



# Prabuddha Bharata

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

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## THE HOLY MOTHER REMINISCES\*

'After I had come and gone two or three times [to Dakshineswar], Captain Vishwanath Upadhyaya<sup>1</sup> provided the timber and a room was built for me on the spot where Ramlal's house now stands. Sambhu Babu<sup>2</sup> had it constructed. One of the logs was washed away at flood-tide. Hriday came and rebuked me saying, "You are unlucky!" When the Captain heard of this, he said, "I shall supply whatever wood is needed." I lived in that room for a while.

'Once during the rainy season, the Master [Sri Ramakrishna] came there. But in the end it rained so heavily that he could not return to his room that night, and had his evening meal and slept there. He teased me about it saying, "Is this not just like the brahmin priests at the Kali temple spending the nights at home? It seems as though I have come just like them."

'Later an old lady from Varanasi urged me to leave the house and stay in the music tower room as the Master was ill and needed proper nursing.... So I came and looked after him....

'The fourth time I came to Dakshineswar, my mother, Lakshmi,<sup>3</sup> and some others came with me. We had come after a visit to the temple at Tarakeswar.... As soon as we arrived, Hriday remarked, "Why have they come? What do they want? Why here?" and behaved most disrespectfully. My mother said nothing in reply. Both Hriday and my mother hailed from the village Shihor; so naturally he wasn't so much respectful to her. Mother said, "Come, let us go back home. In whose care shall I leave my daughter here?" The Master was afraid of what Hriday would do, and did not interfere in the matter. We all returned home the same day. Ramlal arranged for the ferry. I secretly said to Mother Kali, "I shall come only if you ever send for

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\* The Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Devi, was the spiritual consort of Sri Ramakrishna. After the Master's passing, she was the source of spiritual inspiration and guidance to the monks and devotees of the Ramakrishna Order. During the course of her conversations with them she often told her reminiscences about the Master. Some such are being presented here for the information of the readers. They have been edited and compiled chronologically by us from the book *At the Feet of Holy Mother* by Her Direct Disciples (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1963).

1. Colonel Vishwanath Upadhyaya of Nepal, the Resident of the Nepal Government in Calcutta, and a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. The Master addressed him as 'Captain'.

2. Sambhuchandra Mallik, a devotee of the Master.

3. Daughter of Sri Ramakrishna's elder brother Rameshwar.

me, Mother." Later Hriday had to leave Dakshineswar as a result of worshipping the feet of Trailokya Babu's daughter.<sup>4</sup>

'Ramlal now permanently became the priest of the Kali temple; and he began to think to himself, "What more! Now I am Mother Kali's own priest." He no longer looked after the Master, who would fall into trances and lie anywhere. On the other hand the *prasada* [consecrated food] from the temple would grow stale, and the Master did not get proper meals. There was no one else there at the time and he repeatedly urged me to come. By whoever came this way [Jayrambati], he would send messages for me.... At last I came after staying away a whole year.'

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'At Kamarpukur he [the Master] used to get up in the morning and say, "I would like to have such and such vegetables, do prepare them today," and we (myself and Lakshmi's mother) would cook them for him. A few days later he said, "Ah! What has come over me? I think of food the minute I get up in the morning! Shame on me!" Then he called to me and said, "I no longer fancy any particular dish. I shall have whatever you cook, whatever you give me." He used to go home for his health. He constantly suffered from dysentery at Dakshineswar.... Later on, all this made him despise his own body and he no longer took any care of it.

'... I used to be quite a good cook; now I am getting out of practice. Lakshmi's mother and I would cook at Kamarpukur. One day the Master and Hriday were eating together. Lakshmi's mother was an excellent cook. The Master tasted something she had prepared and cried, "O Hridu, the person who cooked this is a specialist!" Then he ate of something that I had cooked and said, "And this one is a quack." ... To this Hriday replied, "True, but your quack will be at hand all the time.... You have only to call her, whereas the specialist's fees are very high and she is not always available. People always call in the quack first; the quack is always one's friend." The Master said, "Quite right, she is always there."

'... Once Ramji Ray came to see him [the Master] at Kamarpukur. He was not a good man, and when he had gone, the Master cried, "Dig away a basketful of earth from that place." When nobody paid any heed he took the spade himself and dug up some earth from the spot, saying, "Even the earth becomes impure where they sit."'

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'[The Master's complexion was] like the yellow orpiment (*harital*). His complexion seemed to be one with the gold amulet he wore. When I rubbed oil on him, a kind of radiance seemed to come out of him. Once a very fair man came to the temple premises and the Master said to me, "Watch us as we walk about in the Panchavati and see who is the fairer." So I watched them as they walked. The other man seemed a little fairer than the Master; there was just a shade of difference.

4. Trailokya Babu, son of Mathur Babu, was a Shudra by caste. He feared that his daughter would be harmed if worshipped by a brahmin.



‘Whenever he went out, people in the temple premises would stand gazing at him, saying, “There he goes !” He was rather stout. Mathur Babu gave him quite a large, low wooden stool. When he sat on it for his meals, it did not seem big enough for him. When he put on his bath towel and went to the river to bathe, people would look at him in wonder.... I never saw him sad. He took the greatest pleasure in the company of young and old.’

## THE SPIRITUAL WARFARE—II

(EDITORIAL)

In the last instalment of this editorial some aspects of the spiritual warfare were discussed. It was told that the gravity of the warfare depends upon the spiritual calibre of the aspirant. For instance, aspirants like Totapuri, whose worldly impressions (*āsurī-vṛttis*) have become completely subdued as a result of hard struggle in past lives, may not feel it at all. While others who are being tossed to and fro like a shuttlecock by their good and evil impressions (*daivī and āsurī vṛttis*), do feel the fight—the sincere but less evolved ones, more intensely. To give hope to the beginners Sri Ramakrishna has pointed out : ‘One must labour a little while at the [preliminary] stage of *Sādhana*. Then the path becomes easy. Steer the boat around the curves of the river and then let it go with the favourable wind.’<sup>27</sup>

### *Warfare between Gods and Demons*

In the *Brhadāranyaka*<sup>28</sup> as well as the *Chāndogya*<sup>29</sup> *Upaniṣads*, the spiritual warfare has been figuratively described as the fight between gods and demons, and Ācārya Śaṅkara has written a very lucid

commentary on this topic. The substance of this commentary is as follows : In this anecdote, ‘gods’ (*Devas*) mean the mental modifications in man illumined by hearing or studying the holy scriptures; and ‘demons’ (*Asuras*) mean the darkening mental modifications which lead a man to take delight in the sense-objects (*asu*), and which are contradictory to the godly tendencies (*A-sura*). The gods and demons, the *Upaniṣads* say, are the sons of *Prajāpati* and they are always quarrelling, and vieing with each other for having the mastery of the worlds. Here *Prajāpati* refers to the spiritual aspirant (*adhikāri-puruṣa*). In his commentary Ācārya Śaṅkara points out that the rise and fall of the godly and demoniac tendencies in the mind is here the warfare between the gods and the demons. He says: At times godly tendencies created in the mind by hearing or reading the scriptures get an upper hand. On such occasions the demoniac tendencies become suppressed. This is called the victory of the gods. While at other times, the devilish forces dominate the mind, and the godly tendencies are completely subdued. This amounts to the defeat of the gods and the victory of the demons. If the gods win, the man goes to heaven; and if otherwise, he goes to hell. But if godly and demoniac forces declare a draw,

27. ‘M’, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, Madras : Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974, p. 547.

28. See *Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, I. iii. 1-28.

29. See *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, I. ii. 1-9.

and remain equal in might, the individual is born on earth as a man. Here, 'heaven' refers to spiritual evolution (*ūrdva-gatī*) and 'hell' means degradation (*adho-gatī*).

The Upaniṣads point out that by nature the presiding deities of (or the consciousness pervading) the organs—nose, eyes, ears, mind, etc.—were pure and luminous in the beginning of creation; but the demons attacked and defiled them. That is the why they receive (perceive) both good and bad things, and the mind thinks both good and bad thoughts. Therefore, to regain mastery over the senses, the gods determined to take the help of Udgītha (the syllable Om) and meditate on it as the principle Prāṇa, which the demons could not defile and which is pure (*viśuddha*) by nature. And when the gods did so, the demons were destroyed as a clod of earth is destroyed when it hits a stone.<sup>30</sup>

Through this anecdote the Upaniṣads and the commentator point out that in every sincere spiritual aspirant of average capacity there is bound to be an internal warfare between his godly and demoniac tendencies, but he should have the conviction that the basic nature of all his organs is pure and divine. The impurity is only temporary, and it can be got rid of by giving a tough fight with the demoniac forces on the right lines. So there is no reason for being depressed although the evil tendencies become at times predominant in one's mind. In spite of repeated failures, one should not lose heart and leave the battlefield. If an aspirant sticks to his spiritual practices with patience and perseverance, and lives a practical spiritual life, he is bound to succeed in the end.

Those who are running after worldly enjoyments are surrendering to the demoniac forces, and avoiding the fight; and howsoever successful their career might be in the world, they are subject to repeated

birth and death. But, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* says, by conquering the demoniac forces by spiritual practices, the aspirant transcends death. For, Ācārya Śaṅkara says, 'everybody dies because of the evil tendencies caused by the attachment of the organs to the sense-objects, prompted by his natural ignorance.'<sup>31</sup> And once the evil tendencies are subdued, the aspirant conquers death.

### *Workings of Nature and Grace*

But the main problem for average aspirants is to distinguish the evil tendencies from the good ones, because, as pointed out in the previous instalment of this editorial, the evil forces approach the aspirant disguised as the good; or they may be so intermixed that discriminating them becomes difficult for him. Therefore, in the *Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis points out the distinguishing characters of these two forces. He calls the good forces 'Grace' and the evil ones 'Nature'. He writes :

Carefully observe the impulses of Nature and Grace, for these are opposed one to another, and work in so subtle a manner that even a spiritual, holy and enlightened man can hardly distinguish them. All men do in fact desire what is good, and in what they say and do pretend to some kind of goodness, so that many are deceived by their appearance of virtue.

Nature is crafty, and seduces many, snaring and deceiving them, and always works for her own ends. But Grace moves in simplicity, avoiding every appearance of evil. She makes no attempt to deceive, and does all things purely for love of God, in whom she rests as her final goal.

...Nature is eager to receive honour and reward : Grace faithfully ascribes all honour and glory to God...Nature loves ease and rest for the body; Grace

30. See *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, I. ii. 2-7,

31. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Śaṅkara-Bhāṣya, I. iii, 10,



cannot be idle, but welcomes work cheerfully.

Nature loves to enjoy rare and beautiful things, and hates the cheap and clumsy. Grace takes pleasure in simple and humble things, neither despising the rough, nor refusing to wear the old and ragged. Nature pays regard to temporal affairs, takes pleasure in worldly wealth, grieves at any loss, and is angered by a slighting remark. But Grace pays attention to things eternal, and is not attached to the temporal. The loss of goods fails to move her, or hard words to anger her, for she lays up her treasure and joy in Heaven where none of it can be lost.

...Nature inclines a man towards creatures—to the body, to vanities, to restlessness. But Grace draws a man towards God and virtue. Renouncing creatures, she flees the world, loaths the lusts of the flesh, limits her wanderings, and shuns public appearances. Nature is eager to enjoy any outward comfort that will gratify the senses. Grace seeks comfort in God alone, and delights in the Sovereign Good above all visible things.

...Grace is a supernatural light, and the especial gift of God, the seal of His chosen and the pledge of salvation, which raises man from earthly things to love the heavenly, and from worldly makes him spiritual. The more, therefore, that Nature is controlled and overcome, the richer is the grace bestowed, while man is daily renewed by fresh visitations after the likeness of God.<sup>32</sup>

This narration may help some aspirants to distinguish between the good and evil forces; for on these forces depend their salvation or doom.

### *The Vanquished*

At times an aspirant feels diffident while fighting with his evil tendencies, or

he is caught in the snares of temptation. In either case he gives up the monk's life and marries. He perhaps feels that he should not deceive his conscience and lead a hypocritical life. William James calls such aspirants 'sick souls'. One such was Martin Luther, the German leader of the Reformation. He says:

When I was a monk, I thought that I was utterly cast away, if at any time I felt the lust of the flesh: that is to say, if I felt any evil motion, fleshly lust, wrath, hatred, or envy against any brother. I assayed many ways to help to quiet my conscience, but it would not be; for the concupiscence and lust of my flesh did always return, so that I could not rest, but was continually vexed with these thoughts: This or that sin thou hast committed: thou art infected with envy, with impatience, and such other sins: therefore thou art entered into this holy order in vain, and all thy good works are unprofitable. But if then I had rightly understood these sentences of Paul: 'The flesh lusteth contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit contrary to the flesh; and these two are one against another, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would do,' I should not have so miserably tormented myself, but should have thought and said to myself, as now commonly I do, 'Martin, thou shalt not utterly be without sin, for thou hast flesh; thou shalt therefore feel the battle thereof.'

...For the godly trust not to their own righteousness. They look unto Christ their reconciler, who gave his life for their sins. Moreover, they know that the remnant of sin which is in their flesh is not laid to their charge, but freely pardoned. Notwithstanding, in the meanwhile they fight in spirit against the flesh, lest they should fulfil the lusts thereof; and although they feel the flesh to rage and rebel, and themselves also do fall sometimes into sin through infirmity, yet are they not discouraged, nor think therefore that their state and kind of life, and the works which are done according to their calling,

<sup>32</sup>. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1968, pp. 168-71,



displease God; but they raise up themselves by faith.<sup>33</sup>

In this confession, we get an idea of the aspirant's feelings while fighting a warfare with his evil tendencies. It also reveals that patience and perseverance and faith in God can help one in winning the battle. Needless to say, in the above quotation 'sin' refers to the demoniac tendencies in man—the Asuras of the Upanisads cited before.

#### *Some Christian Saints on Spiritual Warfare*

The Christian mystics have their own observations about the spiritual warfare; and they have described it in detail in their writings. St. Gregory of Sinai writes in his *Text on Commandments and Dogmas* that the 'warfare of the flesh against the soul can be of five kinds in us. At times the flesh misuses what it has, at other times it seeks to do what is unnatural as if it were natural; sometimes it forms a close friendship with the demons who arm it against the soul; sometimes it happens that the soul acts lawlessly of itself, when pervaded by some passion; and, finally, the demons may sometimes be allowed to wage war against us to make us more humble, if they have not succeeded in tempting us by any of these means.'<sup>34</sup> The Saint is of the opinion that this warfare is caused in us for three reasons: 'through habit, through misuse of natural things and ... through the envy and onslaught of the demons.' (*Ibid.*)

St. Simeon the New Theologian says: 'From the longing for God and praying, the mind acquires strength and chases away all thoughts which circle round the heart seeking entry, and strikes them down

with prayer. Then warfare beings: with a great roar the evil demons arise, and through the passions raise mutiny and storm in the heart. But by the name of Jesus Christ all this is dissolved and vanishes, like wax in a flame. Yet even when banished and driven out from the heart, the demons are not quelled, but make other attempts to disturb the mind, from without, through the senses.... The mind is not yet able to free itself from warfare completely, and to be untroubled by attacks of the evil demons. This is the attribute only of the perfect...'<sup>35</sup>

Abba Evagrius the Monk says in his 'Century on Active Life': 'With laymen the demons fight rather by means of actual things, but with monks mostly by means of thoughts; for in the wilderness they have no things. But as it is easier and quicker to sin in thought than in deed, so mental warfare is more arduous than that waged by means of things. The mind is something extremely mobile and unrestrainable, susceptible to sinful fantasies.'<sup>36</sup>

St. Francis de Sales says in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*: 'The flesh rests heavily on the soul and constantly drags it downward unless the soul frequently lifts itself up by fervent resolutions, just as birds soon fall to the ground unless they beat their wings again and again to keep themselves in the air.... Spiritual falls have this peculiarity: they always cast us down to a lower state than the one from which we rose up to devotion.'<sup>37</sup>

The Christian saints struggled sincerely in their own way for spiritual evolution and have noted down their experiences for

33. Quoted in William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1913, (hereafter *Varieties*), pp. 129-30.

34. *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, London: Faber and Faber, 1973, (hereafter *Writings*), p. 68

35. *Writings*, p. 160.

36. *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, London: Faber and Faber, 1973, (hereafter *Early Fathers*), p. 106.

37. St. Francis de Sales, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, John K. Ryan, New York: Image Books, 1972, (hereafter *Devout Life*), p. 271,



the benefit of others. Some aspirants may find the above quoted mandates useful while fighting the spiritual warfare.

### *Wrong Measures*

From what has been said so far, it is clear that every average aspirant has to face the spiritual warfare in some form or the other, and at times he may have to spend his whole life battling with his lower propensities. Some aspirants become so much obsessed by the warfare that they adopt all sorts of hideous and impractical means to curb their senses. Some burn their hands, some destroy their eyes, some bind their hands and feet by chains, some damage their generative organs, some sleep on bare grounds, some torture the body by excessive fasting, and so on. Even some Christian mystics took recourse to such abnormal methods. For instance, the German mystic Suso, living in the fourteenth century, wrote in the third person about himself in his autobiography :

He was in his youth of a temperament full of fire and life ; and when this began to make itself felt, it was very grievous to him ; and he sought by many devices how he might bring his body into subjection. He wore for a long time a hair shirt and an iron chain, until the blood ran from him, so that he was obliged to leave them off. He secretly caused an undergarment to be made for him ; and in the undergarment he had strips of leather fixed, into which a hundred and fifty brass nails, pointed and filed sharp, were driven. . . . He had this garment made very tight, and so arranged as to go round him and fasten in front, in order that it might fit the closer to his body, . . . and it was high enough to reach upwards to his navel. In this he used to sleep at night.<sup>38</sup>

### *Right Remedies*

*A Firm Intellectual Foundation* : Now, the various methods cited above no doubt show

the sincerity of the spiritual aspirants, but they also signify that these aspirants did not know proper remedies to curb their senses. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'One should be a sadhu, but why should one therefore be an impractical fool.' (*Sādhu habi, tabe boka habi keno*). One must know the science of leading a practical spiritual life. The root cause of all lower propensities is in the mind ; so the mind, rather the intellect, should be properly trained.

From the *Vedānta Sāra* we learn that at the base of our personality is the blissful sheath (*ānandamaya-Kośa*) which causes in us a leaning towards pleasure. Then follows the knowledge sheath (*viññānamaya-kośa*) which is the agent (*kartr-rūpaḥ*), endowed with the power of knowledge (*jñāna-śaktimān*). It is a storehouse of knowledge—right or wrong, good or bad, perfect or imperfect—, and hunts out objects which can give pleasure. This is followed by the mental sheath (*manomaya-kośa*) which is controlled by the knowledge-sheath and is endowed with will-power (*icchā-śaktimān*). This in turn controls the vital-sheath (*prāṇamaya-kośa*), endowed with the power of action (*kriyā-śaktimān*), and controls the gross body. As is the knowledge of an individual, so are his desires, and so also are his actions. This is the psycho-physical chain of any action. So if a person wishes to curb his senses, the wisest method would be to drain the knowledge-sheath of its wrong and imperfect knowledge, by practising spiritual disciplines like *śravaṇa* (hearing or studying the scriptures), *manana* (reflecting on the Truth taught therein), and *nididhyāsana* (meditating on the Truth). Filling the knowledge sheath with right knowledge will give rise to right or holy desires and will help in getting rid of unholy desires and actions. This is the scientific method for controlling the mind according to Vedānta. So according to the science of spiritual life, on the

<sup>38</sup>. *Varieties*, p. 307.



aspirant's firm intellectual foundation depends his success in the spiritual warfare.

*Thinking Contrary Thoughts:* But the enemy is very shrewd. It raises its head when the aspirant is off-guard. Moreover, the sense-objects have a power to darken the intellect of the aspirant and drag him down. So there are some other practical remedies prescribed in the scriptures. When the enemy catches us off-guard, Patañjali says in his *Yoga-Sūtras*: '*Vitarkabādhane pratipakṣa bhāvanam*—To obstruct thoughts which are inimical to Yoga, contrary thoughts should be pondered on.'<sup>39</sup>

Surprisingly enough, even the Christian mystics found this method practical to save themselves from the onslaught of evil thoughts. For instance, St. Abba Dorotheus says: 'Every man who wishes to be saved must not only refrain from doing evil, but do good, as it is said, "Turn away from evil, and do good." For instance, if someone has been given to anger, he must not only not be angry, but must acquire meekness; if he was proud, he must not only not be proud, but must become humble; for each passion has its opposite virtue: pride—humility, cupidity—loving-kindness, fornication—chastity, faintness of heart—patience, anger—meekness, hatred—love.'<sup>40</sup>

St. Francis de Sales also advises the devout to strengthen their hearts against temptation on the same lines: 'Consider from time to time', he says, 'which passions are most predominant in your soul. When you have discovered them, adopt a way of life that will be completely opposed to them in thought, word and action. For example, if you find that you are inclined to the passion of vanity, reflect often on the miseries of human life.'<sup>41</sup>

*Spiritual Practice and Dispassion:* Under some circumstances thinking contrary

thoughts is the most practical remedy; but this is not the only remedy. In the *Gītā*, Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa has told Arjuna that one can bring the mind under control by spiritual practice (*abhyāsa*)—training the knowledge-sheath—and by dispassion (*vairāgya*) for worldly pleasures. Ācārya Śaṅkara gives primary importance to dispassion if one wants to succeed in spiritual life. He says: 'The first step to liberation is the extreme aversion to all perishable things, then follow calmness (*śama*), self-control (*dama*), forbearance (*titikṣā*), and the utter relinquishment of all work enjoined in the scriptures [for going to heaven, etc.].'<sup>42</sup>

Other disciplines which help mind-control are *śama*—resting of the mind on God after having detached it from the sense-objects by observing their defects. It also means, not thinking of sense-pleasures. Then comes *dama*: avoiding gross contact with the sense-objects. *All circumstances* in which the mind becomes weak should be avoided on principle by an aspirant who wants to progress spiritually. Otherwise life will become difficult for him, and defeat in the spiritual warfare will be certain.

As a remedy against great temptations, St. Francis de Sales suggests that as soon as you are aware of the temptation, you should follow the example of little children. When they see some wild animal, they immediately run to the arms of their parents, or cry aloud for their help. Similarly turn to God in right earnest when overcome by a temptation, and pray for his mercy and help. And regarding minor temptations like vanity, impatience, jealousy, envy, foolish love and so on, he advises us not 'to disturb ourselves too much over them'.<sup>43</sup> They will pass away gradually as we progress in spiritual life.

Besides these, there are many other spiri-

39. *Pātañjala-Yoga-Sūtras*, II. 33.

40. *Early Fathers*, p. 172.

41. *Devout Life*, pp. 249-50.

42. Ācārya Śaṅkara, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 69.

43. See *Devout Life*, pp. 246, 248.



tual disciplines prescribed in the scriptures of all religions, which help the aspirants in fighting the mental battle successfully.

Some aspirants are very zealous about practising spiritual disciplines in the beginning of their spiritual life; but their dynamism becomes tepid when they find that in spite of practising so hard according to the directions of the scriptures and guru, they have not been able to succeed a bit in the battle. So they become nervous and diffident. Some even leave the struggle. To such aspirants St. Abba Dorotheus says: 'We should not be disturbed even when passion troubles us. Why be surprised, passionate man, and why be disturbed when passion stirs you? You yourself have fashioned it and consent to keep it in yourself—and yet are you disturbed?'<sup>44</sup> This does not mean one should foster passions; but that an aspirant should not lose courage and should go on fighting with patience and perseverance.

### *Possible Causes for Failure*

*Psychological Causes:* There can be many causes for losing the battle with the evil forces of the mind. For instance: lack of discrimination and dispassion, lack of one-pointed devotion to God, ignorance of the science, strategy and equipment for the spiritual warfare, absence of zeal in spiritual practices, lack of spiritual practicality, indiscriminate mixing with the opposite sex, over emphasis on work at the cost of meditation and study, drag for scholasticism and reputation, lack of proper guidance, and so on.

*Physical Causes:* Besides the above-mentioned causes, there can be some physical causes as well. For example, the environment in which the aspirant is staying may not be suitable for spiritual practices, or the aspirant's health may be bad. At times, if

the aspirant is not spiritually developed enough, even staying alone in a solitary place may be detrimental for him. Or if the aspirant leads a wandering life, he may not be able to make his mind steady on the Ideal. Many times, coming in contact with a variety of people also distracts the mind. That is why monasteries, where holy men of the same temperament live, are always helpful for spiritual growth.

*Psycho-Physiological Causes:* At times there are none of the above-mentioned psychological or physical causes to defeat the aspirant in his mental warfare, but he finds that in spite of his scriptural knowledge and favourable environmental circumstances and sincere effort, he loses the battle. When this happens, the Christians say: 'The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak' (Matthew 26:41). Sometimes, even great men are found to commit silly mistakes in their lives, which they could have avoided in their saner moments. In Bengali it is said: '*man bujheche, prāṇ bujhe nā*—the mind [intellect] has understood, but the Prāṇ [the vital force or the nerves] does not yield.' This phenomenon may be explained in the light of Western psychology as follows:

Our bad habits are a result of our wilful past actions, which have resulted in forming strong nerve-channels in the nervous system. When they get stimulated by any internal or external means, the nerve-current passes with the speed of electricity through these nervous circuits, and even before the person starts thinking about the goodness or badness of the action, his body responds to the stimulus in seconds in spite of his will. This is due to the reflex action, which is generally regulated by the spinal cord and the hind brain. The cerebral hemispheres which are the seat of our intellect have hardly any control over these reflexes, unless special effort is made to bring them under control. Moreover,

<sup>44</sup>. *Early Fathers*, p. 172.



extinction of the old nervous circuit takes a long time. That is why after practising spiritual disciplines for a long period, the bad habits are overcome by the good ones. It is due to this nervous phenomenon that an aspirant sometimes feels that he is forcibly dragged down (*balādiva niyojitaḥ*) by his senses in spite of his knowledge and will.

Some aspirants often find their sex instinct difficult to control. When they sing the name of God, meditate, or pray, they may even fall into ecstasy; but when the spiritual emotion subsides, they may be overpowered by a violent carnal drag. Hesychius of Jerusalem corroborates this fact saying: 'Simple and passionless thoughts are followed by passionate ones, as we have ascertained by long experience and observation. And the first serve as a door to the second—the passionless to the passionate.'<sup>45</sup> The reason is: The generative organs are controlled by the autonomic (self-operating) nervous system, over which the higher brain (the seat of intellect and will) has no control. That is why one cannot stop his heart, stomach, or endocrine glands functioning by his wish. But Swami Vivekananda says that by practising spiritual disciplines for a long duration the autonomic nervous system can be brought under control. So till then, average aspirants may find themselves defeated by carnal demons. One should not, therefore, feel depressed on this account, and should continue the spiritual disciplines with patience and perseverance.

Another reason for the carnal onslaught may be the sex hormones. The hormones have an excitatory function. When the sex glands secrete hormones in excess, an individual's carnal appetite may increase. But in the case of aspirants who observe continence and practise spiritual disciplines, these hormones get mixed in the blood and

are utilized for better purposes like activating the brain. That is why the brain of a chaste man has extraordinary capacities. But these hormones may turn ordinary men into animals.

### *Truth Alone Triumphs*

Giving sermons is easier than living a practical spiritual life. Many spiritual aspirants know everything about the goal and the means to attain it, but when they look to their practical life, they become depressed. The Christian monk Philotheus of Sinai rightly points out that 'we have in us a mental warfare more arduous than physical warfare.' But if the aspirant has the conviction that his real nature is divine, and that it will certainly become manifest in the end, he will be able to transcend his depression. The divinity in man is like a clock-spring which is trying to unwind itself gradually, and the question is only of time. So there is no need for fear.

The faint voice of the pricking conscience or the super-ego in man, is the voice of that potential divinity. The spiritual longing in aspirants like Buddha, Mirabai, Tulsidas, St. Francis of Assisi, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, and numerous other aspirants of the world, is the expression of the same divinity in a developed form. Today one may feel bound like a slave, and helpless like a straw before the strong current of the evil tendencies; but one should know that it is the lion who has been caught in the net of Maya, not a mouse. Swami Vivekananda says: 'He who is prepared to renounce all, who amid the strong current of the duality of good and evil, happiness and misery, is calm, steady, balanced, and awake to his Ideal, alone endeavours to attain to Self-knowledge. He alone by the might of his own power tears asunder the net of the world "*nirgacchati jagajjālāt piñjarādiva keśarī*"—Breaking the

<sup>45</sup>. *Writings*, p. 312.



barriers of Maya, he emerges like a mighty lion.”<sup>46</sup>

This knowledge can help aspirants to transcend their depression and march for-

<sup>46.</sup> *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, VII, 1972, p. 193.

ward like brave soldiers with renewed zeal towards the goal supreme. Every aspirant should have the conviction that in the spiritual warfare, the ultimate success is his, because it is said: ‘*satyameva jayate nānṛtam*—Truth alone triumphs in the end, not falsity.’

(Concluded)

## A GLANCE THROUGH JOSEPHINE MACLEOD'S LETTERS—II

(A Compilation)

SHOUTIR KISHORE CHATTERJEE

8

There are some telling references to Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in Miss MacLeod's letters; for instance: ‘Saradananda came to see me yesterday in a motor so I went with him to Calcutta, for the drive...and was left on the quay of the Ganges alone, waiting half-an-hour till the 7.10 up-ferry arrived, to bring me home here. Such a beautiful poetic half-hour! Lost in the twilight, watching the flickering lights of boats go and come, nobody knowing me, nor I them—so restful and gentle and all-pervading! I found myself laughing to think that a man called Ramakrishna, whom I had never seen, should be the magnet that had brought me to India, where I loved being! Why??! Sometimes Eternity seemed to enfold one! There being no why to that, or anything else—just Isness!’ (January 10, 1923).

‘Fancy, darling, getting your long letter here last evening, and reading most of it to the Sens! It seems that this Mr. Sen is son of Keshab Chandra Sen, and was blessed by “Paramahansa” Ramakrishna, sitting on His knees! Mr. Sen says, “encompassing love was Ramakrishna’s

chief characteristic.” I slept in the bedroom with Keshab and his wife's photos, with flowers, like a shrine. Isn't it fun, forty years after to get this near touch?’ (September 15, 1927). ‘The new “World Bible” just issued, of 1,400 pages, begins with six sentences of *Ramakrishna*!...Isn't it interesting to learn that fifty years after Ramakrishna's death, His great message should lead the world's new Bible? Of course it was Swamiji who caused this great new prophet's message to come from Bengal—and be known everywhere where English is spoken’ (December 26, 1939).

‘Your letter from Calcutta about Sarada Devi shows you have found the precious jewel in her that we all feel and that Ramakrishna so worshipped. She is the real thing, gentle, strong, human and with such insight! I love her and think I must see her again’ (February 11, 1913). ‘It seems that the Holy Mother frequently gave the *mantram* at first sight—as if by inner perception. She saw the need, the way the aspirant would grow’ (June 29, 1922).

9

Miss MacLeod had the opportunity to come into contact with some of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. A few refer-

ences to them in her letters are noteworthy. During Swami Brahmananda's last illness she anxiously wrote: 'I may cable you to help Swami Brahmananda (who is lying very ill in Calcutta of diabetes after an attack of cholera) by Christian Science. If you were raised up in a day by Christian Science why shouldn't he be? Only I must get their permission to send the cablegram...Perhaps I may be obliged to go myself for I find that one cannot delegate faith as one can words to another, can one?' (April 5-6, 1922).

Describing Swami Brahmananda's passing away she wrote: 'It seems that on the Saturday night before his death on the following Monday, Swami Brahmananda said, "I am floating over a banyan leaf of faith in the dense darkness of Brahman," and then began his revelations, establishing as if it were a harmony from Eternity, seeing and talking with Ramakrishna, Swamiji, and others of the past, as well as those near and at a distance...calling those in the room to come to him for his special message to them according to their needs' (September 24, 1923).

One of 'the most lovely sights' she ever saw was: 'the early morning light breaking upon the tiny boat ferrying across the Ganges the body of the monk Swami Brahmanandaji under the yellow silk canopy of his bed, with all the monks in ochre yellow—the helmsman—Swami Shankarananda, standing like a sentinel, swaying backwards and forwards as helmsman, against a big oar' (November 5, 1923). And on another occasion she wrote: 'Brahmanandaji is gone. Two thousand were fed here on Saturday, the feast given by his disciples. Now ten thousand rupees is subscribed for adding ninety feet to the Ganges ramparts and fifty thousand rupees to build him a temple. He was of the Trio Ramakrishna and Swamiji, everyone says' (April 24, 1922).

Miss MacLeod was full of admiration for Swami Turiyananda. After his death she wrote: 'My beloved Turiyananda has died: now there are none of *that* stock left! Fire, power and knowledge. He just filled me with courage the few minutes I talked to him at Benares coming up here! It was worth coming to India for that half-hour. He seemed at the *Centre* pouring forth his power. Nothing hesitating, unsure or insecure' (July 1922). And later: 'Turiyananda, dying last year July, insisted on sitting bolt upright and did "to meet the Messenger, Death"! (September 4, 1923). Referring to the Hindu Temple, Webster Street, San Francisco, she wrote: 'That *Kalifornia* mission was founded by Swami Turiyananda, one of the greatest saints worth to be coupled with Swamiji, so it is sure to last the fifteen hundred years Swamiji said the Math would' (September 21, 1922). In answer to a query she gave the following information: 'Swami Turiyananda came to Ridgeley with Swamiji in 1899, staying at the Little Cottage with him and lying on the floor "as not worthy to sleep on the same level as Swamiji"' (November 15, 1926).

In one of her letters she quoted an interesting piece of conversation with Swami Shivananda: 'Shivananda told me yesterday, as a lad he said to Ramakrishna, "I hope I can spend most of my time in meditation," and Ramakrishna answered, "Well, if He is God, He will make you do His work"' (November 13, 1923). Referring to his later years she wrote: 'Dear Shivananda can no longer leave his floor—with heart. But thousands came and were fed on his seventy-sixth birthday on Tuesday. He spends about eight hours daily in meditation and is *radiant*' (January 9, 1929).

We find mention of Swami Saradananda in the extracts: 'Last evening Swami Saradananda took me to see Girish Ghose's



splendid play *Jana*, which only ended at 12.45, but as we sat or half lay in Indian fashion in a box, I found it so easy!' (December 16, 1915). 'Dear Swami Saradananda is still alive, a gentle loving benediction and blessing to all who know him, indeed "the saucer to the Swamiji cup"—or as Beatrice Cooke says what Ramakrishna really said was, "the lid to the Swamiji jar"—which is probably true as cups and saucers are not Indian' (November 15, 1926).

About Premananda: 'It was Premananda...that took the four mile walk with Swamiji the day of his death, saying "If India keeps to her quest of God, she will never disintegrate, but if she goes into politics or social reform, she will disappear"' (February 22, 1939).

About 'M', the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: 'I had half-hour with "M" and go to him tomorrow for a long talk. He has heart trouble and is not able to come to me. His face is beautiful, isn't it?' (December 9, 1915).

There are some telling references to Sister Nivedita in Miss MacLeod's letters: 'Today a letter from Dr. Bose dated Darjeeling October 10th says Margot is gravely ill and asking for our prayers. In three days she was gone. I am glad to know she was surrounded by love and the best of care (the famous Dr. Sircar). Precious child: she fought bravely and was killed literally, but not as she expected to be—the boomerangs we send out come back to us. When will we ever learn that love alone can heal and help?' (November 3, 1911). 'Yesterday I saw the Saraswati Puja at the Girls' School and when hymns were sung to Nivedita tears were in all eyes' (January 23, 1923). 'But it is in renunciation that lies India's great spiritual gift: and so the worker in and for India (Nivedita) used to say, "I only hear one word ringing through my ears, day and night: Renunciation!

Renunciation!" Hence her hold and grip on India and the coming generations' (March 12, 1923).

About Nivedita's last meeting with Swamiji: 'It was on July 2nd, 1902, that Nivedita saw Swamiji for the last time, and he said, in answer to her inquiry as to whether she should teach a certain science in her school, "My mind is given to other things; I am preparing for death, so I am only eating certain things; but you must have a meal." After she had finished he poured water over her hand, and she, very much the disciple, answered, "I can't bear you to do this, Swami!" and he said very gravely, "Jesus washed the feet of his disciples," and Nivedita answered, "Yes, but that was the last time they ever met." It was also the last time Nivedita saw Swamiji alive, for he died at 9 p.m. on Friday, July 4, 1902, in Meditation. On July 6th 1902, Nivedita wrote me a long letter about Swamiji's cremation, and the last words he uttered to her of me were "Pure as purity, loving as love itself." It seems fitting that I write to you of this thirty-nine [years] after!' (July 2, 1941).

## 10

In her letters Miss MacLeod drew pen-pictures of some personalities associated with the Belur Math and Swamiji, and related a number of interesting anecdotes: 'The spirituality that seems to have been released by Brahmananda's death... is quite wonderful. Yesterday they drove me in a motor in the evening to see "Nirod's Mother" who had been having these beatific visions for the past five days. Her sons tell me they all seem lifted to a new world. Such light and peace everywhere. She is only eating Prasad [consecrated food] from Ramakrishna's Temple from here...I watch and listen and won-

der. It seems that some weeks ago Nirod's Mother went to Brahmananda saying: "All my life of forty years I have worshipped. I have made no headway; my life is a failure," but he said, "No, no, it is good"; and now that Brahmananda has been dead only three and a half weeks all this glory has come to her life. It appears the first vision of "Kali" came when she was in great physical agony which she has transcended ever since and is now at peace, wanting nothing, her life fulfilled, she says' (May 3, 1922).

'I arrived on January 5th at Belur, the day before Swamiji's Birthday celebration, and talked with Swami Shivananda (the Abbot). He said that they had 2,000 rupees for Sister Christine whenever she asked for it, for a first-class return passage, or anything she wanted it for. So I said, "But she will never ask for it. It isn't Christine's nature to ask. Why not give it to her tomorrow on Swamiji's Birthday, saying 'a gift from Swamiji on His Birthday'? It will be so dramatic!" So they did! And it arrived as she was reading a Poem Swamiji had written and dedicated to her—"To my disciple, Miss Christine Greenstidel, January 6, 1896. 'To a Violet'." Just thirty years to a day! Isn't life curious? Sometimes *very* sweet. Of course Christine was *deeply* moved. She is still in bed after five months, but looks well and has no pains. I think she'll get quite well, for she feels an "inner healing" going on, she says' (January 14, 1926).

'I stayed...for two hours with Phoni—a new (to me) monk who was a soldier for two years in Mesopotamia. He said while there, he used to feel that Ramakrishna was training him in discipline, punctuality and order so that he could bring it back to the Math. Now he is one of the dozen new strong monks the Convention has gathered in from the outlying centres to stay at this [Belur] Math, and one sees

everywhere a new standard growing up! It's so slow, growth, isn't it? But it is the only secure thing there is to build upon (June 1, 1926).

'It seems that in 1916, the first time Phoni ever saw the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, she initiated him—stopping and holding up meal that was already served, and took him into the Chapel—alone—the ceremony of initiation lasting about ten minutes, to the amazement of everyone. The next week Phoni volunteered for the war and was off with thirty other young student soldiers for Karachi, thence to Persia. At the time of Phoni's initiation he had no ideas of joining the army' (June 2, 1926).

'They all feel that Sarada Devi had prevision: "*She knew*". Gopal Chaitanya<sup>15</sup> first saw her when he was fourteen. He lived six miles from her village, Jayram-bati, but lest his family should interfere with his seeing her weekly, he made a detour to see his secular teacher, whom his family approved of, in another village—so really he had to walk each way fourteen miles. To his amazement one day his father gave him twelve rupees, saying "Keep it by you to use as you like" (though he had never had more than a pice or two from his mother before, and never any money from his father), so he used to spend four or eight annas on fruit or sweets for Sarada Devi each week till the money was gone. Then, having nothing to take to her he was shy about going. Soon after this, Sarada Devi gave him weekly money to buy her certain things she needed in his village (which was larger than hers); so then he was quite happy—for he took her something. Sometimes, instead of letting him (Gopal) return early on Monday mornings in time for his school, Sarada Devi

15. Brahmachari Gopal Chaitanya was named Swami Gaurishwarananda after he took the monastic vows. He is familiar in the Ramakrishna Order as Rammoy Maharaj.



would keep him for some special feast, or party, saying, "Your teacher won't notice your coming late." And he never did... Gopal says Sarada Devi trained him to be very particular—nothing haphazard—or "*à peu près*" ["almost, tolerably close"]. That once she asked him to arrange eight mats in a line for food; he did it; she said, "Do it again." The second time it wasn't straight, so *she* did it. That each leaf (for food) she required to be very carefully washed and dried with a clean cloth, wiped all over "lest the chapati stick to it." Once Gopal forgot to dig the flower-garden and arrived to see Sarada Devi doing it, and when he remonstrated, she said, "But my hands can do everything." There was nothing she could not and did not do' (June 2, 1926).

'Last evening Swami Atmabodhananda (one of the fine twelve young monks who is on this new Central Committee at Belur) came to see me. It seems it was he who found Ruma Devi in 1916, when he was on a pilgrimage to Kailas, 22,000 ft. high in the Tibetan Himalayas. She was then about thirty, kind, strong, gentle, giving food, tea, shelter, fuel to the pilgrims and particularly religious and interested in monks. So Atmabodh, told her of Ramakrishna and Swamiji, gave her Swamiji's books in Hindi to read. Though half-Bhutanian and half-Tibetan, she was like a jewel amongst that whole people. Through him she came to Mayavati, thence to the Nivedita school, then to Holy Mother, both in Calcutta and in Holy Mother's native village where she was initiated. Leaving her own inaccessible village she has started this Darchula School with two or three Ramakrishna monks to help' (November 23, 1926 [?]).

'When I was at Almora I met Miss Rubel—"Bhakti"—who gave the money [needed for building the Ramakrishna Temple at Belur] to Swami Akhilananda,

to do exactly what he wished to do with it, so she said to me: "I have nothing to do with the Temple. It was Swami Akhilananda's gift." Bhakti is lovely to look at, thirty-five, graduate of Mryn Mawr, but who found no peace till she met Swami Akhilananda' (November 1, 1938).

'Swami Srivasananda I'm seeing most of now. He saw Swamiji in 1897, while in College in Madras, and Swamiji said to him, "Will you follow me?" He said, "Some-day. Not yet," so he made his career, tutor to the Maharaja and Yuvaraj of Mysore, became Head of the Co-operative Bank and governor of one of the Mysore Provinces and he is here now' (December 7, 1938).

# 11

Miss MacLeod had the opportunity to observe from close quarters the happenings at Belur Math on many occasions. This is how she described the spiritual atmosphere in the Math during those days: 'A current of interesting events goes on at the Math all the time and I am free, being alone, to go there any time I like; so I am really never out of human relationship' (April 24, 1922). 'It appears that there are several monks and Brahmacharins on the ground floor of this guest house, whose whole nights are spent in meditation, trying to get to the Beyond and Permanent, and they are excluded from all other work' (September 14, 1923). 'I'm having such an interesting time by myself, trying to understand what prayer and worship really are, in the light of the *Gita*, and this constant worship by the Math of Ramakrishna. Day and night, It—He—is *literally* the physical centre around which all revolves, and I'm specially interested, not having any/much of it in my nature. Perhaps you'd be interested too. Have you Swarupananda's *Gita*? On page 79 he says: "Yajna, here



denotes not the sacrificial deeds themselves, but the subtle principle, into which they are converted, after they have been performed, to appear *later on* as their fruits." Now I fancy this "subtle principle" is what the prayers of the saints are converted into (or perhaps also the curses of sinners!) (September 24, 1923).

'Being here on this beloved Ganges is a constant joy. Odd people turn up, some interesting, some not. Days go past without my going to the Math, or hardly seeing any of them; but I know one long prayer and worship service goes on to Ramakrishna, as if he were the most beloved of *living* gurus. Day and night thinking of him! His tastes, his likes, his predilections—absorbing all the love and devotion of these thirty or forty monks. It's the youth and enthusiasm of it all that amazes me. It never grows stale to them. Each flower, fruit, water, incense, camphor, lights, clothes (literally new Chadars [shawls] and dhotis) are offered with the respectful devotion as if He were literally sitting there—pipe, *pan* [betel]—then comes His afternoon sleep, the chapel closed, to be opened for afternoon service (refreshments) and again Arati, or Evensong, after dusk. Then the monks continue to meditate on till their evening meal at 9.00 p.m., and some all night! They feel this keeps the real sluices open between life and death—so both are merged into a present (no past or future)' (October 4, 1923).

## 12

Mis MacLeod's letters contain numerous references to development and construction work in the Math and its affiliates. Often we find interesting background stories: 'I have been to the Math and arranged that Swamiji's marble bas-relief should be put against the wall *flush*, which has to be done by building the plaster out

about four inches—the depth of the marble, so that the marble frames shall be its only separation from the wall. They could not put it *into* the wall, as the wall is to be the crypt foundation of the new library<sup>16</sup> which they hope eventually to raise over it' (December 16, 1915). 'Mother<sup>17</sup> gave five thousand rupees towards the sea-wall of the Swamiji Temple, the day of its dedication on January 28th. It seems the present wall must be strengthened by an outer one, in line with the Mother and Brahmanandaji ones. It was so fitting and so fundamental, and made one feel the security and permanence of this place, as the Great University, which Swamiji predicted, the day before his death, it would be, "lasting 1,500 years and extending for two miles in extent"' (February 13, 1924).

'Mrs. B— has made a sketch of the steps at the Villa d'Este in Italy, sufficiently clear, so we hope to get them made for the Swamiji Temple—instead of the stiff, straight, high narrow steps, so unlike Swamiji and his teachings!' (December 26, 1935). 'I spend hours a day watching a tube-well being dug, 1,000 ft. deep, taking my mending and sewing, and Sanaṭ telling me lovely stories of Turiyananda! Now they are putting a deeper embankment in front of Swamiji's temple; Mother [Mrs. Leggett] gave 5,000 rupees towards the present one, still not enough to protect Swamiji's temple, the engineers say' (January 24, 1939).

'Today the prospectus for a new technical school in connection with this Math has been shown to me. They've already had the weaving and spinning school for some time; now they've added a hostel with six students and so it goes on' (March 12, 1923).

'At Bhubaneshwar, eighteen miles from

<sup>16</sup>. The plan of building a library on the upper floor of Swamiji's temple was abandoned, and the Om temple was built there instead.

<sup>17</sup>. Alberta's mother Mrs. Francis Leggett.



Puri, once the capital of Orissa and the site of 1,000 temples now crumbling into the dust, Brahmanandaji has built a fine new Ramakrishna Math—temple and dispensary. So the new wine of this last great Incarnation is already renourishing ancient India, and a desert again blooming into new life and fertility. I was much moved by it all. One feels oneself to be on the uptide. Floating on the deep heart of the ocean of life as Swamiji put it—"without effort, without will" (June 29, 1922). 'Going in the evening to a benefit performance at the Star Theatre, Calcutta, for the Ramakrishna Mission of Bhubaneswar near Puri. The great Indian actress Tara coming out of her retirement for it' (February 19, 1923).

'Lord Lytton<sup>18</sup> has and is playing the game. And we have word that owing to his personal letter to Sir Henry Wheeler, the Governor of Bihar, the first school, *purely educational*, started by the Ramakrishna Mission is established on twenty acres of land, a gift from a zemindar. Then H. E. [His Excellency Lord Lytton] does it all in such a simple way! As if it were a privilege. Oh! How much is in manners!' (March 17, 1924).

'This [Madras] Students' Home of 200, the work of Rai Bahadur Ramanuja Ayengar, a brahmin who also knew Swamiji, is said to be the finest in India. It is amazing in its beauty, order, discipline, happiness. No boy pays anything. At 5.00 a.m. the loveliest chants awaken one; the boys beaming with intelligence. Rai Bahadur Ramanuja is its inspiration, collecting all the money...Life is indeed enriched to know such people exist in the world' (November 17, 1938).

## 13

In those early days contributions from many foreign devotees sustained the activi-

ties of the Ramakrishna Math and its centres. Miss MacLeod's personal acquaintance with many of the contributors led her to give first-hand information and throw interesting sidelights: 'I've just learned Mrs. Bull's<sup>19</sup> 15,000 dollar gift to the Math is one-third of what was given to Swamiji by England to found and build this monastery' (May 24, 1922). 'Swami Prakashananda of San Francisco is back after seventeen years work at the Hindu Temple. He says that Miss Morton (who gave the 45,000 dollars to buy the New York Vedanta centre) lent him 1,000 dollars to pay off the debt of the S. F. Temple, saying all she prayed for was to be worthy of being "Mother's Treasurer"! So silently and quietly the work going on, mostly by women' (January 10, 1923).

'Christine is to begin her own "Sara Thorpe Bull Training School for Teachers" (in memoriam Saint Sara) apart from the Nivedita School—which is now a fine girls' school of two hundred, and which during her ten years absence has got its own roots and traditions—as soon as we receive a cablegram "Yes. Thorpe" in answer to letters sent Mr. Thorpe today by Christine, Swami Saradananda and me. We think this is the wisest after a month's survey. Mr. Thorpe told Christine in November last, and me three years ago, that he was giving this 1,200 dollars a year for Indian girls' training as teachers, in memory of Sara—but he did not see her name connected with it. So, Swami Saradananda says that the generous support of Mr. Thorpe all these ten years has so established the Nivedita School that he is sure that they can now maintain it from Indian funds; and he wants Mr. Thorpe to give the money direct to Christine, which will be sufficient for her keep and the few older girls or

18. The then Governor of Bengal.

19. Mrs. Ole Bull, an ardent American admirer of Swamiji.

widows to be trained. It is so fine of Saradananda, isn't it?' (February 6, 1924).

'I...enclose a letter to Swami Akhilananda, who has given the 200,000 dollars for this great new Ramakrishna Temple, a description of it follows. All criticism of so expending this vast sum of money fades away in this fulfilment of Swamiji's plan! For he himself gave, made the plan, over forty years ago. Thousands now come to see it daily' (November 1, 1938).

'It seems years ago that Mother [Mrs. Leggett] gave 5,000 [rupees] to the Math for the embankment, 5,000 for ghee (melted butter) for food, 10,000 for this my Guest House, and for the Leggett House, 20,000 rupees' (November 2, 1938). 'The Leggett House here, mother gave the year before she died, a pretty villa on a triangular piece of land on the river, next to the Math; I gave 1,000 dollars, Mary Hale Matteini 1,000 dollars, and mother the rest, the rest about 25,000 rupees or 5,000 to 6,000 dollars. The monks now use it for sleeping; it has a charming garden, well kept, and it is used feast days—Ramakrishna's Birthday or Swamiji's or any fête day to feed the women, thousands of whom come' (November 27, 1938).

'I think it wiser to give a lump sum now, 10,000 rupees, to start a chair for cows<sup>20</sup> in the New College that is being founded at the Ramakrishna Math, to be affiliated with the Calcutta University. Another of Swamiji's dreams to become Realities. So then I'll not leave the Math any money, but see the gift used' (February 9, 1939). 'I did give 10,000 rupees to found a Sanskrit chair at the Math immediately on mother's [Mrs. Leggett's] death seven years ago, out of the 15,000 dollars she left me outright. Now I've promised another 10,000 rupees to make the first instalment on the Math's

Mission being affiliated with the Calcutta University.... So I'll have nothing to leave the Math when I die, but give what I wish to now, while living' (February 22, 1939).

'The Belur Math's affiliation<sup>21</sup> with the Calcutta University of 10,000 students will now get Swamiji's *man-making* education into all these young students. You see I gave 10,000 rupees (3,500 dollars) to found the Sanskrit chair, then 10,000 for the cows, and just as I was leaving India, three years ago, a third 10,000 dollars which they needed before they could begin the affiliation! Mother [Mrs. Leggett] had already given 10,000 rupees, so I could keep my floor of the Guest House on the Ganges' and just before she died, 20,000 rupees to buy the Leggett House at the other end of the Math property, also on the Ganges' (May 22, 1941).

'At last the Calcutta University has ordered 16,000 books in Bengali of Swamiji's book of Hindu Heroes! printed by the Udbodhan Press. This touches me, for in 1898, when Mrs. Ole Bull gave Swamiji 15,000 dollars for the founding of the Math and Mr. Sturdy 5,000 dollars, I gave Swami 800 dollars—my savings of several years. He asked me, "What for?"—I said, "Anything you like," and he gave it immediately to a young monk [Swami Trigunatita], standing by, saying, "There buy your Udbodhan Press"—fun? To see, after forty-one years, the harvest?' (February 22, 1939).

'Today has come again my medicine from Dr. Kolisch from Los Angeles—the wonderful Vienna doctor settled since fourteen years in Los Angeles, who finished the lovely white Hindu Temple when their [the Vedanta Society of

21. This refers to 'Vidyamandira', a residential three-year degree college in Arts and Science conducted by the Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha, Belur, W.B.

20. For the study of dairy farming.



Southern California's] funds gave out—and now last month Swami Nikhilananda of 17 E. 94th St., N.Y. [New York] received 3,500 dollars from an Italian prince married to a Swede, who learned he needed it to publish Ramakrishna's Bengali sayings (on which he and Miss Margaret Wilson have been working four years) into *English!*' (May 6, 1940).

## 14

Miss MacLeod passed long periods in India at a time when the Indian freedom movement was gathering momentum. The following extracts sum up her attitude to the movement: 'I loved every word of your letter and your warning that what I say makes one feel I am anti-English—which is not at all what I feel. In fact, I am temperamentally anti-very little, but pro-much! I think that is the basis of my character and outlook; think it out and see if you don't think I'm right. My attitude in regard to India and England has always been summed up in Swamiji's "England has made the road-ways by which Indian spirituality will travel; God bless England." That Ireland should want its freedom I quite understand: that India may want hers I can equally understand, but I have never taken any interest in either. I only do understand, instead of condemning as so many do. Ireland is free after seven hundred and fifty years' effort. They say in five years since I was there, the Indian gain in political status is enormous; yet even if it is, that side of India doesn't really interest me' (February 3, 1922).

'All Swamiji asked of me was to love India—"and if you love her enough, she will solve her own problems." Now nobody can put another in jail for simply loving! I really do little, but I do feel that the race that can produce a Vivekananda is deeply

virile—and anything I can do to help, I enjoy doing' (October 4, 1923).

## 15

Here and there in the letters we find interesting comments on the outstanding Indian personalities of those days:

About Rabindranath Tagore: 'Swamiji and His message is eternal; the poet an embroidery on that message. I admire and love the poet, and think he is growing finer and finer, and I am so proud to have him alive, to represent India. The Swamiji type is more the Rishi type, not perhaps so understandable to the majority of the cultivated, but the masses understand; for they, like children, get at the heart of a thing intuitively, as we women do...' (December 5, 1923).

About Mahatma Gandhi: 'What if India does suffer by her own shortcomings and the world greed? If she can yet produce spiritual giants, her race is not yet run. And now, twenty years after, comes a Gandhi<sup>22</sup>—spiritualizing, by sheer force of character, politics! There may be nothing else to do with him but put him in prison. But India herself, especially the humble and lowly, know and are galvanized anew by him. There is no hope in the politics of aggression and expansion, but the politics of self-restraint, thinking no evil, loving even the aggressor, has saved India from chaos' (October 23, 1923).

'You ask my impression of Gandhi—I saw him on March 6th in his Ashram for three minutes and thought he looked less frail, less emaciated, but three days after, he had a stroke. He is utterly unconscious of himself, his looks, surroundings—absorbed in his ideas, giving courage, strength, initiative to his people. Full of

22. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi; popularly known as Mahatma Gandhi, the father of India's freedom movement,



hope, joy, expectancy—they fill his whole being. We sat on the floor,—and I, facing him, also on the floor. He wanted us to sit in chairs, but one wanted to get nearer; and then I always love the floor with its space and steadiness, so one can't fall off. ——— asked, "Where shall I find Truth?" and he pointed to his heart and said, "Here, within; it is in no other place."

'I said I'd lived with and seen Swami Vivekananda for seven years; he didn't pay much attention, but said presently, "They are asking me to come to the West. Shall I go?" I said, "No, stay in India. She needs all her strong children at home," and he seemed pleased.... I had seen him and sat on the platform with him at a little village near Calcutta in January (1927), within three feet of him for an hour, while he lectured in Hindi or Bengali to the thousands and thousands of spell-bound Indians—a great sight—and we were introduced afterwards. Of course there is no measurement of such men! Their strength lies in their *unconsciousness*. We lived with One and I know! Hence our strength, power, usefulness' (November 5, 1927).

Miss MacLeod came into particularly close contact with Mr. C. R. Das. On one occasion she even played the role of a go-between to bring together Mr. Das and Lord Lytton (the then Governor of Bengal). The incident is described in detail in the following:

'Yesterday morning at 7.45 a.m., C. R. Das came to see the Vivekananda Round Table.<sup>23</sup> (Then I learned that he had often been to Ramakrishna and that Swamiji had been his teacher, forty years ago! Swamiji's wonderful voice being what he recalled most vividly) he came by motor. At 8 a.m. Lord Lytton, Mr. Wilkinson (H. F.'s [Lord Lytton's] private secretary) and Mr. E—, a

fine young policeman, came by the Governor's launch, and we all had tea and coffee together at the "Round Table". As I was busy with the younger men and serving, I didn't hear much of what H.E. and Mr. Das were saying nor did I care to. But it was all quite friendly and touched upon local matters and I heard Mr. Das say, "It sounds all right on paper, but it cannot be worked." H.E. and staff stayed till 8.50, then left and gave a grand whistle salute, from the yacht as they left, to the Round Table. So I waved back. Great fun! Then Mr. Das and I sat for three quarters of an hour and I asked him why he couldn't co-operate with the Governor, since both evidently wanted the same thing, and this is what he answered, and what I'm sending to H.E. today:

"The system of government is such that it makes co-operation dishonourable. Co-operation means combination with a view to serve each other's interest. The only co-operation possible under existing circumstances is the subordination of the country's interest to the interest of the governing class, and I include the big European merchants amongst the governing class, I want such a system of government as will recognize the interests of every party. It is only under such a government that such co-operation is possible."

'I then said, "What is your suggestion?" and he said, "A Round Table conference". I said, "What names do you suggest?" He said, "B. Chakravarty, Abdul Karim, Dr. Bidhan Roy, Bepin Chandra Pal, Abdul Rashid Khan, C. R. Das.... Let H.E. appoint the men he wishes." I asked, "Do you want this for India—*all* India—or Bengal?" and he said, "I don't care; let it be an All India Round Table, or for Bengal alone." He then added, "His Excellency's Local Self-Government views and mine are similar. How to shape the provincial Central Governments is the question;

<sup>23</sup>. A big round table made of a single red-wood log which was kept in Miss MacLeod's apartment at the Belur Math guesthouse.



but if the Local Self-Govt. work is well done, the Provincial Central Govt. will be much simplified." I then said, "But why not begin now to co-operate since the present Governor is so sympathetic to the principle of self-government?" He said, "Because in two years we may not have a sympathetic governor, and will have to fight the issue out again. We do not want favours granted; we want *principles established* on which we can build a future." I said, "Why not meet here at the Vivekananda Round Table?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Or at Govt. House?" He said, "Yes, anywhere that His Excellency appoints we will come." I said, "Do you object to any of his European Ministers now in his Cabinet?" He said, "No, we object to no European. They are Britishers and have a right to represent and fight for their own country and ideals; we want *representative* Indians to do the same for India." (December 20, 1924).

'I didn't go to Government House after all for Xmas.... but I went to meet them on Saturday afternoon.... I also had a talk with Lord Lytton, after the others had gone, regarding his talk at the Vivekananda Round Table with C. R. Das, for I'd heard nothing at the time. It began, he says by C. R. Das saying he had often gone to Sri Ramakrishna and forty years ago Swamiji had been his teacher. Then H.E. said, "My first acquaintance of Indian thought was from an Irishman, 'A.E.' George Russell, who told me that his first acquaintance came through Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni*, that led him (A.E.) to the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Tantras* and *Puranas*, so that he found at last a religion that satisfied him." That "A.E." used to meditate upon each sentence till he got the essence of it; that gradually he saw visions, fairies, pictures, the past history of his own country of Ireland; so he became poet-painter-visionary. Till Sir Horace Plunkett

got him interested in Agriculture and Co-operative Societies and thus *do* something constructive for Ireland. Then H.E. said to C. R. Das, "Why do you begin building a superstructure of Councils in your cities, instead of building up the village communities 'Union Boards', which will feed the cities and give a foundation to your political institutions?" Mr. Das said, "Because the elected Village Union Board members are paralysed by the Govt. appointees." Then H.E. said, "Why not meet and talk it out—how we can get the Village Union Boards to act as self-governing bodies?" So Mr. Das said he would, and that's where the interview had ended. The next day Mr. Das left for a conference and only gets back next Friday. So we are waiting to see. Fortunately nothing has come out in the papers' (December 31, 1924).

## 16

All Swamiji had asked of Miss MacLeod was to love India. Time and again her love for India and her people found expression in the lines of these letters:

'How I love this Ganges! No wonder they worship it. It is so interesting, living, vital, never by chance the same. Not a boat in sight—forty, twenty minutes ago. Now ochre-yellow because the rains are sweeping down from the Himalayas in torrents' (August 14, 1923). 'The great Ganges is a living companion, the boatmen chanting "Ram, Ram" or "Krishna", till the whole atmosphere seems filled with His presence. *It is the lower classes that seem to be so civilized in India, with definite roots of their own into Eternal Verities.* They chant and sing and talk like happy children, so ingenious in their building, making different shaped arches according to opening with two bits of string fastened to some bamboo' (April 24, 1922).

'Being an ordinary woman (and in *that* lies my strength) I know how little reading and writing have played in my life. But loving, doing, serving, talking—are the natural ways of expression to me. Now all women have this, in India as elsewhere, only here their scriptures, their literature, their amazing ideals of different types of womanhood are written from their earliest childhood in their hearts. Their mind is parchment on which it is all engraved—Savitri, Sita, Uma! What a trilogy! Now to tell them that reading and writing is higher than this (their own culture) isn't true' (May 1, 1923).

'When anybody of any spiritual achievement is thought to be dying in India, from far and near come friends, relatives, disciples to get the blessing of such a departure from the body—amazing to see! They believe spirituality is *transmitted*, actually' (September 4, 1923). 'All India seems in pilgrimage in quest of God! I suppose really everyone, everywhere is, only India is conscious of it, in that lies the difference' (June 29, 1922). 'There is something deep and fundamental in this race that withstands floods, famines, and centuries of subjection, isn't there?' (February 14, 1923).

What I loved was meeting the Maharani of Burdwan, said to be the richest of Bengali ladies, and hear her say she didn't leave Calcutta last summer as her boy wanted her to stay with him. I said but wasn't it very hot? She said yes, for a week, but then the weather was delightful. They have a whole hill at Darjeeling. Then she said she was up at 3 a.m. to 6 for meditation and worship! So I knew India was safe, if its leader kept the religious fire burning like that' (December 31, 1924).

'I see that Sylvan Levi, the great French Indologist, is visiting and teaching for a year in the poet Tagore's International University of Bolpur, Bengal. Levi says that India has influenced one fourth of the human race: so on his researches and teachings the new Indian histories will be built—the thing Margot [Nivedita] so longed for' (May 3, 1922).

Thus we get a vast fund of hitherto unknown information about the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the Ramakrishna Movement, India and her people, through the letters of Miss Josephine MacLeod.

(Concluded)

## STEPS TO SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

SWAMI BHASHYANANDA

Swami Vivekananda defines religion as 'realization.' It is being and becoming, not a mere belief in certain dogmas, or a bundle of good habits. Śaṅkarācārya insists that freedom from bondage cannot be obtained without the realization of the identity between the individual self (Ātman) and the cosmic Self (Brahman).<sup>1</sup> In the

'Sermon on the Mount', Jesus also speaks of the practical application of his theoretical teachings as follows:

Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. . . . And every one that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended,

1. See Śaṅkarācārya, *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, (hereafter *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*), 56.



and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell. And great was the fall of it.<sup>2</sup>

Realization is perfection. It has to be attained in this very life. The lower nature has to be changed and the higher manifested. Ego, passions and greed have to be slowly brought under control and channelled towards a higher ideal. It is a very slow and laborious process. A single example will convince us how patience and constant effort are necessary. Take the practice of control of the mind, which is most essential for any spiritual experience. When we sit for meditation or worship and try to concentrate our mind, we find that even for a single minute the mind doesn't become steady. Arjuna had this problem. When Śrī Kṛṣṇa explained the disciplines of yoga to him, Arjuna exclaimed that it seemed easier to catch hold of the moving wind than to control the restless mind. Śrī Kṛṣṇa replied that, though the mind is restless and hard to control, it can be brought to steadiness through regular practice (*abhyāsa*) and detachment (*vairāgya*).<sup>3</sup> It is like emptying a lake drop by drop. It requires infinite patience and constant vigilance. The two main enemies in this process are sloth and inadvertance.

Some spiritual aspirants seem to stumble upon spiritual experience. Many a seeker of religion goes after various teachers asking for powers and quick results, but there is great danger in this. Usually, they turn out to be fanatics. Some, perhaps, experience harmful effects on their body or mind. It is like a poor man winning a lottery. The joy is so powerful that the weak nerves and mind cannot stand that outburst. Therefore, a seeker of spiritual experience must go step by step, making his

body, nerves and mind fit and strong by discipline.

Sri Ramakrishna tells the story of Mathur Babu's asking for quick visions:

He[Mathur Babu] sent for me. When I went I found that he was, as it were, a different man: his eyes were red and tears were flowing; speaking of God he was shedding floods of tears. And his heart was trembling with quick pulsation. When he saw me, he clasped both my feet and said, 'Excuse me, father, I admit my defeat; I have been in this condition for the last three days; I cannot apply my mind to wordly affairs in spite of all my efforts; everything is getting spoilt everywhere. Please take back the ecstasy conferred by you; I don't want it.' 'Why,' said I, 'did you not pray for ecstasy?' He then said, 'Yes, I did so and there is also bliss in it; but of what avail is it? Everything is going to be spoilt on this side. This ecstasy of yours, father, becomes you only. We don't want all these things. Please take them back.' I then laughed and said, 'I told you so previously.' 'Yes, father,' said he, 'but did I understand then so clearly that something like a ghost would possess me and that I should have to take every step according to its whim all the twenty-four hours and could do nothing, even if I had a mind to?' I then passed my hand over his chest.<sup>4</sup>

Why do we fail? It is interesting to explore the reasons why we fail in spiritual endeavour. If we carefully analyze our daily life of spiritual practice, we often discover that there is some flaw in the discipline. Just as a builder of a house and a doctor treating a patient have to be very careful from the beginning to achieve their respective goals, and even a little flaw in the building or the treatment may defeat their purpose completely, similarly, a seeker of spiritual truth, has to go step by step

2. Matthew, 7:24-27.

3. See *Śrīmad-Bhagavad-Gītā* (hereafter *Gītā*), VI. 33-35.

4. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna: The Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda, Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1970, p. 452.



very carefully, securing each step before he goes to the next.

Swami Vivekananda put it very aptly when he said: 'One has to idealize the real and then realize the ideal.' We are often enamoured of the ideal when we hear from the scriptures such sentences as *aham brahmāsmi* ('I am Brahman').<sup>5</sup> It sends an emotional thrill through our body, but we forget that this is a transcendental experience in which body and world are left behind.

Thus, we find that one has to deal with obstacles and enemies in the path by studying them, knowing their power, and slowly overcoming them. 'No one can call himself an emperor without subduing his enemies and possessing control of the surrounding kingdoms.'<sup>6</sup> In order to acquire hidden treasures, one has to do the laborious task of excavation, removal of debris, putting forth hard labour, until the treasure is brought to hand.<sup>7</sup> Mere theoretical knowledge does not help us nor give us satisfaction. By merely drawing a line on a piece of paper, we cannot get the satisfaction nor utility of building a wall.

Take another example. Nowadays it has become a fashion to speak of the harmony of religions. Most of the religious leaders, however, mean by harmony of religions religious 'get-togethers', interfaith dinners with a pat on the back given at the end. We forget the deep meaning involved in harmony of religions. The whole personality has to change before the idea of harmony can be experienced. Sri Ramakrishna practised the harmony of religions for almost twelve years of his life. He prepared himself by his many spiritual disciplines of various Hindu sects and other religions to demonstrate through his teachings the

concept of the harmony of religions. The analogy he gives of the circumference and the centre of a circle illustrates the real meaning of religious harmony. There are many points on the circumference, but the circle has one centre in which all the points are connected. Thus the various manifestations of religious customs and beliefs all radiate from one centre in which all the various manifestations are connected: Brahman or the Godhead.

Perfection is defined in various ways by scriptures and world-teachers. The three chief ways to reach perfection are by following the path of non-dualism (Advaita), qualified non-dualism (Viśiṣṭādvaita), or dualism (Dvaita). The ultimate experience to be realized is the same: effacement of individuality, transformation of the personality from human to divine, and constant communion with God in the form of service to human beings as the veritable manifestation of the Lord Himself.

Steps to realization, or spiritual disciplines, have some universal characteristics. The difference is only in emphasis, which varies according to an individual's temperament and level of understanding; and according to the necessities of time and cultural environment. Let us take a few examples.

The teachings of Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount' give emphasis to ethics in human relationships: how to treat your neighbour, how to overcome lower propensities such as killing and anger through the higher disciplines to be learned and practised such as love, charity and goodwill. Vedānta, while accepting all these, adds an intellectual discipline for evolving the deep spiritual layers of the human personality. It lays down such preparations as *viveka* (discrimination between the Real and the unreal), *vairāgya* (detachment), *śama-dama* (control of the mind and senses), *titikṣā* (bearing capacity, fortitude), and *śraddhā*

5. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, I.iv.10.

6. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 64.

7. See *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 65.



(attainment of religious faith through reason).<sup>8</sup>

This is accomplished by pointing out to the student the following universal facts of daily life: All material objects belong to time and space. They originate, stay for some time, dismantle or decay, and disappear. One should have possession of objects only for maintenance of the body, because the sense-organs, if they lose control, carry away the equanimity of the mind and thus disable the student from attaining and realizing God.

Certain things, such as incurable disease, vagaries of nature, and old age, cannot be changed. We have to accept them and live with them in a spirit of equanimity. But there are many other facts which can be changed with courage and discipline, self-effort, and constant struggle or longing for self-knowledge.

Another path, that of devotion or Bhakti, has the same characteristics. Scriptures of devotion, such as the *Bhāgavata*, *Nārada-Bhakti-Sūtras*, and others, lay emphasis on the pure emotions which develop through two stages. The devotee begins by practising such disciplines as taking pure food, singing devotional music, repeating the Lord's name (*japa*), meditating and worshipping at a shrine. Through these disciplines, he attains to the higher love of God, experiencing love of God for His own sake, just because He is the highest ideal, rather than for any expectation of reward or fear of punishment. The devotee-lover, Beloved, and God's love become one.

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* lays stress on practical renunciation and detachment for the attainment of God-realization. One is not to give up his daily work, but rather to dedicate this work to God. Instead of working for any selfish end, the devotee works as an instrument in His hands, in a

spirit of self-surrenderance to His Will. This spirit ultimately leads to purification of mind and heart, and thus creates inspiration, development of intuition, and power of meditation on God.<sup>9</sup>

The path of Rāja-Yoga lays emphasis on the attainment of mental harmony or peace of mind through the following eight steps:<sup>10</sup> ethical practices of (1) *yama* (non-injury, truthfulness, non-covetousness, continence, and non-receiving of gifts) and (2) *niyama* (internal and external purification, contentment, austerity, study, and worship of God): (3) *āsana*, that is, physical observances of bodily control and good posture; (4) *prāṇāyāma* or breath-control through breathing exercises; and four successive mental exercises: (5) *pratyāhāra* or withdrawal of the mind from material objects, (6) *dhāraṇā* or concentration, (7) *dhyāna* or meditation, and (8) *samādhi* or absorption in the object of meditation.

The four requisites which are more or less applicable to all spiritual aspirants are: (1) scriptural study; (2) a spiritual teacher; (3) personal enthusiasm in *sādhana*; and (4) patience and perseverance.

The scriptures contain the recorded experiences of seers and saints who have sought and realized the truth. Such writings are considered very sacred. They are helpful in preparing us for the ultimate experience. Spiritual life is like sailing in an uncharted sea where there is little help from the senses, from one's own reason, or from values of society. Scriptures are like charts of navigation. They warn us of sandbanks, shallow water, submerged rocks and icebergs. Scriptures describe the nature of God. They can be tentatively accepted as hypotheses and then realized through

<sup>9</sup>. See *Gītā*, II.38, 48.

<sup>10</sup>. See *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, I. 1972, pp. 260-70.

<sup>8</sup>. See *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 69.

practical experience, and, hence, should be read with reverence. Since the scriptures give discipline and guidance to all, one has to make a distinction between essentials and non-essentials, and use only those which are applicable in individual cases. Scriptures are the means and not the end. After getting the necessary guidance, one realizes the highest and transcends the scriptures; but still maintains his reverence for them.<sup>11</sup>

Spirituality is the awakening of the inner Truth or soul within, the kindling of the spirit. It is the transmission of Light from one living soul to another living soul, much as one candle becomes lighted by the light of another candle.<sup>12</sup> It is a new birth. One can get tangible spiritual experience when one comes in contact with a living teacher. Such experience stays on throughout life. Just as we need teachers in all the departments of our life—art, music, science, practical matters—so too, do we need a true God-realized teacher. The essential factor is that one should be a proper student first; then the proper teacher comes automatically.

Individual effort must be sustained through inspiration and a sense of determination. Otherwise, it tends to become spasmodic. Sri Ramakrishna gave several beautiful examples to illustrate this point: A bee always seeks the flower and the nectar in the flower ('right effort'), while a fly always seeks to alight on filth. A water drop falling on a hot pan dries up instantaneously ('preparedness'). A farmer irrigating his field will not take rest and relax until he removes all obstacles in the path of the

current of water so that it can reach the field ('determination').

The lives of the saints should be regularly read. How often they failed before they finally reached their goal, but still they never lost enthusiasm!<sup>13</sup> Enthusiasm must not be confused with mental restlessness. The latter is characteristic of a lower mind which is unable to concentrate for any length of time. Enthusiasm in spiritual life has to be cultivated by studying the impermanence of this world and by taking refuge in the Lord alone.<sup>14</sup> At a certain stage of development, the soul feels this irresistible attraction to God and constant desire to know the truth. When the mental impurities are removed, God is then realized.

The time factor (*kāla*), or patience, is very necessary in spiritual life. Many past tendencies lying hidden in the subconscious have to be overcome through regular discipline. A great struggle must go on, for which infinite patience and perseverance are required. One should be ready to work for eternity. The result may come much quicker than the devotee would expect, for the joy is in striving.<sup>15</sup> The struggle proceeds in stages, much as the lawyer's defence of his client goes step by step, with arguments and facts marshalled, to prove his points and final conclusion before the judge. A true devotee is never impatient. One should do all that one can, and then leave the rest to God.<sup>16</sup>

If we have these four requisites, the result will come as a matter of course.

11. See *Gītā*, II. 46, XVII. 1, 5.

12. See *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, IV. ix. 3, VII. i. 3.

13. See *Gītā*, VI. 5.

14. See *Gītā*, XIII. 8.

15. See *Gītā*, II. 47.

16. See *Gītā*, IV. 38, XVIII. 14.



# REMINISCENCES OF SWAMI VIJNANANANDA\*

RABINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA

TRANSLATED BY DULAL CHANDRA CHAKRAVARTY

Since 1932-33, I started visiting Belur Math. I cherished a desire to be initiated by Swami Shivananda, but it was not fulfilled as the Swami passed away some time later. I was disheartened. Unfortunately, I was then under the impression that none of the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were still living. Therefore, I had not been to the Math for about a year after the demise of Swami Shivananda. Moreover, I even sought for initiation elsewhere. Someone complied with my prayer and instantly gave me one *mantra* and asked me to repeat it. He told me that he was going to Varanasi and after returning he would initiate me with the proper ritual.

I continued repeating that name. But I felt a great urge to keep the photographs of Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother (Sri Sarada Devi) in my room and prostrate before them every day. One day, in order to buy these photographs, I went to Belur Math. When I reached Swami Vivekananda's room to pay my respects, after prostrating in the shrines of the Master and the Holy Mother, I saw a great assemblage in the adjacent room. I came to learn that the Vice-President of Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna—Swami Vijnanananda—had come. As soon as I heard this, my mind was ablaze with remorse. 'Alas, what a blunder I have committed! Without inquiring whether any other disciple of Sri Ramakrishna is living or not, I took a *mantra* from someone else!'

I was overwhelmed with grief. And with an utterly disturbed mind, I returned home. I spent a whole week in unspeakable mental agony. What should I do now?

One day while in this situation, my preceptor, who was to initiate me, returned from Varanasi and sent for me. My mental agony reached its height—I often stayed away from home to avoid him. One day my mother, learning everything, said to me, 'Give up your worries; pray to the Master. Tell him your problems. He will show you the way.' At this, I regained courage. Thereafter, one day I went to Belur Math again. It was the summer of 1935. There I narrated all my problems to Swami Abhayananda [Bharat Maharaj]. He said, 'Vijnan Maharaj [Swami Vijnanananda] is now in the Math. Yonder the foundation work for the shrine of Sri Ramakrishna is going on. There he is, sitting on a chair supervising the work. But you need not go there. When he returns to his room, you should go to him and tell him everything personally.' I requested Swami Abhayananda to accompany me, but he declined, saying, 'It will be better if you go alone.' About fifteen minutes after Swami Vijnanananda's return to his room, Swami Abhayananda sent me to him. I gathered courage to enter his room and prostrated before him. He said, 'What's the news?' He spoke these words in a manner as if I was long acquainted with him. This encouraged me. I narrated to him everything and prayed, 'Maharaj! I beg to be initiated by you. At present I repeat everyday the *mantra* which I received previously.' Then he said, 'Well, you continue to repeat that at least for eight years.' I insisted, 'Maharaj, I have a strong desire to have initiation from you.'

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\* These reminiscences were first published in Bengali in the Bhādra (August) and Kārtick (October) B.S. 1383 (A.D.) numbers of the *Udbodhan*, a Bengali monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order, published from Baghbazar, Calcutta.—Ed.

Yet he replied, 'Hold on to that with firm faith.' Then I suddenly said, 'Maharaj, I like Sri Ramakrishna very much.' After this, Maharaj was silent. He gazed at me for long and consented to initiate me, asking me to come to the Math on Wednesday morning. Then he said, 'You are taking initiation from me, but you should regard your former preceptor with the same respect and devotion as before. When he comes to your house, you should serve him as sincerely as you have done in the past. And you should repeat the *mantra* given by him daily as usual. You must not disrespect him in any way.' Then his face became bright and he said, 'You think the *mantra* to be a childish affair. We have seen the *mantra* in its radiant form, as a living presence too.'

Before departing I asked, 'Maharaj, what things are required for initiation?' 'What else? One *amalaki* (myrobalan) is sufficient,' he replied.

On the appointed day, Wednesday, I was blessed with his grace. After initiation, he explained everything regarding spiritual practice and at last said, 'If you have enough time, practise more *japa*. While walking or travelling by vehicle, you may repeat the *mantra*.' I asked him, 'Should I repeat the *Gāyatrī mantra* anymore?' 'Gāyatrī is very sacred,' he replied. 'You have received initiation...you will have everything in it,' he added. 'Repeat your previous *mantra* and also respect your former guru. Write down the new *mantra*, otherwise you may forget it. You should know, you are no more alone from today. You have the Master and the Holy Mother as your refuge—so you need not be afraid of anything. They will protect you from any mishap. And at the time of your death, they will themselves lead you by the hand to their abode. Thakur is reincarnating—with a stronger physique this time,' he continued.

Again he said, 'You should not argue with anybody. You should revere every other creed. "My path is right and others are wrong"—you should not have such an idea. Have regard for every form of religious belief. Try to live in a detached manner in the world. At the last hour, the Master and the Holy Mother will come to lead you by the hand.'

He further said, 'Keep the photographs of all the monastic disciples of the Master in your room and prostrate before them.' He remained silent for a while and said, 'Keep one of mine too.' At last he told me, 'Now, perform your *japa* and meditation outside in the veranda of the shrine for some time, and then going downstairs, bow down to each and every monk residing in this Math.'

In the evening, I went to his room and saw his attendant preparing coffee. Taking his coffee, Maharaj would go out. The car was ready downstairs. I learnt that he was going to see Sri Ramakrishna's marble statue which was being carved at that time.

\* \* \*

For the third time, I had the opportunity of seeing Swami Vijnanananda at Belur Math in March 1935. After entering his room, as soon as I made obeisance to him, he said, 'Sit down. What's the news? How are you?' 'I am quite well,' I replied. Hearing this he said, laughing, 'You are a gentleman indeed! See, these people [pointing to the assembled persons], none of them are well—you may ask them. You are the only person who is getting on well. You are a very decent man.' At this, everybody began to laugh. Then, bringing up many other topics and with humour he amused us to a great degree. After a while, Yatish Maharaj, Swamis Omkarananda, Abhayananda and others arrived. Vijnan Maharaj looked at me and said, 'You brothers, help me a little—carry this



trunk to the car.' We were moved and obliged by these words. At the time of his departure we all said to him, 'Please come again.' Maharaj replied, 'It depends on Rama's [God's] will.'

\* \* \*

It was Wednesday, April 10, 1935, the seventh day of the lunar fortnight scheduled for the worship of the Goddess Bāsantī. The worship would be performed at Belur Math. On this occasion, Vijnan Maharaj had arrived from Allahabad. Having gone to the Math I had my *darśan*, and after enjoying the ceremony I returned home. Again I visited the Math on April 14 at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It was *ekādaśī* (the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight). I thought his room would be crowded; but to my astonishment, I found him alone! Again the same query, smiling, 'What's the news?' After a little conversation, I said, 'Maharaj, I am in great trouble. I work in the Burn Company at Ramakrishnapur, Howrah; I am to attend at 8 in the morning. I live in Kalighat. So I have to start at 7 o'clock, and I have to finish my bath and take my meals before that. I travel both ways on bicycle. It is a long distance. Moreover, after a strenuous work in the office, and having the same long return journey by bicycle, I go to bed late at night performing my *japa* and meditation. Again it is very difficult to get up early at 4 o'clock. The *mantra* which I received before is very long and the *Gāyatrī mantra* is also long. Besides, I repeat the *mantra* received from you. And you have instructed me not to make haste at the time of *japa* and also asked me to practise meditation along with *japa*. As a result, I am not getting enough time to follow all these in detail... Now allow me please to give up my former *mantra*.'

Maharaj listened to everything and gave his consent. At last he said, 'You should

respect the preceptor from whom you received your first *mantra*, as usual.' Later on, I asked his permission to give up the *Gāyatrī mantra* as well, but Maharaj refused. 'No, you should practise *Gāyatrī*,' he said. When he noticed my helpless look, he added, 'Well, you may omit the *Gāyatrī* occasionally if you are awfully busy.'

\* \* \*

It was a Sunday in the month of May 1935. I had already heard that Vijnan Maharaj had arrived at Belur Math for supervising the construction of the Shrine. Going to the Math, I found him sitting on a chair in the veranda in front of Swamiji's room. Many devotees were present. He made us all laugh heartily and engaged himself in making merry with us, as if he were of our age and one of our bosom friends. How wonderfully he behaved! I wondered whether he was the same serious and grave person whom I feared to approach. What a current of pure delight he created that day!

Entering his room in the afternoon, I found him seated in a grave mood. There were some other persons also. He told me, 'My spectacles are on the table. Give them to me, brother!' He wrote down the addresses of three of us present. There was no more conversation. I witnessed a jubilant sea of joy in the morning: now, he was very calm and grave (and he remained very often in this mood). When the bell for the evening prayer rang Maharaj said, 'Now, please leave me alone.' We came out from the room.

I did not understand why all on a sudden that day he took down our addresses in his diary. I dared not ask him the reason. But later it was clear. On the 1st of June, I received a letter from him. Inside was a photograph of his. He sent it from the Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad. I had read about unconditional grace in the scriptures,

but now I experienced it in the core of my heart.

\* \* \*

October 7, 1935. It was the auspicious Vijayā Daśamī day, and I wrote a letter to Maharaj to pay my respects. I heard that he was due to come to the Math, but later I was told that he usually performed the worship of the Goddess Durgā at the Allahabad Math, so he was not coming. In reply to my letter he wrote to me, along with other topics, 'Here, on the occasion of Durgā Pujā, we worshipped the Mother by making Her image in this Math. So I could not go to the Belur Math.' He also reminded me, 'Try to remain unattached as far as possible.'

\* \* \*

November 18, 1935. Sunday. Although I did not get any news, I got some intuitive feeling that Vijnan Maharaj had arrived at the Math. Next day, I went to the Math and saw that he had really come. I was much delighted. Seeing me he asked, smiling as usual, 'What's the news?' That day Maharaj narrated what places he had visited and what things he had seen and so on. We all got up when the bell for serving *prasād* (consecrated food) rang. Again, in the afternoon, I went to his room. Many devotees were sitting there on the carpet. I also sat down. Many topics were discussed. Suddenly, one gentleman began to tell Vijnan Maharaj about planchette. Thereafter a flow of ghost-stories went on. Samar Maharaj [Swami Vashishthananda] said, 'At Patna, at dead of night on a new moon day, I spent a whole night in a cremation ground to see ghosts, but I found nothing. But the Master told about ghosts, so I believe.' Thus ghost stories became very interesting to all. But I began to think, 'I am now enjoying it all. But at night between 11 to 12 when I shall have to go by bicycle through the Esplanade area, then

I shall be afraid. (I was then about nineteen or twenty years of age). Afterwards, ghost-stories from English books commenced. All on a sudden, Vijnan Maharaj looked at me and said, 'You are much afraid, aren't you?' It was about 8 p.m. I remained silent. Suddenly, Maharaj's face became bright. I felt his eyes were emitting fire. He looked at me and uttered forcefully, 'What's there to fear? There is nothing to fear. Is man less powerful? Even gods are afraid of man, what to speak of insignificant ghosts!' As we saw Maharaj's grave and bright countenance and heard his words, the story was discontinued, and everyone became stunned. Instantly, fear disappeared from my mind for ever.

\* \* \*

April-May, 1936. I went anxiously to the Math in the morning to verify whether Maharaj had arrived or not, because a strange incident had taken place the previous night. Swami Vijnanananda had been staying at Allahabad for five or six months. When he would come to the Math or depart, I would not be able to know at all. And due to heavy pressure of work, I had not the time and energy to inquire about his whereabouts from time to time. That was why I grew a little sensitive if it happened that he came and went away and I got no news of it. Such thoughts occupied my mind (it was natural in that tender age).

On the night previous to my visiting the Math, I had my physical exercises in our club, 'Vivekananda Union,' and went to the house of one of my relatives. About 12 midnight I was returning home. It had rained a little ago, so the road was solitary and all the shops were closed. It was very calm and desolate. I was walking along the footpath all alone. Suddenly, an unknown youth appeared before me from behind a tree and told me laughingly, 'He



has arrived at the Math and you have not visited him yet?' With these words, he proceeded in the opposite direction. I was dumbfounded. 'Who is this young man? I have never met him!' Thus wondering, I looked back but could not find him anywhere. I searched but could not trace him. It was a very unusual event which roused diverse thoughts in my mind. So, next day, anxiously I reached the Belur Math and found that Swami Vijnanananda had really come. (This incident might have been a projection of my mind or only a coincidence of events), but whatever it was my surmise came to be true; and so, overwhelmed with joy I went up the first floor of the Math building and found the room empty, Maharaj seated on a chair at the railing of the veranda by the Ganga side, with his face to the south. I was so glad to see him that I even forgot to bow down. I was thinking, 'Here is an embodiment of the gracious Sri Ramakrishna in another form.' My thought was interrupted, and I came to my senses on hearing the words, 'What's the news?' Once I thought I would narrate to him last night's incident; for I had a firm belief that whatever might be the case, it happened due to his grace. But I was a little nervous and there were other devotees sitting in the room. I heard that he was leaving for Allahabad that very day. After a while, preparations for the journey commenced. I thought, I would have missed the chance of meeting him just for a little delay! The monks of the Math came to salute him. I had been saving (of course with considerable hardship) some money for some time, keeping it apart. I put the sum on the tripod in front of him, and as I made my obeisance, he asked, 'What is this?' With trembling heart and bashful voice I answered, 'Maharaj, it's my offering to the guru.' Instantly, he became grave and said, 'Why do you want to offer money? Those who

are well-to-do will do these things.' I remained silent and apprehended that he might refuse it. But, as he the all-knowing (*antaryāmi*), could know of my sensitiveness and poverty, so could he read the state of my mind of that moment; and out of grace he accepted that humble offering.

After his car started, I attended the Aratrika (evening prayer) in the shrine and went to the Howrah station. There was ample time: the train was to leave the station about 9 at night. Vijnan Maharaj used to reach the station about two or three hours before the departure time of a train. At the Railway Station, I found Maharaj seated in a second-class compartment, the devotees standing in front on the platform. Maharaj said, 'When you all have come, please help me a little. Please come inside the compartment and be seated here. Then nobody will try to get into it seeing such a crowd. You shall get down at the time of departure. I too would be able to travel comfortably in this empty compartment. On seeing such a crowd, specially the European gents and ladies will not get into this compartment, and they are the biggest trouble-makers.' Then he narrated how he was once inconvenienced by them during a journey by train. He also told us of a similar incident which happened to Swami Shivananda (Mahapurush Maharaj). Then he began to amuse us in various ways. (Someone) <sup>he</sup> childishly snatched away the money-bag from <sup>one monk</sup> (Maharaj's) hand. <sup>The monk</sup> (Maharaj) repeatedly asked him to return it, but the <sup>he</sup> devotee was not yielding. At last when <sup>the monk</sup> (he) said, 'You must give me the bag, the train is leaving just now,' <sup>Maharaj</sup> (the devotee) laughingly replied, 'It will be well. Here are your coins. The bag is very nice; it is to my liking. I won't part with it.' Such fun continued, and thus he dispelled the gloominess of our minds due to his departure.

December 29, 1936. Sunday. A sense of



utter dejection had grown in my mind for sometime because I had achieved nothing by *japa* and meditation. Nothing interested me anymore. Sometimes I thought, perhaps I could not properly follow the spiritual practices in detail, so I failed. Again I pondered, 'I practised a little at least, so there must be some effect. But why did I fail to achieve anything!' I resolved to give up all these practices as they proved fruitless to me. And in this state of mind, a terrible sense of fear also haunted me. I was to be rich in faith and devotion; on the contrary, I had this downfall! At this time, I heard that Swami Vijnanananda had arrived at the Belur Math. I thought, 'Well, I shall go to him and return his *mantra*.' But even this thought made me tearful and I thought of weeping in a solitary corner.

However, I went to the Math and met Maharaj. My mind was still very disturbed. He addressed me as usual: 'What's the news?' But I did not utter a word in reply. I only nodded my head once. Many devotees were seated on the floor. The room was full. I had no opportunity to speak my mind, but still I was thinking how to start my tale; even if I tell him he might chide me strongly. Perhaps he would advise, 'Go on with your *japa* and meditation with perseverance.' But that would not be to my liking at all. After much hesitation, I dragged myself close to him and with my mouth very close to his ear, whispered, 'See, I have not realized anything so far.' 'Stick to it with faith and you will have it in due course of time,' he replied gently. But this did not satisfy me; rather I was displeased. The bell for evening prayer rang and he told us as usual, 'Now you get up please; leave me alone.'

I attended the evening prayer but a sense of unrest prevailed in my mind. I resolved to put an end to this by any means on that

day. After the prayer, I requested Maharaj's attendant to allow me to talk alone with Maharaj for only a while. With Maharaj's consent I entered his room. We were alone. The attendant closed the door. Maharaj was in a grave mood. I told him, 'Maharaj, I have degraded myself. Instead of developing, my faith and devotion have disappeared altogether. I like *japa* and meditation no more...I am good for nothing. I have lost all hopes too. Now, what will be the support of my life?' My assumptions proved false. Neither did he rebuke me nor give me any advice. 'How is that? Let me see you!' he said, and with these words he asked me to stand in front of him. With long glances, he stared at my eyes for four or five minutes and began to scrutinize me carefully from top to toe. At last with normal countenance he uttered, 'That's nothing. You have nothing to fear. You may go now.' Instantly, the discomfort of my mind disappeared and I became free from my excruciating mental agony. I prostrated before him and with a mind full of bliss and joy, came out of his room.

\* \* \*

Swamis Akhandananda and Vijnanananda were then staying at Belur Math. I went to the Math at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and as I bowed down to Swami Vijnanananda he asked me to make obeisance to Swami Akhandananda, who was staying in the room adjacent to Swamiji's. None except the attendant was there in the room. Maharaj was talking with him and I overheard a little of their talk: 'It would be better to help others make pilgrimage and religious performances than to perform them personally.'

Swami Vijnanananda was to return to Allahabad that very day and he was to start after a while. At this time Swami Akhandananda entered into the room and said, 'Prasanna [Swami Vijnanananda's pre-mon-



astic name], are you leaving just now?' Maharaj replied, 'Yes Maharaj, I am to start now.' Swami Akhandananda said, 'Why are you starting so early? There is time enough!'

'I like to go out before the sun sets.'

'You need not observe all these particulars. Don't go now. Let me come back finishing my walk and then you start.' With these words, Swami Akhandananda walked out laughing. A little before dusk he came back and said, 'Prasanna, I have come : I have made you a bit late.' 'No, Maharaj, that's nothing. May I start now?' Swami Vijnanananda asked with a smile. Swami Akhandananda remained standing there to see him get into the motor car. The devotees asked, 'When are you coming again?' and the reply was the same as on previous occasions, 'The will of Rama.' He saluted Swami Akhandananda with folded hands, and the latter also blessed him raising his hands.

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In the March of 1937, Swami Vijnanananda was elected President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He visited the Belur Math in the summer that very year.

At that time, I had a doubt in my mind—'Does the Master really accept our worship and offerings?' I thought, 'He does not accept everyone's; perhaps he accepts from only a few—those who are very pure in heart. And Swami Vijnanananda also usually distributes the fruits or sweets offered to him by the devotees either to the devotees or sends these things to the kitchen-store. He never takes anything himself. Does he also accept our worship?'

One day while going to visit him I wished to take something for him. But due to my poverty I had not the ability to purchase any costly thing; on the way I bought two large-size green-coconuts.\* It was evening when I reached Belur Math. The bell for the evening prayer rang. Generally

Vijnan Maharaj allowed none to stay in his room at this hour and usually he never met anybody after the prayer. So I was disturbed with the thought that I might not have the opportunity to see him that day. I went upstairs; the door was still open; and Maharaj was there sitting inside the room facing the north. There was none else in the room; only the attendant, who was ready to come out after shutting the door. He said, 'No more visitors today, please go downstairs.' I was disheartened; all my efforts came to naught. I placed the green-coconuts in the attendant's hand and saluted Maharaj from outside. Maharaj noticed me and said, 'What's the news? Come and take your seat. Have you brought the green-coconut? Very well, very well.' And thus he raised an uproar. He told his attendant, 'See, he has brought the green-coconut; I was just thinking of drinking coconut-water for sometime, and the coconut is here. Cut one, let me drink it.' He further said, 'See, it is dusk; be careful, don't cut your hand! That will be discredit for me. Oh, the green-coconut is very fine!' And he became jubilant like a child. The attendant said, 'Maharaj, you usually drink coconut-water at 3 in the afternoon. Would you take it now in the evening?' Maharaj replied, 'Oh yes, I will. Just prepare it.' I saw that there were seven or eight green-coconuts stocked in the room. I was told that at 4 o'clock he was asked to take coconut but he refused.

The coconut was cut and he drank the water—about one and a half tumblerful. I was beside myself with joy: indeed these revered souls also accept our humble offerings. They are aware of all our secret desires and dispel all the trifling doubts with a benign touch of sympathy.

After this he started telling about coconuts: He drank a large quantity of coconut-water at Madras. At Ceylon or somewhere



else, he had eaten golden coconuts etc. It was about 8 p.m. I had never seen him before, gossiping like this with anyone during the evening prayer hours or after. I was rather astonished and concluded that he had made this break of routine only out of grace to this poor disciple.

\* \* \*

1937, summer. Maharaj had arrived in the Math. I went to see him. For some time past, I had a thought in my mind: 'I have prostrated before Maharaj many times, but never have I had the opportunity to touch his bare feet, as they are always covered with socks.' That day he suddenly asked me, 'Would you please remove my socks?' I was at the height of pleasure. As the socks were removed he was laughing. He said, 'Would you please stroke my legs a little?' Such a favour was beyond my expectation. After a while he said, 'You may stop now. I was having a pain in the leg; your stroking has soothed it.' I understood: he knew my mind. He fulfilled my desire by allowing me not only to touch his feet, but also by giving the opportunity to serve him a little.

\* \* \*

July 1937. Maharaj had come to the Math. I went to him and said, 'Maharaj, I would like to visit Allahabad, but I get no opportunity.' Maharaj replied, 'You are to create an opportunity. Where there is a will there is a way. A man went to have bath in the sea, but as he was about to get into the water, he saw a big wave approaching and he turned back. After a while, he tried again to plunge, but the large wave was there again and so he retreated. The waves never stop, hence he could not have his bath in the sea. So I say, the waves of this sea of the world [*samsāra*] are always there, but you have to finish your duties in the midst of them. Misfortunes and obstacles are sure to come in succession, but ignoring these troubles, one

should perform his duties. One should neither give up one's efforts nor wait indefinitely. Everything will go hand in hand—your duties and the calamities and the obstacles of life. Otherwise, it will be like the old lady's desire to live in Varanasi which, in the long run, was not fulfilled.'

Such talks were going on when a Western lady, wearing a sari like a Bengali woman, entered and kneeled down to offer her salutation to Maharaj. She was very jolly and was about twenty-four or twenty-five years of age. She spoke in English with Maharaj. I was told that she was initiated by him. She had brought a wood-apple (*Bilva* fruit) for Maharaj. He took it and asked Samar Maharaj (Swami Vashishthananda) to give her two consecrated apples. The lady was much delighted and said smilingly, 'I offered one but received back two.' After some more conversation she went away.

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It was rainy season. Vijnan Maharaj had arrived in the Math. I went there in the afternoon. A monk (outsider) accompanied with seven or eight girls entered into the room and after saluting Maharaj said, 'These are Brahmacharinis; please bless them by putting your hand on their heads.' Maharaj did not comply with the request. He said: 'Nobody is "special" to me; all are equal to me. Moreover, my blessings will be of no avail; otherwise I would bless myself first with my hands on my head before touching their heads and blessing them...What authority do I possess to bless anybody? The Master and the Holy Mother, they are all in all.' Afterwards, when all of them left and I was alone with him he told me, 'Ask blessings of your mind.'

\* \* \*

November 1937. Maharaj was staying at Belur Math for seventeen or eighteen days. As he was not keeping well, devotees only



had an opportunity of visiting him, but talking was prohibited. On such a day, I was in the queue with others to salute him. Now, I had a question to ask him and when I bowed down to him and said, 'Maharaj, a question...', he raised one finger and said, 'Do you know the rules of this place?' 'What?' I asked. 'You see my finger: not a word, and your visit should be for one minute only!' he replied. But I insisted, 'I had a question...' Maharaj said, 'Not a word even. You see my finger. Just one minute for you!' So I had to come out. After the evening prayer, I stayed a while in the Math and about 8 at night, before returning home, I went in front of Maharaj's room to salute him from the veranda. As soon as he saw me, he beckoned me and asked to take my seat. There was nobody in the room. He said, 'The night is far advanced. Won't you get fear to go home now?' Again that topic of fear! I said, 'No'. He stared at me and suddenly said 'What more can you do? It will be all right if you call on him once at the end of the day. The Master is all gracious!' He remained silent for a while and moving his head said again smilingly, 'It will do even if you don't call him!'

On hearing this I sat stunned. Since my initiation I had feared that if I failed to observe the particulars in detail, it would be a great omission on my part! Now I understood that Maharaj was trying to dispel that fear.

Some days back, he advised me not to salute the Holy Mother by only raising hands. 'She is the Mother of the universe. You should bend your head or salute her by falling prostrate on the ground,' he added.

During this time, another incident occurred one day. Maharaj was not keeping well. I decided to salute him from outside, and as I stood on the threshold, he uttered,

'Here he comes, he has come again!' and with a loud laugh said, 'Come, come in please. Why do you stand outside? Come in and join us in the gossip.' There were some monks in the room. Someone was massaging his leg. There were six or seven persons in all. He was talking on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Śrī Rāmacandra, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, and was speaking of their physical features. He told about Sri Ramakrishna's power of differentiating people. Then he started the story of Urvaśī. 'Urvaśī dances very nicely.' Saying this he showed us her dancing posture. The monks and I were rolling with laughter. Our loud laughter attracted one or two monks more, and all of us were laughing heartily. The loud laughter continued rending the room. After long, it was stopped. Then he looked at us and asked, 'How did you enjoy it?' The remnant of the joy of this day quite absorbed me for six or seven days. It makes me laugh even today. I wonder how a grave and solemn person like him could behave so childishly like us and amuse us so much!

January 14, 1938. Makara Saṅkrānti day. Swami Vijnanananda installed Sri Ramakrishna in the new shrine on this day. As I got no opportunity to salute him during the day, I went into his room in the afternoon. He asked me as usual, 'What's the news? When have you come?' I told him that I had come in the morning. Maharaj said, 'We have now the new shrine of the Master, and it has been dedicated to him. The duty on my part is finished. The Math belongs to you. You are to come here regularly. Now I depart.' 'When are you coming next?' I asked. 'I will come here once only and never more. I have to perform the "Tithipujā" of Sri Ramakrishna in the new shrine. I will come at that time and no more visit will be possible,' he replied.

We took the statement as mere words

for words' sake. But it proved to be shockingly true.

\* \* \*

February 27, 1938. It was a Sunday afternoon. I came to know that Swami Vijnanananda had come to the Math from Allahabad, and so I went to see him. When I visited him I noticed his legs had swollen very much. As I stood in front of him he very loudly said like a child, 'Here you are! How are you? See, the Master's birthday worship is on Friday. Sunday is the day for the public festival. You must come on both these days. The pick-pockets

of this place will surely relieve you of your purse. How would you enjoy it?' With these words he began to laugh and we also joined him in the laughter.

I attended the festival on both these days and it was a matter of surprise that I was really pick-pocketed on the public-festival day.

After this, I also visited the Math once or twice before his return to Allahabad. But I could not meet him due to his extremely ill health. Lastly, one day he appeared before the window of his room with his hands on the window-bar. And that was the last time we ever met!

## NOTES AND COMMENTS

*The Spiritual Warfare—II (Editorial)* : In the last instalment of this editorial some aspects of the spiritual warfare were discussed. In this instalment some more points will be seen in this connection. In his commentary on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* (I. iii. 1-28) and *Chāndogya* (I. ii. 1-9) *Upaniṣads*, Ācārya Śaṅkara has figuratively described this warfare as the fight between the gods and the demons. Thomas à Kempis calls it 'the working of Nature and Grace' in man. Besides him there are other Christian mystics who refer to this warfare in their teachings. Some right and wrong measures adopted by the aspirants to win this battle with the senses, have also been narrated in brief, along with some possible causes for failure in the fight.

*A Glance through Josephine MacLeod's Letters—II* : In this instalment have been compiled the remaining extracts from Miss Josephine MacLeod's letters concerning Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi, the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, the spread of the Ramakrishna Movement in India

and abroad, her love for India, her impressions about some great men of India, and India's struggle for independence. We also get some hitherto unknown information about Sister Nivedita and Sister Christine.

*Steps to Spiritual Experience* : The ultimate goal of all religions is attainment of perfection. But to be spiritually perfect is not an easy job. For that one has to undergo gradual spiritual evolution step by step for which there are some requisites. In this learned article Swami Bhashyananda, Minister in charge of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society, Chicago, has pointed out the requisites and the steps to spiritual experience, by giving some very apt quotations from the scriptures.

*Reminiscences of Swami Vijnanananda* : In the August and October 1976 numbers of the *Udbodhan*, the Bengali monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order, appeared these reminiscences written by Sri Rabindranath Chattopadhyaya, a householder disciple of Swami Vijnanananda. They were liked by many readers as they are full of



inspiration and illumination for the seekers of God. Swami Vijnanananda was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, and the President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission from March 1937 to April 1938. In order to make this valuable treasure available to the English-knowing readers, Sri

Dulal Chandra Chakravarty of the Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, translated the reminiscences into English. They are being published in the number with the kind permission of the author and the publisher. We are thankful to them as well as to the translator for their kindness.

## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

**THE UPANISHADS: TRANSLATED BY ANTHONY ELENJIMITAM**, Publishers : Aquinas Publications, Sadhana Hall, Mount Mary, Bandra, Bombay, 400 050, 1977, pp. 237, Price : Rs. 8/-.

The book is a sincere attempt, apparently the first by the author, to translate the Upanishads. It contains : *Isa*, *Katha*, *Mundaka*, and *Mandukya* with its *Karika*. The text of the Upanishads has been given in Devanagari, and has also been transliterated into English without using the diacritical marks. The Sanskrit verses have been freely translated and commented upon, without being literal, 'only to make the sense clearer.'

Works of this kind would satisfy more the author than the serious student. Those who have already read the Upanishads and the commentaries on them in the original, would hardly appreciate the present book. The innumerable spelling errors in the Sanskrit verses, the inaccuracies (e.g. *Isa*, I.i, and *Katha* I.iii.10), and the too free a translation (as of the *Isa Upanishad*), far from 'making the sense clearer', would disappoint many (e.g. pp. 141, 164, 169, 176, 182-3).

The commentary, too, is not lucid and vigorous, and fails to impart the sublime spirit and strength of the Upanishads, partly because the author has drawn on so many ideas from different religions, cultures, psychology, etc., presenting an unfamiliar blend (e.g. pp. 90, 132).

The Introduction alone seems to be fairly consistent, showing, in spite of the shortcomings in the commentary, that the author certainly has a good grasp of the subject, and of the spiritual life in particular. The shortcomings only reveal the necessity of a deeper acquaintance with the Vedantic literature, especially the penetrating commentaries of the Acharyas on the Upanishads.

Nevertheless, it must be pointed out that a reading of the translator's commentary, especially that on the *Katha* and parts of the *Mundaka*, without being particular about technicalities and

accepted forms of interpretation, draws one by its sincerity. This is bound to be so, because throughout the work the commentator has tried to be true to his own 'experiences', and therefore, authentic. The commentary occasionally contrasts the *rational* doctrines of the Upanishads with the *theological dogmas* of other religions (e.g. pp. 98-99, 107-08, 154-55, 162, 178, 221), and frequently refers to the fundamental concepts of different religions (e.g. p. 115) and the harmony of the basic teachings of all sages and mystics (pp. 231, 233, etc.). To the general mind, unfettered with systems of philosophy and theology, this provides a wealth of thought for rethinking one's attitude towards religion, and the relevance of the pure form of religion enshrined in the Upanishads to the problems of man in a shrinking world.

As some leading scientists, psychoanalysts, and sociologists frequently allude to Vedanta and the Upanishads these days, more and more persons are eager to study them. For such, many of whom shy away from Sanskrit, books like the one under review would be very useful to make a beginning in the study of these scriptures. To that extent this book is recommended. Every reading of the Upanishads, which Swami Vivekananda referred to as a 'mine of strength', is bound to deepen one's perspective on all aspects of life, and provide a profound ideological basis to meet the urgent need of rescheduling the priorities of our life.

BRAHMACHARI APURVA CHAITANYA

**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE PRESENT AGE: BY SWAMI SAT-PRAKASHANANDA**, Publishers : The Vedanta Society of St. Louis, 205 South Skinker Boulevard, St. Louis, Missouri 63105, U.S.A., 1978, pp. 250, Price : \$ 9.50.

It can be said, in a way, that the middle of the nineteenth century marks the dividing line



between the present and the past ages. Since then, arising out of a long process of more or less steady but slow development, with generally accepted values of life and ways of thought, new forces began to make their appearance in the social, economic, political, scientific, religious and philosophic fields, with a rationalistic outlook and strong overtones of materialism, putting great strain on the old framework of life of humanity, progressively lending to a breaking point with accelerated speed. This was especially so in the West, where the new forces had their epicentre, but their influence was felt widely in the East as well, where the Western nations had their empires. No more could man think in the old narrow terms, and was groping to reach out to a new broad and expansive framework of life and thought. 'The Modern Man was in search of a Soul' in harmony with the new developments.

The East had its own story of ups and downs, and had faced similarly revolutionary problems of life and thought in the past, albeit from a different angle, and had found solutions to momentous questions, according to its own genius, as to man's nature and his external and internal environment. This was especially so in India, the heart of the Eastern world. She had delved deep into the internal world to the source of all phenomena and found the ultimate unity and meaning of all existence in the Divine Self of Man and the Universe, realizing which man finds self-fulfilment. But in course of time, she had become too much engrossed in the internal spiritual Reality and neglected the external material verities which affect life in the world. The contact with the West made her aware of this glaring imbalance.

The comprehensive law of life is such that a felt need is always fulfilled at the proper time. Even as the need develops, the means of its fulfilment is already set in motion *pari passu*. At this juncture was needed a mutual exchange of the deliverances of the materialistic science and industrial-technology of the West with the spiritual science and yoga-technology of the East for the total well-being of humanity and for the emergence of a complete civilization out of the collective human experience. Providence chose Swami Vivekananda as an instrument to accomplish this great task, for in him the East and the West met and were well synthesized in a living dynamic manner. In Romain Rolland's words: 'He was the personification of the harmony of all human energy.'

In the pages of this book Swami Satprakashananda presents in a systematic manner Vivekananda's words and deeds, showing how he set about to accomplish his divinely ordained task

in the West and the East and gave to the movement a permanent shape and form in the twin institutions of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission to bring it to fruition. The book comprises the collection of the writings and speeches of the author on different occasions, furnished with an introduction as to the present need for the unification of the world and how it can be accomplished on the basis of the spiritual unity of mankind and solidarity of existence as expounded in the Vedanta and realized and taught by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

Chapter II, 'The Buddha, Sri Shankara, and Swami Vivekananda', shows how Vivekananda is an embodiment of the whole of India's spiritual and philosophical past and how he has welded it into a universal message of hope to mankind in the modern context by combining it with the achievements of the West. Chapter III gives an account of the 'Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Vedanta Movement' in West and East to deliver this Message of Hope, which was initiated by Vivekananda in the West by appearing as a great beacon-light on the platform of the World Parliament of Religions held at Chicago in 1893. Chapters IV and V delineate the comprehensive universal message of Vivekananda, quoting appropriate passages from his writings and speeches. His message covers all aspects of life, not merely the religious. As pointed out in the blurb: 'Swami Vivekananda interpreted the fundamental spiritual truths in modern terms, so as to enlighten mankind on the age-old problems of human existence. He built a bridge between the ancient and the modern, between the East and the West. In so doing he has fulfilled the vital need of the present-day world for a universal message and a comprehensive view of life.'

Chapter VI gives an account of Swami Brahmananda, the brother-disciple of Vivekananda, who consolidated the work of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission founded by Vivekananda for the furtherance of his objective of total reconstruction of humanity on spiritual foundations.

Though the book, being only a collection, is not exhaustive and does not cover all aspects of Vivekananda's versatile contributions, it sheds light on the central theme of his universal message of divinizing humanity. It is a welcome addition to such studies which are being increasingly undertaken with the growing recognition of the great significance of his life and message to humanity.

SWAMI MUKHYANANDA  
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**THE YOGA PHILOSOPHY OF PATANJALI :** TRANSLATED BY ANTHONY ELENJIMITTAM, Publishers : Allahabad Saint Paul Society, Allahabad-211 002, 1974, pp. 222, Price : Rs. 7/-.

Since the visit of Swami Vivekananda to the United States in 1893 and his exposition of Indian philosophy and Yoga, particularly Raja-Yoga, there has been a steadily growing interest in the Yoga Aphorisms of Patanjali (the ancient text on Yoga philosophy and psychology) among earnest spiritual aspirants all over the world.

The author of this new English translation has been immensely helped in his spiritual quest by the study and application of the Yoga philosophy of Patanjali, and so he has been moved to prepare this book to help 'other fellow-tramps in many countries and in many religions'.

The book contains the original Sanskrit Sutras in Devanagari script and their transliteration in Roman script. Then a literal English translation is given followed by a thought-provoking commentary in simple language. The author draws upon apt quotations of the saints and mystics of many religions to explain the aphorisms. This will make a ready appeal to modern youths saturated with Western notions. The author has also written a learned introductory chapter explaining the basic foundation of Yoga philosophy in the general context of Indian philosophy. A noteworthy feature of this book is the author's correct and much-needed emphasis on Brahmacharya (continence) in the practice of Yoga. He has written a very stimulating chapter on Brahmacharya, quoting Sri Ramakrishna and Mahatma Gandhi. The author has also given five helpful hints on the maintenance of Brahmacharya which the young reader will find very useful.

Students of Yoga philosophy will find this book of immense interest. It is a readable book of inspiring thoughts. A welcome addition to the Yoga literature.

PREM H. JOSHI

### SANSKRIT

**ABHIDHARMAKOSABHASYAM OF VASUBANDHU :** EDITED BY PROF. P. PRADHAN, AND REVISED 2ND EDITION BY DR. (MRS.) ARUNA HALDER, Publishers : K. P. Jayaswal Institute, Patna, 1975, pp. xxvii+174+525, Price : Rs. 42/-.

The first edition of the book under review was published in 1967. This edition by Prof. Pradhan was on the basis of the Sanskrit rendering of the Chino-Tibetan original version of the book, by Rahula Sankrityayana. However, the volume contained no annotation or critical analysis, but

only the text. The editor of this second edition has given a comparative analysis of the text, a critical Introduction, a Glossary of technical words used in the *Kosa*, a select Bibliography and Indexes. The Introduction is adapted from the second editor's own separate study, entitled 'Some Psychological Aspects of Early Buddhism as based on the *Abhidharmakosa* of Vasubandhu' (which is to be shortly published). The Introduction runs into 174 pages and is divided into four studied chapters. They take a general survey of the Buddhist literature, and the *Abhidharma* in particular. It deals with the 'Background and History of Buddhism', 'Development of Sarvāstivāda', and so on. It gives general remarks on the identity and scholarship of Vasubandhu, examines the Buddhist conception of the constituents, the *anāsrava-mārgaśatya* and such other important topics.

The text of the *Abhidharmakosabhāṣyam* is critically presented, with various readings noted at the foot of the pages.

The special features of the Introduction are a critical and comparative analysis of important terms and discussion. Thus, according to the Vaibhāṣika thinkers, *dharma* means 'Elements' or 'the Reals'. The editor very well distinguishes this conception of reals from the 'Reals' of the Vaiśeṣika school, adding that the 'Reals' of the latter are hypothetical, while for the Buddhists they are actual. Various aspects of *dharma* are studied; and here we have also a thorough classification of the *dhātus*. It has been shown that the *śabda*, according to the *Abhidharma*, does not differentiate between sound and word, or between a sentence and a gesture. The three strata of the phenomenal world in the Buddhist conception, namely, *kāmaloka* or *kāmadhātu* (the sensual sphere), *rūpaloka* or *rūpadhātu* (the material sphere) and the *ārūpyaloka* or *ārūpyadhātu* (the non-material sphere) are well explained. The concept of the *kāmadhātu* has been further compared with the concept of Freud relating to 'Id', 'Ego', and 'Super Ego'. The whole Introduction is marked by much important information, and is studied and analytical. In the topics of *indriya* and Personality, various faculties of the body are examined and their relationship with the *rūpaskandha* (the material formation) is discussed. We have also a studied exposition of the atomic make-up of the five sense-organs, according to the *Kosa*. Other topics like mind and matter, *prajñapti*, and the body-mind relationship are well explained.

The book is a welcome addition to the literature on Buddhism in particular, and Indian



philosophy in general. The price is quite reasonable. The printing and the get-up are attractive. The K. P. Jayaswal Institute has to be congratulated for adding one more important item

to its reputed publications.

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## NEWS AND REPORTS

### THE VEDANTA SOCIETY OF ST. LOUIS

REPORT: APRIL 1977—MARCH 1978

**Regular Services :** Regular weekly services were conducted every Sunday morning at 10-30 a.m. and every Tuesday evening at 8-00 p.m. in the Society's chapel throughout the year. Due to Revered Swami Satprakashananda's age and ailments, tape recordings of his previous lectures were played on Sunday mornings and Tuesday evenings until the arrival of Swami Chetanananda, the Assistant Minister. At that time the tape recordings were discontinued and Swami Chetanananda began lecturing every Sunday morning and every Tuesday evening. Besides the members and friends of the Society, many came from churches of different denominations, as well as students from educational centres including the universities, colleges, and schools. As often as possible Swami Satprakashananda (the Minister-in-charge) met the newcomers and answered their questions.

During the major part of the year, following the Sunday morning tape in the chapel, the devotees and friends regularly met Swami Satprakashananda in the library where he informally talked with them and answered their questions. On many occasions the Swami further expounded the topic of the service on that morning. Beginning in mid November, however, the Swami's physical drawbacks, due to age and ailments, prevented him from joining the devotees in the library. He was able to greet them following the services while seated in his room on the second floor. Beginning in March, Swami Chetanananda met with the devotees in the library following the Sunday service. Many devotees continued to greet the elderly Swami in his room following the service and then afterwards they joined others in the library for questions and discussions with Swami Chetanananda.

The Sunday morning school was regularly held for children who accompanied their parents attending the service. The Sunday afternoon class for young people was also held during the major part of the year. On the first Thursday of every month, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* was read aloud to the audience by several devotees alternately. The class was held in the Society's

library. After the arrival of Swami Chetanananda, the *Gospel* class was held every Thursday evening.

**Anniversaries :** The birthday of Sri Krishna, the Buddha, Sri Sankara, Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Premananda and Swami Shivananda were duly observed with morning devotions in the shrine. On the following Sunday or Tuesday special birth anniversary recordings were played in the chapel. Other festivals and anniversaries such as the worship of the Divine Mother Durga, and the Divine Mother Kali, Easter and Christmas were also humbly observed. On Sri Ramakrishna's birth anniversary a sumptuous Hindu dinner was served to about 110 guests after the service. On every other occasion refreshments were served to all present.

**Interviews, Guests and Visitors :** Throughout the year, including the summer recess, the Society had the privilege of receiving guests and visitors from different parts of the United States and other countries including India. Some came for the solution of their personal problems and had interviews with the Swami.

**Other Events :** On March 1, 1978, Swami Chetanananda arrived at the Society, having been assigned to the Vedanta Society of St. Louis as the Assistant Minister by the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math, Belur. The Swami had previously been the Assistant Minister of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, Hollywood. He began immediately the early morning worship in the shrine and the carrying on of all lectures and classes at the Society.

Two of Swami Satprakashananda's books were published by the Vedanta Society of St. Louis during the year under review : (1) *The Goal and the Way : the Vedantic Approach to Life's Problems*, and (2) *The Universe, God and God-Realization*.

The Society's library was well utilized by the members and friends and admirers. Mimeographed and printed sheets, folders and pamphlets on Vedantic teachings and also recent reviews of Swami Satprakashananda's books published by the Society were kept in the foyer and in the library for distribution among the audience and visitors.