit, which is the essence of the physical universe, escapes the ravages of time. If we were to perceive the universe with the eyes of the spirit, however, all finite objects would vanish into the one divine existence. Our bodies would disappear and death and disease with them. But in the world of *māyā*, which we perceive with our senses, our bodies, like all other finite objects, remain subject to the laws of nature. We must, therefore, use physical means if we wish to maintain healthy bodies until we become old and nature dispenses with them. On the other hand, if we wish to escape our physical vulnerability altogether, we must outsmart *māyā* and enter the bodiless realm of the spirit. There is no other way.

A further misinterpretation of the concept of *māyā* has to do with the belief in a personal God. The assumption is sometimes made that since the impersonal *Brahman* is the only divine existence, the personal God who is worshipped in most religions must be a figment of the imagination. To this the Vedantic philosophers of non-dualism reply that both the personal God and we human beings are readings of that one *Brahman* obscured by the veil of *māyā*. In order to forestall a possible misunderstanding they go on to point out the tremendous difference between the eternally perfect personal God, who has always known his divinity, and us mortals, who ordinarily pass imperfect lives under the sway of *māyā*. In spite of this great difference, we exist in the same way that the personal God exists, and if we were to assert that the personal God is a figment of the imagination, we would have to say the same thing of ourselves. But, as we have already observed, we cannot rationally deny our human existence as long as we eat, sleep, clothe our bodies, and pamper our egos. To deny the reality of the personal God from

the standpoint of non-dualism would be tantamount to denying our own existence, and that is something we are not prepared to do.

Another serious error involving *māyā* and the Absolute concerns spiritual disciplines. Some aspirants are confused by the idea that since all activity is within *māyā* and cannot touch the *Ātman* (*Brahman-within-the-Creature*), spiritual practices for Self-realization are useless. Of course they are correct in assuming an unbridgeable gulf between *māyā* and the Absolute, but they seem to be unaware that spiritual practices are not intended to bridge that gulf. Their purpose is to chip away at the accretions of wrong thought and attitude which obstruct their spiritual vision. When these accretions have been removed, a current of bliss from the

Ātman will automatically flow into their consciousness.

To recapitulate briefly, illumined souls, who have pierced the veil of *māyā* with their spiritual practices, know that we and the world, though real, are not precisely what our senses perceive. They have seen that although we may take ourselves to be vulnerable to change and sinful by nature, our innermost Selves are unalloyed joy and perfection. They assure us that since all are essentially divine, there is hope for everyone. No one need yield to self-deprecation and despair. In fact, everyone, even the most depraved, will sooner or later become disillusioned with his little worldly self and begin practising the disciplines which will eventually enable him to cast it off and assume his divine identity.

FREEDOM FROM SORROW—I

(Continued from page 246)

is nothing accidental or whimsical. Man is the maker of his own destiny. He can free himself or suffer in his self-imposed limitations. Nobody binds him except he himself. The Yogis say all enjoyment gives rise to actions which finally bring misery.

Raja Yoga does not stop by just giving the details of causes of our sufferings. To remove these impurities it also elaborately, scientifically outlines the ethical steps and their practice to purify our minds. The famous eight means to attain perfect freedom

in this life are: *Yama* (restraint), *Niyama* (observance), *Āsana* (posture), *Prāṇayama* (regulation of breath), *Pratyāhāra* (withholding of the senses), *Dharana* (concentration), *Dhyāna* (meditation), and *Samadhi* (absorption in meditation). The great sage Patanjali goes to the very source of our earthly life which hangs between 'attraction' and 'repulsion' and tells us the facts like a great scientist. Learning about these things brings clarity to our understanding, and in the light of that clarity we progress towards our goal of freedom.

The Unique Space-Time and Historical Sense of The Hindus

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

8. The Hindu Method of Recording Time and Events by the Coordinated Cosmic and Natural Standards.

We have so far dealt with the Hindu conception of Space and history. We shall now turn to the conception of time and the methods of recording time and events in tune with these vast and profound conceptions.³⁴

First of all Creation, rather Projection—

Sṛṣṭi), Sustenance (*Sthiti*), and Dissolution into the Causal state (*Pralaya*) of the *Brahmāṇḍa* are held to go on cyclically, without beginning or end in time, Space-Time-Causation themselves being the framework of the *Brahmāṇḍa* and integral to it. Now each *Brahmāṇḍa* is presided over by a Creator-God designated *Brahmā* (Personal God). His life-span, therefore of each *Brahmāṇḍa*, is computed as 100 years in the following scale:

1 Human year of 360 days (12 lunar months of 30 days Tithis)

= 1 day of the gods (or celestial day)

360 Celestial days

= 1 Celestial year

12,000 Celestial years (consisting of 4 Yugas)³⁵

= 1 Celestial Mahā-Yuga or Chatur-Yuga

34. Prof. Fritjof Capra, a well known physicist, writes in his book, *The Tao of Physics* (Fontana Paperbacks, 1976; pp. 208-9):

“This idea of a periodically expanding and contracting universe, which involves a scale of time and space of vast proportions, has arisen not only in modern cosmology (of Science), but also in ancient Indian mythology. Experiencing the universe as an organic and rhythmically moving cosmos, the Hindus were able to develop *evolutionary cosmologies* which come very close to our modern scientific models. ...The Hindu sages were not afraid to identify this rhythmic divine play with the evolution of the cosmos as a whole. They pictured the universe as periodically expanding and contracting and gave the name *Kalpa* to the unimaginable time-span between the beginning and end of one creation. The scale of the ancient myth is indeed staggering; it has taken the human more than two thousand years to come up again

with a similar concept.” (We may point out here that, really speaking, this conception is not mythological, but a well thought-out and integrated philosophico-astronomical speculation of the Hindu thinkers, put in the form of a myth in the *Purāṇas* for popular understanding.)

35. The four Yugas in a Chatur-Yuga or Mahā-Yuga are named Krita (or Satya), Treta, Dvapara, and Kali, which move in a cycle. In the new system of cosmic time-scale, they were allotted 4,000, 3,000, 2,000, and 1,000 celestial years, instead of 2,500 ordinary human years equally to the four Yugas as of old. Just as there are morning and evening twilight periods at the two ends of the day-time, which are called Sandhyā periods, such Sandhyā periods were conceived for each Yuga on either side equal to 1/10th of its duration. Thus a Chatur-Yuga along with the Sandhyā periods totals up to 12,000 years.

1,000 Mahā-Yugas

(14 Manus rule over the manifested Brahmāṇḍa successively during the Kalpa, each for a vast period called a Manvantara, consisting of 71 Mahā-Yugas)³⁶

= Day-time or Active Period of Brahmā, called a *Kalpa*, when the Brahmāṇḍa is in state of manifestation.

With each Kalpa-ending, there is dissolution of the Brahmāṇḍa (*Pralaya*) into the subtle causal or seed state. Then it is the night or potential state of Brahmā, lasting for 1,000 celestial Maha-Yugas. Thus a day-and-night of Brahmā consist of 2,000 celestial Maha-Yugas.

Next day, again, another Kalpa begins, and the Brahmāṇḍa is manifested with all the past *Samskāra-s* (Impressions and Tendencies) of the creatures in the previous cycle, just as we wake up from sleep and begin a new day with all the previous memory. *In fact, these Samskāra-s, which lie dormant, are the motive power for the next cycle.* Every cycle is not a mere repetition, for the Samskāra-s go on accumulating, modifying, and perfecting during the cycle and in each subsequent cycle, just as we go on improving our experiences and impressions from day to day, thus leading all towards ultimate Perfection. This Projection, Sustenance, and Dissolution of the Brahmāṇḍa go on till 100 years of Brahmā's life are completed, every year consisting of 360 days and nights of 2,000 celestial Mahā-Yugas. Then there is *Mahā-Pralaya* or Great Dissolution called *Prakṛta-Pralaya* (Dissolution of *Prakṛti* or entire Nature) into the Primal Cause. Then a fresh Brahmāṇḍa comes into being on a new plan, presided over by a new Brahmā, even as a man is reborn in a fresh body after the death of the present body, with a new name and fresh associations.

Thus a Brahman's life span consists of: $12,000 \times 360 \times 2,000 \times 360 \times 100 = 311,040,000,000,000$ years, i.e. 2,11,04,000 crores of years. The every-day (of Brahmā) Dissolution of Brahmāṇḍa is called *Nitya-Pralaya*, comparable to our daily sleep at night. When a Soul realizes the Self (Ātman) within as its real nature and its identity with Brahmā, the Supreme Reality, for that Soul the Brahmāṇḍa never rises, for the Soul merges in Brahmā like a river entering the Sea. This is called *Ātyantika-Pralaya* (Final and Absolute Dissolution), and the Soul realizes Mukti or Freedom from all relative existence.

For the present computation of time, it is regarded that Brahmā is now in his second half (*Dvitiya Parardha*) of his life; and in the current Kalpa, designated as '*Sveta-varāha Kalpa*', six Manvantara periods are over, and the seventh Manvantara, presided over by Vaivasvata Manu, is running; hence it is called the *Vaivasvata Manvantara*. In this Manvantara, 27 *Mahā-Yugas* are past, and we are now in the 28th *Mahā-Yuga*, of which Kṛta, Treta, and Dvāpara Yugas are over. We are now in the Kali-Yuga (consisting of 4,32,000 years). The present Kali-Yuga is said to have started on 18th Feb. 3,102 B.C., and now (in 1992) the 5,094th year of the Kali Era is running.

This vast computation may be speculative, even as the geological, astronomical, and micro-physical computations of modern science are, but it serves to give a vast time scale and helps to conceive time in the

36. See Footnote No. 32.

cosmic context. They, the Hindu sages, saw that this vast infinite universe cannot be thought of with the ordinary time-scale of human events. In modern times we use light-years to compute the distance of very distant astronomical bodies. It is all speculation, for there have been vastly differing computations, changing from time to time, and these can never be actually verified. But still they serve the purpose of conveying the vastness of the physical universe.

We have already referred to the two systems of chronology—one cosmic and symbolic; and the other practical, based on astronomy. Now in early Vedic times, this vast time-scale had not yet been invented. They had the conception of a Yuga of 10,000 years divided perhaps into 4 equal parts, which formed the basis of the later formulations.³⁷ The Vedic people fixed the time of the events with reference to the position of the sun, moon, stars, equinoxes and solstices, and the months in which the different seasons occurred, etc. These data, which were recorded for all the events according to their relevance, just as we use the modern system of dating, help us to fix the closely approximate date of the

various compositions of the Vedic and other texts in which such astronomical data is found. The precession of the equinoxes help us to determine the approximate time of past events. Even up to the end of the Mahābhārata time, this method was universally used in India, and we find records in profusion for most of the events. This was the only method then, and later on also it was continued in association with the *Kali* and other eras for given the exact year. This astronomical system is known as *Kāla-Cakra*—the 'Wheel of Time', or the *Astronomical Clock* as mentioned earlier.

Since the past was receding and accumulating, to fix up the period and the century in which the event occurred, sometime before the Mahābhārata period, the 27 Lunar asterisms, each of which has its name, were used as numbers from 1 to 27 to indicate a cyclic period of 2,700 years, at the rate of 100 years for each asterism. Just as we have numbers on the face of the clock and tell the time by noticing the hands of the clock in relation to the numbers, similarly, the *Saptārṣis* (Ursa Major) was conceived as the indicative hand, and the 27 asterisms denoting the centuries. Of course, the *Saptārṣis* do not really move from asterism to asterism. But the intelligent Hindu sages used it as a convention. If it is said that the *Saptārṣis* are in a particular asterism, the centuries passed could be known by counting from the start of the Asterism Cycle. If, conventionally, it has already completed a cycle, then 1,700 years will be added to the centuries for every completion of the cycle. This method was called the *Saptārṣi-Kāla*, to arrive at the number of centuries passed since a past happening, and was in common use for a long time after the Mahābhārata period, and then was used sparingly since the *Kali* and other eras came into being. It is said there was a cycle of 1000 years earlier in Vedic

³⁷. The new time-scales were developed when the cosmological speculations attained vast proportions in terms of the totality of Existence and the framework of Space-Time-Causation of the Cosmic Universe were also conceived commensurate with it. We have, therefore, to view the development of the Purāṇās and the Epics not in mere mythological terms, but as revealing the development of thought and conceptions in an evolutionary historical perspective. It may be noted that the Purāṇatype literature was evolved, not out of ignorant faith but when great rational philosophical systems had been evolved and were current, to which the Purāṇās themselves refer, just as in the case of Hindu image worship which came into being after achieving the highest trans-personal Supreme Reality and not out of ignorance or natural superstition.

times, called the Saptārṣi-Cakra, and this Saptārṣi-Kāla cycle was an improved development of it to cover a larger period.

But since there was no natural means of indicating the number of cycles that had elapsed, and calculation on the basis of the precession of the equinoxes was a technical affair, though a cycle based on it *then* covered a period of about 27,000 years (we may conjecture that the earlier Saptārṣi-Cakra of 1000 years may have been based on the rate of precession in those times from one asterism to another, which was about 1000 years then, according to Sw. Sakhyananda, *Op. cit.*), and another more convenient fixed standard was introduced to indicate the exact year, making use of the Yuga-system. And that was the Kali-Yuga Era, starting in 3,102 B.C. of course, for determining the months and days, etc. the position of the moon and its digits were employed, and are still being employed. This Kali-Yuga Era is also a non-personal astronomical era, when several of the planets are said to have been in close proximity or conjunction.

Apart from the Kali Era, later on two other important eras, based on persons, were introduced (there were also, and are still current, some later regional eras and those used by some religious sects), which are used at present all over India: (1) The Vikramāditya Era, commencing from 56 B.C., the year being called Vikrama Samvat or Samvat for short; and (2) The Sālivāhana Era, beginning from 78 A.D., the year being called Sālivāhana-Śaka or Śaka for short. Though at present for all administrative and some civil purposes, the Christian Era, and the Western methods of months and dates are used, as a result of the British rule in India, for all sacred and religious purposes the Hindu method and Hindu eras are widely adopted in all the *Pañcāngas* (almanacs).

There is also in use another short *Bṛhaspati-Cycle* of 60 years, developed from an earlier 5-year cycle of Vedic times used for ritualistic purposes, based on the movement of the planet Bṛhaspati (Jupiter) round the sun, co-ordinated with the five-year cycle. Both the cycles are said to be in conjunction in every 60 years. The sixty years have their individual names. These are used to denote the year of the event, especially in individual life, such as birth etc. When a person has completed a cycle of 60 years from where he started at birth, it is celebrated as *Saṣṭi-abda-pūrṭi*. It is like observing the diamond jubilee. Some important events and natural calamities etc. that occur are indicated by mentioning the name of the year in which it happened. When a person completes 100 years, *Śata-abda-pūrṭi* is celebrated.

9. *Application of Astronomical Factors in Daily Life.*

We shall not go here into the details of the astronomical method of calculation to arrive at the date of composition of a work or of an event mentioned in ancient texts, for it is a technical subject. Scholars may refer to the books published on the subject. We shall refer to the factors in daily use.

First of all the year—the time taken by the earth to go round the sun, is divided into 12 months and are named after the 12 Rāṣis (the 'Fixed-Stars' constellations in the *Rāṣi-Cakra* or the Signs of the Zodiac) in some regions, and at others after the Lunar Asterism nearest to the particular Rāṣi on the ecliptic. This is the solar year. But for all sacred and religious purposes and to record events, the luni-solar year, i.e. the time taken by the moon to complete 12 luni-solar months, named after the asterisms (*Nakṣatra*) in which the full moon occurs,

are used. The lunar month is calculated from the day after the new moon to the next new moon (in some regions from the day after the full moon to the next full moon). A lunar month is of 29.53 days, and the lunar year consists of 354.367 days and is shorter by 10.883 days than the solar year which consists of 365.25 days. Now, to prevent the accumulated difference widening the gulf between the solar and the lunar year, an intercalary month, called an *adhika-māsa* or *mala-māsa*, is added once in three years. But during this additional month no sacred functions are performed. As a result of this device, the various annual functions vary only within the range of about 10 to 30 days of the solar month, unlike in the Muslim calendar, which also follows the lunar year, the festivals moving all round the year because of the lack of such adjustment.

Every lunar month (*Māsa*) is divided into two halves called *Pakṣa*-s (Wings or Sides—fortnights)—the bright one (*Śukla* or *Śuddha*), when the moon waxes, the full-moon day being designated as *Pūrṇimā*; and the dark one (*Kṛṣṇa* or *Vadya/Bahula*), when the moon wanes, and the new-moon day is called *Amāvāsyā*. The digits are called *Tithis* (lunar days) and in each *Pakṣa* are counted from one to fourteen in Sanskrit numbers, culminating in *Pūrṇimā* or *Amāvāsyā* on the 15th lunar day. The *Tithi* is related to the position of the moon to the nearest lunar asterism, and being shorter than the solar day, will start from varying times of the solar day.

The seven days of a week, called *Vāra*, start with *Āditya* (Sun) and are further named after the six planets—*Soma* (Moon), *Mangala* (Mars), *Budha* (Mercury), *Bṛhaspati* (Jupiter), *Śukra* (Venus), and *Śani* (Saturn). All these names have several synonyms.

The day (*Ahan*) and night (*Rātri*) together are called *Ahorātra*, and are divided in

several ways to suit different religious and secular purposes, such as *Ghatikās* (24 mins.), *Muhūrtas* (48 mins.), *Hora* (60 mins.), *Yāma* (3 hrs.), etc. A table is given later on.

The solar year is divided into two halves called the *Uttarāyana*, the six months when the sun moves northward (*Uttara*) from the winter solstice to the summer solstice, and *Dakṣiṇāyana*, the six months when it returns southward (*Daksina*) to winter solstice.³⁸ *Uttarāyana* was considered auspicious for all religious rites and sacrifices. The twelve months of the year are divided into six *Ṛtus* (seasons) of 2 months each—*Vasanta* (Spring), *Grīṣma* (Summer), *Varṣā* (Rainy), *Śarad* (Autumn), *Hemanta* (Winter), and *Śisira* (Cold)—the *Vasanta* setting in at present around the beginning of March. In the early Vedic times, more or less, the first three seasons used to correspond to the *Devayāna*, and the latter three to *Pitryāna*.

Now, in observing religious rites and festivals, all or several of the above men-

38. In the early Rg-Vedic times, the two paths of the sun were known as *Devayana* and *Pitryana* (the Path of the gods, and the Path of the Manes). *Devayana* was the path of the sun in the northern hemisphere, from the Vernal Equinox to the Autumnal Equinox; and the *Pitryana*, in the southern hemisphere, from the Autumnal to the Vernal. Later, at sometime, they were designated the *Uttarāyana* and *Dakṣiṇāyana* and the connotation of the northern and southern paths was changed to the present conception. Tilak has discussed this in his book *Orion, or the Antiquity of the Vedas* (pp. 19ff) and in the *Arctic Home in the Vedas*. He adduces the earlier connotation as one of the proofs for the Arctic Home theory of the Vedic people in ancient times. When they came down to the lower latitudes, the words remained, but the connotation changed and new designations were introduced. The original significance of *Deva-yana* and *Pitr-yana*, and *Deva-loka* and *Pitr-loka*, were forgotten in due course, though the words were continued to be used but in a different sense.

tioned factors are taken into consideration relevant to the different functions. The auspicious day and time are fixed according to five factors, which are called the *Pañcānga*. They are—*Tithi*, *Vāra*, *Nakṣatra* (the ruling lunar asterism for the day), *Yoga* (the auspicious conjunction time of the moon with the asterism), and *Karaṇa* (the particular auspicious division of the day, the day being divided into eleven parts for this purpose). The almanac which gives all these and other details of auspicious and inauspicious times, etc. every day is also called a *Pañcānga* or *Pāṅgikā*. It acts as a calendar of dates and times of sacred days, festivals, and several other details of religious importance, observances, etc. as well, and also of the birth-days of holy persons, Seers, and saints.

It has been a noteworthy practice from ancient times to this day that when any individual or public socio-religious rite is undertaken, before its commencement a *Saṅkalpa* or Solemn Vow is to be uttered by the performers giving details of the time, place and purpose of the undertaking. In this *Saṅkalpa*, especially in huge and important public undertakings, all the details of exact time and place are to be mentioned—such as that it is being done in the Second *Parārdha* (of Brahmā), in the *Śveta-Varāha-Kalpa*, in the *Vaivasvata Manvantara*, in its 18 *Chatur-Yuga*, in the first step of first quarter of *Kali-Yuga*, and the year according to the *Kali, Samvat*, or *Śaka* era, the *Ayana*, the *Rtu*, the *Rāsi* in which the sun is, followed by the lunar *Māsa*, *Pakṣa*, *Vāra*, *Tithi*, *Nakṣatra*, etc. to pinpoint the exact time in the context of the cosmic time, and also co-ordinating it with the location of the place where the rite is being performed, mentioning that it is in *Bhārata-khanda* in *Bhārata-varṣa*, and therein *Jambu-dvīpa*, and then refer to the conspicuous landmark or region and the particular holy river in the region, such as for example if in South

India—the region of *Dandakāraṇya*, south of the river *Godāvarī*, etc., and if north India—north of the *Vindhya*s and the holy river *Narmadā* (these details will change according to the location of the place), etc. to specify the exact place in which the rite, sacrifice, or any other religious function, such as dedication of a temple, is being performed. Thus the time and space factors are co-ordinated and the act is lifted up into the universal context. Most of such big rites and sacrifices (*Yajña-s*) are performed for world peace, welfare of mankind and other creatures, and to ward off great natural calamities like drought, famine, etc. In individual and small-scale undertakings, the details of the *Saṅkalpa*, with regard to time and place may be shortened. Thus every one present is always made aware of the time and place in which he/she is living in the cosmic context.

The Hindus are required to always live and function in the universal context of cosmic Space and Time. Even their Supreme Personal God, *Īśvara*, Who assumes myriads of forms as *Deities (Devatā)* to suit the tastes (*Iṣṭa*) of people, does not remain confined to the Heaven, but lives and moves and has His being with the people in every aspect of their life. He/She sports with mankind, especially with the devotees, in numerous colourful ways (cf. *Holi festival*). The whole country—rivers, mountains, forests, and holy places of the Hindus are infused with Divinity. The *Purāṇās* declare that the gods sing the glory of the blessed *Bhārata (Gāyanti devāḥ kila gītakāni, dhanyāstu te bhārata-bhūmibhāge...)*; the *Himalāyas* are considered the abode of the gods and ensoul divinity (*Devatātmā Himālaya—Kālidāsa*); the *Gaṅgā* is a celestial river (*Suranadī*) which has flowed down on earth (*Svar-lokād-āpatantī*); forests like *Naimiśaraṇya* are the dwelling places of the holy sages; *Vārānaśī (Benaras)* is the very city of *Śiva*

(*Siva-kṣetra*) and Mt. Kailasa is his abode. The whole of India is instinct with Divinity. The twelve places of the *Jyotirlinga*-s, the four sacred *Dhama*-s of pilgrimage, and the fifty-two *Śakti-Piṭās* of the Devī are spread out all over the country, and the Śiva in Mt. Kailasa is united with the Devī in Kanyākumārī. Everyday the Hindus are required to remember in the early morning after waking up the cosmic divinities—impersonal and personal, the seven planets after whom the days of the week are named, the seven holy cities, seven holy rivers, and seven holy mountains, spread out all over India, besides remembering the holy men and women, the Supreme God, and the Absolute Reality which resides in all as their inmost Self (Brahman/Ātman). Even animals like the bull, cow, lion, etc.; and plants like the Bilva, Tulasī, and Java (*Hybiscus*) are holy being associated with Śiva, Kṛṣṇa, and Durgā.

10. *A Peep Into the Hindu Measurements of Space and Time.*

The keen Hindu mind not only looked into the vastness of Space and Time, but also into the minute aspect of the micro-world. Their concept of the Supreme Reality embraces both the infinitely big as well as the infinitely small (*Aṅoraṇīyān mahato mahīyān*). That is, It is all pervading, or rather the whole of *Brahmāṇḍa* exists in It, being Its own projection, like waves and bubbles in the ocean. So they tried to conceive the minutest particle of space and the smallest instant of time that is graspable as practical standards of measurement. It is quite pointless to compare these ancient conceptions with those of the latest in modern science. What is to be noted and appreciated is their systematic and rational efforts in these directions thousands of years ago with the data and instruments of measurement available to them.

Measurement of Space:

Space (*Ākāśa*) is the first evolute to manifest from the Supreme Reality which is of the nature of Absolute Consciousness. To the Hindus, Space (*Ākāśa*) is not mere relationship between entities; it is not empty nothing in itself, but an intensely dynamic etherial, all-pervading, non-particulate entity from which all matter, energy, and mind (which are already involved in *Ākāśa* and impel it from within to evolve) arise by stages. Though *Ākāśa* is invisible, we can always conceive of it in terms of a material entity which manifests within it the other elements, like fog in the air.

The minutest visible particle to the naked eye is considered the smallest mote or dust-particle in the sun beam. It is called a *Trasareṇu* (Trembling-mote), and the 30th part of a *Trasareṇu* is called a *Paramāṇu*. These are technical terms and are used as units of measurement of Space (length, breadth, etc.), Time, and Quantity (weight) with their own values. The word '*Aṅu*' is a general term signifying anything which is minutely small, visible or invisible—atomic, or even sub-atomic. There are also words like *Reṇu*, *Kaṇa*, etc. to signify small particles, which however are visible, though very small. In the *Lalitavistara*, an ancient Buddhist work, it is mentioned that $4 \times 1000 \times 4 \times 2 \times 12 \times 7^{10}$ *Anus* will be required to be kept side by side to cover one *Yojana*. Of course, this is a figurative statement indicating that the *Anu* is very small. So far as the Macro-Universe is concerned, the sizes and distances are as far as can be imagined, since they are relatively infinite.

Regarding the measurement of length, breadth, distances, etc. commencing from

the Paramānu, we have the following collated table:

Another time scale is given here (in part), arrived at by collating different versions:

10 Paramānus	...	1 Anu
3 Anus	...	1 Trasareṇu
8 Trasareṇus	...	1 Reṇu
—Unspecified large No. of Reṇus	...	1 Yava (length of a barley grain)
8 Yavas	...	1 Angula (breadth of an adult finger)
12 Angulas (about 9 inches)	...	1 Vitasti (distance between extended thumb & little finger)
2 Vitastis/24 Angulas	...	1 Hasta or Cubit (elbow to tip of fingers)
2 Hastas	...	1 Gaja (36 inches or a yard)
2 Gajas (4 Hastas)	...	1 Danda, 1 Yuga
100 Dandas	...	1 Nalva, (400 Hastas or Cubits)
20 Nalvas or 2000 Dandas	...	1 Krosha (about 21 miles/Gavyūti)
4 Kroshas	...	1 Yojana (about 9 miles)

Generally, Yojana is the unit for all long distance measurements, while in modern times we have kilometer or mile, and for small measurements millimeter.

Measurement of Time:

Time is integrally related to Space, being the dynamism inherent in it, and can operate only in and through space. Time is relational and is measured by the movement or change of entities in space and the distance traversed, or the duration for the filling, emptying, etc. of a certain quantity. But we need a standard for measurement. So, again, the Paramānu is used as a starting point for measuring time. India being a vast and ancient country there were some different systems even as we have different systems today. We give here two systems for measuring time:

- I. 1 Paramānu ... 1/37,968.75 of a second.
 1 Paramānus ... 1 Anu
 3 Anus ... 1 Trasareṇu
 3 Trasareṇus ... 1 Truti — and so on.

- II. 1 Anupala ... 1/150 of a second
 30 Anupalas ... 1 Truti — 1/5 second
 60 Anupalas or 2 Trutis ... 1 Vipala or Lava — 2/5 sec.
 ... and so on.

We shall now give a table showing (in part) the minute conception of the weights and measures that the Hindus had. As we have already mentioned, there were different systems in some regions of this vast land. We shall give here a representative one. The Trasareṇu being the smallest visible particle floating in the sun beam, it was considered an ideal standard for micro-measurements of Space, Time, and Quantity.

30 Paramānus	...	1 Trasareṇu (Vamshi)
26 Trasareṇus	...	1 Marīchi
9 Marichis	...	1 Rajaka
3 Rajakas	...	1 Sarshapa (Mustard Seed)
8 Sarshapas	...	1 Yava (Barley grain)
4 Yavas	...	1 Gunja and so on

There are other tables for the weights and measures of precious metals and stones, and for measuring the quantity of liquids.

Now we shall come to the conception of numbers (*Saṁkhyā*) in general. It is said that beginning with one, the numbers are up to the Parardha (*Ekamtvādi Parārdhāntā Saṁkhyāh*). Of course, the numbers can be used both as integers as well as fractions. We have seen some of the fractional numbers when dealing with micro measurements. We shall give here numbers in tenfold ascending order. It may be noted that the concept of zero, the place value, and the decimal systems were the original, most important, and revolutionary Hindu contributions to mathematics, among many others

Ekam	...	1
Dasha	...	10
Shata	...	100
Sahasra	...	1000
Dasha-Sahasra (Ayuta)	...	10,000
Laksha—(Niyuta)	...	1,00,000
Dasha-Laksha (Prayuta)	...	10,00,000 — 1 million
Koti	...	1,00,00,000 — ten millions
Dasha-Koti (Arbuda)	...	10,00,00,000 — 100 millions
Shata-Koti (Nyarbuda)	...	100,00,00,000 — 1 billion
...and so on to...		
Parardha	...	100 million billions

If further larger numbers are required, the Parardhas or the previous numbers could be multiplied as required.

11. Conclusion.

Thus we see from the most ancient times,

the Hindus cultivated very vast, deep, and comprehensive view of Existence as a framework for the life and history of mankind in all aspects of life. The individual is put in the context of the universal. Some of the concepts may be mythical; nevertheless they have deep and abiding influence on the mind and guide the life and conduct of man and enlarge his vision. They cannot be simply brushed aside because they are not perceptible to the senses. They have an existence of their own.³⁹ Just as there is invisible micro life of different varieties, there is invisible macro life of different varieties also. Both require special instruments and devices to comprehend them. As Ācārya Śaṅkara has pointed out, "the mind by the Śāstra disciplined, and made subtle by the practice of virtues, and properly trained by an Ācārya, and focussed by concentration, is the instrument for the comprehension of subtle supra-sensual verities."⁴⁰ For that matter we do not see the mind. It has neither colour, nor form, nor weight; but still, it is a powerful entity and we cannot deny its existence, for we think through it.

39. See Footnote No. 19, last para. The Western conception of history is confined to the terrestrial world, cut off from all the rest of the surroundings—cosmic or universal, with a materialistic biological view of man. Though modern man boasts of being very scientific, his science is limited to the sense data isolated from the totality of external and internal existence, which are also as much facts of experience as the sense-data, rather far more—for the external sense-life is directed and moulded by the internal volitions and instincts and passions, well known in Hindu thought as the six internal enemies of man, viz. *Kāma* (Lust and desire), *Krodha* (Anger), *Lobha* (Greed), *Moha* (Delusion), *Mada* (Pride, hauteur, and superciliousness), *Mātsarya* (Jealousy), and added to these are the universal *Ahamkāra* (Ego), and *Rāga-Dveṣa* (Attachment and Aversion, Likes and Dislikes). Modern Western thought has reduced man to a biological creature.

40. *Sāstra ācārya sama-damādibhih susams krtam manah ātma-darsane karanam.*

Similarly, thoughts recorded in books by artificial script, influence us greatly though they cannot be said to be existing there concealed in the writing. Even great novels, imaginary films, and dramas influence us very much. They are all part of life. Why then separate certain political acts and events only as history, and brush aside all else as myth though they shape the life of mankind? Why should history be thus circumscribed to very narrow limits?

We see the operation of the subtle Hindu mind both in the sphere of the Micro World as well as in the sphere of the Macro World. The Jaina philosophy conceives of collective invisible micro Jivas—millions and millions in a drop of water. We also have in Hindu literature conceptions of travel to different *Loka-s*, and of aeroplanes (*Vimāna-s*), automatic devices, missiles of various types, transplantation of limbs, transference of foetus, extra-uterine births, brain surgery, etc., etc. There are also conceptions of millions of *Brahmāṇḍa-s* (*Brahmāṇḍa-koti*) in some Upaniṣads, Purāṇas, and popular songs. Most of the recent conceptions in the modern world are there. Even though they cannot be established as actual facts, while they are described to be so, these form the background of Hindu life, thought and literature, inspiring them and broadening their vision. This has enabled the Hindu mind to accept without any hesitation and with the greatest ease the latest scientific developments in different fields on the physical plane without feeling any awe or wonder, since they are in harmony with their own mental framework. Rather, the difficulty has been with the moderners who were and have been brought up in an environment of very narrow conceptions, and it is they who are now broadening their ideas and vision and approaching and appreciating many of the profound Hindu conceptions in regard

to the universe, man, and the totality of Existence and its cyclical manifestation. The real conception of the history of man is gaining ground as a result of the facts revealed by the latest researches in modern science which are in harmony with Hindu thought. As Swami Vivekananda pointed out in 1897 itself:

Once more history is going to repeat itself. For today, under the blasting light of modern science, when old and apparently strong and invulnerable beliefs have been shattered to their very foundations, when special claims laid to the allegiance of mankind by different sects have been all blown into atoms and have vanished into air, when the sledge-hammer blows of modern antiquarian researches are pulverizing like masses of porcelain all sects of antiquated orthodoxies, when religion in the West is only in the hands of the ignorant, and the knowing ones look down with scorn upon anything belonging to religion, here come to the fore the philosophy of India, which displays the highest religious aspirations of the Indian mind, where the grandest philosophical facts have been the practical spirituality of the people. This naturally is coming to the rescue, the idea of the oneness of all, the Infinite, the idea of the Impersonal (Divinity), the wonderful idea of the eternal Soul of Man, of the unbroken continuity in the march of beings, and the Infinity of the universe. The old sects looked upon the world as a little mud-puddle and thought that time began but the other day. *It was there in our old books, and only there, that the grand idea of the infinite range of time, space, and causation, and above all, the infinite glory of man governed all the search for religion. When the modern tremendous theories of evolution and conservation of energy and so forth are dealing death blows to all sorts of crude theologies, what can hold any more the allegiance of cultured humanity but the most wonderful, convincing, broadening, and ennobling ideas that can be found only in the most marvellous product of the Soul of man, the wonderful voice of God, the Vedanta?* (Vol. III, p. 110).

This being the real picture, it is really amazing that some so-called historians and scholars must say that the Hindus lack the

(Continued on page 275)

Sri Ramakrishna Touched Them— Mangarabini Mandal

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

The boundless grace of Sri Ramakrishna touched and lifted those souls to divine heights whom society often despised as naive or illiterate. This is a touching account of one such woman devotee of Kamarpukur. A good research scholar, the author is Assistant Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math.

A twenty-four hour programme of devotional music had created excitement among people in the far-flung backward village of Jayrambati about one hundred kms. north-west of Calcutta. People of the village as well as people from the adjoining ones were visiting the place of festivity. After dusk Sarada Devi too started for the place in the company of Brahmachari Gopesh (later Swami Saradeshananda) and a woman neighbour who carried a small lamp in her hand. It was a pitch dark night. As Sarada Devi was trudging on ahead of others, she most unexpectedly noticed something like a dancing firefly leisurely advancing towards them. What could it be? Soon thereafter she discerned to her delight that it was but Aunt Bhani, a village woman well known to her. Sarada Devi as well as many others used to call her Aunt Bhani. Absent-mindedly Aunt Bhani was advancing with a graceful rhythmic step, holding on her head with her right hand a lighted lamp, her left hand on her hip. Now, recognising Sarada Devi's voice she came back to her senses. All of them laughed heartily and continued their ways.

This jolly good woman was Aunt Bhani or Bhanu of Jayrambati, then aged above sixty. She lived in a road-side cottage in the north-east end of the village. Her real name was Mangarabini, reduced for oral use to Mani, and it finally took the form of Bhani.

Educated people used to call her Bhanu.¹ Her father, Kshetramohan Biswas, belonging to a *sadgope* (caste) family, was a man of moderate means. She had one brother and one sister and amongst them she was the youngest. The Mukherjees of Jayrambati were their family priests and the Mazumdars of Sihore were the priests of their in-laws' family living in the same village. Sarada Devi's uncle, Nilmadhava Mukherjee had received the new initiate's first *bhikṣa* (alms) just after his *upanayana* (sacred thread ceremony) from Bhanu's mother and Nilmadhava addressed her according to the local custom as 'mother'. And following the trail Sarada Devi used to address her as Aunt Bhanu or simply *Pisi*, maternal Aunt. Sri Ramakrishna too called her Bhanu or Bhani or simply *Pisi*. Consequently, Bhanu looked upon the disciples and admirers of Sri Ramakrishna as her grandchildren.

Born around 1851² in the Biswas family of Jayrambati, Bhanu was married young to Ananda Mandal of Phului Shyambazar, a village to the south-west of Jayrambati. A daughter was born to her. But Bhanu found her fate doomed when her husband died a few years later. Then about twenty, she

1. Swami Saradeshananda, *Śrī Śrī Māyer Smṛtikathā* (Bengali), 2nd ed., p. 239.

2. Swami Gambhirananda, *Śrī Mā Sārada Devī* (Bengali) 1981, p. 566, footnote.

came back to her parents at Jayrambati bringing with her their only daughter to pass the dreary life of a widow among the orthodox people. Unfortunately, the daughter too died quite young.³ Bhanu spent the rest of her life at Jayrambati except for some short trips to her in-laws' house at Phului Shyambazar and for pilgrimage in company with Sarada Devi. Despite her family misfortunes, her cheerfulness, guilelessness, and above all her spontaneous love for God endeared her to all the villagers except her elder brother Gour Biswas.

Gour Biswas was a sturdy and head-strong man and a hater of the Sahajiya Vaiṣṇava cult which was nevertheless very dear to Bhanu. Though she lived with him, in her advanced years she used to take food with the family of Satish Biswas, her nephew. A typical village woman of Bengal, Bhanu was strong in body and simple of nature, devoted to spiritual life and unwavering in her faith in God even when she had to pass through vicissitudes. To the villagers, this unassuming illiterate woman could only have seemed laughably naive, but Sri Ramakrishna correctly estimated her worth. Moreover, as Sri Ramakrishna touched her heart the spiritual possibilities in her got awakened. It turned out to be an oasis in the desert of her life.

It is said that Bhanu had taken to the practice of *madhura bhāva*, the spiritual mood of Brajagopis while she was living with her in-laws at Phului Shyambazar, dominated by the Sahajiya Vaiṣṇava cult. There she had picked up singing of *padavali kīrtan* also. On her return to Jayrambati she continued the practice of the spiritual discipline and also her singing, though at times, she was threatened by her elder brother

Gour. But such restraints seemed to have whetted her fervour and strengthened her determination. Unobtrusively, but devotedly she followed her spiritual practice.

Bhanu felt unspeakable joy when she had seen the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar at Jayrambati for the first time. Whereas the villagers considered him a crazy priest of the temple of Dakshineswar and called him the nutty son-in-law of the Mukherjees', Bhanu's natural insight opened up for her an entirely new vista. Instinctively she knew that the Brahmin priest was an extraordinary personage. Her straightforward and simple approach helped her somewhat to appraise the divine personality of the apparently eccentric Brāhmin.

Sri Ramakrishna, born in 1836 at Kamarpukur, five kms. north-west of Jayrambati, had shown since childhood a highly devotional nature and mystical temperament. Subsequent to his appointment as priest of Mother Kālī at the temple of Dakshineswar his sincere worship of Mother Kālī led to an intense longing for a direct vision of the Divine Mother. It became an irresistible passion with him and was finally crowned with the blessed vision. This only swelled up his desire for uninterrupted communion with the Divine Mother and he lost interest in food, sleep and other necessities of life. People thought he had lost his head. Alarmed, his mother Chandra and eldest brother Ramkumar had him brought to Kamarpukur. As a remedial measure to his idiosyncratic conduct they got him betrothed and married to Sarada, slightly over five, daughter of Ramchandra Mukherjee of Jayrambati. When Sarada was seven years old, Sri Ramakrishna paid a short visit to Jayrambati. On this occasion and every subsequent visit, Bhanu was one of those few who felt extremely delighted. She felt an inexplicable attraction towards this extraordinary man.

3. The family particulars have been furnished by two members of the family Murali Biswas, a college teacher, and Benoy Biswas, a school teacher.

No doubt, the pervasive magic of his personality had worked on her.

At Jayrambati no matter how routine life there could be, at a moment's notice Sri Ramakrishna's presence charged the atmosphere with unexpected life and bliss. In fact, he used to radiate a holy good cheer. Naturally, during Sri Ramakrishna's stay with the Mukherjees Bhanu used to peep in whenever she found an opportunity to do so. She would feel beside herself with joy in the holyman's presence. Consequent to a few such meetings with him, the pure-hearted Bhanu comprehended in her own way the greatness of the Dakshineswar saint. She felt a power emanating from him—a power which she could no more understand than ignore. Counteracting the charges that Shyamasundari's daughter had been married to a lunatic, Bhanu assured Shyamasundari Devi saying, "Well, sister-in-law, your son-in-law is Siva Himself, and Krishna too. You may not understand this now, but you will in the future. Mark my words." When in November-December, 1860 Sri Ramakrishna came to Jayrambati for the second time to take his girl-wife to Kamarpukur, Aunt Bhanu remembering the divine couple Sive and Parvati, sang merrily, "As thou art beautiful, my little child (Sarada), have thou got a groom who is both mad and naked." But the villagers in general regarded her as too sentimental and did not heed her.

Sri Ramakrishna had gone back to Dakshineswar and plunged once more into the practice of hard spiritual disciplines. Intoxicated with his continuous communion with the Divine Mother, his behaviour was taken to be thoroughly eccentric, even scandalous. Stories reached Jayrambati. When neighbours began whispering that Sri Ramakrishna had gone mad at Dakshineswar and that he was going about naked, Sarada Devi felt disturbed. At the sight of her, some of the villagers would invariably

blurt out, "Dear me, Shyamasundari has married her daughter to a lunatic. How sad!" Sarada Devi spent her days in anxious thoughts. In those days of anguish she would get some solace from Bhanu who was almost of her age. In Bhanu she found a sympathetic heart. When seriously perturbed by criticism of her husband, Sarada Devi would go to Bhanu's house and lie awhile on the veranda.

In 1867 when Sri Ramakrishna came to Kamarpukur to recuperate from stomach trouble, he was no more the heedless madman of God. He was firmly established in God-consciousness. He appeared more mature; his instructions though as spontaneous as before, became more incisive and therefore more powerful. On this occasion he visited Jayrambati and Sihore. During such trips Bhanu along with other village women used to visit Sri Ramakrishna. Full of joy as he was, he would entertain them with funny tales and verses and witty remarks. On hearing those things the women would laugh heartily or blush and run away. After such merry makings Sri Ramakrishna would quietly say to those who remained, "Do you see, the chaff has vanished. Now be seated, I shall talk to you." Then they heard him speak rapturously of God. The nectar of God-communion that Sri Ramakrishna served fascinated his listeners. They enjoyed a foretaste of heaven on earth, as it were. Explaining the reason for this, Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "You know I am a fool. I know nothing. Then who is it that says all these things? I say to the Divine Mother: "O Mother, I am the machine and Thou art the Operator. ...I do as Thou makest me do; I speak as Thou makest me speak; I move as Thou makest me move..."⁴ Sri Ramakrishna believed that he

4. 'M': The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, (New York: The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942) p. 891.

was but an instrument in Her hand. The words coming from his mouth bespoke of the Divine Mother and Her glory only. During Sri Ramakrishna's several trips to Jayrambati, Bhanu noticed that there was something that permeated his words and ingenuous pranks; it pervaded the atmosphere of the place wherever he stayed, stirred the hearts of his companions and made those days of Jayrambati an unforgettable and lasting joyous experience to them.

Aware that Bhanu was extremely afraid of her elder brother Gour, the childlike Ramakrishna would all on a sudden say, "There comes Gour-da (brother-Gour)." At this the otherwise jovial Bhanu would shrink in fear, and Sri Ramakrishna would turn grave. He would advise Bhanu: "Bashfulness, hatred, fear, these three are the impediments (to spiritual progress)." One day he suggested, "When Gour-da threatens you next, you begin to dance with your two hands raised, and clapping your hands sing, 'O mind, praise Gour and Netai!' He will take you for insane." The candid Bhanu took this advice seriously, and it is said that when she followed it she was benefited greatly.

Bhanu was fortunate enough to have Sri Ramakrishna come to her house. The first visit came in response to her invitation. The happy Bhanu served him with some nice dishes. On that day Sri Ramakrishna gave her some valuable advice, which she treasured for her future guidance. He said, "Bereft of husband, son, daughter, you are carefree now. You have no domestic trouble to face. Take moderate food, and shutting the door of your room sing, 'O mind, praise Gour and Netai', and dance to your heart's content. You will find peace of mind, and derive immense joy. What happiness is there in worldly prattles? Renounce them!" The advice was as lofty as it was practical.

It warmed her heart. It brought about slow but steady metamorphosis in Bhanu's mental life. She withdrew herself somewhat from the world. Shutting the door of her room she used to thus sing "O mind, praise Gour and Netai", and dance. In fact, it became her daily spiritual practice. Her family members thought she must have lost her mental balance. There was a picture of Sri Ramakrishna hanging on one wall of her room. In her ecstatic moments she would see Gour and Netai in that picture. They became living for her. This made her mad with joy. Clapping her hands she would dance and dance. When someone asked if she did not feel abashed dancing wildly in front of Ramakrishna, her son-in-law, Bhanu would confess: "What's that! No more do I feel shy in his presence, earlier I did." However, it must be admitted that Bhanu's devotion was not yet deep and flamboyant as it became later.

One day Sri Ramakrishna found Bhanu working with a spinning wheel; she was spinning cotton into thread. Full of fun as he was, Sri Ramakrishna began singing a song in tune with the rattling noise of the spinning wheel. He sang gesturing, with his hands twisting. Several decades later Sister Nivedita heard of this episode when Bhanu was living at 16-A Bosepara Lane, Baghbazar under the loving care of Sarada Devi.⁵ One day Nivedita brought her a spinning wheel. At Nivedita's importunities, Bhanu ran the spinning wheel while singing the funny song sang by Sri Ramakrishna. Everyone laughed heartily but Bhanu could see before her eyes the smiling countenance of Sri Ramakrishna.

Never did she feel tired narrating a particular experience. One day as Sri Rama-

5. Swami Gambhirananda, *Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, 1955) p. 196. Bhanu lived there for more than a year this time.

krishna was getting ready to set out for Kamarpukur, many village women gathered there to see him off. Some had brought garlands, some brought food. Aunt Bhanu too desired that she should present him something. But what could she give him? As she was musing, she heard Sri Ramakrishna saying, "Can you give me betal leaf rolled into a cup?" An exceedingly happy Bhanu rushed to her house and carefully made two such rolls having some lime, cashew, betal nut and spices within. But when she returned to the Mukherjee's house Sri Ramakrishna had already left for Kamarpukur. Dauntless as she was, she practically ran over the village road leading to Kamarpukur and overtook him. The latter was amazed to see her there. He said, "Aunt, what's the matter? Why have you come so far?" Quietly she said, "You had asked for rolled betel leaf; I have brought it." No doubt, Sri Ramakrishna was happy to notice her sincerity. Now, with a smile on his lips he said, "You will have; you will have; certainly you will have". Bhanu understood Sri Ramakrishna's blessings would help her to attain to God-vision. Accepting the betel-rolls however, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Being a woman how did you dare to come alone this far? Now, Gour-da will perhaps give you a good beating after you return home. Well, do one thing. Get one earthen pot from the potter's house. Then, your family people will think that you had gone to the potters' locality." Bhanu took the dust of his feet and returned.

Bhanu was of slender body and bright dark complexion. She always wore a smile on her lips. Her simplicity, candour, absence of hesitation and friendly attitude towards others made her popular among the pilgrims who visited Kamarpukur and Jayrambati. In her old age she used to invite the visiting devotees to her cottage, entertain them with rolled betel leaf, fried

pigeon peas, chops made of palm, etc. She considered all of them as her grandchildren. She used to call Girishchandra Ghose, the dramatist, the 'elder grandchild'. She would narrate before them anecdotes regarding Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi. Observing devotees coming from distant places and finding no stir among the local people, Bhanu lamented saying, "People from Vishnupur, Tamluk, etc. came here, but alas, there is hardly any awakening among the local people. The bottom of a lamp remains dark always, no doubt."

Not only was Bhanu blessed by Sri Ramakrishna, she was fortunate enough to have a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna's high spiritual moods. One day she had made a garland for Sri Ramakrishna. Hiding it under her *sari*, she went to Sri Ramakrishna. As there were other women present, she felt shy about offering it. Sri Ramakrishna came to know of her secret desire and just to help her fulfil her wish he played a trick. He told a naughty joke which made the women present run away laughing. Sri Ramakrishna then asked Bhanu to offer the garland. As soon as Bhanu put the garland round his neck he went into deep *samādhi*. Unfamiliar with such a transformation in him, Bhanu got frightened; she did not know what to do. Presently Hriday appeared on the scene. Eventually Hriday, by uttering some mystical words into Sri Ramakrishna's ears brought him back to the normal state of mind.⁶ A murmur of astounded admiration rippled in her heart as she realized that she had been fortunate enough to witness the rare sight of *samādhi* of Sri Ramakrishna. Bhanu considered herself doubly blessed.

As told earlier she had adopted the spiritual mood of a *Braja-gopī*. She worshipped

6. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1982) pp. 53-54.

God as her beloved husband. She had already learnt some songs when she was living with her in-laws at Sihore. She would sing them alone or at times would entertain devotees with those songs. Among the many songs, the following were her favourite:

- (a) *I love thee O Mind! That's why I gave you the Precious gem of Hari's name...*
- (b) *In the city of love, Rādhā is the money lender,
Her creditor is Sri Hari...*
- (c) *O dear! I could not reach Shyam
What happiness can confine me to home any longer?...*
- (d) *Banished the name of Adarini,
Vanished the name of Garabini,
Can there be that happiness in Braja still?
Devoid of Hari, Vrindavan's light has turned into darkness...⁷*

Of course, the gifted Bhanu learnt some songs after hearing Sri Ramakrishna singing them. She used to sing those songs to the devotees later on. By way of illustration we may narrate one such occurrence. One day Sri Ramakrishna, when he was staying at Jayrambati, found himself surrounded by a host of village women, including Aunt Bhanu. As they pressed him to present a song, Sri Ramakrishna sang the following song of Śrī Rādhā:

*Who of the locality has tended the black cat?
O Lalita, catch him, please!...
It broke the pot, drank the curds
And wiped its mouth with the wrapper.
If I can catch the cat
I shall tie him to my cot.*

⁷. Brahmachari Akshaychaitanya, *Pañch Phule Sanji* (Bengali), 1394 B.S., pp. 1-2.

The women broke into laughter; they were beside themselves with mirth. However, the talented Bhanu learnt the song by heart and presented it on many occasions later. Imbued with the spirit of love of a Braja gopi, she used to express herself, particularly while entertaining, by graceful gesticulations of the hands when singing and dancing. No doubt, her talks always veered round to Sri Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. It is not known whether she was given spiritual instruction⁸ by Sri Ramakrishna or the Holy Mother, but it was noticed that she used to worship Sri Ramakrishna in his picture daily. At times of her staying away from Jayrambati, she would hand over Sri Ramakrishna's picture to Indumati Devi⁹ with the request to offer at the holy feet of Sri Ramakrishna two Basil leaves (*Tulasī*) every day. Sri Ramakrishna was her *Iṣṭa* personified. As she advanced in spiritual life, she developed the detachment to enable her to separate herself from the values and expectations of those around her. No more did she cling tenaciously to her kinsmen. No more grief, anger, pride could overwhelm her, and she remained self contented.

Unbounded faith in Sri Ramakrishna blossomed into a firm conviction that the Master was with her always. During his first visit to Calcutta, the devotee Surendra went to Udbodhan house only to learn that Sarada Devi had gone to Kothar in Orissa. He met aunt Bhanu and heartily chatted with her. As dusk was approaching he was in a hurry to leave. Surprised at this, Bhanu intervened to get his decision changed, saying, 'How is it? You are his children. Even

⁸. Bhanu mentioned that Sarada Devi had whispered into her ears the *mantra* while she and Bhanu were one day lying side by side. (*Śrī Mā Sārada Devī*, p. 449).

⁹. Wife of Baradaprasad, the fourth brother of Sri Sarada Devi.

if you go astray, he would certainly guide you. Oneday I had gone to have a view of the Ganga. On my way back I could not make out which path I was to follow. I waited in blank dismay when the Master came to my rescue ; taking me by the hand he led me to this house. ?¹⁰

Notwithstanding Aunt Bhanu's cordiality with Sarada Devi ever since her young days, experiences forced her as days passed to change her attitude. Gradually it dawned on her that Sarada Devi was but a divine being in human form. Bhanu claimed later that one day she had the vision of Sarada Devi as a goddess with four arms. One day she told Sarada Devi that whenever the latter sang, she could hear the voice of Sri Ramakrishna. Sarada Devi quipped, "What do I know about it? It is you who know!" Bhanu asserted her viewpoint saying, "The Master resides in you." Convinced that Sarada Devi was not an ordinary mortal but a divine being, she would tell devotees of her glories and divine attributes. She would quietly tell the near and dear ones, particularly the monastic devotees, to collect the Mother's footprints. It was at her instance Swami Saradeshanda collected a footprint of the Mother¹¹ and preserved it as a treasure. Every evening she used to visit the Holy Mother carrying in her hand an earthen lamp burning. Putting it out she would quietly sit near the Mother, attentively listening to whatever poured from her lips. At last she would receive *prasād* from the Mother's hand and return home carrying the lamp in her hand.

In company with the Holy Mother, Bhanu visited Calcutta, Benaras and some other places. In the month of December 1912 the Holy Mother was staying in the house called

'Lakṣmi-Nivas' at Benaras. Aunt Bhanu too was in her party. Swami Brahmananda used to visit Lakṣmi-Nivas occasionally and enquire about the Mother. One day as he was about to leave the house he met Aunt Bhanu and began playing a prank on her. Aunt Bhanu too was not to be subdued. With artistic movements of her hands she began singing:

Who of the locality has tended the black cat? O Lalita, please catch him...He broke the pot, drank the curd, wiped its mouth with the wrapper etc.

This song pertaining to young Krishna brought a sudden transformation in the elderly Swami's mood. Very soon he seemed to become indrawn, losing his consciousness of the external world ; in ecstasy tears rolled down his cheeks, wetting his garment. The Holy Mother who was observing everything from the first floor of the house later remarked, "O Aunty! You are not an insignificant being. You have stirred Rakhal who is as deep as the ocean." It may not be out of place to mention that Bhanu stayed at Belur Math for a week in October, 1912 and witnessed Durga Puja.¹² Also she was awed at that time to observe the great regard with which the monks of the Order held the Holy Mother ; they worshipped her feet.

Almost always aunt Bhanu was in excellent humour. Oneday she told the Holy Mother in the presence of some devotees at Calcutta, "Formerly, the villagers used to call you 'the wife of the madcap'." Saying this, she began to sing.

'People called the Naked One mad,
How much you suffered in the Strangers'
house,

10. Brahmachari Akshaychaitanya: Sri Sri Sarada Devi (Bengali), 4th Edn. p. 312.

11. Śrī Śrī Māyer Smṛtikathā, pp. 86-7.

12. Śrī Mā Sārada Devī, p. 287.

A sentry guards your door now, I hear,
Even Indra, Moon-god, Death-god
cannot see you,
What a joy to hear!

Looking towards the Mother she further said, Mother, Sarat Maharaj (Swami Saradananda) is your sentry this time. Then addressing the devotees she laughingly observed, 'You all represent Indra, Moon-god, Death-god, etc. What hardship everyone of you undergo just to see the Mother once.' The devotees noticed a soft smile rippling on her lips.¹³

We may narrate here a small incident just to show the Mother's elevated status in Bhanu's estimation. A very distant relation of the Mother, Banku had renounced worldly life and become a monk. A source of unfailing inspiration to those who would take to monastic life, the Holy Mother stoutly defended Banku when the latter's wife and mother bitterly criticized his action. Mother knew that Banku had made provision for maintenance of the family before he left home. However, the Mother pacified both the grieved women by her kind and loving treatment.¹⁴ After a long time Banku appeared in the village again. The news spread and people assembled in the house of

13. Sri Sri Sarada Devi (Bengali), 4th Edn, p. 311.

14. A witness of this incident, Bhann appreciated the Holy Mother's point of view; she used to narrate this incident to the devotees. (*Śrī Mā Sārada Devī*, pp. 372-73).

Satish Biswas, nephew of Bhanu, where Banku had stepped in. The Holy Mother too went there. Seeing the Mother Bhanu got thrilled and shouted, "O Satish, today is a day of blessings for you. The Mother herself has come. Receive her, make *Pranam* to her and spread a mat for her."¹⁵

As she advanced in age Aunt Bhanu merged herself more and more in the thought of the Master. It seems she could feel that Sri Ramakrishna's presence pulsing within all the devotees as love in the heart. She used to rejoice to see the glory of the Master spreading. She came to be known as one of those few in the village whom no visitor to Jayrambati would like to miss. She sang the glory of the Master, spoke of the greatness of the Mother. Devotees too found that she was, in the most literal sense, a dream come true. Stripped of all pretensions, she was sweetness and joy personified. But she was never one to make demands and flaunt her spiritual bounty. Bhanu passed away before the Holy Mother did but her memory lingered in the niche of everybody's heart who had met Sri Ramakrishna and Sarada Devi at Jayrambati. As traces of gold often seen in the sand of Suvarnarekha river always attract the prospectors, so the glow of spiritual growth in this simple village woman of Jayrambati ever attracted God seekers. No doubt, Bhanu's attainments bespoke the glory of Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master.

15. *Śrī Śrī Māyer Smṛtikathā*, p. 124.

The Ganga, The Himalayas and The Banyan

N. S. V. RAO

The author, a retired professor from Bombay, compares Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi, and Swamiji metaphorically to the Ganga, the Banyan and the Himalaya, highlighting the unique role of the Holy Mother.

In this ancient land, sanctified by sages, seers, divine incarnations, many sacred rivers lofty mountains, gigantic trees with a thousand sheltering arms offering cool shade, the River Ganga, the lofty and majestic Himalayas, and the Banyan trees occupy a special position of purity and sanctity, peace and bliss. Likewise are the divine personalities who have taken birth in this holy country, who embodied similar qualities.

In this century of phenomenal advance of science and technology the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and the Holy Mother Sarada Devi has been acclaimed as a veritable shower of faith and hope to all. They have revealed the sanctity and serenity of the Ganga, the Himalayas and the Banyan, bringing peace and bliss to our lives and to the whole of humanity, each one of them.

There is much to be said about each of these personalities, but we emphasize here mostly Holy Mother Sarada Devi. Yet, one of them can be hardly comprehended without reference to the other two. After all, the trinity is but one though they appeared on earth as three different beings. Sarada Devi is adored and worshipped like the other two great consort Devīs, Sītā and Rādhikā. It is of great interest to notice the nature of the role each one played in their earthly sojourn alongside the Divine Incarnations, their husbands.

Advent of Divine Consorts and Their Role.

The noble name of Sri Rama is ever associated with that paragon of purity and chastity, Mother Sita—like milk and its whiteness—, as also with that ideal of a devotee and dedicated personal attendant, the valiant Hanuman. The ever-charming name of Sri Krishna, the bard of the immortal song of wisdom, the *Gītā*, with his eternal companion and alter-ego, Radhika—the embodiment of intense divine love, and that ideal devotee, Partha, who as the symbolic calf drew the milk, the nectar of the *Gītā* from Lord Sri Krishna.

Next in order, in this age of kali (not to be confused with Goddess Kālī), the most outstanding advent has been that of Sri Ramakrishna accompanied by the most brilliant Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi, widely acclaimed as Holy Mother, as his consort, all born for the spiritual rejuvenation of this land.

Sita and Radhika represent the unswerving absorption and contemplation of happiness and divinity in their consorts to the utter exclusion of their own personal lives. They represent the supreme purity and fidelity of spiritual love. But, as Swami Premanandaji has said, the Holy Mother occupies a far higher place. In addition to manifesting the full measure of noble characteristics and qualities of her predecessors, she manifested

yet another outstanding characteristic, that of universal Motherhood. She became the Mother dear, of one and all, whosoever addressed her as Mother, be he good or bad, high or low, or of whatever caste or religion, nation, man, woman or child. Her mother's heart swelled with love at such a call, and she responded without hesitation to the children's calling even sometimes when Sri Ramakrishna's instructions were to the contrary. Regarding the Master Himself, she was not only always thinking of his personal service and comfort, but was a help-mate in his spiritual mission.

It was because of this, her complete identification with Sri Ramakrishna's life and spiritual mission, that she was able to give her personal touch, shape and form to his spiritual ideals and bring into existence the unique organization of all-renouncing monks dedicated to the service of humanity. It is hence that she is acclaimed as '*Sangha-janani*', the Mother of the Sangha. To a question, why she was chosen to be a teacher of humanity in a way the other divine consorts were not, she said, "My child, you know that the Master used to see the Divine Mother in everyone. He left me behind this time, for demonstrating that Motherhood of God to Humanity." This is a unique facet of Sri Sarada Devi's personality never seen before, so much inclusive and yet broader and different from the lives of the other two divine consorts.

Revelation of Divinity.

At the final hour of attaining beatitude, Sri Ramakrishna revealed his true identity as the personification of both Sri Rama and Sri Krishna in this age. He had already revealed his identity as Siva and Sakti to Mathuranath. Similarly, Sarada Devi too can be identified as the personification of

Sita and Radhika, and the Divine Mother Herself. Sri Ramakrishna said of her, "She is Sarada—Saraswati. She has come to give knowledge. She has descended by covering up her beauty this time, lest unregenerate people would come to grief by looking at her with impure eyes. Is she an ordinary person? She is my *Sakti*."

There are no known accounts of either Sita or Radhika actively participating in the pursuit of the work of their divine consorts. The former has become a symbol of pristine purity and chastity, teaching to humanity the supreme value of utmost fidelity to her Lord, as the very Divine, and the Be-all and End-all of her life. It is indeed the power and efficacy of this devotion that acted as a shield for Mother Sita, which all the evil designs of Ravana could not pierce. The strength of this *Pativṛtya* even served as the sheet anchor for all the acts of Dharma of Sri Rama. Hence it is that Mother Sita is adored as an outstanding model of wifely virtue.

Radhika, the other divine consort, also was immersed in Supreme love, fidelity to, and contemplation of her Lord. She had merged her entire self in Sri Krishna. In fact, this aspect of her austerities forms one of the important *sādhana*-s, called the *Madhura-bhāva*, which Sri Ramakrishna also practised, identifying himself with Sri Radhika. Sri Ramakrishna described the conjoined images of Radha and Krishna as that of *Prakṛti* and *Puruṣa*, the dynamic and potent form of the Divine. On account of this union, he says, "...the images are slightly inclined towards each other. Sri Krishna is *Puruṣa* and Srimati is His *Sakti*, the Primal Power. ...If you think of one, the other is also understood. It is like fire and its power to burn. Krishna's eyes are fixed on Radha, and Radha's on Krishna.

Radha's complexion is golden, like lightning, so Krishna wears a yellow apparel. Krishna's complexion is blue like a dark cloud, so Radha wears a blue sari. She has also bedecked herself with blue sapphires. Both of them have tinkling anklets. In other words, there is inner and outer harmony between *Puruṣa* and *Prakṛti*."

Like Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi too was every inch not only a personification of Sita and Radhika, but much more—of the Divine Mother Herself. Swami Tapasyananda writes: "There were moments when under the influence of higher moods, or by way of confiding some secret to a devoted disciple, she would compare herself to Lakṣmi, the divine consort of Nārāyaṇa."¹ Many accounts in her life reveal her identification with her divine predecessors, the consorts of the Incarnations of God.

Adoration of Mother.

There have been outstanding testimonies of what Holy Mother was, and how great she was, by disciples who were in close contact with her. To Swami Vivekananda, "Mother's grace is a hundred times more valuable than Father's. Mother's grace, Mother's blessings are all paramount to me—please pardon me, I am a little bigoted here as regards Mother. If but Mother orders, her demons can work anything." Who can fathom what moves him so deeply and makes him so eloquent about the Holy Mother? It is because "...you have not yet understood the wonderful significance of Mother's life—none of you. But gradually you will know. Without *Sakti*, there is no regeneration for the world. Why is it our country is the weakest? Because *Sakti* is held in dishonour here. Mother has been born to revive that wonderful *Sakti* in India,

1. Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Sarada Devi, The Holy Mother* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore,) p. 160.

and making her the nucleus once more, Gargis and Maitreyis will be born into the world."

Nag Mahashaya declared ecstatically to all that Mother was more compassionate than Father. Once when Yogin-Ma said humorously to Mother, "Look at the Master's disciples. Each one of them is a spiritual giant. But what about your disciples, Mother?" Mother replied calmly, "Is it to be wondered at? He picked up the best type and with what care he selected them! And towards me he has pushed all this small fry, coming in their hundreds like ants. Don't compare my disciples with his."

Swami Premananda in his adoration of Mother said, "Who can understand the Holy Mother? You have heard about Sita, Savitri, Viṣṇupriya, Radharani. The Holy Mother occupies a far higher place. Not even the slightest trace of divine power was noticeable in her. Sri Ramakrishna had the *Vidyā* powers, we witnessed his trances and ecstasies. But in the Holy Mother even the *Vidyā* powers were concealed. What a Supreme Power that! Don't you see how many people are rushing on! The poison which we cannot digest we just pass it on to the Mother, and she gives refuge to everyone. Infinite is her power! Unbounded love! Victory unto Mother!"

Manifestation of Motherhood.

Starting from her earliest encounter (1884-85) with the dacoit 'Father and Mother' on the plain of Telo-belo, whom she won over and transformed by her extraordinary love, courage and charm, she manifested more and more her wonderful quality of Motherhood all through her life. Golap-Ma sometimes complained that Mother was incapable of seeing evil in anyone and that whoever called her 'Mother' got kind response from her without any consideration of the person's nature. Holy Mother never discriminated

against any nationality. During the freedom movement when disciples wanted to boycott British cloth as they were oppressors and enemies, Mother retorted, "No, I cannot be as narrow as that, they too are my children." She was saying, "I cannot contain myself when one draws near me and calls me Mother." She assured, "Whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself, 'I have a Mother'." One time, when a woman who had led a bad life sincerely repented and confessed her sins, Mother embraced her with great warmth of feeling and assured her, "Don't despair, for whatever you have done you will get over your sinful tendencies," and gave her initiation.

For even the most wicked she felt near and dear and there was no error too grievous for her forgiveness. If he or she opened their heart, her overflowing sympathy and assurance of divine protection would heal the wounds of the repenting persons. When her close associates protested to her about her indiscriminate offer of shelter and protection, she would say, "If my child gets covered with mud or dust, is it not my duty to cleanse him and take him in my lap?" Such was the magnanimity and overflowing warmth of her motherly heart for one and all. To sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble) she was "...Dear Mother, full of love! and it is not a flushed and violent love like ours, but a gentle peace that brings good to everyone and wishes ill to none, surely...the most wonderful thing of God...and the wonderful things of God are all quiet—stealing unnoticed into our lives—the air, and the sunlight and the sweetness of gardens, and of the Ganges, these are the silent things like you." Nivedita said that in her "...one realized that wisdom and sweetness to which the simplest of women may attain, and yet to myself, the stateliness of her courtesy and her great open mind are almost as wonderful as her sainthood. I have never known her

to hesitate in giving large and generous judgement, however new and complex might be the questions put before her. Her life is one long stillness of prayer."

Conclusion and Salutation.

The phenomenon of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and Sri Sarada Devi has illumined the religious firmament of this century as no other phenomenon in the entire universe. To Romain Rolland, "Sri Ramakrishna's message of the soul represented the 'symphony of India'—like those of classical masters, built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past. But the sovereign personality, concentrating in himself the divinity of these elements and fashioning them to a royal harmony is always the one who gives his name to the work.

And Vivekananda was 'energy personified', and action was his message to man. For him, as for Beethoven, it was root of all virtues. His pre-eminent characteristic was kingliness. He was born king and nobody ever came near him, either in India or America without paying homage to his majesty.² His message of energy had a double meaning; a national and a universal. For the great monk of Advaita, it was the universal meaning that predominated, it was the other that revived the sinews of India.

And what of this grand and simple Divine Mother Sarada Devi? "...She was a perfect example of gentleness, humility, purity, patience and self-dedication on the one hand, and on the other, great liberal mindedness, common sense, boldness, fearlessness and strength. The quiet aspect of her personality is more apparent while the bold side remains hidden. For this reason, modesty and self-effacement are emphasized. ...It is in the

2. Swami Lokeshwarananda, Editor, *World Thinkers on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda* (Calcutta: R. K. Mission Institute of Culture,) p. 49.

harmonious blending of her personality that she is the perfect ideal. It is with all this vastness and many-sidedness of her personality that the Holy Mother has made her appeal in the West and has become our ideal,"³ is how Gwendolyn Thomas an American student of Vedanta describes her.

To Elizabeth Davidson yet another American devotee: "...India and the world became sanctified anew a century ago by the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and his wife Sri Sarada Devi. The spiritual realizations of this illumined pair have once more made significant the truths of the great world religions."⁴

3. *Sri Sarada Devi, The Great Wonder* (New Delhi: Ramakrishna Mission 1984) p. 315.

4. *Sri Sarada Devi, the Great Wonder*. p. 291.

Thus, understanding the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda would be incomplete without having a glimpse of the simple and yet down-to-earth life and message of Sri Sarada Devi. Understanding the three will be like emerging from a refreshing and invigorating plunge in the cool waters of Ramakrishna's Ganga; then having a view of the lofty and magnificent brilliant sunlit peaks of Vivekananda's Himalayas; and move finally to the cool and comforting shade of the myriad sheltering arms of the gigantic Banyan tree, to sip Nectar and imbibe the soothing and silent message of Holy Mother Sarada Devi. Let then the symphony of the heart beat with the rhythm.

SPACE-TIME AND HISTORICAL SENSE OF THE HINDUS

(Continued from page 262)

historical sense. Rather it is the Hindus who have laid the foundations of real history of mankind, a universal history of Man and his higher evolution, 'from man the brute into Man the God'.⁴¹ It is a pity that in recent times the invasion of the narrow empirical Western notions are obliterating the grand concepts and vision

41. As Swami Vivekananda has pointed out, "India's gift to the world is Light Spiritual," and its mission has been "the spiritualization of the human race." And to this task the great minds of India have applied themselves since ancient times to the present day. Sri Ramakrishna/Vivekananda are among the recent ones. Vivekananda wrote to Nivedita in a letter dated 7th June 1895 from London: "My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life."

of the Hindus in regard to the procession of universal history, to the detriment of mankind. Life and existence in all their aspects are being forced into a parochial, fragmentary, dichotomistic and reductionist framework, impelled by mere utilitarian motives. The so-called historians and scholars thus seek to deprive India and Hindus at one stroke of all its vast and ancient glorious heritage by sweeping away the Vedic literature as so much of babbling, and the Purāṇās, Itihāsas, etc. as mere mythological stories, because they do not fall in line with their limited preconceived views. For them the Western views of life, values, and achievements are the only worthwhile ones, and the Western view of history is the only real history. The sooner we are saved from such historians and scholars, the better will it be for mankind.

Memoirs of Swami Brahmananda

SWAMI SARADESHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

I recall a memorable occasion which shows the great interest and enthusiasm Maharaj had for gardening. Once when I was coming from Kamarpukur to Calcutta I brought a few mangoes from the mango tree that Sri Ramakrishna planted with his own hands. So far as I remember it was the end of Vaisakh or the first week of Jaistha (May). Holy Mother was then staying at the Udbodhan house; and the mangoes were brought specially for her. Those mangoes were not quite ripe at that time, only a few of them of the tree's upper branches showed a tinge of colour. Anyway, I climbed the tree and plucked those few mangoes myself. At the same time Swami Keshavananda, the head of the Koalpara Ashrama¹ arrived in Kamarpukur and gave me some freshly picked *patal-s*² to take to Holy Mother. Reaching the Udbodhan I paid my obeisance to the Holy Mother and handed over the mangoes and patals, along with some other articles. Mother was very happy when I told her that all were keeping well in the country-side. Next evening Golap-Ma put a bundle containing some of the mangoes and patals in my hand and went with me to see Swami Brahmananda at Balaram Mandir.³ It was Holy Mother who had made this arrangement. Maharaj was then residing at Balaram Mandir. It was afternoon when we arrived and the drawing room was

crowded with a good many people. We saw Maharaj standing on the south-east corner of the veranda and we bowed down to him offering our *pranams*. There was a happy exchange of greetings between him and Golap-Ma, and enquires about the Holy Mother, Sarat Maharaj, Radhu and other inmates at the Udbodhan. Standing to one side I was enjoying their sweet and affectionate conversation. Then Golap-Ma introduced me to Maharaj saying, "This boy brought mangoes from Thakur's (Sri Ramakrishna's) tree at Kamarpukur; also some patals grown at Koalpara Ashrama. Mother has sent these for you." Maharaj took out a few of the mangoes from the bundle and looked at them very closely. After a little he called his attendant and asked him to prepare some sour broth with them. The fruits were not yet ripe, that was why he decided to use them for sour broth. Then closely examining the patals he asked me, "Did they produce these beautiful patals in their own vegetable garden? I answered, "Yes, Maharaj, they picked these the day I was at the Ashrama. They are not quite mature since they are the first of the season. That is why they could not give more." But surprising, those small undeveloped patals appeared to Maharaj to be very fine and delectable. At the time there were plenty of very good patals already available in Calcutta, but as these were produced by the sadhus of the Ashrama, Maharaj was highly pleased and he praised and blessed the sadhus very much for their effort and proficiency.

Swami Keshavananda related to me an incident showing the great kindness of

1. Koalpara Ashrama is about nine and a half kms north-west of Kamarpukur.

2. A tropical garden vegetable used in curry, akin to the cucumber.

3. Balaram Bose's home came to be called 'Balaram Mandir' in the early days, meaning 'shrine'.

Maharaj. Vishnupur,⁴ lying to the west of Koalpara, one of the great cultural centres of Bengal long ago, was a producer of a very good type of tobacco known as *amṛtā-tāmāk* (ambrosia-like tobacco). Its fame was widespread among smokers, especially the aristocrats. As a result the tobacco trade flourished in Vishnupur. Later due to the downfall of the Vishnupur princely state, the town with its many industries declined. The tobacco industry also suffered very much. Still later with the import and popularity of foreign cigarettes, Vishnupur tobacco lost its fame. But knowing that Swami Brahmananda smoked, Swami Keshavananda found out from some of the old tradesmen, after a lot of enquiry, how to process such tobacco. Then he determined to bring some of it to present personally to Maharaj at the Math.

In those days there was one boy named Debu, a poor farmer's son, who used to come to the Koalpara Ashrama to help in the work. Debu was not literate. Yet, he became very eager to visit Belur Math and Swami Brahmananda, due to his long association with the monks and his devotion to Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. Learning that Swami Keshavananda was going to visit Maharaj at the Math, after many importunities Debu was allowed to come with him. As Debu was very poor, however, what could he give to Maharaj? All he had was a four-anna coin (one-fourth of a rupee). At last, he tied that coin in the corner of his wearing cloth with the intention of offering it to Maharaj. On reaching the Belur Math they saw Maharaj. Maharaj affectionately enquired about the affairs of the Ashrama from Swami Keshavananda. They discussed many things between themselves and Maharaj was glad to receive the

tobacco of Vishnupur. After offering his obeisance to Maharaj, Debu sat quietly by the side of Keshavanandaji and intently observed Maharaj as he listened to their conversation. But seeing all the beauty and charm of the Math, and the important and elevated position of Swami Brahmananda, he withdrew very much into himself, overcome with fear and shyness. He could not muster enough courage to offer his four-anna coin at the holy feet of Maharaj. Now he was thinking what should he do with that coin. By this time Maharaj's attention turned towards him. After enquiries about his well-being, Maharaj looked at his cloth. Suddenly he asked Debu: "What is there fastened in the corner of your cloth?" Eyes moist with tears, Debu took out the coin and placed it near the feet of Maharaj with hesitation and trembling hands saying, "Though I am very poor, as an offering to your feet I brought this quarter rupee (*Siki*) for you from home." Being highly pleased, Maharaj blessed him with an affectionate and auspicious look. As a result of the unbounded grace of Maharaj this poor boy developed great devotion for him. So great was his joy, that as long as he lived Debu used to relate his great admiration for Maharaj to everybody and tell this story of how Maharaj showered his grace on him, such a humble man.

Maharaj used to instil enthusiasm in the monks to practise austerities wholeheartedly and practise *tapasyā*, worshipping the Lord with onepointed mind in lonely places. Of course, he did not give the same uniform advice to everybody. Rather, his instructions varied with different aspirants according to their capabilities. I heard about an incident related to this from his attendant, Viswaranjan Maharaj.

4. A large town to the west of Koalpara about twenty-five kms. away.

There were only a few sadhus and brahmacharins in Belur Math at that time.

Maharaj used to keep close watch over all and would advise and instruct everyone separately for his welfare. One time, for a few day's something unusual was noticed in the behaviour of a particular Brahmacharin. The Brahmacharin was—very devotional, reverent, efficient in work and of good character. During those days all used to assemble in the room of Maharaj in the evenings. Maharaj would at that time make enquiries about the well-being of each one, ask about his health and work, and give spiritual advice. Finding this particular Brahmacharin absent for two or three days, Maharaj sent for him to come and meet him. The former was deeply engrossed in *japam* and meditation in a solitary place, in his own way. After offering his obeisance to Maharaj he sat down and Maharaj asked him: "Why do you not come here after evening nowadays?" With due humility the Brahmacharin replied, "When I come a good amount of time is wasted in talking with others, that is why I have been sitting alone in contemplation instead of coming." Maharaj praised him for his steadfastness in his devotion, but he said affectionately, "Well, let a bit of your time be thus wasted; every day you should come here at this time. If you talk with us a little it will do you good. Many twists of your mind will be loosened and you will never feel despondent. On the other hand, if you live alone, distracting and disquieting thoughts may overcome you. If you talk with others those will not trouble your mind. This will help keep your mind cheerful and you will gradually be able to go deeper into spiritual practices little by little."

The next morning that Brahmacharin was not seen within the compound of the Math. A search was made for him but he could not be found anywhere. Everyone was feeling sad and worried about him. The search continued in and around Calcutta. After a

few days news came from the house of Bhusan Pal, a devotee from Chandannagar, that the Brahmacharin was staying there but had become mentally derailed. In an isolated room he was constantly busying himself with religious practices. One day he was seen to be sitting stark naked having smeared night soil all over himself. When Maharaj heard all this he became very grave and worried and said, "I apprehended his mental disorder. That is why I requested him to join us like the others. But he did not understand." Maharaj at once sent men to bring him from Chandannagar and with medical attention, careful nursing, and Maharaj's sympathetic counseling, he recovered his normalcy. By Maharaj's affectionate treatment he was overwhelmed. Giving up his eccentric ideas of spiritual practice he gradually learned to follow his proper spiritual path. Later on he became a very good monk.

Among those who are looked down upon as fallen women in society, there were a few fortunate ones that came to be blessed with divine love due to the grace of Holy Mother, Swamiji and Maharaj. We came across one such fortunate person in Dhaka who had received the grace of Maharaj. When Maharaj once went to Dhaka, this lady by her good luck met him. At her first sight she felt attracted to Maharaj and used to visit him every day. Before this visit her heart had been only full of worldly desires and there had been no trace of *bhakti*, or spiritual devotion. By the grace of Maharaj faith and devotion to God dawned in her heart and went on increasing day by day. Slowly her life was transformed. By and by her heart turned so irresistibly towards renunciation and spiritual life that she gave up all hankering for wealth and worldly enjoyment and embraced the life of a humble ascetic. When we first saw her she was quite aged and frail. On festival days, after

offering devoted *pranams* to Sri Thakur, she used to sit quietly in one corner of the temple portico (*natmandir*). She used to fix her gaze on Sri Ramakrishna, like any humble and lowly person. After the bell for *prasad*, she would sit with the other ladies, take the *prasada*⁵ with great devotion and slip away unnoticed after offering her salutations to the sadhus. When she was approached by other elderly devotees she would talk only a little. Rather, she disliked lengthy conversation. While I was a worker in the Dhaka Ashrama, busy with the duties of Thakur's worship in the shrine, one of the elderly devotees told me about her. Near the end of her life she left Dhaka and went to Dakshimeswar, living in a small hut not far from the Kali temple. She used to spend her time in *japam*, meditation and contemplation on Sri Thakur, having her bath daily in the Ganga and taking food only once a day. It was as though she was a *tapasvīnī* (an ascetic) of the ancient times. Her name was Radharani. In her youth she had been very beautiful, the mistress of a wealthy man of Dhaka, enjoying life to the full. Now her devotion and the depth of her spiritual life were a source of wonder to all. Behind the extraordinary transformation in her life was the divine influence and spiritual guidance of Swami Brahmananda.

Maharaj always wanted the sadhus to accept invitations of the devotees to participate in religious festivals and gatherings. In fact, he gave instructions that all should

5. Consecrated food offered to the Lord in a temple.

attend them and was watchful that there should be no avoidable infringements otherwise. Once, the widowed daughter of Manilal Mallick, who was a great devotee blessed by Sri Ramakrishna, invited the sadhus and brahmacharins of the Math to her house for a lunch. Those who came with the invitation on her behalf were received very cordially by Maharaj and were told that it was not possible for Maharaj personally to attend at his age, but that other sadhus would come. On the appointed morning, as it turned out, many expressed unwillingness to go to the luncheon. In the Math also there were preparations under way for a *bhāṇḍārā* feast within a day or two. Maharaj however ordered everyone except those who were sick, old, or invalid, or those whose presence was needed at the Math to be present at the luncheon. So there was no alternative for us. We had to leave the Math by boat in order to arrive on time. As far as I remember the house was situated a bit far off from the Ganga within a garden compound. There we saw the fortunate lady upon whom Sri Ramakrishna had showered his affection and grace, and we were very much pleased. Quietly she moved all around looking after the sadhus and supervising the serving of their food. Even at her advanced age her face was full of child-like sweetness. She was handsome, sturdy and tall, with a bright fair complexion. I still clearly recollect the scene of that day. Watching the sadhus eat, her face and eyes glowed with joy and satisfaction. Maharaj was also very delighted when in the evening he heard the whole account from the sadhus who had been sent to the devotee's place.

FOR SEEKERS OF SPIRITUALITY

No man who has not true love towards God can be religious. Religion begins when attraction towards God is greater than attraction towards the world.

The attraction towards the world means egotism, attraction towards God means self-surrender.

Actually very few of us believe in God all the time. How do we know this? Because we allow anxieties and fears to arise in our minds. If we really have faith in God and in His infinite power of goodness, we can never feel fearful about anything.

What makes the mind impure? Desire. Free the mind of all desires, and at once it becomes pure. A man, however, who has no idea of God, can never get rid of desire. The lover of God sees that instead of bringing enjoyment, these desires are the source of all miseries. He understands that in God alone he can find the satisfaction of all desires, for He is infinite bliss, and all other pleasures are finite and perishable.

We seek matter first and spirit afterwards. We should reverse the process. Our hearts also must be free from any ulterior motive. If we love God for what we can get from Him in the world, we really love the world, not God, and we can never be true devotees. The true devotee loves God just for the joy of loving Him, because God is the Beloved.

Ananda or bliss is the best definition of God. The real ideal of every human being is Sachchidananda—eternal Life, infinite Knowledge, and everlasting Bliss, for all men wish to live for ever, to be all-knowing, and to have eternal bliss. But God alone is all-life, all-knowledge and all-happiness; therefore God is really the ideal of every living being.

Almost all men in the world have usurped the throne where God should sit. On that

throne where God should be, a most worthless slave has been given place. This is the ego. When you know this, then drive out the ego. When you do this and become the slave or servant of God instead, you will realize your eternal nature. Being one with God, all fear of death will go, peace will come to you, and you will taste true Ananda (bliss).

So long as we have no ideal to follow, we will have to head the calls of our lower nature. A characterless man is a slave to all worldly enjoyments.

All religions teach the necessity of hero-worship. Who is a hero? The man who has realized his oneness with God, who has self-knowledge, for religion is not a matter of talk or learning or faith, but a matter of realization. A man of realization alone is the true teacher, the Guru. So you must hear, study, understand, and then try to realize with the aid of a real Guru.

The path which leads you to realize life eternal is not by the exercise of your outgoing energies but by your ingoing energies. You must collect your energies and direct them inwards.

You have been worshipping this god of your body for so many lives, it is not easy to begin to worship the true God all at once. If you would raise your Self, you must crucify the body and conquer the senses. Always mixing with the world and identifying ourselves with the body, we are prone to forget religion which awakens us to the real state of affairs which we are in, and opens to us the gate of eternal bliss, and keeps us away from being drawn down to the abject life of beasts—doing nothing but eating and drinking and making merry.

*from the Teachings of
Swami Ramakrishnananda*