



Prabuddha Bharata

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

INTEGRAL VISION OF VEDIC SEERS*

"Truth is one : sages call It by various names"

गणानां त्वा गणपतिं हवामहे
कविं कवीनामुपमश्रवस्तमं ।
ज्येष्ठराजं ब्रह्मणां ब्रह्मणस्पत
आ नः शृण्वन्नूतिभिः सीद सादनम् ॥

अम्बितमे नदीतमे देवितमे सरस्वति ।
अप्रशस्ता इव स्मसि प्रशस्तिमंब नस्कृधि ॥

आ नो दिवो बृहतः पर्वतादा
सरस्वती यजता गन्तु यज्ञं ।
हवं देवी जुजुषाणा घृताची
शग्मां नो वाचमुशती शृणोतु ॥

प्र णो देवी सरस्वती वाजेभिर्वाजिनीवती ।
धीनामवित्र्यवतु ॥

1. We invoke you, lord and leader of the heavenly hosts, the wise among the wise, endowed with incomparable fame, the supreme king, the lord of all Mantras. Hear us and come to us ready to protect us.¹

Rg-Veda 2.23.1

2. Best of mothers, best of rivers, best of goddesses, O Sarasvatī, we are, as it were,² without wealth. Dear Mother, give us supreme wealth.

Rg-Veda 2.41.16

3. From high heavens and from mountaintops may holy Sarasvatī come to us. May she, rich with oblations, accept our offering. Like a mother, may she listen to our praise.

Rg-Veda 5.43.11

4. May the goddess Sarasvatī, rich in power, protect us. May she awaken our intuitive faculties.³

Rg-Veda 6.61.4

* Four well-known prayers.

1. This is one of the most famous prayers addressed to the deity Gaṇapati or Ganesa who is worshipped before the worship of any other deity is begun. This prayer is supposed to remove all obstacles and fulfil all desires.

2. 'As it were' (*iva*) shows that the prayer is not for material wealth but for spiritual wealth.

3. *Dhī* is the intuitive faculty lying dormant in man.

TO OUR READERS

With this issue the *Prabuddha Bharata* or *Awakened India* enters the eighty-sixth year of its publication. On this happy occasion we send our greetings and best wishes to our readers, contributors, reviewers, publishers of books, advertisers, friends and sympathizers, and take this opportunity to express our gratitude to them all.

As one of the oldest religious periodicals now in India, as a symbol of Swami Vivekananda's vision of the future, as the official organ of the Ramakrishna Mission, as the mouthpiece of the Ramakrishna Movement, as the herald of India's spiritual resurgence, and as an active participator in the social transformation of the country, this journal has its own uniqueness. Nevertheless, its

message is universal and meant for people in all walks of life all over the world irrespective of the distinctions of caste, creed or wealth.

This journal was started by Swami Vivekananda with a threefold purpose: to awaken the divinity potentially present in all people, to perpetuate the eternal truths of Vedanta, and to give to human society a foundation of religious harmony, social equality and synthesis of science and religion. More than ever, at this critical juncture in history the actualization of these ideals has become an imperative need. We invite you to take part in this supremely important task by popularizing *Prabuddha Bharata* among your friends and relatives.

ABOUT THIS NUMBER

This month's EDITORIAL deals with the obstacles on the path of meditation and the beneficial effects of meditation.

Swami Gauriswaranandaji's REMINISCENCES OF THE HOLY MOTHER leads you to the universal mother-love and benediction that a great divine personality radiated in her life. The article is based on a private talk given by the author at Jayrambati in October 1979, which was tape-recorded and transcribed by Sri Keerti Kumar of Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala, Mysore. We are grateful to Sri Keerti Kumar for making available this precious document to a large number of devotees through the pages of this journal.

In the third and concluding instalment

of his Moscow lecture SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: HIS HUMANISM Swami Ranganathanandaji touches upon Swamiji's influence on Tolstoy and gives thought-provoking answers to some questions of contemporary importance.

Through its throbbing cadences the inspired poem THE EYE OF THE TIGER by Robert P. Utter gives you glimpses of the power and radiance of a mighty spiritual personality—Swami Vivekananda. The author is a retired teacher of English and Philosophy in the City College of San Francisco.

In the eleventh instalment of IS VEDANTA A PHILOSOPHY OF ESCAPE Dr. Vinita Wanchoo tries to remove some of the misconceptions about asceticism and lack of emphasis on ethics in Hinduism.

MEDITATION : ITS CONDITIONS AND FULFILMENT—II

(EDITORIAL)

Obstacles to meditation

Every path of life is beset with difficulties. No man can achieve anything great in any field without overcoming obstacles. 'The heights by great men reached and kept/
Were not attained by sudden flight/But they, while their companions slept,/Were toiling upward in the night.' These lines of Longfellow which every schoolboy knows are nowhere more true than in spiritual life.

To a person who has turned away from the struggles and turmoils of worldly life and taken to religious life in the hope of quickly and easily attaining spiritual fulfilment, the presence of so many obstacles on his spiritual path can be most discouraging. But all those who achieved success in spiritual life did it by overcoming obstacles. Even great prophets like Christ and Buddha had to face 'temptations'. Sri Ramakrishna's practice of Tāntrik disciplines perhaps meant the same thing.

In the Indian religious tradition human afflictions have been classified into three groups. An unfavourable environment or unsatisfactory job, unexpected calamities, psychic disturbances and similar troubles originating from unknown causes are called *ādhidaivika*. Difficulties created by other people or other living beings come under the *ādhibhautika* group. And those obstacles created by oneself are called *ādhyātmika*. Of these, the first two are more or less beyond the control of the aspirant and are regarded as results of his past karma. Only those internal obstacles which he himself creates by his wrong attitudes and actions are within his control. And in spiritual life these are the only ones that matter. Once these are overcome, external obstacles will become powerless to impede spiritual progress.

What are these internal obstacles? Every religious tradition in India has its own list of them. The *Sāṅkhya Kārikā* enumerates about a hundred such obstacles! It, however, divides these into three groups: false knowledge (*viparyaya*), incapacity (*aśakti*) and satisfaction (*tuṣṭi*).¹ False knowledge is of five types: ignorance, egoism, attraction, hatred and clinging to life. These when further subdivided come to about sixty-two types of false knowledge according to Sāṅkhya reckoning.

The natural incapacities of man are said to be twenty-eight. There is no need to go into their details but every spiritual aspirant must be aware of his limitations and weaknesses, though he should not brood over them. Physical strength does not necessarily mean mental strength, and spiritual power is something quite different from mental power. In order to get a true spiritual experience one needs spiritual power, and if one does not have it, one should first of all be aware of it. And then one should pray to God who is the ocean of power.

The third type of obstacle is satisfaction (*tuṣṭi*). Under this category are included, not gross sense-pleasures which the average aspirant is supposed to have overcome, but subtle delights and consolations which prevent the aspirant from going ahead full tilt. The *Sāṅkhya-Kārikā* speaks of nine types of satisfaction. One is the satisfaction produced by early spiritual progress or minor spiritual experiences. This is one of the commonest obstacles. Many aspirants struggle hard and practise meditation and *japa* with great earnestness for some years. But after attaining a certain degree of purity and calmness of mind their interest in spiritual practice cools down. There are

1. Īśvarakṛṣṇa, *Sāṅkhya-Kārikā*, 46-51.

others who remain contented with theoretical knowledge derived from books. A second type of satisfaction may come from certain external changes like carrying a *kamaṇḍalu* (water pot), wearing ochre robes, maintaining a beautiful shrine, keeping a stock of spiritual books, consuming *prasāda* (sacramental food), etc. In fact, many aspirants just remain satisfied with these. Another kind of satisfaction comes from the false faith in time (*kāla*) and fate (*bhāgya*). No doubt spiritual progress takes time, and there is an element of uncertainty in getting spiritual experiences. But to think that everything will happen gradually in course of time² or that nothing happens without luck is only an attitude of escape and a great obstacle to spiritual progress. The *Sāṃkhya-Kārikā* also warns against the false satisfaction produced by misconceived and premature renunciation of work. External renunciation and austerity can create a sense of achievement and the feeling that nothing more is necessary in spiritual life.³ These lower satisfactions and fleeting fulfilments neutralize the soul's true aspiration for supreme bliss and highest fulfilment. Sri Ramakrishna illustrates this point through a simple parable. Merchants keep big heaps of grain in their warehouses. Around each heap they strew some puffed rice. Rats eat these the whole night and go away satisfied forgetting that one seer of rice produces ten seers of puffed rice.

A strikingly similar list of obstacles to spiritual progress is given by the great Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross, who had wide experience in directing souls, in his book *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*. While discussing the nature of higher mystical experience he asks in another

work of his: 'Here comes the question, why is it that so few ever attain to this state? The reason is that in this marvellous work which God Himself begins, so many are weak, shrinking from trouble and unwilling to endure the least discomfort or mortification, or to labour with constant patience. . . . If thou hast been unwilling to make war against the peace and pleasures of the earth, thine own sensuality, but rather seekest comfort and tranquility on it, how wilt thou stand against the more interior trials of the spirit?'⁴

Patañjali in his *Yoga-Sūtra* mentions nine main obstacles (*antarāya*) on the path of meditation.⁵ The first one is disease (*vyādhi*). Yogis believe that disease is caused by an imbalance in the flow of *prāṇa* or life-energy. The second obstacle is lack of fervour or unwillingness to intensify meditation (*styāna*). This may be caused by the presence of conflicts in the depths of the mind or by the lack of proper discrimination. Many spiritual aspirants do not take meditative life seriously because of their ignorance of the value of time and the evanescence of life. Says St. Augustine, 'God has promised forgiveness to your repentance, but He has not promised tomorrow to your procrastination.'⁶

The third obstacle is doubt (*saṁśaya*). Doubt is of two types. One is an absence of faith in the eternal verities of religion or an attitude of suspicion towards everyone. It is about those people who have such attitude that the *Gītā* says, 'The ignorant,

4. St. John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love*, trans. Lewis (London: Thomas Baker, 1910).

5. Patañjali, *Yoga-Sūtra*, 1.30.

6. Also cf.

Procrastination is the thief of time.
Year after year it steals, till all are fled,
And to the mercies of a moment leaves
The vast concerns of an eternal scene.

Edward Young (1683-1765)

2. This is not what the well-known *Gītā* passage कालेनात्मनि विन्दति (4.38) really means.

3. संन्यासग्रहणमात्रेण नरनारायणो भवेत् ।

the faithless, the doubting person is ruined. There is no happiness for him nor any hope in his world or the next.⁷ The second type of doubt is a questioning or analytical attitude, characteristic of an enquiring mind. It is based on faith in certain fundamental truths. Spiritual life is a quest, a seeking, and without questioning and enquiry one is likely to follow the wrong path. Regarding this second type of doubt about meditative life Swami Vivekananda says, 'Doubts will arise in the mind about the truth of the science, however strong one's intellectual conviction may be, until certain peculiar psychic experiences come, as hearing or seeing at a distance, etc.'⁸

The fourth obstacle is carelessness (*pramāda*). In spiritual life carelessness may be of different types. Carelessness in guarding the senses, in reading, in talking or in choosing one's company can tarnish the pure mind. Most of the impurities of the mind are acquired through carelessness. Carelessness about regularity of meditation leads to the 'accumulation of dust on the spiritual feet', as St. Francis of Assisi used to say. To an aspirant who is somewhat advanced, carelessness means forgetfulness of one's true self, to remain without self-awareness. A true seeker constantly remains alert. Even in sleep he maintains pockets of awareness. To a devotee of God carelessness means not always remembering God. According to a beautiful verse popular among Vaiṣṇavas, 'Prosperity is not prosperity, calamity is not calamity. The real calamity is to forget Viṣṇu, and the real wealth is remembrance of Nārāyaṇa.'⁹ God alone is our true wealth, and to forget Him is our greatest misfortune.

The fifth obstacle to meditation is lethargy (*ālasya*). This means heaviness or inertia of the body and mind, the preponderance of *tamas* caused by too much sleep or food or fatigue. The next obstacle is clinging to sense-enjoyments (*avirati*). A person may give up sense-objects externally but internally his will may be still attached to them. Detachment of will, giving up all *saṁkalpas*, is necessary in order to get absorbed in meditation. Yet another obstacle is false spiritual experiences like delusion, hallucination, morbid imagination, etc. These are the result of trying to deceive oneself and God. A spiritual aspirant being a seeker of Truth must be truthful not only in external conduct but also in meditation. Spiritual life built on false experiences is like a house of cards.

To those aspirants who have attained some progress in spiritual life the eighth and ninth obstacles in the scheme of Patañjali are important. These are inability to get a true spiritual experience or to attain a higher plane of consciousness (*alabdha-bhūmikatva*) and inability to retain the experience or plane after attaining it (*anavasthitatva*). In a sincere spiritual aspirant who is struggling hard in the path of meditation, these obstacles could create serious difficulties. When he finds that his path of progress is obstructed he may be overcome by sorrow (*duhkha*), depression (*daurmanasya*), palpitation of the heart or shaking of limbs (*angamejayatva*) and irregular breathing (*śvāsa-praśvāsa*)—says Patañjali.¹⁰ During the early stages of spiritual life most aspirants have to face some of these reactions.

The root cause

The root cause of all our troubles, the ultimate source of all obstacles, is ignorance

7. *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 4.40.

8. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1977), vol. 1, p. 221.

9. संपदो नैव संपदो विपदो नैव विपदः ।

विपद् विस्मरणं विष्णोः संपन्नाराधनस्मृतिः ॥

10. *Yoga-Sūtra*, 1.31.

(*ajñāna* or *avidyā*). It is because of ignorance that we do not see the light of Ātman and realize our true nature. This is an important and universally accepted doctrine of Indian thought. There is, of course difference of opinion among the various schools regarding the nature of this ignorance. The dualist schools believe that ignorance is only insufficiency of knowledge. According to Rāmānuja the real nature of the self and the Supreme Self (God) can be known only by the expansion of a power of the soul which he calls *dharmabhūta-jñāna*. In ordinary people this knowledge exists in a contracted state and this is the cause of ignorance. The Advaita schools, on the other hand, believe that ignorance is not mere absence of knowledge but 'something more', though what exactly this is cannot be defined. It not only covers the Ātman like a screen but also produces this illusory phenomenal universe.

Whatever be the nature of ignorance, it is a part of man's existential experience. The Upaniṣads, the *Gītā* and other Hindu scriptures unanimously and emphatically declare that the real nature of man is the eternal, immutable, self-luminous Ātman. And yet owing to ignorance, the vast majority of people are unable to realize this. Ignorance separates the 'I', the ego., from the Ātman and it is this self-alienation, this self-exile, that is the root cause of all our troubles. The alienated ego identifies itself with the mind and the body and the world and its objects. This identification leads to the experience of pleasure and pain, and from experience are born the three main attitudes or reactions: love, hatred, fear, which leave their impressions or *saṃskāras* deep in the mind. These past *saṃskāras* determine our present and future thought and actions. What we have called 'obstacles' are all produced by *saṃskāras*.

If we try to remove our obstacles one by one by destroying each *saṃskāra* separately,

it may take a very long time. And we may never succeed at all, for by the time we have destroyed one *saṃskāra* we would have collected ten more through ignorance. We should therefore try to destroy the root cause of all *saṃskāras* and obstacles, namely, ignorance. Ignorance covers the Ātman like a screen. When the screen is lifted even partially, the brilliant light of the Ātman streams forth. When the soul realizes its real nature it ceases to identify itself with the mind, the body and the external world, and all our misery comes to an end. This is the spiritual solution to the problems of life. There is no other lasting solution.¹¹

So then, the fundamental problem of spiritual life is, how to remove ignorance from the soul. Instead of worrying about their limitations and obstacles if spiritual aspirants gave all their attention to the problem of ignorance, they would save so much time and energy. To know the difference between real knowledge (the light of Ātman) and ignorance and to value that true knowledge above everything else—this is the first lesson to be learned in spiritual life.

Overcoming obstacles

Ignorance is the ultimate source of all obstacles. The sole purpose of meditation is to remove that ignorance, to lift the curtain covering the Ātman. However, this cannot be accomplished in a day. It needs persistent struggle for months and years. And in this struggle no quality of mind is more necessary than an unshakable faith. By faith is meant not a mere belief but a temper of the will. Faith is the orientation of the will towards the ultimate goal. Let the body, the senses, emotions, desires, reason and the mind itself move in any way

¹¹. See Vyāsa's commentary on *Yoga-Sutra*, 4.11.

they like, but as long as the will is firmly directed towards the goal, the aspirant will move forward in spite of all obstacles. To keep the will resolutely fixed for ever towards an unknown reality is not possible unless it is enlightened and guided by faith. The creation of such an enlightened, goal-oriented will is the first step in overcoming obstacles. This is what Patañjali means when he says, 'In order to overcome obstacles one should practise one-pointedness.'¹²

Once the will is turned inward towards its source, the Ātman, the rest is all in the hands of the Divine. Human effort can go only so far; beyond that everything will take place according to the laws of the spiritual world. The purpose of prayer and worship is to detach the will from desires and turn it Godward. The purpose of meditation is to fix the will at the door of the inner chamber. This chamber is the heart or *buddhi* where shines the light of the Ātman. The door to it remains closed in most people. Meditation is only a continuous knocking at this door. But it is the Divine who opens the door. This is the meaning of revelation. Except Buddhism and Jainism all religions hold that true spiritual experience is a revelation. It is not something created by human effort but something new and spontaneous. It is the unseen hand of the Divine that lifts the curtain covering the soul. This is what Śrī Kṛṣṇa means when He says that to those who worship him constantly with love He gives '*buddhi-yoga*'.¹³ He explains this term, 'Out of mere compassion for them, I, dwelling in their self, destroy the darkness of ignorance by the luminous lamp of knowledge.'¹⁴ By removing ignorance which

is the primary cause of all obstacles, divine Grace provides the best means of overcoming obstacles.

For those who are unable to turn their minds constantly towards God and are unable to establish a direct contact with the Divine, the only way is to seek the company of holy men who act as channels of Grace. Like an experienced traveller, a spiritually advanced person knows a great deal about the unseen world of the Spirit. A little guidance from such a person gives the aspirant the understanding and progress which it will otherwise take years to attain by trial and error.

Effects of meditation

Meditation appears to many people as nothing but waging a war with the mind. Not a few of them give it up altogether as a futile exercise. This happens because they attempt meditation too early. Meditation, as was pointed out earlier, is a higher degree of concentration which one attains as a matter of course after practising preliminary spiritual disciplines like prayer and worship, self-enquiry or selfless work. These preliminary disciplines detach the will from sense-objects and turn the mind Godward. Then meditation becomes easy and effortless. True meditation is a silent, peaceful flow of a stream of unbroken thought towards an object at a higher centre of consciousness.

Real meditation gradually produces great changes in the aspirant. The first visible sign is that his mind becomes more inward (*antarmukha*). This condition is quite different from what psychologists call introversion, which is a morbid withdrawal of mind caused by daydreaming or brooding over the past. True inwardness or interiority is the ability to focus consciousness at a level deeper than the ordinary empirical mind. This becomes possible be-

^{12.} तत् प्रतिषेधार्थमेकतत्त्वाभ्यासः । *Yoga-Sūtra*, 1.32.

^{13.} *Gītā*, 10.10.

^{14.} *Ibid.*, 10.11.

cause the aspirant begins to feel a new type of joy welling up from within which is higher than sense-pleasure. This joy of meditation refreshes and invigorates the mind greatly.

The second change is the development of a higher centre of consciousness within. It is like the emergence of an island in a rough sea. The aspirant's mind may not be completely calm. Ideas, images, emotions and desires may be moving in it, but these do not affect the centre of silence which he discovers within. Normally when you sit alone listening, you hear the various sounds somewhere *within* you, for the sounds reach down deep into you. But when you have discovered the centre of silence, you will hear them *outside* you. The horn of a car, the cry of a baby, the shouting of people, the clear note of a bird—you hear them all in their respective places, these sounds do not penetrate into your soul. In a remarkable passage the *Gītā* describes this as a process of 'externalizing the external experiences'.¹⁵ This state of alertness or awareness sometimes comes to some people, especially adolescents, suddenly, naturally and spontaneously. But they are not able to retain it for long. Meditation enables you to acquire and retain such a state as a permanent possession.

Man has a tendency to internalize sounds, sights, incidents, people, problems, worries—everything. Meditation enables you to keep all these things out, and gives you a centre of peace within. 'It is like closing the gate of the outer court in a house,' says Sri Ramakrishna. '... At the beginning of meditation the objects of the senses appear before the aspirant. But when meditation becomes deep, they no longer bother him. They are left outside.'¹⁶

Meditation produces a third change in the aspirant: it gives him greater self-knowledge. He begins to understand more clearly the workings of his mind: how images appear, how desires rise, how the will is swayed by instincts, how egoism causes misery, and so on. He also begins to be aware of his higher self, though vaguely. A crystal becomes red if a red flower is kept near it, it becomes blue if a blue flower is kept near it. In deep meditation the mind becomes like a crystal, a block of glass, and the aspirant clearly sees how the self, the mind and the objects are inter-related.¹⁷

Self-knowledge gives greater self-control. As the will gets detached from desires, one's will-power increases and the passions are kept in check. Then the aspirant leads a less impulsive life. He gains an inner poise and, if he gets upset once in a while, he recovers his balance sooner than others. He becomes more selfless and more sympathetic towards others.

Self-control leads to greater coordination between the body and the mind, between the mind and the senses and between reason and emotion. As a result the aspirant's life gets a sense of direction and purpose. He is able to handle his day-to-day problems with greater confidence. He pays undivided attention to his work, and his efficiency, concentration and memory improve enormously. He needs less leisure and learns how to use his leisure profitably for higher development.

Meditation has another important benefit. The object of meditation, the *Iṣṭa Devatā*, begins to influence the mind of the aspirant in a subtle way. If you meditate on Jesus, Buddha, Ramakrishna or any Deity, your mind gradually absorbs their divine attributes without your being aware of it. Their qualities percolate into your mind and im-

15. स्पर्शान् कृत्वा बहिर्बाह्यान् *Gītā*, 5.27.

16. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1974), p. 722.

17. Cf. *Yoga-Sūtra*, 1.41.

part a subtle divine aura to your inner self. Meditation on a Deity is thus a process of self-divinization. How rarely people understand this !

However, the most important effect and the real end of meditation is spiritual illumination. Meditation attains fulfilment only when it culminates in illumination. So we now turn to a brief discussion of this important subject.

Prajñā or meditative illumination

According to Patañjali *dhyāna*, which forms the seventh step in his scheme of yoga, when practised properly leads to *samādhi*. However, the word *samādhi* is used in Vedāntic literature to indicate a very high degree of spiritual illumination. And it is in this sense that the term finds usage in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. These highest states are beyond the reach of the average spiritual aspirant. What is really within the reach of most aspirants is a kind of mystic illumination or vision. Meditation directly leads to it. To avoid confusion with higher *samādhi*, we call this lower experience by the term *prajñā* or 'meditative illumination'.

In order to understand the nature of this experience we must first of all understand the difference between *dhyāna* and *samādhi* according to yoga. *Samādhi* is not just the prolongation of *dhyāna*: there is a qualitative difference between the two. *Dhyāna* or meditation has three components: the subject, the object and the meditative effort. The subject is the ego, the object is usually the image of a Deity, and the meditative effort is the exercise of will needed to connect the other two like a violin string. As long as the will remains steady no distracting thought can enter the mind. Mental energy flows uniformly in one and the same direction.

When this kind of meditation is practised

for a long time along with purity of mind (especially *brahmacarya*), some transformations begin to take place in consciousness. First of all, behind the ego a new light begins to appear. It is the light of the Ātman reflected through the *buddhi*. This light illumines the Image on which the aspirant is meditating. Secondly, the meditative effort (exercise of will) becomes unnecessary, for the luminous Image now fills the whole mind. Patañjali's description of this experience is 'Then the object alone shines' (*tadeva arthamātra-nirbhāsam*).¹⁸ The aspirant's 'I' gets riveted onto the Image and he becomes absorbed in the experience. He directly encounters the Image. It is like suddenly encountering a mysterious phenomenon when you become dumbfounded and can think of nothing else.

Ordinary meditation is like looking at the small, dark pictures in a strip of cinematographic film. When, however, the film reel is put in a projector and a powerful light falls on it, the images suddenly become bright and appear to be living. And the spectators get absorbed in the show, forgetting everything else. Meditative illumination is something like that. Sri Ramakrishna has described this experience in his characteristically simple way as follows: 'Haven't you seen a theatrical performance? The people are engaged in conversation, when suddenly the curtain goes up. Then the entire mind of the audience is directed to the play. The people don't look at other things any longer. *Samādhi* is to go within like that. When the curtain is rung down, people look round again. Just so, when the curtain of Māyā falls, the mind becomes externalized.'¹⁹

18. तदेवार्थमात्रनिर्भासं स्वरूपशून्यमिव समाधिः
Yoga-Sūtra, 3.3.

19. Gospel, p. 383.

Swami Brahmananda describes this experience with great clarity: 'When the mind becomes absorbed, a shining light is first experienced in a mystic vision. With this vision, there comes a kind of higher and nobler joy, and the mind is reluctant to give up this joy, and move forward. But if the aspirant goes further, the vision of the light will be concentrated into the form of the Chosen Ideal and the mind become merged in His consciousness. Sometimes again in his mystic experience, the aspirant may hear the long-drawn-out sacred word Om, and his mind becomes absorbed in that.'²⁰

Every spiritual aspirant must have some idea of the first true spiritual experience he can hope to get. He does not meet the Deity face to face right away. What he can hope to see is his mental Image of the Deity illumined by an inner light. This light is the light of the Ātman. So the first spiritual experience is really the experience of one's higher self. It is an illumination of the heart or *buddhi*. It is this experience that we have termed 'meditative illumi-

nation' or *prajñā*. It is known by different names in different religious traditions.

This is the goal of meditation. When it is attained, meditation fulfils itself. This, however, does not mean the end of spiritual striving. On the contrary, true spiritual life only begins with a direct experience of one's real self. There are higher experiences like the direct perception of the real nature of the Deity, the infinite Spirit, etc. which come later on. Meditation only leads the soul up to the door of the Jīvātmā (the individual spirit) and stops there. Beyond lies the boundless realm of the Paramātmā (the Supreme Spirit).

Conclusion

Meditation to become effective must fulfil certain conditions. In the path of meditation certain obstacles appear which can be overcome through one-pointed effort and divine Grace. When practised properly, meditation enables a student to become a better student, a businessman to become a better businessman, an engineer to become a better engineer—and a sincere spiritual aspirant to see the inner light.

(Concluded)

²⁰. *The Eternal Companion* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1971), p. 365.

REMINISCENCES OF THE HOLY MOTHER

SWAMI GAURISWARANANDA

It was the year 1914. I was studying in Class VII, and was a frequent visitor to Kamarpukur, the birth-place of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna's two nephews who lived there, Sri Ramlal-dada and Sri Shibu-dada, loved me like a child. Often I helped them in plucking flowers, bilva leaves, durva grass and in making sandal-paste for *pūjā*. Despite this intimacy I

never knew where Jayrambati was or where Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi lived. Then one day I requested Swami Jnananandaji and Gopesh-dada (now Swami Saradeshanandaji) to take me to Holy Mother. They fixed the coming Saturday, for Saturdays were half-days at our school, leaving us free in the afternoon.

On my way to Jayrambati the following

Saturday, I was thinking that I would see Mother seated on a beautifully decorated throne, with *sevikās* (female attendants) fanning her with *cāmar* (yak-tail fan). But when I was taken into the Mother's old house I was shockingly disappointed, for I found only a small room, built of mud with straw thatching. There wasn't even cement on the floor. Besides, I was astonished to see that Mother was squatting, sweeping the floor with a broom all by herself. I whispered into the ears of Swami Jnananandaji and Gopesh-da, 'What is this? Is there nobody to help Mother even in these little things?'

'You'll know everything soon,' they replied.

Seeing us Mother said, 'Wait, my boys, till I sweep the floor and wash my hands.' 'You see,' she continued, 'this broom cleans the whole world, but when we touch it we have to wash our hands!'

After her work was over Mother sat down and we saluted her by making pranams. Swami Jnananandaji did so first, next, Gopesh-da. Mother knew both of them as they were frequent visitors. I was the only newcomer. They hadn't yet introduced me to Mother. But with Mother what was the need for an introduction and all such formalities? So, when I saluted her she touched my head with both her hands and enquired who I was. Swami Jnananandaji and Gopesh-da said that I was a student of Badan Ganj High School. Immediately Mother said, 'Oh, you are Prabodh's student?' I wondered how she came to know my Headmaster. A little later I understood. In those days there was no educated person in or around Jayrambati. Among the women only a very few could write their name in Bengali. Being an educated person my Headmaster Prabodh Chandra Chattopadhyaya must be very well-known in the whole of that area, I thought. A few days later I also learned

that both my Headmaster and his wife were initiated disciples of Holy Mother. While Mother was talking to my friends, I simply looked at her. She too often looked at me, and with such tenderness that it was a wonderful experience: I felt as if affection was touching my heart.

At the end of our meeting Mother gave us a little *prasād*, which we ate and then washed our hands. When we were leaving she said, 'My dear boys, come again.' As I prostrated she again placed both her hands on my head. An electric shock ran through my system as she touched my head. The feeling persisted even on reaching home. The magnetic words 'come again' seemed to be constantly drawing me towards her. But how to go to Jayrambati immediately? I had my classes. To be absent from school meant punishment, though the teachers loved and taught us very well. So, I had to wait for the next Saturday when school closed at 1.00 in the afternoon. I walked the six miles from school to Jayrambati and Mother was extremely happy to see me there again.

I started visiting and staying with Mother every weekend. After school on Saturdays I would carry a piece of cloth, a towel and a few books for my study. Mother became very fond of me and I began helping her in sweeping the floor, cleaning the vessels, putting the fire in the oven for cooking, dressing the vegetables, kneading the dough and rolling it into chapatis, and making betel-leaf rolls for chewing. I also helped her in preparing for her *pūjā* by plucking flowers, bilva leaves, tulsi leaves, and durva grass, and by making sandal-paste and spreading the *āsana* (carpet to sit on) for *pūjā*.

As weeks passed by there gradually arose in me the desire to receive spiritual initiation from Mother. Despite the intimacy I was afraid of broaching the subject directly,

for fear whether she would accept me. So I approached a lady devotee who used to serve Mother and stay with her. She was four or five years younger than Mother.

'Why not?' she said, 'Mother will surely be glad to initiate you. Go and ask her yourself.' When I expressed my fears the lady said, 'No, Mother loves you very much. If you don't come here on a Saturday she remembers you twenty times. She asks everybody, "What has happened to Rammoy [my premonastic name]? Has he forgotten his Mother? Is he not well? Is he down with malaria?" A little later she says, "No, he is an intelligent boy. Perhaps he might be preparing his lessons. So, he has forgotten his Mother." Again after some time she says "There may be some examination coming up. So he must be preparing for it." Therefore, you see, she loves you very dearly. She will not refuse if you ask her for initiation.'

When I told Mother of my desire she readily agreed, saying, 'Oh, you want initiation? All right, sit down.' Apart from the *āsana* used by Mother there used to be two more in the room. If husband and wife came for initiation, I used to spread two *āsanas*, when a single lady or gentleman came I spread only one. So now I took one of them and spread it in front of her. After saluting her I sat on it. Mother took some water from her *pūjā* vessel and began to sprinkle it on my body with the words, 'Let all the sins committed by you in your previous births be washed away. Let all the sins committed by you knowingly or unknowingly in this life be washed away. May you become pure.' In this way she purified me.

Uttering the name of a Deity she asked me, 'Is it not your *Iṣṭa* (Chosen Deity)?' I was just a boy. Thinking that I might not understand the meaning of the word '*Iṣṭa*' she explained the meaning. 'Is it not that you love this Deity most and have the

greatest regard and respect for Him? Shall I give you the *mantra* of this Deity?'

'You're quite right. From my childhood I have had the greatest love and regard for Him. But after reading the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, I now think that all gods and goddesses are one and the same. So if I want the *mantra* of any other Deity, will you kindly give me it?'

'All right, tell me.'

When I told her the name of my *Iṣṭa* she said, 'Will you be happy if I give you that *mantra*?'

'Yes.'

She then initiated me with the holy *mantra* of my new *Iṣṭa* and guided me how to keep count of its repetition 108 times on my fingers. At the end of the instruction she advised me, 'Don't differentiate between the Guru and the *Iṣṭa*. Know that they are one and the same.'

My desire being fulfilled, I prostrated before her in the usual way by touching her feet with my hand. 'No, not that way. All these days you had to salute me in that manner. But today you touch your head to my feet,' she said. I was overjoyed at this opportunity and followed her bidding.

When I came out of the room Swami Jnananandaji who was standing outside asked, 'Did you give *Guru-dakṣiṇā* (the fee for the Teacher) to Mother?'

'No, nothing. I have no money with me.' (During those days there was no need for me to carry any money. I walked all the way from my village to Jayrambati and walked back. There was no proper road and no bus in that part of the country. Besides, six miles of walking was nothing for me.)

He then opened his kerchief and gave me a rupee coin, half-rupee coin, quarter-rupee coin, two-anna bit, one-anna bit—all that he had with him. Maybe it totalled about two or three rupees. I didn't count.

When I entered Mother's room again, she

asked, 'Why did you come again? What do you want?'

I placed the coins before her.

'Where did you get all these from?'

'Jnan-da gave me.'

'All right, give it to me.'

Smilingly, she received the *dakṣiṇā* and said, 'My dear boy, you are very young. You must be hungry now. Come, have a little tiffin with me.' So we sat, Mother by my side with puffed rice, and she gave me also puffed rice. We began to eat, and while eating she would give me of the puffed rice from her own plate. I didn't ask her to do so, but she was giving me *prasād* on her own initiative. She said, 'I have become old. My teeth are shaky. I can't chew well. You take more.'

Whenever her shaky teeth caused her a lot of trouble, she would just pull them out. One day a daughter-in-law (Mother addressed her women devotees as daughters-in-law and I used to call them sisters-in-law) saw Mother throwing out a tooth. She picked it up and, washing it well, kept it for herself. Mother asked her what she would do with it.

'I'll keep it,' said the daughter-in-law.

'No, no, throw it away. It's from my mouth. It's spoiled,' urged Mother.

While combing the Mother's hair the same daughter-in-law used to preserve the fallen hair. At this Mother said, 'Why do you keep all these things? Everyday I am throwing them away.'

Nowadays it is very difficult to get these precious relics. Once Mother herself gave me some fallen hair, the nail clippings of her toes, the dust of her feet, her footprint and so many things. Another time she purposefully took one big piece of sugar candy and, touching it to her tongue, gave it to me saying, 'Keep it with you. When I am away in Calcutta, you can break it into small pieces and use them as *prasād* whenever you need.'

One day two ladies were fighting over a footprint of Mother's, each claiming that it belonged to her. At this Mother smiled and said, 'I am still alive. Why do you fight for my footprint? Get a long piece of cloth and bring some colour.' This was done, and the cloth was spread on a piece of wood on the floor. The colour was applied to her feet, and then she stood on the cloth and made her footprint. Twenty prints were taken in this way. 'Now, take one each,' she said. She asked that the best print be given to her.

'Why? what will you do with your own footprint?' the devotees asked.

'No, it's not for me. I'll give it to my Rammoy. He's a small boy. He'll like it,' Mother replied.

This best of her footprints was given to me when I came the following Saturday, and she asked me to keep it. All these mementos I kept in a steel trunk in my room. Then once I went to Belur Math for a few days, when a thief broke into my room and took away my trunk along with all its precious contents. He must have thrown away all the precious relics, using only the money and clothes.

I'm a little dwarfish. This proved an advantage to me in those days, for though I was about seventeen years old, people used to mistake me for a boy of nine or ten! So, many women-devotees never complained when I moved freely in Mother's house. Besides, Mother loved me very dearly, which gave me still greater freedom.

Mother suffered from arthritis. She allowed me an exclusive privilege: to apply medicated oil to her knees and feet and massage them. Oh, what lovely feet she had! When she used to go to Dakshineswar to meet Sri Ramakrishna she had to walk seventy-five miles barefoot and walk back to Jayrambati in the same way. In Jayrambati also she used to move about barefoot. But still the soles of her feet

were very soft and a little reddish like lotuses.

Mother was in the habit of wearing a veil. She never appeared before men without covering herself properly and veiling her face. She addressed Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda, Swami Saradananda and other direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna as her own children, but still she didn't appear before them without the veil. They would thus never see her full face. One day after saluting Mother Swami Saradananda came out of her room and said, 'She is wearing her veil as if I am her father-in-law.' But as I was a small boy she would not veil her face in my presence, and I saw her full face.

Once a lady and her husband came to Mother from Pabna. She was always veiling herself before me. At this Mother told her, 'Look, daughter-in-law, you are feeling modest before Rammoy. He is not my boy, he is my girl.' From then onwards this sister-in-law kept her face unveiled before me.

One day I saw this same sister-in-law rolling three chapatis one over the other simultaneously. I sat down and requested her to teach me how to do it. 'Oh, it's nothing. Spread a little flour (*āṭā*) and then put a ball of the kneaded dough on top and press it. Then put a little more flour over that and put another ball and press it. Again put a little flour and a ball on that. Finally putting a little flour over the last ball, go on rolling. All the three chapatis will move. You needn't touch them by hand. When the rolling is over you can separate them easily.' I started practising the new technique, but when I began to roll them the three became one ! Then I realized that the flour was not adequate. When I tried again, I got the three chapatis to stay separate, but they were like the map of India ! I had to practise a lot to make chapatis which were perfectly round.

The devotees coming from outside Jayrambati were fed in Mother's house. When there were more male devotees Mother would ask me if they belonged to Calcutta or to the village-side. Calcutta boys would take only three or four chapatis each, while the village boys would consume twenty-five to twenty-six each ! So Mother would calculate the quantity of ingredients accordingly. One day there were more male devotees. I prepared a large quantity of dough. Mother suggested that her niece Nalini bake the chapatis while she and I roll them. So we sat down side by side. Mother had a white marble rolling-board and a jet-black roller made of ebony wood. She began rolling chapatis one at a time while I did them three at a time. Both of us were throwing the rolled ones into a container. When the chapatis were nearly half-done, our sister Nalini said, 'Aunty, Rammoy's chapatis are better than yours.'

At once Mother behaved like a small village girl. She kept her roller aside and said, 'I have been doing this for over sixty years ! He is a little boy. If his throat is pressed milk will come out. Can he do chapatis better than me? Well, let him do it ! I'll not do any more !' I was startled. I scolded sister Nalini. 'How do you know continue rolling chapatis, then I'll also do it. Otherwise I'll go away.' Mother found that it was getting late. If the chapatis were not rolled soon, the offering to Sri Ramakrishna would be delayed and she wouldn't be able to feed her children early. So she resumed her work. I also continued. I scolded sister Nalini. 'How do you know which is mine and which is Mother's? Both of us are throwing the chapatis into the same container. How can you tell the difference !' This incident showed the child-like nature of Mother. Many days later when I began to study the scriptures I found in one place that the behaviour of

those who have seen God and realized Truth is sometimes like that of children.

Many a time Mother couldn't get a single flower for Sri Ramakrishna's *pūjā*. She would say to him with folded hands, 'You haven't given me a single flower today to offer. So you must be satisfied with sandal-paste, tulsi leaves and Ganges water.' There was a small vacant plot at Mother's house, so I planted a few flowering plants—jasmine, hibiscus and oleanders. (I knew then only the rudiments of growing flowering plants from their cuttings, though later I learned the technique well.)* As the plants grew up day by day Mother was very happy. One day at last the oleanders bloomed. Mother didn't allow anybody to pluck them even for offering to Sri Ramakrishna. When I came the next Saturday, she caught my hand and took me to the plants saying gleefully, 'Look, your dear plants have brought forth flowers. I've forbidden others from plucking them so you could see them. Now you may pluck them.' She gave me a basket, so I washed my hands, feet and also the basket and plucked them. She humbly offered the flowers at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna.

Mother was an embodiment of patience. She had to pass through great hardship all her life. After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, she came to live in her husband's home at Kamarpukur. But there was nobody to care for her. She passed the days all alone in a small apartment, with a piece of cultivable land as her only property. A farmer grew paddy there, and she had to rest content with the small part of the produce he gave her. Since she had no other source of income she herself had to husk the paddy and cook the rice. This rice was the only luxury she had. Just half-a-pice worth of salt would have been

sufficient for her for days. But where was that to come from? Who was to give her money? Without complaint she bore with all the difficulties and thus passed her days. The devotees in Calcutta who once flocked around Sri Ramakrishna didn't come to her help as most of them weren't at first aware of her difficulties. Nobody knows how many days she managed like this, eating plain cooked rice without even salt, not to speak of vegetables.

Shyamasundari Devi, the mother of Holy Mother, once came to Kamarpukur to see her daughter. She could not bear to see the plight of her widowed daughter. She forced her to come to Jayrambati and stay with her. But the condition at her parental home was no better. Ramchandra Mukherjee had passed away, leaving behind his wife and four young sons. Holy Mother joined this group. To eke out a living both the widows—the mother and the daughter—had to go to somewhat more affluent houses to work the paddle-machine for husking paddy. After cleaning a heap of rice, they would each receive as payment a small quantity of rice, about half a seer! This they would cook at home, feed the youngsters and then partake of whatever was remaining.

When Sri Ramakrishna was alive he used to receive seven rupees as monthly pay for having once worked as a priest in the temple of Kālī. (He would not touch anything of it himself.) After his passing away the temple authorities paid the same to Holy Mother as pension to support herself for a few months. But some of her relations stopped this, saying that she was looked after very well by the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna! Holy Mother swallowed all such hardships, never for a moment harbouring a grouse or complaint against anybody. She bore all difficulties without even letting others know about it.

Mother was also an embodiment of love. She didn't differentiate among those who

* The Swami is now one of the foremost experts on rose cultivation in India.—Ed.

came to her. All were her children wherever they came from. When Sister Nivedita came to India she expressed a desire to meet Holy Mother. At that time she didn't know Bengali and Mother didn't know English. So Swami Vivekananda sent Swami Swarupananda with her to Mother to act as an interpreter. (Swami Swarupananda knew English well and was an M.A., a high qualification in those days.) Swami Vivekananda was afraid whether Mother would receive Nivedita well, as she was a foreigner; for during those days all foreigners were considered as *mlecchas* (barbarians) by the orthodox. But Mother received Nivedita with all cordiality; and when the English devotee prostrated, Mother allowed her to touch her feet. What's more, Mother placed both her hands on her head in blessing! A shock of happiness passed through Nivedita's body.

With the assistance of the accompanying Swami, Mother enquired, 'What is your name?'

'Miss Magaret Elizabeth Noble.'

'Oh, such a long name! I can't repeat it. I'll just call you Khuki ('Baby'). Is that all right?'

Nivedita's happiness knew no bounds. She soared into dizzy heights of joy. Mother had received her with so much affection! On learning about this, Swami Vivekananda ran to Swami Brahmananda and said, 'I am relieved of a great worry. A huge burden is removed from my head. What would have happened if Mother were to reject Nivedita? She has accepted her as her own!'

Nivedita learned Bengali quickly. She started visiting Mother more often and conversed with her without anybody's assistance. Mother was very glad at this. One day afterwards as I was spreading Mother's clothes in the sun, I found a torn piece of silk cloth in the lot. I wanted to throw it away and told Mother, 'What's the use of

keeping this torn cloth? You can't use it. I'm throwing it so a piece of good cloth can be kept in its place.'

'No, no,' Mother said, 'Don't throw it away. It was given by that Khuki. I used it for a long time. Ordinary cloth won't last long. But that Assam silk is not so. Even now when I see this torn piece of cloth I remember her. What a nice girl she was!'

Varieties of devotees came to Mother to slake their spiritual thirst and to receive instruction. Without feeling inconvenienced in the least, she was ever ready to respond to their call. She suffered from malaria which was rampant in that region those days. Often she used to come down with fever. So did the rest of us, for it was very common. It used to be very severe during the monsoon, and after it was over she would return to Jayrambati in the winter for Jagaddhātrī Pūjā.

One time in Jayrambati she was suffering from high fever. I was attending to the domestic chores. Four ladies came to see Mother who had travelled nearly twenty miles in a bullock-cart with the sole intention of meeting Mother and receiving the holy *mantra* from her. Explaining Mother's condition I appealed to them, 'You may meet Mother, but please do not ask her for initiation. You may stay here for a few more days until Mother gets well, or you may go back to your place now and after ascertaining Mother's health come again.' They nodded assent and went inside to meet Mother. After prostrating, one of them could not control herself and told Mother the purpose of their long journey. At once Mother called me in and asked me to prepare the place for initiation.

'How can you do it in this condition? You have high fever and are very weak. Let them wait here for a few more days, or let them come again when you are well.'

'Whatever my condition may be. Young

boys like you and men can find it convenient to come here anytime and everytime. But what about ladies? Can these women come here again, leaving all their responsibilities at home? God only knows whether we can meet again.' Such was Mother's concern for ardent seekers that she set aside all her personal discomforts: the four ladies left with joy after getting initiation from Mother.

Mother's education was only up to the first Bengali Primer. When she began to read the first line of the second Primer, Hriday Mukherjee, Sri Ramakrishna's attendant and nephew, snatched the book from her hands saying, 'Ladies should not study books. Then their character will be bad. They may start writing letters privately to gents and read novels and spoil their character.' In spite of her lack of education, however, I found a number of men and women coming to Mother from Calcutta and other places, telling her many of their spiritual problems and doubts. Mother would listen patiently, and then reply in such an excellent way that they would return fully satisfied with the clarifications. I could neither understand their problems nor the solutions suggested by Mother. But I could clearly see the happiness and satisfaction in their faces.

Rustic simplicity was in Mother's very blood. She hardly ever saw any graduate girl, and she had absolutely no knowledge of the developments in science. A certain neighbour of Mother's had a daughter-in-law from Calcutta. Being city-bred the young girl knew how to wind a watch. This itself was a great skill in Mother's eyes. She would innocently say, 'Look, the daughter-in-law who has come to the Banerjee's of Jayrambati knows how to wind a watch!' That daughter-in-law didn't even possess a wristwatch herself. Though she had only meagre education and could not even write her name in English,

still Mother praised her because she was more sophisticated than all other girls of her age in the whole village.

Mother's new house was built in 1916. When she moved into it I wrote in front of the house the word SVAGATAM ('Welcome'). Mother was very pleased. She told others, 'You see how my boy has written, as if it is printed.'

Many of the villagers were completely ignorant even regarding some basic information common to all. There was no clock in Jayrambati. Then a disciple of Holy Mother, Sri Lalit Chatterjee, gave her a clock in 1916. It didn't strike the hours loudly, so he gave her a gong also along with it. We had great fun in beating the gong every hour so loudly that the whole village could hear the sound. At six o'clock in the morning when I beat the gong six times, some of the villagers would say, 'Arey, he has not begun from *one*. It is just now sunrise and he has already beaten six!'

Mother used to initiate anybody and everybody with the holy *mantra*, without discriminating. But Swami Brahmananda was not so. Once his brother-monks told him, 'Mother initiates anybody and everybody immediately. But you pick and choose only a few people. You are a miser. You only try to avoid people.'

Swami Brahmananda at once replied, 'What do you know about the powers of Mother? She is a storehouse of vast powers. She is capable of digesting all the poison. How can we do so?' The Swami himself possessed great spiritual powers. Besides, he was the first President of Sri Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Yet in the presence of Mother he would fold his hands and follow her humbly like a child. He had the highest reverence for her.

Swami Brahmananda had issued strict instructions to his junior monks at Belur Math that he should have his breakfast at 7.00, and that the tea should be fresh and

steaming. He was very particular about the time. One morning when Mother happened to be at the Math, the Swami's attendants found him in deep meditation. They tried in vain to bring his mind down for the breakfast. The time was running out and the tea was getting colder. They were alarmed and rushed to Mother telling her everything. Very calmly she said, 'Don't worry. Take this *prasād*. Tell him that I have sent it.'

The attendants returned with hope, but they failed to bring him back to the earthly plane. They ran again to Mother and said, 'Is the Swami not coming back? What has happened to him?'

'Nothing has happened to him. He is in

deep Samādhi. Let me come with you.' Saying so Mother herself walked up to the Swami. Touching his shoulder by the finger she said, 'My dear Rakhal, enough of this. I have come with *prasād*. Get up and take it.'

At once, as if awakened from deep sleep the Swami opened his eyes. All were relieved and happy. Seeing Mother standing by his side, the Swami jumped up, prostrated before her, and stood at a distance like a young boy who had been caught committing a serious mistake.

Holy Mother was really the embodiment of spiritual power, of wisdom, of love, of forbearance, of simplicity and of generosity.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA : HIS HUMANISM

SWAMI RANGANATHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

(At this stage in the Swami's talk, a member of the audience referred to Leo Tolstoy's interest in Swami Vivekananda.)

17. Tolstoy and Vivekananda

Yes, that is right. It was probably in 1905 that Tolstoy first studied Vivekananda, his book *Rāja-Yoga*. He was deeply affected by Vivekananda's spirituality and humanism, because that humanism was so universal, and was based on a profound philosophy of man in depth as deriving from Vedānta.

I have seen in Tolstoy's library in Yasnaya Polyana a book by his Secretary, Bulgakov: *The Descriptive Catalogue of Tolstoy's Library*, prepared between 1911 and 1916, that is immediately after Tolstoy's death. I have recorded a reference to some of the interesting contents in this catalogue in relation to Swami Vivekananda and Sri

Ramakrishna, in my book: *A Pilgrim Looks at the World* (vol. 1, pp. 468-69):

Against the book *Sayings of Paramahansa Sri Ramakrishna*, from the journal *Brahmavadin*, Madras, the entry of his Secretary reads:

'There are remarks by Tolstoy in black pencil; the book was read by Tolstoy probably in 1910 when it was sent to Yasnaya Polyana by the author who, at that time, had planned to visit Tolstoy in person. There is the following evidence about it given by Tolstoy's doctor and friend, Makovitzki: On 6th February 1906, Tolstoy writes to Sergeenko (a Russian writer whose son was a friend of Tolstoy):

'“I know Ramakrishna from Theosophical journals. There are nowhere such beautiful ideas as you wrote out for me. Where have you taken them from?”'

After this, the next few pages of the catalogue are devoted by Bulgakov to record the pages and paragraphs (practically of the whole book of over 1,000 sayings) of the *Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, in which Tolstoy has entered his comments.

From the large number of books on Indian philosophy, literature and religion in his library, and the marginal comments he has entered in many of these, it becomes evident that Tolstoy was deeply fascinated by Indian thought. The Upanisads, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and the story of Buddha deeply moved him.

According to Bulgakov, Tolstoy used to study the writings of Vivekananda, who was his contemporary, with great attention and interest. He adds that, after reading the Swami's writing 'God and the Soul', Tolstoy wrote in his diary on July 4, 1908:

'I read the wonderful writing of Vivekananda on God; this should be translated; intend to do this myself.'

Tolstoy had himself translated into Russian *The Way to Blessedness* by Swami Abhedananda. (This is more likely to be Swami Vivekananda's lecture on the subject appearing now in his *Complete Works*, vol. 2, p. 406 ff).

One of the books in his library is a collection of I. F. Naszhivin's *Voices of Peoples* in Russian. Two of Vivekananda's writings are included in this collection: 'God and Man' and the poem 'The Hymn of Creation'.

Bulgakov's article on 'Books about India in Tolstoy's Library', published in the collection *Brief Reports of the Institute of Orientology* (301: India and Pakistan, Academy of Sciences, Moscow, 1959) contains much interesting information on the subject....

Tolstoy may well become the link between Soviet Russia, which has forsaken religion but is in search of spiritual values, and India and her hoary spiritual thought, which has moved Tolstoy as well as Goethe and other free thinkers of the West....

There is a book in Russian by Shifman entitled *Tolstoy I Vostok* ('Tolstoy and the East'), in which Tolstoy's relations with India, including Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, are discussed in ten pages (pp. 190 to 200).

18. 'Arise, Awake!'

When I speak tomorrow, some of these other aspects of the subject will be dealt with. Since our time is very very limited today, I have discussed only some facets of Vivekananda's multi-faceted teachings, with special reference to his humanism and its national and international bearings.

There is one beautiful exhortation in his literature which I wish to convey to you in this connection; it occurs in his lecture on 'The Mission of the Vedanta' (*Complete Works*, vol. 3, p. 193):

Our aristocratic ancestors went on treading the common masses of our country under foot, till they became helpless, till, under this torment, the poor people nearly forgot that they were human beings....

Our poor people, these downtrodden masses of India, therefore, require to hear and to know what they really are. Ay, let every man and woman and child, without respect of caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind everyone, there is that infinite soul assuring the infinite possibilities and the infinite capacity of all to become great and good. Let us proclaim to every soul: *Uttiṣṭhata, jāgrata, prāpya varān nibodhata*—'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached!'

Arise, awake! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak. The soul is infinite, omnipotent, omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself; proclaim the God within you; do not deny Him....

Teach yourselves, teach everyone, his real nature. Call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come, when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.

Vivekananda sends out his call to man everywhere to awake from his hypnotism of weakness. You will find this one clarion call to arise and awake in many of his writings. It is a free translation by him of a famous verse of one of the Upanisads, the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* (3.14). In the original Sanskrit, it sounds a powerful utterance: *Uttiṣṭhata, jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata*; its literal translation is: 'Arise, awake, and, approaching the great ones, enlighten yourself.' What is that goal? What is that enlightenment to be gained?—The realization by every man and woman of his or her universal spiritual nature, and the projecting out of that fulness and richness

within, that universal humanistic impulse into the outside world. That is the awakening which the people of the world will have to experience in this modern age, if they are to achieve international peace and a crime-free social order. And Vivekananda spent every ounce of his energy to educate modern humanity in this great vision of human excellence and its implementation. Though born in India, he was not a mere Indian. He was international in his sympathies and outlook.

19. *America and Vivekananda*

When he was working in America for four years, an English friend wrote to him so as to say: How long will you be there? Please return to your own Mother India; there is plenty of work for your nation awaiting you. To this, he sent a reply on 9 August 1895, which breathes his international interests and sympathies and his broad spiritual humanism (*Complete Works*, vol. 8, 1959 edition, pp. 349-50):

Doubtless, I do love India. But everyday my sight grows clearer. What is India or England or America to us? We are the servants of that God who by the ignorant is called *Man*. He who pours water at the root, does he not water the whole tree?

There is but one basis of well-being, social, political, or spiritual—to know that I and my brother are *one*. This is true for all countries and all people. And Westerners, let me say, will realize it more quickly than Orientals, who have almost exhausted themselves in formulating the idea and producing a few cases of individual realization.

That is a beautiful idea. Though deeply Indian, he did not become exclusively Indian. Therefore, today, you will find many Americans accepting Vivekananda as part and parcel of America itself. Last year I was in America on a lecture tour. That nation was celebrating its bicentenary—two centuries of independence—1776-1976.

On that occasion, for the first time, the American political state recognized the importance of Vivekananda in American history, recognized the importance of Vivekananda as a link in Indo-American cultural and spiritual relations. This is revealed in the interesting book published by the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: *Abroad in America: Visitors to the New Nation—1776-1914*. When I came across this book in Washington, I was fascinated and impressed. The book contains interesting accounts and impressions of twenty-nine people from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Austria, Cuba, France, England, China, and some other countries who visited the USA during that period. There is also one from Russia, Pavel Svin'in, Secretary to the Russian Consul-General in Philadelphia, 1811-1813.

The one from India, the only one, was Vivekananda, who is the twenty-fourth in the book. Apart from the book I saw also the bicentenary exhibition in the National Portrait Gallery, organized by the Smithsonian Institution, featuring, with photos and write-ups, these twenty-nine visitors. Below Vivekananda's photo on page 238 in the book are inscribed the following words:

Travelling in the early 1890s through the 'Yankee-land', as he called it, Swami Vivekananda passed a mystic's judgement on a materialist society and captured the imagination of his American audience.

These are significant landmarks in the first inter-twining processes of Indo-American history. Students in American universities are already writing Ph.D. theses on Vivekananda's contribution to America, on his Vedānta movement in their country.

The following words from a letter written by him from Chicago to India on 2 November 1893 convey Vivekananda's appreciation of the American human experiment

(*Complete Works*, vol. 5, 1959 edition, p. 23):

The Americans have their faults too, and what nation has not? But this is my summing up. Asia laid the germs of civilization, Europe developed man, and America is developing the woman and the masses. It is the paradise of the woman and the labourer.... The Americans are fast becoming liberal; and this great nation is progressing fast towards that spirituality which is the standard boast of the Hindu.

20. Conclusion

Slowly, the rest of the world also is realizing the importance of Vivekananda's contribution, not only to the people of India, but also to all humanity. Vivekananda worked hard to deepen the spiritual life of humanity everywhere and to bring harmony between the Orient and the Occident at a high level.

I thank you for your kindness. [Loud applause.]

QUESTION-ANSWER SESSION

1. *Question:* Can we have your views regarding the relationship between the work of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the father of the Arya Samaj?

Answer: There are many things common between Swami Dayananda and Swami Vivekananda. Both were devoted to making India dynamic and progressive in the modern age. Both drew inspiration from the ancient Indian culture and traditions. But there is a slight difference in approach and that makes a little difference also in the range and scope of the work of each. Vivekananda accepted fully the past of India, Vedic and post-Vedic, and also the modern contact of India with the West. But Dayananda did not accept the post-Vedic Indian developments nor the modern Western contributions. He was solely looking back to India's

far past to receive inspiration to work and to reshape modern India. Vivekananda, on the other hand, accepted the entire past of India, including the Islamic and other later contributions, and the modern Western contributions. He sought and worked hard to build a bridge between ancient India and modern India, and between East and West, and was himself such a synthesis. In his essays written in Bengali in 1909, and published under the general title *Samāj* in the fifteen-volume Bengali edition of his complete works entitled *Rabindra Racanāvalī*, poet Rabindranath Tagore greeted Vivekananda as the meeting point of East and West. What really impressed Tagore in Vivekananda, in comparison with other contemporary leaders, was his positive mind and attitude (vol. 13, p. 55):

The great soul whose death occurred a few years ago in Bengal, that Vivekananda also rose keeping the East to his right and the West to his left and himself standing in between. The purpose of his life was not to contract India for all times to narrow thought-moulds by excluding the West from Indian history. To accept, to mingle, to create was, verily, his genius. He sacrificed his life to open up a communication line by which the achievements of India may be given to the West and the achievements of the West may be accepted in India.

And some years later, writing about the depth and the sweep of Vivekananda's vision and programme of human development and its creative role in bringing out the vast hidden possibilities in man, unlike the limited do's and don't's of contemporary leaders, Tagore said (*Prabāsi*, vol. 28, p. 286):

In recent times in India, it was Vivekananda alone who preached a great message which is not tied up with any do's and don't's. Addressing one and all in the nation, he said: In every one of you there is the power of Brahman (God): the God in the poor desires you to serve (Him). This message has roused the hearts of youths in

a pervasive way. That is why this message has borne fruit in the service of the nation in diverse ways and in diverse forms of renunciation. His message has, at one and the same time, imparted dignity and respect to man along with energy and power.

When Tagore met Romain Rolland in Europe in the early 1920's Tagore told him:

If you want to understand India, study Vivekananda. In him, everything is positive, nothing negative.

That impressed Rolland, and he studied Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, became deeply impressed with the depth and sweep of their life and thought, and produced the best scholarly and critical and sympathetic biographies on them, in which he presented both, as referred to earlier by me, as *'the splendid symphony of the Universal Soul'*.

This sweep and range of thought cannot be said of Dayananda. But both were steeped in India's ancient culture. Both lived pure and holy lives and gave new strength to India's ancient Vedic monasticism; and both preached a dynamic humanism, worked hard to eliminate caste exclusiveness and untouchability and oriented Hinduism towards the service of man along with worship of God. India loves and honours both of them. Romain Rolland has devoted a long chapter entitled 'Builders of Unity' in his *Life of Ramakrishna* in which he has made a critical study of Ramakrishna's predecessor Ram Mohun Roy, and Ramakrishna's important contemporaries, including Dayananda.

2. *Question:* Swamiji, what is your experience about the latest situation in India, and how do you interpret Vivekananda's teaching about the coming of the Śūdra dominance in the modern age?

Answer: I was thinking that I would be dealing with that aspect tomorrow. But,

since you have asked about it, I shall deal with it now, though only briefly.

Swami Vivekananda has spoken about human social evolution, particularly in the context of Indian social thought and terminology. When you study human history, he says, you find first the Brāhmaṇas, or priests, dominating society and history; later on, you find the Kṣatriya, or military power, dominating history. When we come to the modern period, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, we find the Vaiśya, or merchant class, dominating society and history. That is the commercial civilization of the modern West. But in this twentieth century you find the last of the four social classes, the Śūdra, the proletariat, the working class, coming up to power and dominance. And Vivekananda proclaimed the modern age as the age of the Śūdra; all the other three classes will remain, but the Śūdra will become dominant.

And he also predicted in 1896 this coming of the Śūdra age, as recorded by his American disciple, Sister Christine, in her memoirs under the title, 'Swami Vivekananda as I saw Him' (*Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, second edition, p. 203):

Sometimes he was in a prophetic mood, as on the day when he startled us by saying, 'the next great upheaval which is to bring about a new epoch will come from Russia or China. I can't quite see which but it will be either Russia or China.'

This he said thirty-two years ago, when China was still under the autocratic rule of the Manchu Emperors, from which there was no prospect of release for centuries to come, and when Czarist Russia was sending the noblest of her people to the Siberian mines. To the ordinary thinker, those two countries seemed the most unlikely nations in the world to usher in a new era.

He was fully aware of the varied forms of exploitation of the common people of India by her wealthy and landed and intellectual aristocracies. He spoke against

this exploitation in a powerful sentence in the course of a lecture in Madras in 1897 on 'The Future of India' (*Complete Works*, vol. 3, eighth edition, p. 279):

The duty of every aristocracy is to dig its own grave; and the sooner it does so, the better. The more it delays, the more it shall fester, and the worse death it will die.

In his *Memoirs of European Travel*, written in 1900 in the form of letters to Swami Trigunatitananda, editor of the monthly *Udbodhan*, Calcutta, Vivekananda has given a touching tribute to the 'ever-trampled labouring classes of India' (*Complete Works*, vol. 7, 1958 edition, pp. 358-59):

Those uncared-for lower classes of India—the peasants and weavers and the rest, who have been conquered by foreigners and are looked down upon by their own people—it is they who, from time immemorial, have been working silently, without even getting the remuneration of their labours! But what great changes are taking place slowly, all over the world, in pursuance of nature's laws! Countries, civilizations, and supremacy are undergoing revolutions.

Ye labouring classes of India, as a result of your silent, constant labours, Babylon, Persia, Alexandria, Greece, Rome, Venice, Genoa, Baghdad, Samarcand, Spain, Portugal, France, Denmark, Holland, and England have successively attained supremacy and eminence! and you?—Well, who cares to think of you! My dear Swami, your ancestors wrote a few philosophical works, penned a dozen or so epics, or built a number of temples—that is all, and you rend the skies with triumphal shouts; while those whose heart's blood has contributed to all the progress that has been made in the world—well, who cares to praise them?

The world-conquering heroes of spirituality, war, and poetry, are in the eyes of all, and they have received the homage of mankind. But where nobody looks, no one gives a word of encouragement, where everybody hates—that, living amid such circumstances and displaying boundless patience, infinite love, and dauntless practicality, our proletariat are doing their duty in their

homes day and night, without the slightest murmur—well, is there no heroism in this? Many turn out to be heroes, when they have got some great task to perform. Even a coward easily gives up his life, and the most selfish man behaves disinterestedly, when there is a multitude to cheer them on; but blessed indeed is he who manifests the same unselfishness and devotion to duty in the smallest of acts, unnoticed by all—and it is you who are actually doing this, ye ever-trampled labouring classes of India! I bow to you.

This Marxist idiom was used by him at a time when Marx was practically unknown in India, and Marxist ideology had established no firm hold on any political state in the world.

Vivekananda prescribed education as the sure means for bringing about the awakening of the Indian masses. Says he in a letter written on 24 April 1897 (*Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, 1976 edition, p. 328):

From the day when education and culture etc. began to spread gradually from patricians to plebians, grew the distinction between the modern civilization as of Western countries and the ancient civilization as of India, Egypt, Rome, etc. I see it before my eyes, a nation is advanced in proportions as education and intelligence spread among the masses. The chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolizing of the whole of education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men. If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it in the same way, i.e., by spreading education among the masses.

From that point of view, he spoke of India's need of socialism for the development of her millions of oppressed humanity and expressed his own faith in socialism.

In a letter written to Miss Mary Hale of Chicago on 1 November 1896 from London, Vivekananda gave expression to these thoughts (*Complete Works*, vol. 6, 1956, pp. 380-82):

Human society is in turn governed by the four castes—the priests, the soldiers, the traders, and

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the labourers. Each state has its glories as well as its defects.

When the priest (Brahmin) rules, there is a tremendous exclusiveness on hereditary grounds; the persons of the priests and their descendents are hemmed in with all sorts of safeguards—none but they have any knowledge—none but they have the right to impart that knowledge. Its glory is that at this period is laid the foundation of sciences. The priests cultivate the mind, for through the mind they govern.

The military (Kṣatriya) rule is tyrannical and cruel, but they are not exclusive; and, during that period, arts and social culture attained their height.

The commercial (Vaisya) rule comes next. It is awful in its silent crushing and blood-sucking power. Its advantage is, as the trader himself goes everywhere, he is a good disseminator of ideas collected during the two previous states. They are still less exclusive than the military, but culture begins to decay.

Last will come the labourer (Śūdra) rule. Its advantages will be the distribution of physical comforts—its disadvantages, (perhaps) the lowering of culture. There will be a great distribution of ordinary education, but extraordinary geniuses will be less and less.

If it is possible to form a state in which the knowledge of the priest period, the culture of the military, the distributive spirit of the commercial, and the idea of equality of the last, can all be kept intact, minus their evils, it will be an ideal state. But is it possible?

Yet the first three have had their day. Now is the time for the last. They must have it—none can resist it.

I am a socialist, not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread.

The other systems have been tried and found wanting. Let this one be tried—if for nothing else, for the novelty of the thing. A redistribution of pain and pleasure is better than always the same persons having pains and pleasures. The sum total of good and evil in the world remains ever the same. The yoke will be lifted from shoulder to shoulder by new systems, that is all.

Let every dog have his day in this miserable world, so that after this experience of so-called happiness, they may all come to the Lord and give up this vanity of a world and governments and all other botherations.

3. *Question:* Swamiji, you referred in your lecture to Vivekananda's teaching about the divine in the heart of man. Is there such a divine focus in man? I am much interested in the idea. Please tell me more about it.

Answer: Yes, that is the fundamental truth expounded by Vedānta and forms the central theme of all Vivekananda's lectures and writings. He expounded this Vedāntic truth for the first time in a great passage in his lecture at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893. (*Complete Works*, vol. 1, 1962, pp. 10-11):

Is man a tiny boat in a tempest, raised one moment on the foamy crest of a billow and dashed down into a yawning chasm the next, rolling to and fro at the mercy of good and bad actions—a powerless, helpless wreck in an ever-raging, ever-rushing, uncompromising current of cause and effect; a little moth placed under the wheel of causation which rolls on crushing everything in its way and waits not for the widow's tears or orphan's cry? The heart sinks at the idea, yet this is the law of Nature. Is there no hope? Is there no escape?—was the cry that went up from the bottom of the heart of despair. It reached the throne of mercy and words of hope and consolation came down and inspired a Vedic sage, and he stood up before the world and in trumpet voice proclaimed the glad tidings:

'Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! Even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion; knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again.'

'Children of immortal bliss what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you brethren by that sweet name—heirs of immortal bliss—yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye, divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep. You are souls immortal, spirits free, blessed, and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.'

To the large enlightened audience in that Parliament, who had till then heard only,

who had been taught only, the Christian dogma of man's inborn depravity and original sin, the masterly presentation of this Vedantic truth was like the bursting of a bombshell in their midst; and the enlightened and rational among them heartily responded to this luminous truth. In the opening page of his book *Rāja-Yoga*, Vivekananda has given a condensed presentation of this Vedantic truth in four propositions:

Each soul is potentially divine.

The goal is to manifest this divine within by controlling nature, external and internal.

Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one, or more, or all of these—and be free.

This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

Man controls external nature through his knowledge and application of physical sciences, politics, and economics. This lifts his life from the primitive to the civilized level. But this control of external nature alone cannot help him to handle and resolve the tensions of his civilized state which overwhelm him and threaten to destroy him and his civilization. 'Science can denature plutonium, but it cannot denature evil in the heart of man,' said Einstein. Recognizing this insufficiency of the external approach, the sages of India investigated the internal nature of man and discovered the infinite and immortal dimension behind the finite man—*Vedāhametaṁ puruṣaṁ mahāntaṁ*—'I have realized this infinite Man [behind the finite man which alone the senses reveal], beyond all darkness and delusion of ignorance,' as the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* verse quoted above by Vivekananda proclaims. Out of these investigations they developed, what I explained in the course of my lecture as the science of man as the Ātman—the *Adhyātmavidyā*. This science of man in depth, this science

of human possibilities, proclaims that energy resources in man are organized in an ascending scale of subtlety, immensity, and inwardness—*sūkṣmā, mahāntaśca, pratyagātma-bhūtāśca*—beginning from the gross muscular system of his outer physical body, through the more and more inner and subtler nervous and psychical systems, to the innermost and subtlest Self of man, the Ātman, which is an ocean of infinite and pure spiritual energy resource. And this science of *Adhyātmavidyā* also adds that this Ātman is one and nondual. In his lectures on Jñāna-yoga, Vivekananda has pointed out the high glory of man as presented in these discoveries of the Upaniṣads (*Complete Works*, vol. 2, 1958, p. 250):

No books, no scriptures, no science can imagine the glory of the Self that appears as man, the most glorious God that ever was, the only God that ever existed, exists, or ever will exist.

Again, in contrast to the speculative and belief-based extracosmic god of all speculative philosophies and Semitic religions, he presents the Vedantic vision of God as the Ātman as a truth given in experience itself (*ibid.*, p. 279):

In worshipping God, we have been always worshipping our own hidden self.

Further, giving the Vedantic definition of theism and atheism, Vivekananda says (*ibid.*, pp. 301-02):

The ideal of faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us. If faith in ourselves had been more extensively taught and practised, I am sure a very large portion of the evils and miseries that we have would have vanished. Throughout the history of mankind, if any motive power has been more potent than another in the lives of all great men and women, it is that of faith in themselves.... The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is an atheist who does not believe in himself. But it is not selfish faith, because the Vedānta, again, is the doctrine of

oneness. It means faith in all, because you are all.... Do you know how much energy, how many powers, how many forces are still lurking behind that frame of yours?... Therefore, you must not say that you are weak.... For behind you is the ocean of infinite power and blessedness.

Romain Rolland puts the following sentence from Vivekananda's *Jñāna-Yoga* lectures in the opening page of his *Life of Vivekananda*

Never forget the glory of Human Nature! We are the greatest God.... Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless ocean which I AM.

Tolstoy wrote his book: *The Kingdom of God Is within You*, presenting this Vedāntic truth as the central truth of Christianity, in place of original sin and the devil.

If that is the true nature of man, his education must help to manifest, to unfold, that truth. Its impact on a Marxist State such as the USSR will be a new emphasis on the inward penetration by men and

women to the centre of their being through meditation and other relevant techniques, over and above the external life of work and art and comfort and organic satisfactions, and the socio-political conditionings of his external life. Without that new emphasis, human problems in the USSR will continue to follow the pattern of the USA and other societies, in spite of Marxism; and the Marxist goal of the eventual withering away of the State itself will recede further and further away. For, if crime, drunkenness, delinquency, interpersonal and interstate tensions and wars increase, the power of the State will also increase to check them; the power of the State will lessen only if the citizens learn to check and discipline their anti-social impulses by drawing on the ever-present spiritual energy resources within themselves. Sensuality can be conquered only by spirituality. And that is the true measure of human progress, says Vedānta.

(Concluded)

THE EYE OF THE TIGER—A REMEMBRANCE OF SWAMIJI*

ROBERT P. UTTER

1

In the red-streaked dawn the tiger wakes on the cliff-ledge.
The thunder of the sunrise hangs in those smoldering eyes.

The tales told of Swamiji are told in dust and ashes,
The dust of all the highways, low ways, winding ways, twisting trails,
and pathless jungles traversed by his feet the world around,
The ashes of the fires of his ever-burning renunciation.

* Read at the Vedanta Society of Northern California's Retreat at Olema, California, on July 4, 1979.

A remembrance of Swamiji I sing,
 A fragment, a spark from the sun, a drop from the sea, a star from the
 imperturbable and infinite sky.
 But with Swamiji nothing is small. The least dust-grain o his feet is
 a world.
 A snowflake star from his sky is a sun seen from afar.
 With Swamiji everything is different. He wore the mask of a man,
 But within he was God's honeycomb.
 One drop of that honey dispels with its sweetness a whole lifetime
 of suffering.

2

Kings and beggars were all alike to him, the human heart alone spoke to
 him the universal tongue of love,
 The scholars, kings, and lawmakers, the rich and famous of the world were
 his daily companions, but all these bustling people
 Were in their apparel of importance no more than the dust of his robe,
 Were to him important only because through them he could reach
 The hidden, the innumerable, the forgotten little ones of the world
 Who were dearer to him than his heart's blood. The human soul alone was
 to him important.
 He sought all human souls, whether hidden under masks of unimportance or
 under masks of importance.
 He sought to touch all souls with the outstretched hand of love,
 To open their hearts like flower-buds to the sun.
 He was that sun, that love which knows all, and whose knowledge is bliss
 unbounded and eternal.

Like the sun he shone simultaneously in all directions of space.
 A being not of time nor of space, he lighted all time and space, and,
 shone unwaveringly in his own self-light
 Beyond all cycles of circumstances, yet, like the sun's light, deeply
 enmeshed in the shadowed forests and sunsets of the world,
 Penetrating the dark leaf-caverns with the long golden look of his knowing,
 Penetrating the jungles of the human heart with the firelight fingers of
 his truth,
 Untangling with one effortless lifting gesture the strangling thickets of
 the heart's nets and knots,
 Bringing peace . . .
 Though he appeared in time, he was not afraid of it, he was not caught by it.
 (Is the sunlight caught by the shadows it dispels?)
 He carried the power of the thunderbolt within him, yet his strength had
 the nourishing softness of a summer's day.

3

Once, at Islamabad, sitting upon the grass with his friends,
 This Man, the Man of this man's age, age of today,
 Spoke words of fire and steel, saying,
 'Whenever death approaches me, all weakness vanishes.
 I am as hard as *that* !' clashing two stones together in his hands,
 'For I *have* touched the feet of God.' Next moment
 A bleeding child stumbled sobbing into the group,
 Having fallen and cut his hand. Swamiji, all love, gathered the child
 to his arms,
 Bathed and bandaged the wound, and sent him on his way
 Much comforted. Swamiji's heart, in resistance to fear and evil
 Hard as flint, in compassion soft as a flower.

This was the man

Who conquered kings and beggars at a glance,
 Whose glance was sharp as steel, as gentle, as irresistible as dawn.

4

Once in Khetri, this Man of men fasted for three whole days,
 Not for a vow, not for self-torture, not for self-punishment,
 Not to obtain strange powers, not for any motive
 Beyond the love he bore for all men and the love they all bore him.
 For three whole days together men flocked to talk to him,
 Giving no respite—no sleep, no rest, no food
 In all that time. At long last, one came to him in tears,
 And, prostrating at his feet, said, 'Swamiji, I am pained beyond measure
 To see that in all this time you have had no food
 Nor water. I long to give you these chapatis
 Cooked by my own hand, but who am I
 To offer you food, I, a low-caste man?'
 'Have no fear,' Swamiji answered; 'from you I will gladly take them.'
 But the man still shrank from giving. 'Who am I?'
 He cried. 'Only a lowly cobbler. If I give you this food
 From my own hand, the Maharaja may banish me from the state !'
 'No, no, don't be afraid,' Swamiji reassured him.
 'I myself will see to it that the Maharaja does you no harm.
 This food is pure, being offered in selfless love.' And he took the food.

That food, cooked and offered by the hand of the lowly cobbler
 Out of kindness of heart, yet in terrible fear, tasted to Swamiji
 More exquisite than nectar offered by Indra, King of the Gods, in a golden
 vessel.

The common touch he sought, not shunned. He was Man incarnate.

He gave to all, he drew all to him as does the life-bestowing sun.
 Yet this sun-eye vision was won only by terrible lonely vigils and inward
 struggles
 Fought in solitude in many wild places far from men.

5

One such struggle was especially memorable.
 It was the time he renounced even the age-old begging bowl,
 Older than Buddha, old as renunciation itself,
 Solely out of compassion for his fellow men.
 'Why should I longer beg?' he thought. 'Why take from the poor
 Their daily handful of rice? What good to eat
 By robbing the poor when this body has not realized God?'
 This terrible cry
 Welled up out of the insatiable yearning of his heart
 For God, and out of the sky-vast love he bore his fellow men,
 And a mountainous wave of desperate renunciation and compassion
 Broke in a wild storm over him.

Deep, deep he plunged
 Into the densest, darkest jungle, and walked all day
 Through pathless wilds of tangled trees and vines.
 On, on, and farther on he strode,
 Burning in his ochre robe and his self-abnegation
 Like a wind-blown fire of dispassion and despair,
 Determined to let the body drop in death, or—
 Realize Truth, Inviolable, Absolute, and Eternal,
 Here and now, before returning to mankind.

Not Buddha's vow
 Under the Bodhi Tree, nor vow of Jesus in the sun-burning mountain
 wilderness
 Above the Jordan River and ruins of old Jericho,
 Was greater than this vow of despairing Swamiji
 Driven by the storm of strenuous truth and love. . . .

Evening approached. The last rays of the sun
 Struck level shafts of muted rose and gold
 Through the age-twisted massive trees hung thick
 With python vines, when Swami sank on the ground
 Exhausted. Fixing his mind on God he resolved to pierce
 The jungle of ignorance, or die. Just then
 He saw approaching the dreaded form of the jungle beast,
 That implacable stalker
 Who instant turns the hunter into the hunted one,
 The flame-rippling, shadow-blending tiger,
 Whose smoldering eye and slashing teeth and claw

Bring quick—extinction—or illumination—that nirvana
 From which no breath or word or thought ever returns
 To tell us what it is, the stroke of sudden light
 That blasts all seeing. . . .

Not moving

From his unshakable seat, the Swami watched.
 Closer it came, and closer.
 'This is right,' he thought. 'We are both hungry,
 Let it feed on me, I offer it my flesh.
 This body is a lightless lamp, no knowledge absolute
 Fulfils the only destiny that renders flesh
 Worthy of living. . . . Let it all go !
 Let this body at least feed this hungry beast.
 It is better so than being chained by the world's delusions.'
 Thinking thus, he waited. . . . But no blow fell.
 The tiger on silent feet moved closer, snuffed the air,
 Paused, looked at him with eyes of floating topaz fire, and at long last
 Turned, and without sound melted like a blown-out flame
 Into the deepening shadows. . . .
 Swamiji, the supreme and imperturbable tiger of the mind
 Sat, unmoved and still, and marvelled at the scene.

Bats flickered in the thickening dusk.
 The stars in a sudden fire-shower filled the sky,
 And still the Swami moved not. All night he sat,
 A Buddha come anew to renew his pledge
 Of love for the jungle-tangled world. And with the dawn
 He left the place, and returned to man, to serve him with his heart's blood.

Where did he soar, what visions did he see?
 What high resolves did his mind fix upon
 Through the long shadow-haunted vistas of that night?
 To what dim starlight arches of cathedral skies
 Unfolding to ever-new dimensions of far being
 Did his mind soar?
 It is better not to ask, or we might be answered
 With broken echoes and chattering bats of words
 Where no words touch the stars. For the plain man
 Unguarded by innocence and the midnight-vigil knowledge
 The eye of the wild tiger is the last sight he can see.
 From it there is no return.

Yet Swamiji returned. Like his Master, Ramakrishna,
 He returned from the eye of the wild tiger to serve the world
 In total sacrifice with the light of his eyes. The tiger sun
 When looked at straight extinguishes all seeing.
 Yet Swamiji, the Sun of suns, returned
 With the sun-power in his eyes. He never told

His secret, the sacred secret of that tiger night.
 Yet it burned in his eyes
 Always, it smoldered in his silences, and filled
 The vast void in which he always walked
 With a thunder beyond the thunder, with the space, trembling silence of
 the explosion of ten-million suns.

The eye of the hurricane is the peace beyond the swirl of life and death
 The eye of the tiger is the truth beyond the birth and death of suns and
 galaxies . . .

His secret stuns us, as the sunlight stuns,
 Even while it illumines, warms us, and uplifts the heart.

The sun, far more than a lamp, can kill us while it lights our way.
 Swamiji, far more than a man, can kill at a stroke
 Our false self, and release us to the sea
 Of our unbounded being.

6

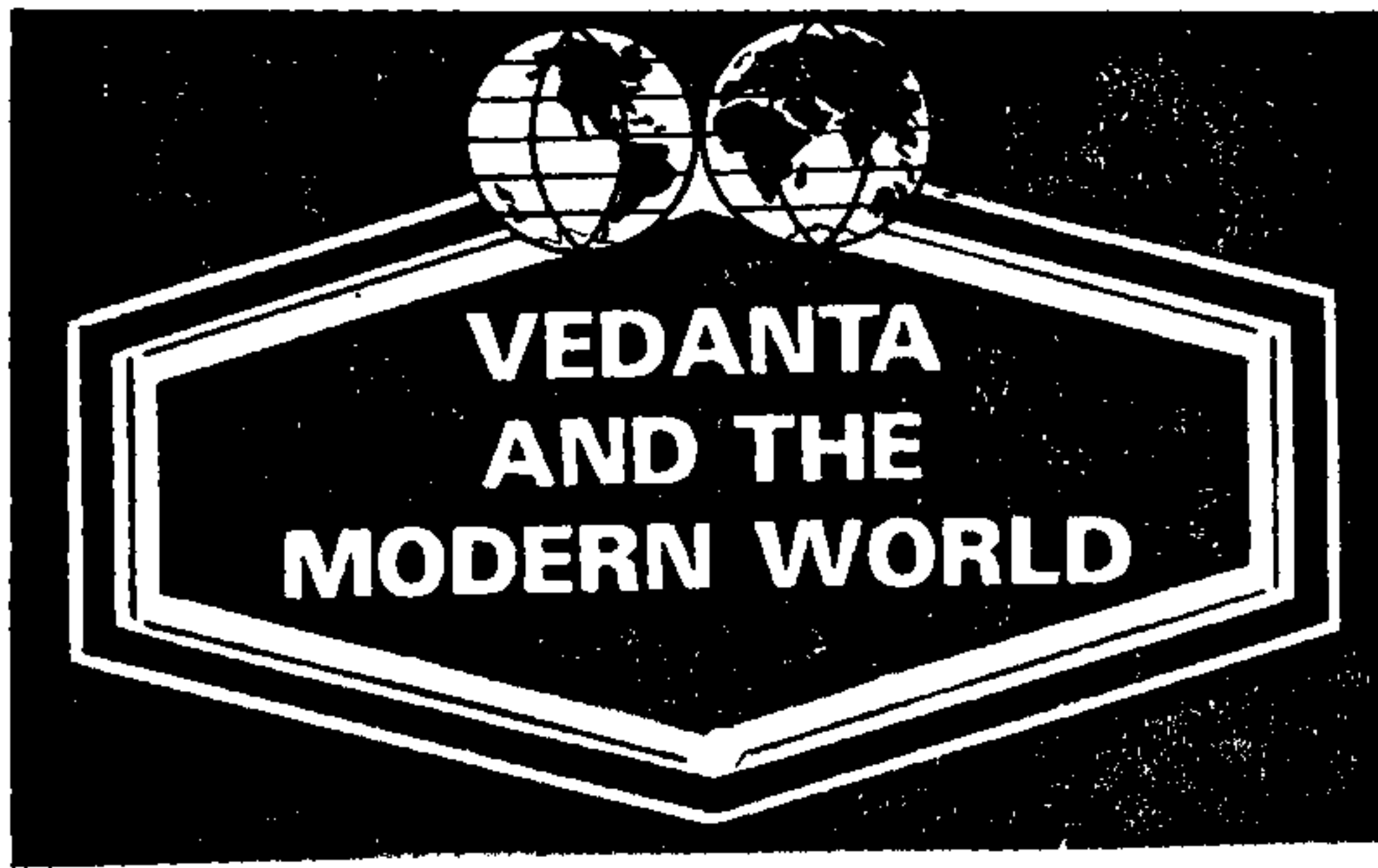
He is all forms of Godhead merged in one:
 The Buddha-Christ; the other Ramakrishna;
 The Holy Mother's deep-sea vessel to the Western World;
 The Holy Grail carried earth-wide for all to see,
 Brimming with the Master's inmost, sparkling life;
 The Ark of the Covenant that leads us out of bondage into freedom;
 Noah's Ark that rides the flood from the Old World to the New;
 The Bodhisattva shedding his heart's blood for the world;
 The Promethean Sage who descended from his mountain cave of meditation
 To bring God's fire to darkness-flooded man;
 Shiva returned to drink once more the world-engulfing poison;
 Shiva's third eye of world-destroying knowledge;
 God's Word, God's Son; God's Answer to man's everlasting prayer.

Whatever he was, this only need we remember:
 He never left us—he still lives, here, among us, at this very moment.
 We should remember him
 Only as the deepest breath we ever drew.

7

The story of Swamiji can be told only in dust and ashes,
 The dust of his feet that walked the roads of the world,
 The ashes of his dhuni fires by which he waked and watched the whole
 night through,
 While we, his dear companions, slept.

The tiger awakens by his cave on the cliff-ledge in the fiery dawn.
 The burning fury of the sunrise bursts from those world-kindling eyes.



IS VEDANTA A PHILOSOPHY OF ESCAPE ?—XI

DR. VINITA WANCHOO

(Continued from the previous issue)

ASCETICISM AND ITS CAUSES

Vedāntic philosophers early recognized the transitoriness of the world and came to the conclusion that possessions did not give permanent happiness. Happiness lay in the inner life, to which external possessions were hindrances.¹ The asceticism and the institution of sannyāsa which arose out of this state of mind, the result of mature and deliberate thought, were often abused. Their exaggeration took the form of self-torture, crude repressions of nature, flight from the troubles of life and debasement of its values. It is pointed out:

Many lazy, good-for-nothing people, who saw honour and praise bestowed upon those deniers of worldly comfort, turned it into a means of acquiring that (worldly good, honour, praise) of which the whole system of asceticism is a denial. The majority of the wandering fakirs and the possessors of so-called supernatural powers in India of today shows clearly to what degradation has this noble doctrine reached.²

Two points must be made clear before proceeding further in the examination of Vedāntic asceticism. First, critics speak as if any form of religious self-restraint is unhealthy. Devotees of the cult of self-indulgence wrongly equate it with self-

expression and freedom, failing to recognize that it, too, is indirectly a form of self-torture in which there is even less freedom than in self-repression and that the ascetics' restraint has a higher end in view, while self-indulgence has no end except further indulgence.³ Even the exaggerations of asceticism have a nobler aim than the exaggerations of self-indulgence. Second, it is to be kept in mind that the intellectual and practical standards of philosophers are not purely subjective but largely derived from the contemporary world, specially in matters of theology and religion. To judge the doctrine and practice of a philosophy we must be able to separate the essential from the historical element. The modern ideal of worldly activity is contrasted with the medieval ideal of monasticism, and judgement is given in favour of the former without a proper understanding of the spirit which animated the latter.

Leaving aside the spurious and perverse forms of asceticism, we must examine the scope, nature, and implications of asceticism in Vedānta. William James has most pertinently remarked:

[Asceticism] symbolizes . . . the belief that there is an element of real wrongness in this world,

1. See *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.4.22.

2. H. D. Sharma, *Brahminical Asceticism*, p. 11.

3. Floyd H. Ross, *The Meaning of Life in Hinduism and Buddhism*, p. 56.

which is neither to be ignored nor evaded, but which must be squarely met and overcome by an appeal to the soul's heroic resources, and neutralized and cleansed away by suffering.... The ultra-optimistic form of the 'once-born' philosophy thinks we may treat evil by the method of ignoring.... [This can never be] a general solution ... and to minds of sombre tinge, ... such optimism is a shallow dodge or mean evasion.... Apart from the vagaries into which the unenlightened intellect ... may have let it wander, asceticism must ... be acknowledged to go with the profounder way of handling the gift of existence. Naturalistic optimism is mere syllabub and flattery and sponge-cake in comparison.⁴

Vedāntic asceticism implies a noble effort towards absolute freedom of spirit and is indicative of high culture and high moral elevation of spirit.⁵

But asceticism is not offered as the final solution of human existence in Vedānta. The detachment and mortifications practised are not ends, though the discipline seems severe, but are accepted in order to release the self from the pull of its lower nature. The belief in the power of the higher nature to overcome the world, and the effort of thought and will to control the senses by sheer effort, constitute the heroic aspect of asceticism. There was no doubt among Vedāntic ascetics about the power of self-control to effect union with the Divine. Thus,

[there] developed a systematic method of rational conduct for the purpose of overcoming the *status naturae*, to free man from the power of irrational impulses and his dependence on the world and on nature. It attempted to subjugate man to the supremacy of a powerful will, to bring his actions under constant self-control with

a careful consideration of their ethical consequences.⁶

Since Vedāntic asceticism is a means to an end, its disciplines are commensurate with the forces it has to overcome. The purgatory is not of another world but here in this world; the foes of freedom and purity are anger etc. which have to be mastered by *tapas*. It considers knowledge and detachment (*viveka* and *vairāgya*) equally indispensable like the two wings of a bird, enabling the soul to rise to its goal of freedom and peace.⁷ What the critic calls the ascetic regulation of the whole of social life is the Vedāntic way of converting social life into a necessary discipline, preparatory to the entering of *sannyāsa*. The ascetic ideal in society becomes 'positive' in the command for self-renunciation through service in the form of *svadharma*, and to this is connected the command to put aside the idea of being an agent and enjoyer. It may be noted in passing that Vedānta does not require *sannyāsa* for all people; but does require detachment, nor does Vedānta treat the body with contempt, but as an instrument of righteousness, *dharma-sādhana*.

As for the type of austerity practised in Vedāntic discipline, it is necessary to remember that neither in *vidvat* nor in *vividiṣa sannyāsa* is there merely mortification of the flesh for its own sake; on the contrary, yoga is avoidance of excess and abstinence.⁸ Vedāntic asceticism should not be equated to Hatha-yoga. It is a fallacy to confuse the question of origin with the development and uses of any

4. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 354-56.

5. Cf. S. N. Dasgupta, *Indian Mysticism*, p. 71.

6. Max Weber's remarks in *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism* (p. 118) about Protestant monasticism apply to Vedāntic asceticism, having reference to *dharma* and *sādhana*.

7. *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 376.

8. *Bhagavad-Gītā*, 6.16-17.

doctrine or practice. It has been remarked that primitive yoga was a magical cult practised to yoke or harness the spirit of the gods for human purposes or to 'yoke' psychic powers by self-mortification (*tapas*), its aim being, not Brahman, but *siddhi*.⁹ But primitive yoga is not to be confused with Vedāntic discipline, for Vedānta can utilize yoga for its own higher purpose of *mokṣa*.¹⁰ This is not merely a novel interpretation, because the distinction of the two types of yoga has been clear to the *Vedāntins* themselves.¹¹

In the three Prasthānas of Vedānta the distinction of false and true austerity is clearly made. The *Gītā* teaches Rāja-yoga and the ideal of *niṣkāma-karma*. Whatever the technical doctrine of salvation, it is in fact an inner freedom by which to meet sensual temptations, the independence of a serene and self-sufficient superior spirit. Otto remarks:

In this way there arises ... against the background of primitive yoga ... 'character-yoga' for which the true yogin is the self-controlled man who pulls himself together in intense concentration, ... the 'harnessing' now becomes the life-

long 'yoking' of will against sense-impressions and emotional agitations, a never ceasing condition of control and alertness, inner 'collectedness' therefore, but at the same time persistent exercise of will, together with discipline.¹²

Contrary to the critic's judgement that Vedāntic asceticism ends only in 'folly and idiocy' or 'annihilation', the aim of asceticism is to enable man to lead a completely alert and intelligent (illuminated) life. Ascetic conduct means a rational planning of life in accordance with the demands of the spirit or the will of God.¹³ Nor may exception be taken to the use of the term 'rational' in this context, because it must be remembered that 'rational' is not a term with a unitary meaning, and mystic rationality is different from worldly rationality. Asceticism is the ideal life of the Vedāntic sage, pure, chaste, discriminating, detached: a genuine emancipation of nature which enables him to look on pleasure and pain, abundance and privation, as alike irrelevant and indifferent (*dvandvātīta*), and to engage in action and have experiences without the fear of corruption and enslavement.¹⁴

9. Rudolf Otto, *The Original Gita*, pp. 117, 177.

10. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 129.

11. See *Māṇḍukya Kārikā*, 3.34-46. Yogīs shrink from Vedāntic truth thinking that *jñāna-yoga* brings annihilation of self, but they are non-discriminating and full of fear. They look on mind as separate from but related to Atman and try to attain destruction of misery or fearlessness by control of mind. But their effort (*cittavṛtti-nirodha*) is not the only way. The mind should be disciplined, brought back from the object to Atman but not to *samādhi-yoga* or *laya* which is as harmful as desire, since it is characterized by absence of Atma-jñāna. The Sādhaka should not taste the happiness experienced by the yogī seeking *samādhi*, which is false, since the mind is not identified with Atman. The mind when brought under discipline—not in the oblivion of deep sleep, nor distracted by objects, but when quiescent like the flame of light in a windless place—then only it becomes Brahman.

ABSENCE OF ETHICS AND ITS CAUSES

The problem of moral content and standard must be studied on the grounds of Vedānta's own theory and practice. Since it is avowedly and actually a philosophy of realization, not merely a speculative or 'pure' philosophy, the moral and mystical development of man is its essence, not accident. This practical nature presupposes competency (*adhikāra*) in

12. *The Original Gita*, pp. 128-29.

13. Cf. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 154. This rationalization of conduct within the world but for the sake of the world beyond was a consequence of ascetic Protestantism.

14. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 353.

its adherent who, if he wishes to follow any method of culture (*sādhana*), must first live a meritorious ethical life. Vedānta is realistic enough to realize that man as he is, is not living a divine life; hence an elaborate discipline with exact directions and training is worked out to develop a noble character¹⁵ Nor can it be objected that the discipline is over-balanced by sheer ritualism:

Despite the handicap of an over-stressed ritual, India emerged with the belief that religion is not a matter of form but of mind and will and that character is more essential than good ritual; (and the old rule) by deed, thought and word to do good to all living beings ... shows how ill-deserved ... the criticism is which declares Hindu morality to be only a matter of form.¹⁶

When it is said in *jñāna-mārga* that *mokṣa* is brought about by knowledge alone, it is presumed that the aspirant has a fully developed moral character. Critics fail to grasp the significance of the well-known rule that a pure *sāttvik* mind is the very first step and that intellectual apprehension and moral worth are but two sides of the *sādhaka's* nature. 'Knowledge without morality is as futile as morality without knowledge.'¹⁷ Though salvation is the fruit of knowledge in Vedānta, knowledge is no simple intellectualism but involves a life and conduct resulting from it 'But apart from gnosis of the mystic even the knowledge of the ordinary worshippers is no ordinary knowledge but a combination of ethical, devotional and intellectual factors.'¹⁸

It is necessary to understand the exact position of ethics in Vedānta. In one sense morality has a negative significance since

immorality is clearly regarded as a serious or fatal hindrance by all scriptures of Vedānta.¹⁹ Also, Vedānta considers morality to lead to happy existence but to fall away in the state of release, as it is considered to be a sign of imperfection from the ultimate standpoint. This philosophical position does not prevent the teaching of a practical ethics for the worldly-minded as well as for spiritual men, inculcating the loftiest moral principles. Criticism of negativistic ethics can be refuted by the many injunctions to exert oneself and to engage in active good works.²⁰ It is true that in the period of decline there was neglect of many virtues and values, but it is noteworthy that positivistic, humanistic values (charity, noninjury, toleration, love, hospitality) have not suffered as much as mundane values like political and social efficiency.

The charge of individualistic ethics is based on the ground that in Vedānta moral forms of conduct are prescribed with reference to either good future conditions for the soul or the soul's attainment of salvation.²¹ If this criticism is exaggerated to mean that since it teaches morality for purifying the soul of earthly things we might reach the same result without morality at all, such a misconception is to be rejected out of hand, since the moral struggle is an essential part of the discipline, and so is the distinction of right and wrong. From the individual's standpoint the moral standard is clear and simple. It is a fact that Vedānta does not face the problem of individual versus society; therefore, social ethics does not become imperative for it as a separate field of thought and action. It largely in-

15. Edmund Davison Soper, *The Inevitable Choice*, p. 98; cf. F. M. Müller, *Three Lectures on Vedānta*, p. 163.

16. E. W. Hopkins, *Ethics of India*, pp. 236, 255.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

19. E.g. the *Bhagavad-Gītā* provides a practical moral code for distinguishing the divine and the demoniac characters.

20. Hopkins, *Ethics of India*, p. 179; P. D. Mehta, *Early Indian Religious Thought*, p. 132.

21. John McKenzie, *Hindu Ethics*, p. 250.

sists on character-formation by a pious, abstemious asceticism, a well-balanced life of restraint. Vedānta does emphasize subjectivistic ethics—austerity, self-control, renunciation, non-attachment and concentration rate high as virtues—yet it is to be remembered that personal morality alone can be the true foundation of a high moral tone in society. Nor is the ethics of inner perfection, subject as it is to the primary demand of surrendering individual claims, inconsistent with social ethics, since inner perfection finds corresponding expression in outer conduct. Nor may it be forgotten that moral conduct has both subjective and objective aspects; though the former aspect rates very high with Vedānta, the latter has never been totally rejected by it.²²

It may also be noted that ethics has two aims. On the one hand it seeks to establish harmonious relations between men and, on the other, between God (Truth) and man. Henri Bergson distinguishes between 'natural' morality—tribal, traditional and institutional—which treats the individual as a unit of society, and 'absolute' morality based on mystic intuition, dynamic in nature and having the effect of an appeal, in which the individual is open to humanity but always as an individual.²³ Vedānta takes its stand on the latter and is bound to appear individualistic.

Two other features of Vedāntic ethics should be noted, because the misunderstanding of them partly accounts for the criticism against it. First, the emphasis is always on the inward rather than the outward aspect of conduct. The insistence is on control of conduct at its source—the motive and desire—rather than regulation of its outer expression and results. Second, the relativity of standards is taught, in which right ethics for each is what is true to his

own capacity and character, his aspirations and dharma. Vedānta resists an absolute standard at the human level, because to attempt a higher ethics without sufficient knowledge and discipline is a sure way to destruction. Three levels of ethical development are to be noted. First, there is the standard of the good life for the man in the world, strictly within the socio-moral sphere and judged in terms of obedience to law or dharma; second, a much stricter code for the ascetic, who is at a higher moral level, to be understood in terms of self-responsibility; and third, a different standard of transcendental morality for the perfected man based on the freedom of the Ātman. Though both characteristics may suffer from misapplications and exaggerations, yet the wisdom of either, from the moral standpoint, cannot be denied.

Here the critic raises the objection of logical inconsistency.²⁴ Morality contradicts Vedāntic metaphysics and is not deducible from it. The identity conception of Advaita is not differentiating enough to provide the basis of a sound social ethics. Critically considered, it is as compatible with utmost egoism as with thoroughgoing altruism. If there is one ultimate spirit, what does it matter which illusory self suffers or enjoys? Altruism requires sympathy based on separation of the object from one-self, and not sympathy of the unconscious type in the absorption of identity. This, when coupled with denial of others' individuality in the impersonalistic conception, is really fatal to social morality.²⁵

In answer, it may be pointed out to the critic that it is rather dogmatic to think that certain conclusions (morality) can result only from one premise and not others; that is, the critic has fallen into the fallacy of

24. Cf. W. S. Urquhart, *The Vedanta and Modern Thought*, p. 175.

25. Cf. S. N. Dasgupta, *Indian Mysticism*, pp. 98-99.

22. Cf. Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanisads*, p. 361.

23. *Religion and Morality*, p. 5.

definition by initial predication, assuming that the subject of discourse (morality) cannot belong to any other complex except the one he has indicated in his own definition. It would be well to make the point clear that the presupposition of man's essentially sinful nature and of God as the dispenser of rewards and punishments for man's good and evil deeds, and the function of religion and philosophy as the means of 'saving' man from this, is not applicable in the case of Vedānta. The critic who applies the above standard of morality is bound to come to the 'conclusion' that Vedānta is lacking in morality or has no high level of morality. Such a conclusion is unjustified; not only can the relation of individual and society be worked out from the principle of Ātman, but in fact ethical enquiries of Vedānta (dharma and *sādhana*) are based upon its metaphysical position that Ātman as distinct from transitory *saṁsāra* is the Good and most satisfying reality.²⁶

26. Cf. Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanisads*, p. 404. Hence there would remain to Christianity the merit of having more profoundly grasped morality, to Vedānta the merit of having set forth the highest attainable reason for it.

In support of morality Vedānta insists that only after *jñāna*, when the world is seen as Brahman, can the vision of man be truly liberal and fruitful.²⁷ The Vedāntic command to know the self is not to know the ego but what lies beyond the ego, the self which runs through all. Its conviction that every human being has his true meaning in Brahman is a metaphysical one, but it breaks out as a moral power also.²⁸ Nor is the Vedāntic teaching that the self is the supreme object of love equivalent to selfishness but the very opposite.²⁹ The highest and purest morality is the immediate consequence of Vedānta. *Tat tvam asi* gives in three words metaphysics and morals together.³⁰

(to be continued)

27. सा दृष्टिः परमोदारा ।

28. Cf. F. M. Müller, *The Vedānta Philosophy*, p. 89; also Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanisads*, p. 404.

29. Cf. Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 101; also Araham Kaplan, *The New World of Philosophy*, p. 252.

30. Paul Deussen, *Elements of Metaphysics*, p. 336.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

SRI RAMANA: REMINISCENCES: BY G. V. SUBBARAMAYYA. Published by Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai, S. India. 1979 (second edition). Pp. viii+224. Rs. 6.00.

After a lapse of twelve long years, these stirring reminiscences of one whom Sri Ramana loved deeply are available again. Subbaramayya had the rare fortune of beginning his first meeting with Sri Ramana on a note of sweetness and familiarity that lasted as long as the Sage lived. With his faithful and vivid record of various incidents, even insignificant ones, in the life of the Maharshi, Subbaramayya projects a clear image of how a *sthitaprajña* or a *jñāni*, established in the knowledge of his Self, apparently reacts to the world around him, how he responds to

its joys and miseries, and also to the love and devotion of the hundreds that sit at his feet.

Not all came to the Sage for spiritual illumination. Many had their share of family and social problems, physical maladies and mental anxieties to unburden before him. To all he was unfailing in suggesting some remedy, or in giving a word of consolation. Not that Sri Ramana encouraged people to go to him with petty desires. In fact, his occasional illnesses, some quite serious, served to keep away such people. He is quoted as having said: My ill-health is really a blessing in disguise. For, seeing this massaging for me, people think, "Poor Swami! he himself is ailing. What can he do for us?", and so they leave me alone. But if I too dispensed *vibhuti* or *tirtham* (holy water), I should

have been mobbed and smothered !' There was the case of a child who was given up as dying by all doctors who had examined her. After a telegram was sent by the anxious father to Sri Ramana seeking his intercession, the child began slowly to recover. Later, when he was asked, 'Sri Bhagavan, did you not think that you must do something, to save the child?', he replied, 'Even the thought to save the child is a *sankalpa* (will), and one who has any *sankalpa* is no *jñāni*. In fact, such thinking is unnecessary. The moment the *jñāni*'s eye falls upon a thing, there starts a divine automatic action which itself leads to the highest good.'

The last thirty-five pages of this book give a detailed and almost day-to-day account of Sri Ramana's illness—a cancerous attack at his shoulder—through all of which stands vindicated the truth of his own utterance : 'Subbaramayya wants me to cure myself with will-power.... But the *jñāni* has no will of his own. Neither has he a body nor the ills to which it is heir. As it came so it will go. To be is our nature, not to go and come. Body itself is a disease—*sthaulyam* (grossness).... But believe me when I tell you that in my view there is no tumour, no Sarcoma Cancer at all.'

There are many similar reminiscences recorded in this book, which bring out the many facets of the great personality of Sri Ramana: the poet, the disciplinarian, the Guru, the devotee of Arunachala, the embodiment of tenderness and compassion, the excellent cook, the friend of animals, the attentive *tāta* (grandfather) to all the children who went to him and, above all, the *jñāni* ever poised in his Self.

SWAMI ATMARAMANANDA
Ramakrishna Mission, Ranchi

PRINCIPAL SYMBOLS OF WORLD RELIGIONS : BY SWAMI HARSHANANDA. Published by Ramakrishna Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education, Mysore-570 002. 1978. Pp. 47. Rs. 3.50.

This unique book on 'Principal Symbols of World Religions' by Swami Harshananda brings together the symbols by which the great religions of mankind are known. These symbols may be described as pictographic signatures of the different faiths at the sight of which even the lay and the uninformed are able to recognize their individualities. The explanations accompanying the illustrations of the different symbols by their very brevity, conceal the considerable referencing that has gone into them. The use-

fulness of the book is enhanced by the simplicity of treatment. It is intelligible to anyone who knows at least a smattering of English.

The Introduction is an answer to cynics who laugh at religious symbolism. They are treated to a scientific and convincing explanation on the need for symbols for the communication of thought. Even words and numerals without their symbolic potency would cease to be conveyors of thought and all knowledge would become impossible. If this is true in the fields of science, mathematics, literature, etc., it is truer still in the field of religious experience. A religious symbol is like a nation's flag—it is a rallying point for the faithful, a proclamation of truth and a comfort to those who seek haven in the experience of their spiritual mentors.

This small book presents twenty-seven symbols covering eleven major religions of the world. Of these, seventeen symbols belong to Hinduism, including the non-sectarian insignia of the Ramakrishna Mission. Among these the author has included the Linga, the Śrīcakra, the Śāligrāma and the Nandi which are actually used as cult objects in worship; but there is a subtle distinction between religious symbols which are used as insignias and these which are actually worshipped as images of the Deity after being duly installed with scriptural injunctions. This difficulty, however, does not arise in respect to other symbols like Pranava (Om) or the Urdhvapundra.

The limitations of space, the author admits, have prompted him to be selective. The illustrations therefore are of the more important of the symbols which are used by the different sects. Of them, the most widely accepted in Hinduism is the Pranava, which is prefixed to the name of all the Hindu deities in the course of worship or prayer. However, the only symbol to which actual worship is offered by the Śaivites, the Śāktas and the Vaiṣṇavas alike is the Śrīcakra which signifies the divine Mother-principle associated with both Śiva and Viṣṇu. The author has appropriately discussed at relatively greater length the significance of Pranava and Śrīcakra.

These symbols, whatever religion or faith they represent, are not necessarily evocative of the philosophical truths they embody. Their meaning is often esoteric and has to be explained. This is exactly what the author has done. Perhaps the most evocative of these symbols are the Cross on which Jesus was crucified, and the Wheel of Dharma which the Buddha set in motion with his first sermon. Free India has acknowledged its debt to the life and message of the Buddha

by incorporating the Ashokan Wheel of Dharma on the national flag. To medieval Christendom which fought the wars of the Crusades, the sign of the Cross was a rallying point invested with martial appeal; and to the spiritually minded it has always been a symbol of self-sacrifice for the love of God and welfare of men.

Most Indians who are familiar with Hindu, Muslim, Christian and Sikh symbols are unfamiliar with the symbolism of other religions like Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Shintoism, Taoism, etc. Even the symbol of Jainism, only recently adopted in spite of the great antiquity of this

religion, is not known to many. This by itself is sufficient justification for a publication of this kind.

The utility of this book is out of all proportion to its size. The text is printed in bold type and the line drawings are by and large authentic. The style is simple and explanatory, within the comprehension even of school children. It makes a useful addition to any library.

SRI S. SRINIVASACHAR
Chief Editor of 'Yojana' (Retd.)
Mysore

NEWS AND REPORTS

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION STUDENTS' HOME MADRAS

REPORT FOR APRIL 1979 TO MARCH 1980

In 1980 this Institution, started by Swami Ramakrishnananda on 17 February 1905, completed 75 years of useful service in the cause of the education of the poor and destitute. The activities of its various branches are described below:

The *Hostel* at Mylapore had 334 boys: 186 inmates in the junior section (for the boys of the Residential High School) and 148 students in the senior section (for the boys of the Technical Institute run by the Home and some poor boys of the Vivekananda College).

The *Residential High School* (standards VI to X) had a strength of 184. There were 4,820 books in the school library.

In the *Residential Technical Institute* the Diploma Course of three years was provided in Mechanical Engineering, three electives being offered: Machineshop Technology, Automobile Technology, and Agriculture and Farm Equipment Technology. The total number of students was 130. Also, there were 21 students in the Post-Diploma Course in Automobile Engineering.

The *Sri Ramakrishna Centenary Primary School* (standards I to V) in Mylapore had 397 students (221 boys and 176 girls).

The *Ramakrishna Mission Middle School* (standards I to VIII) in Malliankaranai (Chingleput District) had 211 students (156 boys and 55 girls). Midday meals were served to 100 children daily; and in the hostel attached to the school there were 24 boarders, all belonging to scheduled castes and backward classes.

Two mobile vans carried out on-the-spot preventive maintenance servicing to agricultural tractors; 72 tractor owners were members of this *Agro-Industrial Service Centre* scheme.

Donations may be sent to: The Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Mylapore, Madras-600 004.

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION ASHRAM... CHANDIGARH

REPORT FOR APRIL 1979 TO MARCH 1980

Spiritual and Cultural: In the shrine, there was Ram-Nam Sankirtan every Ekadashi and special worship and bhajan on various holy days. Several times a week regular discourses on the scriptures and spiritual topics—including regular classes for youth and children—were conducted by the Swami-in-charge and others. The Library had 2,150 books (number lent: 499), and the Book-Sales section provided publications of the Ramakrishna Order in English, Sanskrit, Hindi and Punjabi. The Combined Public Celebration of the birth-anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda was held from November 3 to 9, 1979.

Medical and relief: The Free Homoeopathic Dispensary served 1,863 patients (new cases: 401). Devotees and friends of the Ashrama collected Rs. 4,800 for the flood relief conducted in Morvi (Gujarat) by the Ramakrishna Mission.

Educational: The Vivekananda Students' Home provided accommodation for about 40 college students.

Donations may be sent to: The Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sector 15-B, Chandigarh-160 016.

LAST PAGE : COMMENTS

Prosperity and Poverty

A recently published report of the World Bank shows that it is impressed by India's creditable performance in the field of agriculture and in achieving self-sufficiency in food. The report notes with satisfaction that the apparent level of grain consumption in India in 1978-79 was 170 kg. per capita or 'approximately equal to a calorie-sufficient quantity, on the average, for Indian population.' But then the report adds, 'With unequal distribution of this consumption, this means undernutrition for lower-income groups.'

The latter point was admitted by the Minister for Planning in Rajyasabha in July. According to him about 306 million people—more than half of the country's population—are living below the poverty line. Of these, 249 million are in rural areas and 57 million in urban areas. Prof. Ashok Mitra and Sekhar Mukherji in a study (referred to in these columns in November 1980) state: 'The nation has on its hands an extraordinary situation in which two-fifths of the population go without enough cereals and pulses while both production and buffer stocks in the hands of the Government go on increasing.'

The Government learned an important lesson from the famines that plagued the country during the first two decades after Independence. As a precautionary measure the Government procures every year huge quantities of grain from farmers and keeps these as buffer stock. Production of grain in India has grown from a mere 50 million tonnes in 1950 to 123 million tonnes in 1977. The Government now holds 20 million tonnes as buffer stock. The Mitra-Mukherji study shows that despite protestations of the Food Corporation of India, much of this buffer grain irretrievably deteriorates owing to unsatisfactory storage conditions and the attack of rodents and other pests. Therefore a large buffer stock is a mixed blessing.

In developed countries the problem is how to reduce the calorie intake of the people. In India the problem is to provide just enough calories to all people in order to keep the body machine working, just plain starch in the form of rice, wheat or millets to appease hunger. But according to the study mentioned above, 'Yet with strictly equitable distribution a mere 110 million tonnes would give adequate nutrition to everybody.'

In spite of increased production enough food is not reaching the poor. Under scarcity conditions it is women and children who suffer most. Unequal distribution is not merely due to a failure of bureaucracy. It is an inherent defect of a democratic polity. However, the frankly capitalist democracies of the West have satisfactorily removed this defect. But in the so-called socialist democracies of developing countries the problem has not been successfully tackled. Income-tax, land-ceiling, etc. are only negative measures the benefits of which are offset by their stifling effect on production. What is needed is a positive measure in the form of an ideology-based sweeping reform of society.
