Prabuddha Bharata

Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

Editorial Office

P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
Dt. Pithoragarh 262524, U.P.

Publication Office

5 Dehi Entally Road
Calcutta 700 014
Phone : 44-2898

[*Rates inclusive of postage*]

Annual Subscription

India, Nepal & Bangladesh	Rs. 15.00
U.S.A. & Canada	$ 10.00
Other Countries	£ 4.00

Life Subscription (30 *years*)

Rs. 300 $ 200 £ 60

Single Copy

Rs. 1.50 $ 1.00 50 P.

Information for contributors, publishers, subscribers, and advertisers overleaf.

MAY 1983

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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'

तं यज्ञं बर्हिषि प्रौक्षन्पुरुषं जातमग्रतः ।
तेन देवा अयजंत साध्या ऋषयश्च ये ।।

1. That Puruṣa[1], who was born in the beginning, was consecrated on the sacred grass, and was sacrificed[2] by the gods, Sādhyas[3] and Ṛṣis.

Ṛg-Veda 10.90.7.

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* *Puruṣa-Sūkta* continued. To understand the hymn it should be kept in mind that two types or dimensions of Puruṣa (God as Person) are mentioned in it. One is the unmanifested primary Puruṣa, the primordial cause, the Inner Controller, Īsvara, the Supreme Self. The other is the secondary Puruṣa known as the Virāj appearing as the manifested universe. Similarly there are two creations, according to Sāyaṇa. In the primary creation the Virāj with all its beings arose out of the Primal Puruṣa. In the secondary creation the Virāj produces all the food needed for the maintenance of living beings ; this is an unbroken creative activity. Both the creations are regarded as forms of Divine Self-sacrifice. The first creation was mentioned in the 5th stanza, and the second creation in the 6th. In the 7th stanza the imagery of the 6th stanza is developed further. Here the whole universe is conceived as a vast cosmic sacrificial altar into which the Virāt Puruṣa is invoked and sacrificed by the gods who are parts of the Virāj. The double creation may be compared to a mother's producing the child out of her body and then continually feeding it with the milk derived from her own life-blood.

1. That is, the Virāt Puruṣa, though Sāyaṇa does not clearly indicate which Puruṣa is meant.

2. According to Sāyaṇa, this sacrifice is a purely mental act (*mānasa-yāga*). The whole hymn is meant to be used as a meditation, *upāsanā*, on the Supreme Self as the all-pervading Reality.

3. *Sādhya* means 'competent to perform creation' and refers to Prajāpati and others (Sāyaṇa).

ABOUT THIS NUMBER

The Vedic *ṛṣis* who had an integral view of life and Reality treated meditation and sacrifice as one discipline. This is the theme of this month's EDITORIAL.

In WILL-POWER AND ITS DEVELOPMENT Swami Budhananda, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, points out that the basic cause of all the small and big tragedies of human life is the inability to develop and exercise will-power. The article, a product of mature thinking and wide experience in spiritual counselling, is only a brief working outline of a larger book now in the press.

BUDDHA'S TRUTH is a lucid analysis of Buddha's vision and interpretation of Truth. The author Robert P. Utter is a former teacher of English and philosophy at the City College of San Francisco.

Swami Chetanananda, head of the Vedant Society of St. Louis, concludes the second instalment of the life of GOPALER-MA, one of the great woman-disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Dr. Umesh Patri of the Department of English, D.A.V. College, Koraput, Orissa, traces HINDU PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES ON THE WRITERS OF EMERSONIAN PERIOD in America like Poe, Melville, Whitman and Whittier.

MEDITATION AND SACRIFICE—I

(EDITORIAL)

Social and cosmic dimensions of meditation

'I want peace of mind', we frequently hear people say. What do they mean by peace of mind? Life is full of uncertainties, conflicts and day-to-day problems, and by 'peace' most people mean a life without these difficulties. But polarity (that is, the occurrence of all experiences in pairs: joy and sorrow, good and evil, love and hate, etc.), impermanence, and ignorance are inseparable attributes of life and, as long as these persist, troubles and afflictions are unavoidable. True peace is not a form of enjoyment, nor is it like sleep. Rather, it is a state of transcendence, remaining unaffected by the polarity, impermanence and ignorance of the world and the pleasures and sorrows that spring from them. Real transcendence is not seclusion or escape, but is the attainment of a higher state of consciousness which harmonizes all polarities and integrates individual life with universal life. Real peace is thus a state of transcendental harmony.

Peace is not something we get by shouting 'I want peace' or by worrying about peace. It is one of the paradoxes of life that peace eludes the person who hunts for it. Peace is a result, an effect, that follows sincere effort and fulfilment. When we hear the call of the ideal or duty, we cannot get peace until we have responded to it in the best way possible for us. This is all the more true of spiritual life. Supreme everlasting peace is the result of higher spiritual experience which can be attained only through intense effort and struggle, and until it is attained, one of the first things that a spiritual aspirant should do is to sacrifice the illusory peace of mind that mundane life offers.

Genuine spiritual experience is the result of a transformation and expansion

of consciousness. This is what meditation brings about, but it can do this only when the power of the body and mind are coordinated and converted into an intense one-pointed effort over a long period. It is only when we attempt to do this we understand that there are various other forces acting upon us. We then find out that meditation has social and cosmic dimensions.

Meditation is not an isolated activity. It involves the whole personality, and personality is imbedded in the social matrix. The quality, content and effectiveness of meditation depend upon a person's beliefs, attitudes, moods and experiences ; and all these are shaped by social forces. He may try to give up external activities, ignore his duties, avoid the company of others. But they continue to exert their influence upon him, and the residues of past experiences burst upon his consciousness during the silent hours of meditation with a force which he can hardly resist. Furthermore, everyone's life is caught in the web of cause-and-effect, the tangle of karmic relationships. The food we eat, the books we read and the innumerable things of daily use are the products of the labour of other people. The karmic effects of these obstruct the unfolding of higher consciousness in us, and bind the soul to the temporal world. The more sophisticated our life is, the more becomes our social obligation and bondage.

One of the main causes of failure in meditative life is the ignorance or neglect of the social forces acting upon human consciousness, and to look upon meditation as a form of escape. Real meditation is a process of transformation of consciousness, and for this it is first of all necessary to recognize and understand the various forces acting on consciousness. If practised properly, meditation itself will reveal the nature of these forces and how to handle them. Forgetfulness or repression is not the way to deal with them. As the Gita says, 'All beings follow nature, what can repression do?'[1] The social forces when wrongly handled create bondage and obstruction, but when sublimated and connected to intense spiritual aspiration become a constructive force and speed up our spiritual progress. Success in meditation depends to a large extent on our ability to integrate its social dimension into our life and adapting meditation to its demands.

Meditation has a larger cosmic dimension too. It is essentially a mental activity but needs the support of the body, for meditation is difficult when there is no coordination between the two. Both the body and the mind are only the individual manifestations of the universal principle of life known as Prāṇa. The individual is in unbroken contact with the cosmos at the three levels of body, mind and consciousness, and there is a continuous exchange of Prāṇa between the two. When this exchange is defective, it produces illness in the body and either dullness or restlessness in the mind. Under such conditions concentration becomes difficult. Indeed disharmony in the flow of Prāṇa is one of the major obstacles on the path of meditation. Yet most spiritual aspirants have no clear knowledge of the nature of Prāṇa and how it affects their health, thoughts, emotions, work and concentration. If we want to avoid obstacles in meditation, we should learn to live in harmony with cosmic forces at the physical and mental levels.

Thus success in meditative life needs two types of integration: integration between the individual and the society and between the individual and the cosmos. Is there one general principle comprehending both the types of integration? Is

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1. प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि निग्रहः किं करिष्यति ।
Bhagavad-Gītā 3.33.

there a universal law which governs the interrelationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm at all levels? At the dawn of civilization the Vedic sages pondered deeply over this problem and discovered the principle of Yajña, the Law of Sacrifice. There is a close connection between meditation and *yajña.*

Three basic concepts

The Vedas are the embodiment of the holistic vision of life and Reality gained by the Ṛṣis. This vision lies at the foundation of Indian culture. All subsequent developments in the realms of values, beliefs, philosophical concepts, moral principles and social life have been an extension and practical application of the original experience of the Vedic Ṛṣis. And yet much of it still remains to be understood and actualized. No book, no teacher, no commentator, no Avatār has exhausted all the power, meaning and possibilities of the primordial vision of the Vedas. There are, however, three key words which give us an insight into the integral experience of the Vedic seers. These are: *ṛtam, yajña* and *dhī.*

Ṛtam

The Vedic seers saw Reality as an eternal self-regulating universal order or harmony which is the foundation and essence of all that exists. They called it *ṛtam.*[2] To the sages this is Truth, the ultimate Truth, and to live in tune with it is the true life. (Not to live in tune with it is *anrtam*, falsehood, false life.) In this integral Reality all distinctions between being and non-being, the absolute and the relative, spirit and matter, cause and effect, the individual and the universal, God and souls, the sacred an the secular, experience and expression, thought and action, good and evil, joy and sorrow—all differences and contradictions are harmonized and knit into one totality of Existence. It is an existential bond uniting God, man and the universe in one inter-dependent Life, an infinite living organism.

Ṛtam is not merely Truth or order. It is also a binding law which even the gods follow. It is the moral order of the universe. When we live in harmony with it, we attain supreme peace and blessedness. To live in tune with it is good life, for it avoids contradictions and conflicts, suppression and bondage. It is a life of fullness in which all the faculties and powers of man find full expression, and the potential divinity of the soul finds its full manifestation. It is divine life. So *ṛtam* is not only Truth but also Goodness.

In the Upaniṣads the word *ṛtam* is replaced by the words *sat* and *satya;* both the words mean the ultimate Truth and also goodness, holiness.[3] However the most characteristic feature of the Upaniṣads is the emphasis on *cit,* Consciousness, the inner Self, contrasted with the objective universe. This inner Self known as Brahman is considered to be the sole Reality, though a distinction (without a difference) is often made between the individual self or Atman and the supreme Self. With the emphasis on inner Self and consciousness, man's life lost its integral nature and Reality came to be looked upon as having three realms: the realm of the inner Self (*ādhyātmika*), the realm of external or physical objects (*ādhibhautika*) and the realm of gods (*ādhidaivika*).

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2. The Chinese concept of Tao comes nearest to this; the ancient Greek concept of Logos partially resembles it.

3. Cf. सदेव सोम्येदमग्र आसीदेकमेवाद्वितीयम् ।

Chāndogya-Upaniṣad 6.2.1.

तत् सत्यमित्याचक्षते ।

Taittirīya-Upaniṣad 2.6.1.

Cf. also *Gītā* 17.23.

We have seen that the word *ṛtam* originally meant not only Truth but also Goodness, the universal moral order or law. By the end of the Vedic period this latter meaning was transferred to the word *dharma* (from the root *dhṛ* meaning 'to bear, support, sustain'). With the development of theism and the law of Karma, *dharma* became the principle of divine justice meted out to people in accordance with their actions. The word *satya* came to stand for personal truthfulness, especially in speech. Thus the original integral concept of Reality as *ṛtam* came to be replaced by a divided view, and this was reflected in the disharmony in individual life and social organization.

Yajña

It is the fall from the universal divine harmony that is the cause of all human conflict, evil and suffering. In order to overcome these man must return to *ṛtam*, according to the Vedic seers, or to the transcendent Brahman, according to the Upaniṣadic sages. How to do this? God is the primordial Teacher of mankind, and He teaches through the example of His own life. The Vedas hold that the creation of the universe is the result of the self-sacrifice of the Puruṣa, the Supreme Person. This is not one primeval act, but a timeless act. It is this ever-proceeding continual act of divine Self-sacrifice that maintains the harmony, *ṛtam* of the universe. So if man wants to attain harmony and peace, he too must imitate the Divine and convert his whole life into a sacrifice, *yajña*. It is through self-sacrifice that man recovers the harmony that he has lost, develops his potential divinity and attains supreme peace. This is a most fundamental concept in Vedanta. It is the very foundation of all Vedantic forms of spiritual practice, and distinguishes Vedantic meditation (known as Upāsanā) from yogic and other form of meditation.

Yajña is not mere 'sacrifice' which means the giving up of something which is dear to one somewhat reluctantly. Yajña is not a one-way traffic, a unilateral giving, giving, giving to God, without receiving anything in return. It is a two-way process of which giving is only one part, receiving being the other. We can give only what we receive, and without receiving anything what will we give? The English word 'sacrifice' stresses only the giving aspect, as the later Mīmāmsaka (ritualist) philosophers too did.[4] The Vedic idea of Yajña may be described as 'participation' in the living drama of the cosmos. The essential point in participation is non-retention, not holding back. Life gives us food, air, energy, ideas, knowledge, love, rest, joy—life itself. It is an unceasing flow which can be maintained only by giving back to it what is taken out of it. This is what Yajña means, consciously maintaining this flow by not retaining what belongs to the universe. Life is a perpetually self-renewing cycle of energy and consciousness, an expression of *ṛtam*. The Gita calls it the *yajña-cakra*, the cosmic wheel of sacrifice. A person who holds back things without giving them to others, who lives only for himself, causes a break or obstruction in this cosmic cycle. About such a person the Gita says, 'He who follows not here the wheel thus set in motion is sinful, sensual and lives in vain'.[5]

There are two types of Yajña: divine and human. The sun is continuously giving away its energy by converting its hydrogen into

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4. देवतोद्देशेन द्रव्यत्याग: ।

5. एवं प्रवर्तितं चक्रं नानुवर्तयतीह य: ।
अघायुरिन्द्रियारामो मोघं पार्थ स जीवति ॥
Bhagavad-Gītā 3.16.

helium at the rate of 600 million tons a second. What else is this process but a form of colossal solar self-sacrifice? The creation and maintenance of this whole universe, the constant rejuvenation of the earth through the rising and setting of the sun, the fall of rain, the flow of rivers, the blowing of wind, the growth of plants and animals, and all other countless, ever-recurring processes of creation, maintenance and destruction going on all over the universe—all these are manifestations of the cosmic Yajña of the Divine. That is why Śrī Kṛṣṇa says, 'The manifested Brahman (or Virāj) is established in Yajña.'[6] The food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe are all the sacramental products, the *yajña-śeṣam* or *prasāda* of the divine sacrifice. Even the natural physiological processes of the human body like breathing, digestion of food, production of energy in the cells through the citric-acid (Kreb's) cycle and oxidative phosphorylation, etc. are parts of the divine yajña. As the Lord declares in the Gita, 'I have nothing to gain in the three worlds, yet I continuously work. If I did not work unceasingly, these worlds would be destroyed.'[7]

What then is the individual Yajña? It is man's *conscious* participation in the divine Yajña. Any action becomes a *yajña* when it is done consciously and its fruit offered to the Cosmic Being. Self-awareness and selflessness are the two factors which convert mechanical secular activities into a spiritual discipline. Most actions of ordinary people lack these two factors, and that is why they lead to bondage and sorrow. This is stated in the Gita: 'This world becomes a source of bondage only when work is done not as *yajña*.'[8] Almost all the miseries of life and the blunders we commit are caused by selfishness and our blind unconscious way of living and working. When work is done with selflessness and Self-awareness, it will not lead to bondage but will help to liberate the soul. This is not only the foundational principle of the Gita but an important spiritual law. Hindu Sādhanā and spiritual life are based on this law.

Self-awareness is an important factor in spiritual life. In the first place, it prevents the soul from getting bound. Secondly, it connects individual *yajña* with the divine *yajña*. Thirdly, it has great transforming power. Even an ordinary action done with Self-awareness immediately starts producing great changes in a person's consciousness, whereas meditation and Japa done without it may not produce any noticeable change. Self-awareness converts every action into a *yajña*. In the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* human life lasting for a hundred years is conceived as 36,000 fires, each fire standing for a day's work. 'To one who *knows* thus, even while he is asleep, all beings at all times build up these above-mentioned fires.'[9]

Dhī

This takes us to the third principle enunciated in the Vedas, namely, the power of intuition known as *dhī*. This word does not mean the ordinary automatic thinking process, as many of the Western scholars have interpreted it. The Vedas themselves distinguish between ordinary mind (*manas*) and *dhī*. As the great Dutch scholar J. Gonda has established, *dhī* is intentional

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6. तस्मात् सर्वगतं ब्रह्म नित्यं यज्ञे प्रतिष्ठितम् ।
Gītā 3.15. Here the word *yajña* refers to divine Yajña, and not the pouring of oblation by priests, as the popular commentaries suggest, which makes very little sense.

7. *Bhagavad-Gītā* 3.22,23.

8. यज्ञार्थात् कर्मणोऽन्यत्र लोकोऽयं कर्मबन्धनः ।
Gītā 3.9.

9. *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa* 10.4.1.12.

thought which becomes transcendental vision. It is the power of illumination hidden in the mind. The *Ṛg-Veda* describes it as having seven aspects (*sapta-śīrṣṇīm*, 'seven-headed') and originating in *ṛtam*, the ultimate Truth-Harmony.[10] Since it springs from Truth, if we want to realize the ultimate Reality we must follow *dhī*. That is why in the ancient prayer of Gāyatrī the aspirant prays for the awakening of *dhī*. All thoughts do not lead to Truth. In fact, most of our daily thoughts lead us away from Truth, and some of them may lead us only to sorrow or destruction. Only that thought which originates in Truth can lead us to Truth. This superior transcendental thought is *dhī*. It is *dhī* that is the guiding power in meditation. Those who want to meditate should remember that meditaion is not mere concentration on any thought. Rather, it is concentration through *dhī*, and until *dhī* is awakened true meditation is impossible. When *dhī* takes charge of the mind, meditation becomes spontaneous and will hit the mark.

Dhī is both spiritual intuition and will. In later Vedantic scriptures (under the influence of Sāṁkhya philosophy) it came to be replaced by the term *buddhi*. It should be remembered that mind and thought are not one and the same. Thought is a modification of the mind, no doubt ; but this modification needs a special power. What is this power? The Vedic sages called it *vāk*, the Word (often wrongly translated as 'speech') which later on came to be called *śabda*. *Vāk* acting upon the mind produces thoughts. Behind every thought there is the power of *vāk*. But by indulging in uncontrolled, unconscious, aimless, useless, impure and harmful thoughts the vast majority of people constantly fritter away this power. It is *dhī* that controls, conserves and guides the power of *vāk*.

How to awaken *dhī*? This is the most vital question in spiritual life. The easiest method of awakening *dhī* is through intense prayer. Prayer was very much neglected in later Hinduism, but in the early Vedic period it was the chief discipline of the *ṛṣis*. The major portion of *Ṛg-Veda* consists of prayers of different types. Ordinary prayers are nothing but articulated lower desires prompted by the instincts of self-preservation and sense gratification. But spiritual prayer is the expression of the soul's longing for the ultimate Truth. It is an impulse issuing from the divine substratum of the soul and the universe. The famous *Nāsādīya-Sūkta* of the Ṛg-Veda describes the nature of Reality before creation as different from the manifested and the unmanifested, like darkness hidden in darkness. 'In that, in the beginning, arose *kāma* (desire), the primordial seed of the mind.'[11] The Upaniṣads state that before creation the Supreme Spirit remained alone without a second. Then He desired, 'Let me be many ; let me be born.'[12] Human prayer is only an echo or reflex of that primordial divine desire. God's desire was to become many, the object of human prayer is to become one with God.

Meditation and sacrifice

The multiplicity that God desired was not chaos but cosmos (from the Greek

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10. इमां धियं सप्तशीर्ष्णीं पिता न
ऋतप्रजातां बृहतीमविन्दत् ।
Ṛg-Veda 10.67.1.

11. कामस्तदग्रे समवर्ततााधि
मनसो रेत: प्रथमं यदासीत् ।
Ṛg-Veda 10.129.4.

12. सोऽकामयत बहु स्यां प्रजायेयेति ।
Taittirīya-Upaniṣad 2.6.1 ; also Cf. *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 6.2.2,3.

kosmos meaning 'order'), *ṛtam*. How was this divine desire fulfilled? How did the eternal Cosmic Order came into being? Through *tapas*, declare the Vedas. Coming from the root *tap*= 'to burn or heat', the word *tapas* means any concentrated effort involving self-denial. The popular meaning of *tapas* is austerity, and austerity means self-denial, some form of sacrifice. In the Upaniṣads it often stands for concentration, meditation: 'One-pointedness of mind and senses is ideed the highest *tapas*.'[13] Divine *tapas* is both a sacrifice and a meditation. It is, as the *Puruṣa-Sūkta* states, God's self-sacrifice, *ātma-yajña*. Hence God is identified with sacrifice: 'Sacrifice is indeed Viṣṇu.'[14] Again, God's *tapas* is of the nature of knowledge,[15] a pure meditation. Hence God is identified with meditation.[16] As a matter of fact, for God sacrifice and meditation are not two different acts but two aspects of one single act. His sacrifice is purely an exercise of His omnipotent will through His cosmic meditation.

Conscious thought and conscious action are only two expressions of one single intentional experience. Therefore during the early Vedic period the sages treated *yajña* and *upāsanā*, sacrifice and meditation, as two aspects of one single discipline or *tapas*. This integrated *tapas* was the yoga of the Vedic seers. The physical ritual was only an externalization of the experience of unity with the cosmos attained through meditation. It was physical *tapas*. On the other hand, meditation was an internalization of the spirit of sacrifice worked out in the outside world. Intentional thought has great power, and the Vedic seers knew it. They treated *yajña* only as a vehicle for the transmission of the power of intention to the external world. Every rite was a meditated act, inspired and directed by the *dhī*.

In fine, to the Vedic seers *yajña* was external meditation, while *upāsanā* was internal *yajña*. Both had the same goal, namely, participation in *ṛtam*, Reality conceived as universal harmony. God, meditation and sacrifice constituted the triangle of Vedic life. They formed the basic equation of Vedic experience expressed in the statement: 'Thought is Prajāpati and Prajāpati is the sacrifice.'[17] The life of the Vedic Ṛṣi was not a struggle to realize an unknown transcendental Reality, but a direct participation in it. There was no division in it between the sacred and the secular, between the individual and the cosmic.

Gradually, as the concept of Reality changed from *ṛtam* to Brahman, the triangle of Vedic life broke up. And the equation based on it came to be replaced by the new equation of 'This Atman is Brahman', which shifted the focus of spiritual endeavour from integral life to inner consciousness. The division between inner life and outer life became stronger. In the meantime, in the hands of ignorant people *yajña* was becoming an independent institution in itself and, becoming more complex and magical, lost its spiritual meaning and purpose. It was being realized that the external act, like all other acts, perished as soon as it was performed, but the mental structure (*saṁsthā*) and connection (*nidāna*), that is, its conformity to the universal order

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13. मनसश्चेन्द्रियाणां च ह्यैकाग्र्यं परमं तपः।

Mahābhārata, Śā. 250.4, quoted by Śamkara on *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* 3.2.1.

14. यज्ञो वै विष्णुः।

Taittirīya-Saṁhitā 1.7.4.

15. यस्य ज्ञानमयं तपः।

Muṇḍaka-Upaniṣad 1.1.8,9.

16. तपो ब्रह्मेति।

Taittirīya-Upaniṣad 3.2.1.

17. *Kauṣītaki-Brāhmaṇa* 10.1.

did not perish. This made meditation more real than the external rituals. Soon it was found that thought was so powerful that it could bring about all the effects of rituals without performing them. As a result, *upāsanā* or meditation got separated form *yajña* or sacrifice, and became an independent spiritual discipline.

(To be continued)

WILL-POWER AND ITS DEVELOPMENT—I

SWAMI BUDHANANDA

Twofold ideal of life

Indian religious tradition teaches that human beings, generally speaking, can have two commendable aspirations. One is called *abhyudaya* or worldly prosperity and well-being ; the other is called *niḥśreyasa* or spiritual illumination and freedom. Of these both *dharma* or righteousness is said to be the basis. Prosperity that has not *dharma* as the basis crumbles down sooner than feared due to internal haemorrhage, so to say. Of course, spiritual illumination one cannot even think of except through being righteous.

Further it is taught, that if *abhyudaya* or worldly prosperity is not directed and subordinated to, and utilized for, attaining *niḥśreyasa*, spiritual illumination, it becomes self-destructive. We must however, clearly understand that from prosperity illumination is not a logical development, though 'empty stomach is no good for religion'.

Will-power: the secret of success

Now, this one thing we all definitely want in life: success. Whatever may be our undertakings—in the direction of worldly prosperity or spiritual illumination, in spheres secular or spiritual—not one of us likes to fail. We all want to succeed. Success though we all desire, it will be noticed in various spheres of life, truly successful men are only a handful. Many are those who attain only a moderate degree of success. And many more just fail.

There will be various factors in the stories of men's successes and failures of life. But in every single case there will be one common factor involved. That is the factor of will-power. The degree of a person's success in life is commensurate with the degree of will-power he has attained.

'How to develop the will-power' thus turns out to be the most important fundamental issue of everyone's life. It should be the part of our education from our childhood to be trained in developing the will-power, for without it education remains largely ineffective. Swami Vivekananda says:

> What is education? Is it book-learning? No. Is it diverse knowledge? Not even that. The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education. Now consider, is that education as a result of which the will, being continuously choked by force through generations, is now well-nigh killed out; is that education under whose sway even the old ideas, let alone new ones, are disappearing one by one; is that education which is slowly making man a machine?[1]

1. *The complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1966) vol. 4, p. 490.

If, unfortunately, we have not learnt how to develop will-power early in life, we should do so at any stage of life, because self-improvement is almost impossible without the voluntary or involuntary exercise of the will-power. Whereas, given the will-power, we can bring about considerable changes in our individual and also collective lives for the better, from very hopeless situations.

Consider these three cases of modern history. When Lincoln was alone with history in the White House in those dark days of Civil War, what would have happened to the Union but for his powerful will to save it? Consider how the will-power of Winston Churchill played the decisive role in the 2nd World War. What would have happened to England and Europe now enjoying prosperity but for that man's will who said he had nothing else to offer but blood, sweat and tears? Consider again the effect of the will-power of Gandhiji, whom Churchill called 'the half-naked father', for all the peoples in the world who in their own lands were ruled by colonial powers?

If we study the lives of those persons who were once in very bad shape and afterwards were found to rise from the shambles in a spectacular manner, we shall discover, in every single case, it was their will-power that brought about their transformation and rise. If we study the lives of some persons who early in life showed much promise, had enviable facility to rise high, and yet never fulfilled their promise, wilting away like buds before fully blossoming, we shall discover in every single case that there it was the absence of the will-power that caused their early wilting.

Given the will-power, man makes everything out of nothing as it were. In the absence of the will-power, all his talents and qualities and endowments come to nothing.

How the will originates

In the Vedas it is said:

> This universe, in truth, in the beginning was nothing at all. There was no heaven, no earth, no atmosphere. This being, that was solely non-being, conceived a wish: 'May I be.'[2]

Whether you accept or reject the content of this cosmogony, one truth comes out of it: that behind all creative efforts in all spheres of life is an act of will. But what is will? Wherefrom does it originate? 'Will is a compound of the self and mind,'[3] says Swami Vivekananda.

By the word 'self' is meant here the Atman or the real soul of man. Atman is beyond causation. It is undifferentiated consciousness. In that consciousness there is no will, because will presupposes reaction to something external or other. In undifferentiated consciousness there is no such thing.

Though Atman is free in its pure essential nature, when identified with mind and body, it is in a state of bondage. In other words, in that state Atman is not free. The will is the first manifestation of the real self caught in phenomena or maya. It is a compound of Atman and mind, and mind is subtle matter. Therefore in the will there are two strands: one of the spirit, the other of matter, a strand of light and a strand of darkness.

In the ultimate analysis, however, this compound is bound to be unreal, for it is based on the unreality of maya. But as long as we are in the realm of maya, that is to say, as long as we remain spiritually unillumined it is very real for all practical purposes. And it moves things in the way which nothing else does in the

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2. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa,* 2.2.9.1.
3. *Complete Works* (1972) vol. 6, p. 44.

world, except the powerful forces of nature.

Even these great forces are surmounted by the force of human will. Imagine what was the face of America in the days of Columbus, or even what the Pilgrim Fathers saw, and compare it with the face of America today. These vast and stupendous changes were all brought about by human will. All the actions we see in the world, all the movements and achievements of man are manifestations of the will of man. What we are proud of, and what we deplore in human civilization; what amazes us in the spheres of science, and what makes us speechless in the domain of religion, are all manifestations of the will of man. As Swami Vivekananda says, 'This will is caused by character and character is manufactured by Karma or work. As is the Karma so is the manifestation of the will.'[4]

The cause of small and big tragedies of life

Let us now understand this concept of will-power from a practical point of view as it affects our life. Why at all need we develop the will-power when we may not be ambitious people trying to do spectacular things? Sometimes in our lives, may be in every one's life, great tragedies happen. They shake us to our roots. After that tragedy we are never the same persons again. If we know how to take these tragedies creatively, we are largely transformed. If not, we are crushed. These tragedies are such that we are forced to take agonizing notice of them. Not only that, others also take notice of them, for very often we become objects of real pity. This is about the big tragedies of our personal lives.

There is another kind of tragedy which is daily happening in every life, the consequences of which are far-reaching. And in these small tragedies are rooted the great tragedies of life. But, somehow, most people seem not to notice them at all. These days, we are giving away our thinking power to machines in the hope of getting more out of life. But it would appear, by and large, we are gradually losing grip on life. It may not be an axiomatic truth, but we shall find it to be generally true that the more our homes become filled with gadgets, the less are the thoughtful people around.

The one way of keeping grip on life is right thinking and deep thinking. These days we all admire free-thinking. Free-thinking is good. But right thinking is better. When right thinking becomes deep thinking, it is excellent. Without cultivating the habit of introspection, it is impossible to keep track of all the forces that are operative within us. Without knowing the nature of these forces, we cannot be their masters. We are then bound to be their slaves. And what chances have slaves to develop and exercise their will-power, when that slavery is due to their own unregenerate nature? How can such persons ever build up their character? How can a man without a character have will-power?

Introspection will reveal that there is a basic tragedy involved in our daily life, in which most of our big tragedies are rooted. In Sanskrit this basic tragedy is narrated this way: 'I know what is *dharma*, what is righteousness, what is good, but I have not the inclination to do it. I know what is unrighteousness, *adharma*, what is evil, sin, but I cannot desist from doing it.'[5] A song of the mystic Rāmprasād, which Sri

4. *Complete Works* (1972) vol. 1, p. 30.

5. जानामि धर्मं न च मे प्रवृत्तिः ।
जानाम्यधर्मं न च मे निवृत्तिः ॥
Prapanna-Gītā (or *Pāṇḍava-Gītā*)

Ramakrishna used to sing piteously describes the content of this tragedy:

O Mother, I have none else to blame;
Alas! I sink in the well these very hands have dug,
With the six passions for my spade,
I dug a pit in the sacred land of earth;
And now the dark water of death gushes forth!
How can I save myself, O my Redeemer?
Surely I have been my own enemy;
How can I now ward off this dark water of death?
Behold, the waters rise to my chest!
How can I save myself? O Mother, save me!
Thou art my only Refuge; with Thy protecting glance,
Take me across to the other shore of the world.[6]

In its fullness the basic tragedy of our daily life leads to such spiritual crisis, about which Rāmprasād laments before the Divine Mother.

So then, the basic tragedy of our life is: (a) our inability to do the thing we know to be right and helpful; as well as, (b) our incapacity to desist from doing what we know to be wrong, unhelpful, if not disastrous.

We know it is good to use polite, decent and restrained language, in our daily dealings at home, on the street, in business, in politics, in society. But, in spite of ourselves, we use wrong language, from which arise many dissensions, small and big, at home, in society, in national and international affairs. Very often we do not remember the power of words, their capacity to break or make, wound or heal. More often, our will just fails to carry into practice what we know about the power of words. Through use of wrong language we are apt to make such wounds in others' hearts as will not be easily healed; or we may anger people to such an extent that dire consequences may follow. And we ourselves shall have to reap them, however bitter they may be.

We know that it is beneficial to live a moral life, yet, in spite of ourselves, we commit sinful acts. And having committed them we have to take their painful consequences. We can give away our entire property but there is no way of giving away the fruits of our karma. We shall have to enjoy or suffer them ourselves. We know it is good to live according to the commandments of religion and obey the precepts of the Guru. We know it is good to get up early in the morning and practise spiritual disciplines. But when in the morning the alarm clock dutifully rings, we feel annoyed and silence it as though it had committed some crime, and then pull the blanket over the nose and sleep half an hour more, only to hurry and worry all day long. In the evening when we return home we are a mass of tension, and so highly inflammable that any little thing is apt to set things on fire.

We may observe, even in little things how little of what we know to be good for us, to be beneficial for us, we are able to put into practice. On the contrary, we continue to do harmful things. We know it is not good to neglect our studies, but somehow we cannot turn our ears or eyes from the radio or TV, specially when a cricket match, a circus show, a fashion show or a movie is going on. If our mind timidly protests, we just give it a thrashing: how can I miss such an exciting thing, for the boring bla-bla-bla of my classes? And the consequences of it are too obvious in the ever growing restlessness and dissatisfaction among the youngsters.

Do not people very well know that it is not good to drink alcohol? Still they gulp one or two glasses first occasionally, then more, compulsively. They promise not to drink only to break the promise

6. Translation of Rāmprasād's song quoted from 'M' *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1981) p. 203.

again. Ultimately they even fail to promise. I believe it was Will Rogers who said: 'Well, it is quite easy to give up smoking. I have done it a hundred times!' But the record of Alcoholic Anonymous shows it is possible to start a new life as it were, by developing a new will to live a different kind of life.

We know that over-weight is a health hazard, and we should avoid eating too many sweets and other highly fattening things. But when these things come round, we smile away our own mental decisions and opposition of well-wishers.

It is well-known that some of us can resist everything except temptations! There is a great fascination in the prohibited, great attraction in the destructive, great pull in the bizarre and wicked things in this world of maya. They pull us by the ear and make slaves of us. We do things in a hurry and then repent at leisure and weep in the darkness of our own making.

Now, why do we behave this way knowingly? We do wrong things unknowingly too. But, that apart, why do we do wrong things and fail to do right things, knowingly? We must not commit the mistake of thinking that we do such things because we are essentially wicked or because of some kind of 'original sin' in us or because of our being forced by evil powers. Let us know it for certain that no one in this world is essentially wicked. Essentially everyone is divine, because the essence of every being is Atman, which is divine. The apparent wickedness of any person is only a fortuity, an outer mask, and hence it can be gotten rid of. No cow tells a lie. A tree does not steal or rob. A stone slab does not commit burglary. Only man does all these. But a cow, as far as we know, cannot think of God. A tree cannot practise spiritual disciplines. A stone slab cannot realize God. But man can.

The inescapable conclusion, then, is that the basic daily tragedies of our lives are not rooted in any inalienable, essential wickedness in us, but in the failure of our will. Many of us have no idea how much of goodness, strength and greatness cry within us for self-manifestation. We have mostly known only the weaker side of ourselves, which in fact belongs to the not-Self, according to Vedanta. It is the basic tragedy of our daily life that effectively prevents a real encounter with our true self. Therefore it is important for every person to know how to avoid the failure of will. The only way to do it is to cultivate the will-power.

How to generate will-power in the human system

How do we cultivate the will-power?

(a) First let us understand what exactly is will-power, in working terms. It is that positive and creative function of the mind which impels, propels and enables us to do chosen actions in a definitive way, and avoid doing unchosen actions in an equally definitive way. It is that power of the mind which enables us to do what we know to be right, and not do what we know to be wrong, under all circumstances favourable or unfavourable, known or unknown.

(b) Secondly, it is important to know and believe that will-power can be increased by everybody, without any exception, provided we are ready to apply ourselves to it and work for it steadily and methodically. Our past failures have not necessarily to be our future failures also. No one is destined to be weak all his life except him who chooses to be so. A departure for the better, nobler, higher state of existence—at least a determined effort for it—is possible at one's chosen time. It is never too early or too late to be good, true, pure and strong. Swami

Vivekananda says: 'Stand up, be bold, be strong! Know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourself.'[7] What a life-giving, saving message! All the strength and succour we need is within ourselves. We should get a firm hold, an unshakable faith, in this fundamental truth.

(c) Only when we have a firm hold on this truth we can develop a will for developing the will-power. Though it may sound like a truism, it is very important to have a firm will to develop the will-power. Incredible though it may appear, many of us do not have even the will to develop the will-power! We seem to think it is big botheration, too exacting a responsibility to be carrying about all the time. But when we know for certain that within ourselves is unlimited power, that we are not these puny things as we appear to be, that we are not weak reeds worthy only to be broken anytime—then we develop the mind to manifest that power in our life, by sharply cutting out all delusions and illusions to which are the contrary.

(d) When this mind is developed, we are ready to take the most important step in developing the will-power. This step is to remove the dichotomy between the head and heart, the intellect and emotion, the thinking and feeling. How do we do it? It can be done only by loving the truth of our being. If we know it for certain that we are divine, we are the children of immortality, with a great history behind and a great destiny before, we will hate to do things which are unworthy of us, being determined to do things expected of us. In other words, our thoughts and emotions will unite in order to enable us to do the best expected of us by ourselves.

Maybe we shall not succeed without a struggle. What of that? What is the worth of a success achieved without a struggle? We shall most certainly succeed, if we give the fight all right, without allowing hypothetical fears to sabotage our self-confidence and energy-supply.

This is the best way of fighting evil within ourselves: assert the divine and the devil will run out. How do we assert the divine within us? If we want to assert the Divine, we must not do two things: we must not be cowards and we must not be hypocrites. We must be brave, take courage in both hands and follow the truth to its logical conclusion. Go with truth wherever it takes us: this should be our motto.

Opposition to this way of thinking and living will most certainly come. We must predetermine our proper attitude to such opposition and receive opposition without being overly ruffled, in good humour, with a smile, if possible. Swami Vivekananda indicates what should be our temper and attitude to oppositions. He asks:

> Have you got the will to surmount the mountain-high obstructions? If the whole world stands against you sword in hand, would you still dare to do what you think is right? If your wives and children are against you, if all your money goes, your name dies, your wealth vanishes, would you still stick to it? Would you still pursue it and go steadily towards the goal?[8]

It is in this temper that we shall have to face opposition. You may raise the objection: to begin with, I do not have the will to surmount mountain-high obstruction. That is my problem! That is *not* your problem. Your problem is you have not adequate love for truth. Intensify the love of truth, then this temper for facing the opposition will spontaneously grow in you.

(e) Two things will oppose this cre-

7. *Complete Works* (1971) vol. 2, p. 225.

8. *Complete Works* (1960) vol. 3, p. 226.

ative move within us: (1) our regrets about the past, and (2) our worry about the future. Both of these are detrimental to the cultivation of will-pewer, because they successfully undercut all forward-looking, creative, positive movements within our minds. They are also wholly unnecessary performances. Exaggerated regrets for our past and over much worry about our future, will only damage our present, weaken our minds and injure our future also.

Now you may honestly say: how can I but regret for my past? In the past I committed many sins. Is it not my religious duty to repent for my past sins? This is an important question which requires a thorough clearing and scotching. Sloppy Vedantins are apt to make light of sin in the vain hope that their reported divinity will somehow like a sponge suck out all their bad karma, and whisk them aloft to the empyreans of *mokṣa* by a trick that is not to be explained though they continue to live indifferent lives. Vedanta acknowledges the fact of sin, but completely rejects the theory of original sin as wholly irrational. Man has nothing but original divinity and adventitious sin. Adventitious though, sin has a powerful binding effect on the soul and its free expression.

Therefore, the fact of sin has to be acknowledged as any other empirical fact. It is one thing to acknowledge the fact of sin, but it is a totally different thing to become some sort of a sin-monger, a habitual regretter. Whatever pious a face this regretting-ad-infinitum may put up, psychologically it is an unsound approach if you intend to get rid of it. If you are over much regretting for any sin, it is likely that you are mentally enjoying repeating the sin under the cover of righteousness.

The most important thing to be done about sin is to stop sinning, physically or mentally. How do we do it? There are a few teachings of Sri Ramakrishna which when practised will completely take care of such inner situations in the life of an earnest spiritual seeker:

> Bondage is of the mind, and freedom also is of the mind. A man is free if he constantly thinks: 'I am a free soul. How can I be bound, whether I live in the world or forest? I am a child of God, the king of kings, who can bind me?' If bitten by a snake, a man may get rid of its venom by saying emphatically, 'There is no poison in me.' In the same way, by repeating with grit and determination, 'I am not bound, I am free,' one really becomes so, one really becomes free.
>
> The wretch who constantly says, 'I am bound I am bound' only succeeds in being bound. He who says day and night 'I am a sinner, I am a sinner,' verily becomes a sinner.
>
> One should have such burning faith in God that one can say: 'What, I have repeated the name of God, and can sin cling to me? How can I be in bondage any more?'
>
> If a man repeats the name of God, his body, mind and everything become pure. Why should one talk only about sin and hell, and such things? Say but once, 'O Lord, I have undoubtedly done wicked things, but I won't repeat them.' And have faith in His name.[9]

This is precisely what we have to do in regard to our past sins: 'Say but once' in true contrition to God of your heart: this really I have done. Pardon me. I shall not do so again. Then resolve to keep the word given to God. And repeat the name of God. Repetition of Lord's name will give us the power to keep our resolution.

It is, however, more important that we live a wakeful life in the living present with an unencumbered free mind honestly trying to live according to our highest convictions. He who suffocates this moment with the worries of moments that are yet not, is doing everything possible to make

(*Continued on page* 222)

9. *The Gospel* (1942) p. 138.

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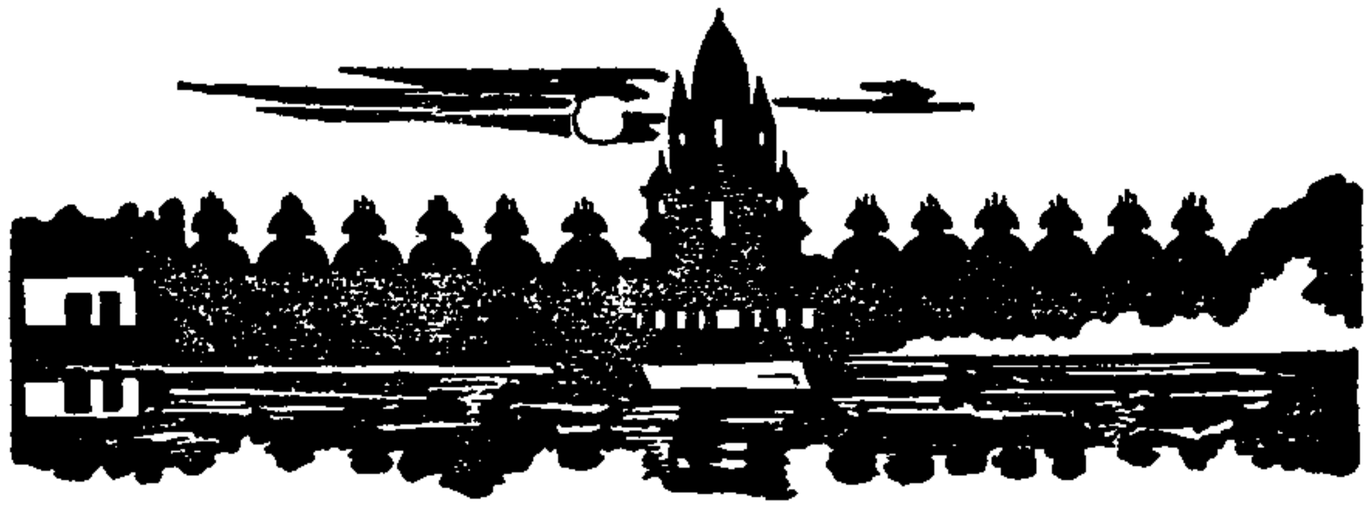

BUDDHA'S TRUTH

ROBERT P. UTTER

Ego—the obstacle to Truth

The Buddha said, 'All life is suffering,' and he was right, as a little thought reveals. I have heard the interpretation of this statement of the Buddha that it is no more true than the view of a child who, when he cries from some childish grief, feels the whole world to be terribly sad. However, the difference between such a transference of subjective emotion to the external world and the philosophical view of the Buddha can be seen in a moment if we but consider the fact that the Buddha was never himself sad. He was not transferring an emotion from himself to the world ; he was, rather, observing the world from a dispassionate, unemotional point of view, the point of view of an illumined sage who has experienced *nirvāṇa.* He was always calm and serene, being filled with the peace that 'passeth understanding'. Yet he said that the whole world of *saṁsāra,* the relative world, the world of sense experience, mental experience, and the desires of the ego, is not the joy that everyone takes it to be but is really nothing but suffering. How could a man of joy and peace say that life is suffering? Because only a man established in non-worldly joy and its peace could continue to see unwaveringly that ordinary worldly joys are by contrast unstable and changeable and therefore without value.

Just consider the mind of an ordinary man who might make a similar statement. An ordinary (non-illumined) man who says that the world is nothing but suffering would himself be suffering from great bitterness. But that bitterness would be instantly turned to joy if the cause were removed. Since the cause of bitterness is always unfulfilled desires, the man would cease to be bitter if his desires were satisfied, and he would accordingly cease to see the world as a place of suffering. The ordinary man thus always alternates between joy and suffering, between praising life for its beauty and condemning it for its ugliness, depending on whether his desires are satisfied or not. The Buddha, on the other hand, was beyond desires, beyond relative joys and sorrows, and therefore he was able to experience a joy of an entirely different kind: absolute joy and peace. He was beyond the pairs of opposites, and thus his joy was not the peak of a wave which would be inevitably followed by its trough, but was unalterable, indestructible, unborn, undying, eternal, and infinite. The Buddha was thus not motivated by any bitterness or resentment, which always comes as reaction to a disappointment, a failure to achieve a desire. He was, rather, motivated solely by compassion for all beings, a compassion which was born of a complete understanding of all beings through the extinction of personal, ego-centred

desires. He was not, therefore, describing a personal, psychological state of suffering ; he was dispassionately observing an eternal truth about the suffering of all mankind. Thus we can see that the suffering of most men's lives must be the result of the fact that they are driven by their desires, and that this is what the Buddha is talking about.

Now what is the truth about human life, the truth whether we like it or not, the truth that we must face when we get down to what really takes place, instead of the rosy picture we are forever substituting for the truth? The truth is that there is an obstacle in our way whenever we try to get at the truth, an obstacle which is very hard to remove. It is because of the difficulty in removing this obstacle that we persist in our romantic views of human life and never really see or admit to ourselves the truth of the Buddha's statement that all human life is suffering. This obstacle is the ego, and this ego we cling to through all the vicissitudes of life and death, giving up body after body, but never giving up the ego. It is the desire for the ego that makes us cling to all finite desires, for the ego is the source of our desires. It is the total conviction that we are the finite ego that makes us desire finite objects. Our love for the ego is thus the central heart of all our desires from which spreads out a vast network of arteries and nerves reaching in every direction, a network which creates and encompasses and sustains our whole relative world (the banyan-tree symbol of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*). The ego is our root desire, and thus we may call it our desire to desire, the universal basis of all our particular desires. It is this root desire that keeps us from admitting that desires have anything wrong in them ; so we keep on creating desires indefinitely because of this basic desire to desire.

The ego is thus the source of all our troubles, because it is the nucleus and symbol of our basic false belief about the self. It is the finite mask we have superimposed upon the infinite Self which each one of us in reality is. Believing ourselves to be finite, we then must always desire something more than we have and are, because we are in reality the infinite, not the finite at all, and nothing less than the infinite can satisfy us. Therefore, strange as it may seem, desires are not wrong from the point of view of the ego, because the ego is finite, and the finite must always desire something more. But if we desire only the finite, we must keep seeking new finite forms to satisfy our desires. Our real desire, however, is to realize our true infinite nature underneath the mask of the finite which we have superimposed upon ourselves. Therefore, our true desire can never be satisfied by means of the finite ; yet we must, as long as we identify ourselves with the finite ego, keep seeking new finite things to enlarge the finite self we believe ourselves to be. Since we cannot reach the infinite by adding finite to finite, we are doomed to disappointment.

It is this endless round of disappointments that the Buddha is referring to when he says that all life is suffering. We, the infinite, desire only the finite. That is our sorrow. That is the source of the suffering we go through every moment of our lives, and every moment of our deaths. For we have, each one of us, lived and died in the body many times before this life. Buddhism and Hinduism agree on this point. Each one of us has an indeterminably long past of many hundreds or thousands or millions of lives before the present one. Yet we could put an end to it all very quickly, not by suicide, but by killing our attachment to the ego. Then we would no longer desire the finite, but the infinite only. Could we but desire only the infinite, we would recollect our true nature as infinite in short

order and so put an end to the suffering inherent in all finite lives.

Desire, fear, hope

We now have before us the cosmic view of each one of us. For millions of lives we have desired only the finite by clinging to the mistaken notion that we are the ego; yet in reality we hunger only for the infinite. All the teachings of the East have been to this effect, and the West is coming to this view more and more out of a general disillusionment with material values. With this universal truth clearly before us, let us take a long, hard look at human life as it is, without our romantic glasses on.

It is not the fact that we desire that is wrong, but that, believing ourselves to be finite, we desire only finite things. As long as we believe ourselves to be finite we must desire something, but that something must be the infinite, for that is our true nature and therefore our only source of satisfaction. I could be ruler of the universe, but as long as that was *all* I conceived myself to be, I would suffer from desire, fear, and hope, because the ruler of the finite, even of the universe, is still only finite, for the universe, though subject to him, is still an 'other' and as such limits him.

It is this trio: desire, fear, and hope, that are the source of all misery. The three are really one, three names for the same thing. As long as I believe myself to be finite, I must desire more. As long as I believe myself to be finite, I must fear all other beings because they threaten me. And as long as I believe myself to be finite, I hope for a satisfaction I have not yet found. So I go from moment to moment in the perpetual hope of finding what I am seeking, but never do I actually find it. Because of desire, fear, and hope I go from birth to death again and again until I cease to desire the finite and desire only the infinite.

We may refuse to admit the truth of this analysis, but such a refusal is based on a fear of finding all desires and their fulfilment or non-fulfilment as hollow as a stalk of dead bamboo. Once that is found, then all relative life becomes meaningless and trivial and not worth seeking, and this we cannot endure. (The flute of Kṛṣṇa is a hollow reed. Is this why the cry of the flute of Kṛṣṇa is such an unendurable joy and unendurable agony at the same time? Is this why the flute of Kṛṣṇa is ever the wind-hollow, distant call of God to drop everything, whatever we are doing, and come, now?)

Thus we can see that everyone except the illumined sage lives in this intermixture of desire, fear, and hope. Desire, fear, and hope: all of these are bad, but the worst of these is hope. Consider for a moment just what it is that hope does: it leads us on, it keeps us going through the ever-recurring round of birth and death, instead of lettng us drop out of the rat-race and find peace, find our true being and our true joy. Thus it is hope that prevents us from renouncing the world and makes us hold on to our desires and our misery, for hope makes us believe that the satisfaction of our desires is just around the corner. It is the expectation of the fulfilment of the personal, ego-centred, finite desires that lures everyone onward, like a mirage in the desert, from minute to minute, day to day, life to life. Finite things can no more fulfil our desires than a mirage of a lake can slake our thirst. Hope is the expectation of future happiness from the fulfilment of finite desires. This kind of happiness can never be a present one because it exists only in anticipation. We are never happy in the present moment, only in anticipation. (Memories do not bring happiness because they always involve the

sense of the loss of times past, which gives us pain.) If we are hungry we look forward to a meal, but as soon as we eat we look forward to something else for we are satiated and the food no longer interests us. It may temporarily satisfy our physical hunger, but us it cannot satisfy for our hunger is much deeper than for physical food. A rich man is never really happy except in giving away his riches to the poor. Only the infinite can satisfy our hunger. So in seeking satisfaction in the finite we are driven on and on and never find any permanent joy or peace.

The hope we are speaking of, the hope we must renounce, is the hope of enjoying finite objects of desire, not the hope of eternal, uncaused, objectless joy. It is only by giving up particular joys that we can experience the infinite eternal joy that is non-dual, that is, without cause and without object. Eido Roshi, a Buddhist monk and teacher, gave Peter Mattheissen, author of the book *Snow Leopard*, the following advice when Mattheissen left New York to undertake the arduous journey to the Crystal Monastery in Nepal: 'Expect nothing.'[1] This can well be a *mantra* for every true spiritual aspirant of whatever creed or faith, for it expresses the eternal truth that God alone is. Only by expecting 'no thing' can we find God. The futility of this endless search for the satisfaction of finite desires must be at least somewhat apparent to us before we can be ready to undertake the real quest: the giving up of the finite and the seeking only for the infinite. We must become disillusioned with sense objects before we can turn away from them. We can accelerate this disillusionment by continual meditation on the fact that sense objects can never satisfy us.

If we stand on a street-corner and watch the passers-by, we can see the truth of this very clearly. Look at the expressions on their faces. Each person is continually reaching forward mentally, leaping to grasp something he does not have ; there is a pathetic eagerness in each person's eyes, a desperate expectation of future fulfilment that never comes to pass ; all are springing forward into the future as monkeys swing and leap from branch to branch ; all are escaping from the unendurable past as from the jaws of a wild beast and their eyes are bright with the anticipation of the fulfilment of some purpose. Anticipation of a future moment is the essence of all relative existence for men and animals alike. Purposive action is based on the hope of future enjoyment of some finite object, and purposive action is what runs the whole relative universe. No matter what anyone is doing—whether walking, working, eating, or even resting or sleeping—all is nothing but a leaping forward or a preparation to leap into the next moment of change. Never is anyone settled immovably into the present moment, which alone is real, except the sage in meditation. The true sage is always in meditation, no matter what he appears to be doing ; whether walking, talking, working, eating, resting, or meditating, he is always meditating. Meditation is the only true enjoyment of the present moment, for it is timeless enjoyment, the experience of the present moment as the Eternal Now. But most people never cease leaping like wind from wave-tip to wave-tip of life, never stopping to calm the raging waters of their restless minds. Most people are always in mid-leap between past and future, about to seize the moment, about to grasp the joy, but never really in possession of it. As a monkey does not hold long to one branch but leaps constantly from one branch to another in

1. Peter Mattheissen, *The Snow Leopard* (New York: Bantam Books, 1979) p. 135.

rapid succession, so does the sense-bound man leap from one finite purpose to another, satisfied with none.

Everyone is thus moved by the ever-eluding objects of desire like a puppet on a string, jerked hither and yon by the puppeteer, the ego. This feverish activity of everyone continues unabated from birth to death, and beyond. Death is merely the cutting of the strings of the puppet so that it falls limp and motionless. But, though the puppet's strings are cut and the puppet dangles lifeless, the puppeteer, the ego, is still there behind the scenes. He makes a new puppet, or picks another one, or puts new strings on the old one, and makes it dance just as before. So the frantic dance goes on, aeon after aeon. Desires never cease as long as the ego lives ; they go on from body to body, like a bird returning to its old nest or building a new one in its old nesting place spring after spring.

The awakening

This process drives blindly on life after life, until something awakens us to the futility of it. Some powerful guru, or combination of several gurus, awakens us. This is symbolized in the story of Buddha's life about the roles played in the awakening of the future Buddha by the sick man, the old man, the dead man, and the monk. These four conditions of man symbolize the sufferings of life which awaken each one of us to what life is really all about: sickness, old age, death, and renunciation leading to illumination, the guru power. Through these four basic facts of life we learn more than detachment from sickness, age, and death. We learn through detachment the deeper meanings about sickness, age, death, and renunciation, such as, that, whether the body is well or ill, life itself as we ordinarily live it is a perpetual sickness ;[2] that whether the body is young or old, the ego that goes from body to body is centuries old, having lived countless lives before, and yet is nothing but an illusion ;[3] that whether the body is alive or dead, we are dead to truth when we seek nothing but the satisfactions of finite desires ;[4] that renunciation of finite desires and all desire for finite desires is necessary if we are to find the peace and joy that give true satisfaction.[5]

This wonderful realization must come to everyone sooner or later. At first it brings total despair, for all appears lost with the perception that finite desires bring no true satisfaction. This total despair, which may result in actual physical sickness, is the necessary prelude to peace. In the end, peace comes, and a joy beyond all finite joys. It is a total revolution in our whole perception of our values, our world, our friends, and ourselves. Nothing is ever the same. As Sri Ramakrishna said, 'It is not a watersnake but a cobra that has bitten you.' Once we have been bitten by the cobra of truth nothing can ever again be the same for us. It may take a long time or it may take a short time for the venom to work, but sooner or later we shall be illumined. There may be little suffering or much suffering, but sooner or later we shall find peace. We shall find peace when we realize within our hearts the real meaning of Buddha's truth that all life is suffering.

The real meaning is more than just that life as it is lived is nothing but obvious suffering. From a worldly point of view

2. See Henry Clarke Warren, *Buddhism in Translation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1922) p. 423.

3. See Warren, pp. 129-152, 234-252, and Dwight Goddard, ed., *A Buddhist Bile* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970) pp. 28-9.

4. See Warren, pp. 255-262.

5. Warren, pp. 331-351.

man has some moments of satisfaction of his desires, although not as many as he likes to believe. But we do not really understand what Buddha meant until we realize that even those apparent satisfactions are no satisfactions at all, because as soon as a desire is fulfilled another one takes its place. The very nature of desire for finite objects is that it can never be satisfied because finite things can never satisfy our real nature which is infinite. Joy is to be found only in the infinite, in the extinction of all desires for the finite, *nirvāṇa*. To persist in the delusion of the hope that we can be satisfied by finite things is the most foolish of notions. One must divest oneself of all hope, of all desire to find something better in the way of external conditions in the future if one is to find truth. This is not a mental state of 'hopelessness' in the popular sense, a deep depression and despair. Hopelessness in this popular sense of the word is simply the form that hope takes when it is completely frustrated. This ordinary state of despair is therefore not the solution, for it is still a kind of hope. Really to give up hope we must give up hopelessness as well, for we must give up all possibility of ever being disappointed in the way things turn out. To give up hope in the true sense we must give up desire, and if we give up desire we shall then feel no fear. Thus the real meaning of this truth is that we must give up all desire for desire, that is, we must give up the ego, for the ego is the source of desire.

That is why the Buddha emphasized so much the total unreality of the ego, and why he never would discuss the undiscussible question of the immortality of the soul. To realize the true meaning of the abstract concept called the 'immortality of the soul' one must actually go beyond all divisions of consciousness and realize in a concrete but universal spiritual experience the total and absolute unity of true selfhood. Such absolute unity, being non-dual and all-inclusive, precludes the possibility of all argument, rational thinking, and discussion, for all of these mental activities are the essence of multiplicity and diversity. It is not that Buddha denies the immortality of the self; it is rather that there is no discussion of the subject that could help one to realize one's true infinitude and immortality. Therefore he gave no promise of immortality, only a certainty of the nothingness of all things mortal, including desires, sense objects, the mind and all mental objects, and anything we could possibly mean by the term 'self' or 'soul'. He offered no compromise between ideas, which, being many, are false, and truth, which, being non-dual, is totally beyond words and thoughts.

If we give up desires for finite things, including the ego, we shall cease to run after the finite, which cannot possibly satisfy us. Then we shall be able to settle into the true enjoyment of the present moment, which is all we ever have, and to see the present for what it truly is: the eternal and infinite Self which we are, and which fulfils all our desires right now and forever. Then all sorrows, which spring from seeking joy in some future finite moment, will cease, and in their place will dawn the light of the unchanging One-without-a-second. Then, instead of our desires being 'extinguished', as the word '*nirvāṇa*' implies, we shall find that our desires have shifted or expanded from the finite to the infinite, and we shall then know that desire for the infinite is the only desire that can ever be truly fulfilled, for it alone of all desires can be fulfilled in the present moment, which is in reality the Eternal Now.

This is what the Buddha meant when he said that all life is sorrow. Sri Ramakrishna said it in a more positive form,

which may appeal more effectively to our hedonistic and sceptical age which wants to 'have everything now'. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Brahman and Shakti are one, just as fire and its burning power are one...just as a gem and its brightness are one.'[6] By this he meant that God is not essentially different from His creation, the world of finite sense objects which we see around us. But to see the world as one with God we must purify our hearts, that is, our egos, which are the source of all our difficulties. He said further.

> On the mirror of the 'devotee's ego' you will see the Eternal Shakti, that is, the Brahman with attributes. But the mirror must be thoroughly cleansed. If there be dirt, you won't get the true reflection! So long as one has to see the sun in the water of 'ego', and there is no other way left to see the real sun except through the reflected sun, the reflection itself must remain the whole truth.... If you want the knowledge of the Absolute, make use of this reflected sun and go towards the true sun.... For He who is Brahman with attributes, is Brahman beyond the attributes, the same who is Shakti is Brahman. All distinction goes after the perfection of knowledge.[7]

The Upaniṣadic prayer says, 'Lead me from the unreal to the real', because the unreal is an appearance of the real and its only reality is the real. As the infinite sky is reflected in a finite pond when the waves are still, so the infinite Godhead can be reflected in the finite ego if it is desireless. We need not give up anything; we need only see the world without the distortion of the ego-centred desires. We can give up finite desires if we desire only the infinite, and this desire for the infinite leads to the vision of the infinite, and then all desires cease. Desireless vision is vision of truth, and the vision of truth is without grief and sorrow.

The Buddha did not teach a doctrine of sorrow; on the contrary, he taught infinite joy. What he taught was the extinction of sorrow by the extinction of the belief that the ego and its desires are real. When we no longer see them as real, we shall enjoy the infinite bliss of *Nirvāṇa*.

6. *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1975) pp. 318-9.

7. *Teachings*, pp. 320-1.

(*Continued from page* 215)

his future fearful. 'In the heart of this moment is eternity!' said Meister Eckhart. And if this moment we have lived well, done our best, we may very well leave the rest. For nothing-better can ever be done for future than always doing our very best right now.

We may, however, always examine our doing best and trying to find methods of even bettering our best-doing. Worry for the future is a mental disease, the medicine of which is to live entirely in this moment with all our powers poised and applied. Those who want to develop will-power must scrupulously avoid living in the past or future, and live in the living present. If we live in the present wisely according to our best light, our future cannot but be good whatever the astrologers may say.

(*To be concluded*)

GOPALER-MA

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

(*Continued from the previous issue*)

Her visions and play with Gopāla continued for two months. During this time she was always in an ecstatic mood. She had to force herself to contiune her daily routine of bathing, cooking, eating, Japa, and meditation. Gradually her divine intoxication subsided ; yet she continued to have several visions of Gopāla a day. Since she had become convinced that Sri Ramakrishna and Gopāla were one and the same, she had fewer visions of the form of Gopāla and more of Sri Ramakrishna while meditating, with the voice of Gopāla instructing her through him. She went to Sri Ramakrishna one day and said to him, crying: 'Gopāla, what have you done to me? Did I do anything wrong? Why do I not see you in the form of Gopāla as before?'

Sri Ramakrishna consoled her, saying: 'In this Kali Yuga if one has such visions continuously, one's body will not last long. It will survive only twenty-one days and will then drop off like a dry leaf.' Since Gopaler-ma had experienced the bliss of constant divine inebriation, it was difficult for her to live without it. She had no interest in mundane things. Just as a wordly person is always restless for worldly objects, in the same way her heart was restless for the continuous vision of Gopāla. She felt a pain in her chest and thought it was due to the pressure of gas. But Sri Ramakrishna told her: 'It is not gas. It is caused by your spiritual energy. How will you pass your time if it goes away? Let it be with you. When you feel too much pain, please eat something.'

Sri Ramakrishna used to receive gifts of sweets, fruits and rockcandy from various people. There were some business people who would offer gifts to him believing that such offering to a holy man would bring them prosperity. This type of food invariably contaminates the mind of the eater. Consequently, Sri Ramakrishna would not give these things to his pure-hearted young disciples. The only devotees to whom he would give them were Swami Vivekananda and Gopaler-ma. He knew that the minds of these two great souls were in such a high realm that they could never be affected by eating any kind of food.

One day Gopaler-ma came to see the Master with some women devotees. Pointing to her, he said to those present: 'Ah, there is nothing inside this body but God. He fills it through and through.' Then the Master fed Gopaler-ma with various delicacies and gave her some food which he had received from several Calcutta business people. At this, Gopaler-ma said, 'Why are you so fond of feeding me?'

Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'You have also fed me with so many things in the past.'

'In the past? When?', she asked.

'In your previous life', he said.

During the Car Festival of Lord Jagannath in 1885, Sri Ramakrishna went to Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta. Balaram had invited many devotees for the celebration. While he was there the Master spoke highly of the God-intoxicated state

and visions of Gopaler-ma, and at his behest, Balaram sent a man to bring her. Just before her arrival the Master was talking to the devotees when suddenly he merged into ecstasy. His body assumed the pose of Gopāla, crawling on both knees, one hand resting on the ground, the other raised, and the face turned up as if he were expecting someone. Gopaler-ma arrived then and found Sri Ramakrishna in the posture of her Chosen Ideal. The devotees were amazed, seeing that divine sight.

'Truly speaking, I don't care for this stiff posture,' she said. 'My Gopāla should laugh and play, walk and run. But what is this? He has become stiff like a log. I don't like to see this sort of Gopāla!'

It was a striking feature in Sri Ramakrishna's life that whenever any mood came over him he would be fully identified with it. Even in his later years, when he sang, danced or made gestures like a woman or a child, people were amazed, seeing their precision and spontaneity. His voice was sweet and melodious, and his movements were natural, simple, and beautiful. There was not an iota of insincerity or display in his behaviour and action.

Sri Ramakrishna stayed in Calcutta for a few days, and then left for Dakshineswar by boat. Some of the devotees, including Gopaler-ma, accompanied him. Balaram's family had lovingly given Gopaler-ma some necessary items of clothing and utensils in a bundle which she was carrying on the boat. The Master came to know from other devotees what was in the bundle. Immediately he became grave, and without directly referring to the items, he began to speak about renunciation. He said: 'Only a man of renunciation realizes God. The devotee who is simply satisfied with another man's hospitality and returns empty-handed, sits very close to God.' He did not say a single word to her, but he kept looking at her bundle. Gopaler-ma understood.

The Master always watched over his devotees so that they might not deviate from the path of non-attachment. He could be as soft as a flower, and again as strong as a thunderbolt. His superhuman love conquered the hearts of the devotees, so a little indifference from him would give them unbearable pain. Gopaler-ma was stung with remorse and thought of throwing the bundle away. But she kept it, and when she reached Dakshineswar she related everything to the Holy Mother. She was ready to give all the items away, but the Holy Mother stopped her and said: 'Let the Master say what he wants. There is no one to give you gifts, and moreover, you have been given some things which you need.' Nevertheless Gopaler-ma gave some of the things away. Then she cooked some curries for the Master and carried the tray of food to him. Seeing her repentance, he behaved with her in his usual manner. She returned to Kamarhati feeling much relieved.

After God-realization the illumined soul is carried along by the momentum of his past karma, but he ceases to be affected by it. He behaves like a witness, completely unattached to the world. He continues his daily routine and he helps other people toward realization. Gopaler-ma also followed her old routine. But from time to time she would visit the Master, and whatever visions she had during meditation she would relate to him. Once he said to her, 'One should not disclose one's visions to others, because it stops further visions.'

One day, however, Gopaler-ma and Swami Vivekananda, then called Narendranath, chanced to be present at Dakshineswar at the same time. Gopaler-ma was uneducated, unsophisticated, simple, and a devout worshipper of God with form. In striking contrast, Narendranath was learned,

sophisticated, intelligent, and a staunch believer in the formless God. As a member of the Brahmo Samaj, he looked down on worship of God with form. Sri Ramakrishna had a tremendous sense of humour, so he engaged these two devotees, with their opposing points of view, in a discussion by requesting Gopaler-ma to relate her visions to Narendranath.

'But will there not be harm in telling them?' she asked, for he had warned her not to divulge them. Assured by him that it would be all right, she related all her visions in detail to Narendranath with overwhelming joy and tears.

Devotion is contagious. Narendranath, in spite of his manly exterior and faith in rationalism, could not control his tears. His heart was filled with love and religious fervour. The old lady now and then interrupted her story to say: 'My son, you are learned and intelligent, and I am a poor, illiterate widow. I don't understand anything. Please tell me, are these visions true?'

'Yes, mother, whatever you have seen is all true,' Narendranath assured her.

On another day Gopaler-ma invited Sri Ramakrishna for lunch at Kamarhati. This time the Master went by boat with Rakhal, a young disciple who later became Swami Brahmananda. She received them cordially, and after they had enjoyed the delicacies she had cooked for them, they went to a room upstairs which had been arranged for their rest. Rakhal fell asleep immediately, but the Master was wide awake. Presently a foul odour permeated the room, and he saw two hideous looking ghosts with skeletal-like forms. They said to him humbly: 'Why are you here? Please go away from this place. Seeing you we are in unbearable pain.' The Divine Presence was no doubt the cause of their pain, either because it reminded them of their own pitiable condition, or because evil spitits cannot bear that presence.

Sri Ramakrishna immediately arose and gathered up his small spice bag and towel. In the meantime Rakhal woke up and asked. 'Master, where are you going?' 'I shall tell you later,' said Sri Ramakrishna. They both went downstairs to Gopaler-ma and, saying good-bye to her, left in a boat. The Master then told the whole story to Rakhal, explaining that he did not say anything to Gopaler-ma because she was staying there alone. At any rate, she knew that ghosts frequented the area, and Sri Ramakrishna knew that her spirituality protected her from their presence.

'One who has steadfast devotion to truthfulness realizes the God of Truth,' said Sri Ramakrishna. His own life was based on truth, and whatever he said invariably came true. One day Gopaler-ma cooked for the Master at Dakshineswar. When he found that the rice was not properly boiled, he indignantly said: 'Can I eat this rice? I shall not take rice out of her hand anymore.' People thought that the Master had only warned her to be careful in the future. But shortly afterward it so happend that cancer developed in his throat, and from then on he could only eat thin porridge and liquids.

As the illness grew worse, Sri Ramakrishna was moved from Dakshineswar to Calcutta, and then to Cossipore (a northern suburb of Calcutta), for treatment. Gopaler-ma now and then would come to serve him. One day the Master expressed a desire to eat a special kind of thick milk pudding. Yogindra, a young disciple, was sent to Calcutta to buy the pudding from the market. On the way, however, he stopped at the house of Balaram Bose, and when the women devotees heard about his errand, they asked him to wait and let them cook it. They meant well, reasoning that the home-made food would be of a better

quality than the market food. Yogindra agreed. But when he returned with the pudding and told the Master the reason for his delay, the Master scolded him: 'I wanted to eat the market pudding, and you were told to buy it. Why did you go to the devotee's house and give them trouble over it? Besides, this pudding is very rich and hard to digest. I will not eat it.' Indeed, he did not touch it, but he asked the Holy Mother to give the pudding to Gopaler-ma. As he explained: 'This is given by the devotees. Gopāla dwells in her heart. Her eating it will be the same as my eating it.'

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Gopaler-ma was grief-stricken and for a long time lived in seclusion. After a while, however, repeated visions of the Master consoled her bereaved heart. Once she went to attend the Car Festival of Jagannath in Mahesh, on the other side of the Ganga. There she had the cosmic vision of the Lord. She saw her beloved Gopāla not only in the image of Jagannath in the chariot, but also in the pilgrims who were pulling the chariot. 'I was then not myself,' she said. 'I danced and laughed and created a commotion there.'

Occasionally she would visit Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples at the Baranagore monastery. At their request she would cook a couple of dishes and offer them to the Master.

The human mind is a mysterious phenomenon. In general, people are not happy because their minds are always craving worldly comforts and luxuries. The mind becomes impure when it is involved with mundane things, and it becomes pure when it becomes desireless. The impure mind suffers, and the pure mind enjoys bliss. It is very difficult to give the mind to God if it is preoccupied with many worldly possessions. Gopaler-ma's mind, however, was always God-centred. Just as the needle of the compass always points to the north, so also her mind was always directed toward God. Mercilessly she would drive away all distracting thoughts. Swami Ramakrishnananda related the following incident:

> One day, after Sri Ramakrishna had passed away, some of his disciples went to see her and found her room full of mosquitoes and other troublesome creatures. Although she did not appear to mind them and kept on repeating the name of the Lord, it distressed them to see her in such discomfort, so the next day one of the disciples brought her a mosquito-curtain. That night when she sat down to repeat the Name, she found her mind constantly wandering to the curtain, thinking whether a cockroach or a rat might not be eating off a corner of it. Seeing this she said, 'What! This wretched curtain thus to take my mind away from my Gopala!' and without ado she made it up into a bundle and sat down again to her devotions with the mosquitoes all about her.
>
> The next morning we were just getting up at the Math when Gopaler-ma appeared. She had walked all the way (at least five miles) and must have started at three o'clock. She laid the bundle down.
>
> 'What is it?' someone asked.
>
> 'It is the curtain you gave me yesterday. It takes my mind away from God. I don't want it,' was her answer; and nothing could persuade her to take it back.[6]

One day in 1887 Gopaler-ma came to Balaram's house in Calcutta. A number of devotees were also there who were aware of her high spiritual experiences, and they began to ask her some questions. She said to them: 'Look, I am an old, illiterate woman. What do I know about the scriptures? Why don't you ask Sharat, Yogin, and Tarak?' But they persisted, so finally she said: 'Wait, let me ask Gopāla. O Gopāla, I don't understand what they are talking about. Why don't you answer their question? Hello, Gopāla says this...' In this way Gopaler-ma answered the

6. *Message of the East* vol. IX, 1920, p. 165.

abstruse questions of the devotees. They were amazed. That remarkable question and answer session ended abruptly, however, when Gopaler-ma suddenly said: 'O Gopāla, why are you going away? Will you not answer their questions anymore?' But Gopāla had left.

In 1897, Swami Vivekananda returned to India from his first visit to the West. Later he sent three of his western disciples, Sister Nivedita, Mrs. Ole Bull, and Miss Josephine MacLeod, to Kamarhati to meet Gopaler-ma. She received them cordially and kissed them. As she had no other furniture in her room, they sat on her bed. She then served them some puffed rice and sweet coconut balls and shared some of her spiritual experiences with them. When they returned to Calcutta, Swami Vivekananda said: 'Ah! This is the *old* India that you have seen, the India of prayers and tears, of vigils and fasts, that is passing away.'

Once two women devotees came to Swami Vivekananda at Balaram's house requesting initiation, but he sent them to Gopaler-ma. She was reluctant, however, and said to Swamiji: 'My son, what do I know about initiation? I am a poor widow.'

Swamiji replied with a smile: 'Are you an ordinary person? You have attained perfection through Japa. If you cannot give initiation then who can? Let me tell you, why don't you give your own Ishta-mantra to them? It will serve their purpose. Moreover, what will you do with your mantra anymore?'

Gopaler-ma initiated the women but was unwilling to accept any gift or offering from them. When she was persuaded, she followed the custom and accepted two rupees from them so that the disciples might not be hurt. She had no greed or desire for worldly objects. Her simple instruction was:

Listen, offer your body and mind to God. Initiation is not an insignificant thing. Do not leave your seat without repeating ten thousand japam in each sitting. While practising spiritual discipline disconnect yourself from the thoughts of the world. Start your japam at 3 o'clock in the morning so that nobody is aware of it; and again practise in the evening.

She had immense love for the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. When the news of Swami Vivekananda's passing away reached Kamarhati, she was in her room. She cried out in pain, 'Ah, Naren is gone?' She felt dizzy, saw darkness all around, and fell to the floor, fracturing her right elbow.

Gopaler-ma was then living there by herself, although the place was known to be haunted. During the time that the landlady lived there, a guard looked after the place, but since no one was there now to help her, Swami Saradananda appointed a gardener and sent a woman to take care of her broken arm. Seeing the attendant, Gopaler-ma said: 'Why have you come here? You will have to face a lot of hardship. My Gopāla takes care of me. Where will you sleep? You must find a room. They are all under lock and key, so you will have to ask the priest to open one for you. Let me tell you frankly at the outset that there are some evil spirits around. Whenever you hear any strange noise, repeat your mantra whole-heartedly.' At night the attendant slept opposite Gopaler-ma's room, and she heard the sound of heavy, hurried footsteps coming from the roof and a rapping noise through the window. It was quite a test for her.

Gopaler-ma had to face many such ordeals during her long stay in that garden-house by herself. She never felt lonely, however, for her beloved Gopāla was with her day and night. Moreover, she did not care for a companion because it might interfere with her visions. As she had

very little body-consciousness, she was reluctant to take personal service from others. Independence is happiness and dependence is misery. She practised this Vedantic teaching in her life.

In 1903, Gopaler-ma became seriously ill. Swami Brahmananda then sent one of his young disciples to nurse her. The boy brought fruits and vegetables for her and slept in the corner of her room. He awoke very early in the morning, however, when he heard Gopaler-ma talking with someone: 'Wait, wait! Even the birds have not yet sung. Let the morning come, my sweet darling, and then I shall take you for a bath in the Ganga.'

Later the young disciple said: 'No one else lives in your room. With whom were you talking this morning?'

'Don't you know that Gopāla lives with me? I was trying to control his naughtiness,' she replied.

As her health grew worse, the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna arranged for her to be moved to Balaram's house in Calcutta. But Sister Nivedita expressed a desire to serve this saintly woman, so Gopaler-ma was taken to her residence. A cook was appointed, and Kusum, one of Gopaler-ma's disciples, attended to her personal needs. In return Gopaler-ma gave Nivedita maternal affection and support. Her presence in the house created an atmosphere of spiritual serenity.

'I feel thrilled,' Nivedita wrote in a letter at that time, 'when I am with Gopaler-ma. The words of Saint Elizabeth sound in my ears, "What is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should visit me?" For I believe that in Gopaler-ma is saint-hood as great as that of a *Paramahamsa*—a soul fully free. I feel that if I can only worship her enough, blessings will descend on all whom I love, through her. Could more be said?'

To see God in everything is the culmination of Vedantic experience. Gopaler-ma had a pet cat in whom she used to see Gopāla. One day it was lying peacefully on Nivedita's lap when Kusum came and pushed it away. Immediately Gopaler-ma cried out: 'What have you done? What have you done? Gopāla is going away—he is gone.'

Those who carry the Lord in their hearts always enjoy festivity. They never get bored or pass a single dull moment. The body of Gopaler-ma was deteriorating day by day, but her mind was floating in bliss. When the Holy Mother went to see her, she sighed, 'Gopāla, you have come. Look, you have sat on my lap all these days ; now you take me on your lap.' The Holy Mother took Gopaler-ma's head on her lap and caressed her affectionately.

The end came on July 8, 1906. Gopaler-ma was carried to the Ganga where she breathed her last at dawn, touching the holy water of the river. A monk bent over her and whispered in her ear the words that the Hindu loves to hear in his last hour, 'Om Ganga Narayana! Om Ganga Narayana Brahma!'

Thus the curtain fell on the divine drama of Gopaler-ma. The monks went to her room and found her two most precious possessions, the rosary which had passed through her fingers millions and millions of times, and a picture of Sri Ramakrishna who had appeared before her as Gopāla. Nivedita took the rosary, and the picture was sent to Belur Math where it still rests on the altar of the Holy Mother's temple.

Once, being asked for some advice from a disciple, Gopaler-ma said: 'Ask advice from Gopāla. He is within you. No one can give better advice than he. This is the truth. Cry with a longing heart and you will reach him.'

(*Concluded*)

HINDU PHILOSOPHICAL INFLUENCES ON THE WRITERS OF EMERSONIAN PERIOD

DR. UMESH PATRI

The Transcendentalists of America were brought up and nourished in an atmosphere charged with the knowledge of Indian scriptures, and they brought into their vision a curious blending of both cultures, Indian and American, and developed an eclectic attitude to life. The three major contemporaries of Emerson, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Herman Melville (1819-1891) and Walt Whitman (1819-1892) who mere to a considerable extent influenced by Transcendentalism, were also, to some extent, influenced by Indian philosophy.

Though consciously an anti-Transcendentalist, Poe used some ideas of Transcendentalism as well as the philosophy inherent in the *Upaniṣads* and the *Bhagavad-Gītā* in his famous prose work *Eureka*, which appeared in 1848. Eleven years later, Sarah Helen Whitman wrote: 'It has been said that his (Poe's) theory, as expressed in 'Eureka', of the Universal diffusion of Deity in and through all things, is identical with the Brahminical faith as expressed in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*.'[1] One of the central ideas in the essay is the self-diffusion of God in the creation, though according to the Christian belief God created the universe standing apart from his creation. Poe says that God 'passes his Eternity in perpetual variation of concentrated Self and almost Infinite Self-diffusion. What you call the universe is but his present expansive existence.'[2] That the universe is an 'expansive existence' of the creator has been the central doctrine of the Hindu cosmo-genesis. God is supposed to have created the universe out of Himself and He has Himself become the indwelling spirit of every atom in the phenomenal world. The first line of *Īśa-Upaniṣad* reads thus: *īśāvāsyamidam sarvam yatkiñca jagatyām jagat*. 'All this, whatever moves in this moving world, is enveloped by God. Therefore find your enjoyment in renunciation...' The following verse from *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* also agree with Poe's theory of creation. The verse reads: 'He (God) thought: let me become many, let me be born. He performed austerity. Having performed austerity He created all this, whatever is here. Having created it, into it, indeed, he entered.'[3] Also about the dissolution of the universe Poe holds a view which is similar to the Hindu concept of *pralaya*. Poe writes: 'The final globe of globes will instantaneously disappear, and...God will remain all in all.'[4] Hindus believe that there will always be a fresh creation after each dissolution which will again be followed by another creation in a cyclic pattern. Poe also believed in this kind of cyclic pattern in creation. In his own words '... another action and reaction of the Divine will... a novel universe swelling into existence, and then subsiding into nothingness, at every throb of the Heart Divine?'[5] We have a parallel theory of cosmic dissolution in the *Upani-*

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1. Sarah Helen Whitman, *Edgar Poe and his Critics* (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1860) pp. 65-66.

2. Poe, *The Work of E.A. Poe*, edited by E. Murkhan (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1904) 'Eureka', 9, p. 154.

3. *Taittirīya-Upaniṣad* 2.6. Dr. Radhakrishnan, *The Principal Upaniṣads* (London: George Allen & Unwin. 1953) p. 548.

4. 'Eureka', *Works*. 9, p. 150.

5. *ibid*., p. 151.

ṣads and in the Gita. The verse pertaining to the concept in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, runs as follows:

> Taking as base My own material-nature
> I send forth again and again
> This whole host of beings,
> Which is powerless, by the power of
> (My) material nature.[6]

Towards the conclusion of his essay one finds a profound vision of soul or Atman and God or Brahman which looks as though the lines had been lifted from the pages of the *Upaniṣad*. Poe writes: 'No thinking being lives who, at some luminous point of his life of thought, has not felt himself lost amid the surges of futile effects at understanding or believing, that anything exists *greater than his own* soul... that no one soul *is* inferior to another—that nothing is, or can be superior to any one soul—that each soul is, in part, its own God.'[7] The identity of the soul and God or the individual self and the Brahman is the essence of the teaching of Vedanta.

Though Poe appears at times opposed to Transcendentalism, there are many instances in this essay which clearly show his indebtedness to Emerson. Poe's essay has been compared with Emerson's *Nature*.[8] There is a clear relationship between Emerson's conception of the primal unity of the universe pervaded by the Over-Soul and Poe's concept of the unity of the universe. Arnold Smithlin remarks: 'In his assertion of the unity of man and the cosmos, and of reliance upon intuition as the best means of realizing that ultimate Truth, Poe is following the main tenets of the Transcendentalists.'[9]

Like Poe, Herman Melville, it is assumed by some critics, was also influenced by Hindu mythology. Though during his round-the-world tours he never visited India, he was avidly interested in Indian lore, a fact which is evidenced in the discussion between Melville and the poet Oliver Wendell Holmes. The following passage suggests this fact: 'At length, somehow, the conversation drifted to East Indian religions and mythologies, and soon there arose a discussion between Holmes and Melville, which was conducted with the most amazing skill and brilliancy on both sides. It lasted for hours....'[10] Besides, there are evidences to show that he had read W.J. Mickle's essay 'Inquiry into the Religious Tenets and Philosophy of the Brahmins', Thomas Maurice's *Indian Antiquities* and an article on 'Hindu Superstition' in Chamber's *Miscellany of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*.[11] *Moby Dick* contains a large number of references to Hindu imagery and symbolism. The central symbol of *Moby Dick*, the white Whale, may have been forged out of his knowledge of Indian mythology, particularly the concept of Matsya Avatāra of Viṣṇu. Viṣṇu, the chief God of the Hindu pantheon was born as a fish in one of his incarnations. H. B. Kulkarni in his book *Moby Dick: A Hindu Avatar: A Study of Hindu Myth and Thought*,[12] has made

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6. Franklin Edgerton, *The Bhagavad-Gītā* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1972) 9.8.

7. 'Eureka', *Works*, 9, pp. 152-3.

8. Patrick F. Quinn, 'Poe's *Eureka* and Emerson's *Nature*', *Emerson Society Quarterly*, 31 (2nd quarter, 1963) p. 4-7.

9. Arnold Smithlin, '*Eureka*: Poe as Transcendentalist', *Emerson Society Quarterly*, 39 (2nd quarter, 1965) p. 28.

10. M.B. Field, *Memories of Many Men and some Women*, quoted by James Baird, *Ishmael* (Baltimore: John Hopkin's Press. 1956) p. 176.

11. John T. Reid, *Indian Influences in American Literature and Thought* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1965) p. 53.

12. H.B. Kulkarni, *Moby Dick: A Hindu Avatar: A Study of Hindu Myth and Thought* (Utah: Utah State Univ. Press, 1970).

a detailed analysis of the parallels existing between Melville's concept of the white Whale and Viṣṇu's incarnation as a fish. In the chapter 'Monstrous Pictures of Whales' in *Moby Dick* Melville refers to the concept of Matsya Avatāra:

> Now, by all odds, the most ancient extant portrait anyways purporting to be the Whale's, is to be found in the famous cavern-pagoda of Elephanta, in India. The Brahmins maintain that in the almost endless sculptures of that immemorial pagoda, all the trades and pursuits, every conceivable avocation of man, were prefigured ages before any of them actually came into being. No wonder then, that in some sort our noble profession of whaling should have been there shadowed forth. The Hindu Whale referred to, occurs in a separate department of the wall, depicting the incarnation of Vishnu in the form of Leviathan, learnedly known as the Matsa Avatar.[13]

The reference to Elephanta caves in the passage is, undoubtedly, based on a confusion of sources. In Elephanta cave there is no representation of Viṣṇu as a fish or whale. Melville must have seen the picture of Matsya Avatāra in Thomas Maurice's *Indian Antiquities* and, as Howard P. Vincent observes, he 'Got it mixed up in hasty recollection with an account of Elephanta in the same volume.'[14] Melville also makes a similar confusion in his concept of 'dark Hindu half of nature' referred to in *Moby Dick*, suggesting that the dark side of the world is essentially a Hindu view of world. Despite these conceptual errors, the fact remains that Melville was acquainted with Indian myths and employed them wherever he found them interesting and appropriate to developing his own concepts. The concept of Viṣṇu's ten incarnations has been used in a satirical vein in *The Confidence Man*, a novel dealing with how one person in ten different guises indulges in confidence game with the passengers in the boats on the Mississippi in order to swindle them.

The influence of Indian scriptures on Walt Whitman has been an established fact. His *Leaves of Grass* is replete with concepts which are typically Hindu. There exist several ideas in *Leaves of Grass* which are identical with the ideas of Advaita Vedanta and its source books such as the Upaniṣads and the Gita. In 1866 shortly after the publication of *Leaves of Grass*, Thoreau greeted Whitman, saying that the book was 'wonderfully like the Orientals.'[15] Malcolm Cowley remarks that 'Most of the Whitman's doctrines, though by no means all of them, belong to the mainstream of Indian philosophy.'[16] S. Radhakrishnan has categorically affirmed the Indian inspiration behind Whitman's writings: 'Whitman turns to the East in his anxiety to escape from the complexities of civilization and the bewilderments of a baffled intellectualism.'[17] Emerson himself thought that *Leaves of Grass* very much resembled the Gita, 'a mixture of the *Bhagavad-Gita* and the *New York Herald*.'[18] The concept of the Atman (individual self) merging into the Brahman (the Supreme Self), the concept of transfiguration and several other concepts basic to Indian thought are employed by Whitman in poems like 'Song

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13. Hermen Melville, *Moby Dick or the White Whale* (New York: Harper & Brothers Pub., 1950) LV, 292.

14. Howard P. Vincent, *The Trying-out of Moby Dick*, quoted by Reid, p. 53.

15. Malcolm Cowley, Introduction to Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*: The First (1855) Edition (rpt. New York: Viking Press, 1967) p. XII.

16. *ibid.*, p. XXII.

17. S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1940) p. 249.

18. William S. Kennedy, *Reminiscences of Walt Whitman*, qnoted by J. P. Rao Rayapati, *Early American Interest in Vedanta* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1973) p. 12.

of Myself', 'A Passage to India' etc. Although Whitman denies having read the Gita before the publication of *Leaves of Grass*, there are strong grounds to disbelieve him. We might quote a few lines from the Gita and compare it with the lines from *Leaves of Grass*. Kṛṣṇa says:

> A leaf, a flower, a fruit or water,
> Who presents to Me with devotion,
> That offering of devotion I
> Accept from the devout-souled (giver).[19]

The same idea is given a voice in the lines of 'Song of Myself':

> A child said *What is the grass*? fetching it to me with full hands;
> How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.
> I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.
> Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord, a scented gift....[20]

Such parallels can be endlessly cited.

However, Whitman curiously denies to have ever read the Gita before the publication of *Leaves of Grass*. His personal copy of Gita was a translation by Cockborn Thomson which was presented to him as a Christmas gift by an English man named Thomas Dixon in 1875, after the publication of the *Leaves of Grass*, but one can assume that Whitman might have been familiar with the Indian text before he was presented with one by his English friend. Although Whitman may not have read the Gita before the writing of *Leaves of Grass*, he had sound knowledge of Vedic literature—a fact corroborated by Dorothy F. Mercer when she says that there is a great similarity between Whitman's prose and Sanskrit prose in general.[21] What she implies is that the literary atmosphere during the 1840 and 1850, being charged with Hindu philosophy, must have unconsciously penetrated Whitman's mind and thinking: 'It was in this atmosphere, impregnated with interest in Hindu philosophy, literature, and religion that Whitman reached manhood.'[22] Emerson might also have been a patent influence on him. In 1847 Whitman reviewed Emerson's 'Spiritual Laws' and subsequently underwent a spiritual transformation, which might have been due to the indirect influence of Indian thought filtered through Emerson's writings. Whitman expressed his gratitude to Emerson for his transformation, saying: 'I was simmering, simmering, simmering, Emerson brought me to a boil.'[23] Whitman may also have been interested in Yoga. O.K. Nambiar claims that in section five of the 'Song of Myself' Whitman has a sudden burst of psycho-physical energy which is very much akin to the unfolding of the energy hidden in *kuṇḍalinī*, the 'serpent power' that lies coiled at the base of the spinal column and awakens when there is some spiritual progress in the yogic discipline.[24] The 'Song of Myself' describes the experience of unitive life which is possible for a person whose hidden energy has bloomed.

Another nineteenth century poet and contemporary of Emerson, John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) was influenced both by Indian philosophy and the Transcen-

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19. *The Bhagavad-Gītā*, 9.26. trans. Edgerton.
20. Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Philadelphia: David Mckay, 1888) p. 33.
21. Dorothy F. Mercer, *Leaves of Grass and Bhagavad-Gītā*: A Comparative Study, Diss. University of California (1933) p. 1.
22. *ibid.*, p. 18.
23. Cf. V.K. Chari, *Whitman in the Light of Vedantic Mysticism: An Interpretation* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964) p. 64.
24. O.K. Nambiar, *Maha Yogi Walt Whitman: New Light on Yoga* (Bangalore: Jeevan Publications, 1978).

dentalism of Emerson. In 1852 Emerson lent him a copy of the Gita which presumably inspired him. The impression he had about the Gita is recorded in a letter written to Emerson: 'I will ever keep it until I restore it to thee personally in exchange for George Fox (the founder of the Society of Friends, or Quakers). It is a wonderful book—and has greatly excited my curiousity to know more of the religious literature of the East.'[25] He was stimulated by books like Edwin Arnold's *The Light of Asia*, Alger's *The Poetry of the Orient* and Max Muller's *Sacred Books of the East.* He also read Kendersley's *Specimen of the Hindu Theatre* and was familiar with the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.* Arthur Christy is of the opinion that he offered in his 'Poetic work more poems on Oriental themes, more paraphrases of Oriental maxims and more imitations of Oriental models than may be found in Emerson's verse...'[26] Poems like 'Miriam', 'The Preacher', 'The Over Heart', and 'The Brewing of Soma' etc. deal specifically with Indian themes. The concept of Over-Heart is very close to Emerson's concept of Over-Soul. Both are translations of the Hindu term *adhyātman.* He was interested in the Brahmo Samaj, and translated a few of its hymns. In his introduction to these verses he wrote: 'I have attempted this paraphrase of the hymns of the Brahmo Samaj of India, as I find them in Mozoomdar's account of the devotional exercises of that remarkable religious development which has attracted far less attention and sympathy from the Christian world than it deserves, as a fresh revelation of the direct action of the Divine Spirit upon the human heart.'[27] A sample of lines where he has been influenced by India is quoted below for an understanding of the impact of Indian thought on his poetic sensibility.

> And India's mystics sang aright,
> Of the One Life pervading all—
> One Being's tidal rise and fall
> In soul and form, in sound and sight—
> Eternal outflow and recall.[28]

and

> Truth is one;
> And, in all lands beneath the sun,
> Whose hath eyes to see may see
> The tokens of its unity.[29]

25. Whittier, *The Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier,* ed., John B. Pickard (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975) II, p. 203.

26. Arthur Christy, 'Orientalism in New England: Whittier', *American Literature,* I (1929-1930) p. 372.

27. Whittier, *The Works of John Greenleaf Whittier* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1891) II, p. 340.

28. *ibid.,* pp. 249-50.

29. *ibid.,* p. 293.

THE STORY OF AN EPOCH

(*A Review-Article*)

The Story of an Epoch. by Swami Shraddhananda. Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras 600 004. 1982. Pp. viii+298. Rs. 25.

This is essentially the story of the life of Swami Virajananda, the sixth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. It is also the story of an epoch, an epoch in the Ramakrishna Movement, an epoch in the history of India's spiritual renaissance. The rationale for this simultaneous approach can be found in Andre Maurois who in his *The Ethics of Biography* wrote, 'A biographer has a right to leave around his central figure a margin, more or less wide, of contemporary facts. Only, if he leaves the margin too wide, he runs the risk of no longer writing a biography, while not writing a good history either. Now, where should he draw the line or how the facts are chosen? The biographer should consider as relevant all the facts that had a direct influence on formation of the hero, on the adventures of his soul, or on his personal action.' The author of the present book seems to have effectively and efficiently followed this guideline. His judicious selection and arrangement of material have helped him to produce a dependable history of the Ramakrishna Movement against the perspective of a vivid account of a modern saint's life and a true picture of his character.

Born in the year 1873, Swami Virajananda had the blessed privilege of coming into contact with the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna at the age of eighteen when he was a college student. Though he had his spiritual initiation from the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, he is popularly known as a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. The latter had ordained him as a *sannyasin* of the Ramakrishna Order. Greatly fascinated by Swamiji, Swami Virajananda considered himself filled with the inspiration of Swamiji. Regarding his first impression of Swamiji he wrote, 'His eyes were captivating, just as the American newspapers had said. Light appeared to emanate from his entire body. What a charming figure—combining beauty and power, a nonchalant air and a dazzling personality! My first reactions were love, devotion, and a sense of fear.' In his daily life, too, Swami Virajananda caught the glint of Swamiji's towering personality. It shone through all he said, all he did, all he was. It gave him power and insight and an authority which no one could dispute. The last he used sparingly. Even as the sixth President of the Ramakrishna Order he guided the members of the Order as well as the devotees rather by love an gentle words than by stringent methods.

'It is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as to live one', observed Lytton Strachey. The author Swami Shraddhanand, a senior member of the Ramakrishna Order, served Swami Virajananda as his private secretary for more than a decade. His own spiritual sensitivity and keen observation helped him to have a deeper understanding of Swami Virajananda. Besides, he is a good writer in both Bengali and English. All these factors have helped him to produce a faithful and beautiful portrait of a soul pursuing the adventures of spiritual life. A few years after Swami Virajananda passed away the author set himself the task of writing *Atīter Smṛti* in Bengali which was published by the Ramakrishna Math, Belur, Howrah, in 1957. The present volume is an English rendering of the same.

A biography, though circumscribed by its subject, is in fact more extensive in its scope than the annals or history proper. In *The Story of an Epoch* the reader finds

at some places the plainness or nakedness of narration characteristic of annals. At some other places he can see the loftiness and gravity of general history. Again, to make the reader familiar with Swami Virajananda's private action and conversations the author has gone into the minute details of some circumstances and trivial incidents of his life.

No doubt, good biographies can only be written from personal knowledge. But what is known can seldom be immediately told, and when it might be told, the details—the delicate features of the mind, the subtle nuances of character, and the minute peculiarities of conduct—are obliterated. The present biography is free from such limitations. The life dealt with in it is that of a saint. And a saint's life is chiefly an interior life. This luminous inner world of spiritual consciousness is beyond the reach and understanding of ordinary people. But our author has succeeded in giving us sparkling glimpses of Swami Virajananda's inner life and the way the holy influences of the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda silently shaped it.

The immediate attraction of *The Story of an Epoch* is twofold: (a) it appeals to our curiosity about the personality of Swami Virajananda, who very ably represents the second generation of pioneers of the Ramakrishna Movement; and (b) it appeals to our interest in factual knowledge about the social context and the important events that happened around Swami Virajananda. These two objectives, one to portray the personality of Swami Virajananda and the other to portray the formative period of the Ramakrishna Movement, have been cleverly inter-woven. Again, following the analytical method, the writer has projected detached pictures of Swami Virajananda and his surroundings with continuity and speed. The total effect produced thereby is that of bringing back to life the past.

Even though the essential element in biography is actuality and individuality, the form of biography is no less important. While his source material must inevitably be factual, the biographer has to employ the technique of the novelist. Following this principle, our author too has taken recourse to the use of the novelist's art of vivid portrayal, suggestion, and dramatization. Yet he has not carried the use of this form too far. There is a happy blending of art and science in this book. The author has repeatedly drawn in a few sentences pen sketches of important personalities that Virajananda had come into contact with in the form of his reminiscences of them, which he gave when the news of their death had reached him. This flashback technique has not, however, disturbed the continuity of the story at any point. And it reaches its height when the author discusses the final departure of Swami Virajananda from the Ashrama at the mountain village of Shyamala Tal which he had founded and loved so much.

The author has also with clear insight presented the story of the continuous spiritual struggle which formed an undercurrent to the outer life of Virajananda. It was essentially a struggle between the contemplative's life and the life of an active worker. Swami Vivekananda said, 'My disciples are to emphasize work more than austerities.' This command often clashed with austerity and inwardness, the two salient elements of Swami Virajananda's character. But it goes to the credit of Swami Virajananda that he successfully struck a harmony between active life and contemplation, work and worship, and the author has very ably presented the process of its development.

Barring some mistakes like the use of the word *Nisiram* in place of *Nasiram*,

the play written by the great Bengali dramatist Girish Chandra Ghosh (p. 264), and the mention of August 19, 1930 in place of August 19, 1927 as the date of Mahasamadhi of Swami Saradananda (p. 166), the production is excellent. This book will be heartily welcomed by the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna and sincere spiritual aspirants. It is a significant contribution to the documentation of the Ramakrishna Movement.

SWAMI PRABHANANDA
Belur Math

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

THE RELIGION OF MANIPUR: by DR. SAROJ NALINI PARRATT. Published by Firma KLM (Pvt.) Limited, 257 B, Bepin Behari Ganguly Street, Calcutta-700 012, India. 1980 Pp. xvi+218. Rs. 50.

The book under review is based on Dr. Parratt's doctoral dissertation and deals with the religio-cultural history of Manipur, a small northeastern State of Indian Union inhabited by a people whose origins are obscure. The treatise is divided into three parts: Beliefs, Rituals and Historical development of the Religion of Manipur. These three parts are again sub-divided into ten chapters, of which the first contains a brief narration of the origins of the Manipuris and an important account of the different sources and principal works which are to be tapped for the historical reconstruction of the religion of Manipur. Though the scope of the present disquisition is limited, yet a little more detailed treatment of the origins of the Manipuris would certainly satisfy the inquisitiveness of general readers and researchers alike.

The second chapter gives an elaborate account of the pre-Hindu deities venerated by the Meiteis. These deities or *umang lāi*, as they are commonly called in Meitei dialect, are classified broadly into four groups: (a) ancestral deities (b) deities associated with a particular tribe (c) household deities and (d) tutelary deities. Here the authoress narrates many interesting myths and legends associated with these deities. Evidently most of these mythological accounts contain elements which are characteristically totemistic and animistic. A striking feature of the Meitei mythology is its conception of High God, the Supreme Deity, in Atiyā Guru Sidaba. which literally means 'Sky-Guru-immortal' or immortal celestial guru who is entrusted with the job of creation of man and two other living beings such as frogs and apes.

In the third chapter Dr. Parratt has offered a detailed description of the various public festivals of the people of Manipur falling under two broad groups: those of Hindu origin and those traditionally Meitei. The Hindu festivals, such as Holi, Janmāṣtami, Ratha Jātrā. Bāruni etc. which are observed by the Manipuris differ slightly from their usual Hindu patterns. These Hindu festivals are tempered to some extent by local faiths. Of all the traditional Meitei festivals, Lāi Harāoba (festival for pleasing God) is unique, for it mirrors the entire culture of the Manipuri people. From the fascinating account given in this book, it becomes impressively clear that Lāi Harāoba is a composite festival where sacred lyrics, traditional music and Meitei dance are beautifully blended together, thus making it a uniqne feature of Manipuri culture.

Part three dealing with the historical development of the Religion of Manipur is the most significant part of the book. By undertaking a dispassionate and critical examination of available data and archaelogical reports including the Phayeng Copper Plate, Dr. Parratt has forcefully controverted the claim made by a section of Manipuri scholars that Vaishnavite infiuences had percolated into Manipur as early as the 7th century. The pre-Hindu period or Medieval period of the history of Manipur (from 1467 to 1678 A.D.) had seen the influences of Hinduism on Manipuri Religion though apparently ineffective in attracting the Meiteis from their indigenous faith. Nevertheless, it offered the preparatory ground for the advent of Vaiṣṇavism in the 18th century when it received royal patronage during the reign of Charai Rongba (1697-1706 A.D.). Vaiṣṇavism came to be recognized as the official religion of the State during the reign of Garib Niwaz (1709-1748 A.D.).

The religious history of Manipur can never be complete without mentioning the role of

Bhagyachandra in consolidating and confirming Chaitanyaite Vaiṣṇavism as the State religion of Manipur, though not in an undiluted form. In view of this, Dr. Parratt rightly observes 'the Vaiṣṇavism practised in Manipur became peculiarly Manipuri Vaiṣṇavism in form, adopting aspects of Meitei culture and being modified by it.' (p. 169) Bhagyachandra was also responsible for the introduction of *rāsa-līlā* into the traditional dances, especially on Lāi Harāoba, which ultimately became an important feature of Manipuri religious art and also one of the classical schools of Indian dance.

Dr. Parratt has discussed her theme in the broader perspective of rich Manipuri culture. Her approach is principally historical. She has consulted almost all the available works on ancient Manipuri culture and religion and utilized a good deal of materials available in Manipuri language, some of them in manuscript form. Her personal knowledge of this religion has enabled her to present her views with much clarity. Notwithstanding a faithful presentation of the various aspects of the religion of Manipur. the authoress has not thrown any light on their spiritual significance and metaphysical basis. Nevertheless, the work on the whole is the result of painstaking research and sound scholarship. Late National Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji, who incidentally was one of the examiners of the thesis on which the book is based, has written an excellent foreword to the book. A good bibliography, a useful index, a glossary of Manipuri terms and a number of black and white plates have undoubtedly enhanced the value of the treatise. Indeed it is a most useful publication and provides the students of Indian Religions with valuable materials for a highly interesting comparative study.

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THE ENTIRE AVESTA IS ONE WHOLE: By H.S. SPENCER. Published by H.P. Vaswani, A6 Sadhu Vaswani Kunj, Poona 411 001. Pp. 111. Rs. 15/-.

Whether an extant religious text is one whole or consists of interpolations and additions is one of the most delicate and persistent problems in the history of religions. To an objective critic a scriptural text might appear to be a collection of the work of several generations of individuals. But to a devout insider the text comes down from the divine source in its entirety. A phenomenologist or a religious scientist will take into consideration both these approaches. The observations of the outsider and the faith of the insider have to be viewed together to reach any sound conclusion. As in the case of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, wherein one has to embrace the discriminating findings of Richard Garbe and Rudolf Otto along with the unitary conclusions of Madhusudan Saraswati and Franklin Edgerton. Similarly in the case of the *Avestā* we shall have to include under the same group the views of European scholars like Drs. Geiger and Geldner who have analysed the text on linguistic and compositional grounds along with the views of Kaviraj A.F. Khabarder and E.K. Kanga who have tried to interpret it in terms of the spirit.

The Avestan phenomenon is a fascinating chapter of human history wherein the Indian mind finds not only fraternal coincidences but also confirmations of its entire religio-philosophical beginnings. The Mazdayasni *din* and the Vedic *dharma* are the two streams coming out from the same fountain-head. Fortunately we have almost complete unanimity of opinion about the authenticity of the *Ṛg-Veda Samhitā*. Regarding other portions of this and other Vedas we have to face chronological and textual controversies. In the case of the *Avestā* the controversy becomes more prominent partly because the adherents of that faith were exterminated in their homeland and partly because they do not have that strong teacher-disciple transmission system of the Brahminic tradition which has been able to retain the Vedic texts without the slightest mutilation.

The *Gāthās* are said to be the genuine formulations of the Persian prophet Zarathustra. Regarding other portions of the *Avestā* like the *Yāsna* and the *Yāshts*, they are supposed to be of either prior or later origin. There is, of course, one view that the prophet himself is the source of the entire text. The author of the book under review has tried to establish, through several of his writings on the subject, that the *Avestā*, in its present form, is one whole and the question of a younger or older *Avesta* is meaningless.

The author of this book holds that prior to the birth of the prophet the most advanced views of the time were contained in the Aryan Mazdayasni faith and the scriptures of the age of Zoroaster consisted mostly of the *Yāsna* and the *Yāshts* (being natural forms of adoration of he powers of the Nature). The Holy Zarathu-

stra's work was directed towards the enlargement of the Mazdayasni concept and also the introduction of several improvements and changes in the scripture. The adoration of various heavenly bodies in the *Yāshts* and the concept of one Creator of the universe advanced by the prophet clearly show the chronological priority of the *Yāshts* over the *Gāthās*.

The author of the title tries to establish that both *Yāsna* and *Yāshts* were composed much earlier (almost contemporaneous to the *Ṛg-Veda Samhitās*) and the advent of the prophet marks improvements in the extant texts of his time. The prophet adopted the texts to suit his own personal revelation. The prophet accepted the then existing texts and the entire Mazdayasni *din* (cf. *Yāsna Ha* 71) except for such changes as he had to introduce to bring them into line with the tenets of his own revelation. Thus there is no question of an earlier or later *Avestā*. The present form of the text is one whole.

The book is a good academic discussion of this issue and gives sympathetic treatment to the traditional approach. If the original sources of the author's references had been given in full, the book would have proved to be of great help to research students.

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YOGA FOR ALL: BY YOGI MAHARSHI SHUDDHANANDA BHARATI. Published by Chetana Pvt. Ltd., 34 Rampart Row, Bombay 400 023. 1978. Pp. viii+119. Rs. 20/-.

Through 62 lessons the author has given in this handy book on yoga the blueprint of a system integrating all the facets of life from the gross physical to the most spiritual. Nearly half of the book deals with human physiology which makes the reader aware of his basic strength. The next sixteen pages discuss rhythmic breathing and *āsanas*. Then follow brief discussions on prayer, meditation, yogic life etc. More than 40 diagrams and photos given in the book help the reader to grasp the functions of the human body and to gain a visual understanding of the different *āsanas*.

The author has presented a graded conrse for human development first in the physical plane. then in the mental plane, and ultimately in the spiritual plane. He includes both Hathayoga and Rājayoga in his scheme, and thus helps the reader to have a clear view of the yogic life. The author is himself a well-known yogi and thus presents the subject with authority. We are glad to note that he advises *nādi-suddhi* before taking to *prānayāma*. Many yogic aspirants do not pay attention to *nāḍi-suddhi* with the result that their *prāṇayāma*-practice does not give satisfactory results. Chapters on *brahmacarya* and mental purity are well-written, but it would have been better if he had discussed some *āsanas* and *mudrās* meant for that purpose. The chapter on meditation is worth reading as he prescribes a unique process to make the mind indrawn. This process will no doubt help even a commoner who is busy all day long. Though the author has not strictly followed either Patañjali's Yoga-Sūtras or *Gheranda Samhitā* or any other authentic yoga treatise, yet his new synthetic method will help many aspirants.

But there are some points in the book which need clarification. For instance, the author says: "In deep sleep we... live in the subtle body" (p. 109). Actually, however, in the dream state one lives in the subtle body and in deep sleep one goes to the causal body. The author further speaks of 'sound' and 'light' in deep meditation. All the sounds heard by a yogi are not *anāhata dhvani*. The sound which is heard in the left ear is produced when one's nerves get purified. Bnt the sound in the right ear has spiritual significance. If one concentrates on this right-ear sound, one will feel that the sound shifts from the right ear to the back portion of one's head, and then to the spinal column. Thus one can know that the *anāhata dhvani* comes from the heart (*anāhata cakra*) and ultimately from the navel (*maṇipūra cakra*). Similarly, a novice can have the glimpse of light in meditation. The light appears in the form of a tiny star, white cloud, the sun or the moon. At first it stays for a fraction of a second though by gradual practice it can be seen for a long time. This light is experienced in the early stages, but when an aspirant proceeds further he experiences another sort of light which emanates from his head or heart, even from the whole body. This light, which appears not only during meditation but also in the *vyutthāna* stage, has got more spiritual value as it helps one to dive deep in meditation and to have spiritual illumination. We wish the author had clearly explained the difference between these two sorts of light. Sometimes it is seen that new practitioners mistake the preliminary stages

for something higher. On page 107 the author writes: "By concentrating on Time he can know the past, present and future". It is not explained what is meant by 'concentration on Time'. Patañjali says: *pariṇāmatrayasaṃyamād-atītānāgatajñānam* (3:16), that is one should concentrate on *dharma, lakṣaṇa,* and *avasthā* to know the past and the future. There is a particular yogic kriyā which is prescribed for this purpose.

Spiritual practice means to bring about a change in one's consciousness; it has nothing to do with the so-called miracles. Purity should regulate one's thought and action, and one should be eager to realize the highest Truth. This point has been stressed by the author, and we are happy to recommend this book to all those who wish to have a clear idea of the fundamentals of spiritual life.

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NEWS AND REPORTS

SRI RAMAKRISHNA ADVAITA ASHRAMA, KALADY

Report: for 1978-'82

Religious: This centre situated in a serene village sanctified by the birth of Adi Śamkarācārya was started in 1936. The monastery carried on daily worship, *ārati,* bhajan etc. in the newly built International Sri Ramakrishna Temple, and observed the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, The Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and other religious celebrities. The Swamis conducted religious classes in the Ashrama every Sunday and delivered lectures outside on invitation.

Educational: The Brahmanandodaya School consisting of a Junior Basic School, a Sanskrit Upper Primary School and a High School had a total number of 1,364 pupils (boys: 802; girls: 562) during 1981-'82. The Sri Ramakrishna Gurukula and Tribal Hostel planned on the lines of ancient Hindu system of education had 147 students of whom 73 were free boarders. The Swami Vivekananda Social Education Library, open to the public, had 6,700 books, and also 18 periodicals and dailies in the reading-room.

The centre has a publication department which brought out 9 religious books during the period.

Social welfare and medical: A Community Hall for Harijans was built with a children's library (books: 1,618) and with facilities for indoor games. Weekly religious classes were conducted, and 200 children and expectant mothers were given nutritious bread regularly except on Sundays. The Community Hall was well utilized by the local Harijans for conducting social and cultural functions.

The centre runs a free Ayurvedic Dispensary which treated 5,568 patients during 1981-'82.

Brahmanandodaya High School—Development Scheme (second stage): The above-mentioned High School is situated between the temple and the hostel. The congestion and noise of the school are disturbing the serene atmosphere of the temple and the discipline of the hostel. Therefore, is was decided to shift the High School to a place near the other schools outside the Ashrama compound. The School Development Committee with the help of friends and well-wishers could collect about Rs. 2 lakh and purchase the necessary land in 1980. The estimated cost of the 3-storey building was Rs. 7 lakh as per 1979 schedule, and the Ashrama issued an appeal for Rs. 10 lakh anticipating the increasing cost of materials and labour. By March, '82, it could collect Rs. 4,89,574/- and with it the ground-floor was completed. It is now found that owing to the unprecedented increase in cost of materials and labour, the total expenditure may go up to Rs. 14 lakh. The Ashrama requires a further sum of Rs. 9.5 lakh. The Ashrama appeals to the generous public to come forward to contribute liberally to this noble cause. Persons desirous of having their names or the names of their dear ones exhibited in a prominent place inscribed on marble plaques may do so by donating Rs. 30,000/- or more to the different classrooms. Persons, firms or companies who donate Rs. 5,000/- or more will be regarded as patrons and a list of their names displayed prominently in a similar manner. Those who contribute Rs. 1,001/- will be donor members and such names will also be displayed in the building.

The Ashrama once again appeals to all to make their contribution at the earliest in any one of the forms mentioned above. All contributions are exempt from Income Tax.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Read and Grow

The private library movement in Kerala, said to be the largest of its kind in Asia, has for its motto, 'Read and Grow', given to it by its far-sighted founder who began his career as a modest school teacher. Not all books help people to grow, though. Some books only waste one's time and energy, while some others destroy one's moral stamina and spiritual sensibility.

A good book is one which brings noble thoughts, inflames the best in man and stimulates and guides his intellectual, moral and spiritual growth. To this category belong some of the great religious books of the world. Among them the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* by M. occupies a unique place. As its title suggests, it is the new 'gospel', good news, of hope and good will for the modern man. Its main theme is a rousing call to arise, awake and realize the divinity of the soul, to give up invidious distinctions and fanaticism, and to lead a well-integrated and harmonious life. This great book, either in its own right or as a link-scripture among the scriptures of world religions, is enabling countless people to have a new vision of life and reality. Its original Bengali version known as *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta* has recently taken the Bengali-speaking world by storm. According to Tapash Ganguly writing in *The Week,* a new cheap (Rs. 18/-) one-volume edition of the book has had a record sale of 2.5 lakh copies worth Rs. 45 lakh in just 45 days. 'The sale of *Kathāmṛta* from January 1 to February 14 surpassed the total sale of Marxian literature in West Bengal in the last three years', he says.

This is, however, only just one indication of a happy trend appearing in society in Bengal and other States. There is among the intelligentsia a growing awareness of the importance of religion as a key factor in personal fulfilment and in the socio-cultural transformation of the country. The 8th Calcutta Book Fair held in February 1983 has given another indication of this. 'Of the 293 new entrants, as many as 22 were publishers of religious books and they were the single largest block at the fair. According to organizers, this block reaped the maximum benefit this year.'

As Milton has said, a good book is the precious life-blood of a master mind. To open oneself fully to the life-giving ideas of a great man his book must be read again and again, and for this it is necessary to own the book. Ruskin's statement, 'If a book is worth reading, it is worth buying', carries an imperative to all those who seek excellence in life. One of the important factors that has contributed to the phenomenal rise of Russia is the popularization of books. While Indian youths are nuts over films, dress and cosmetics, Russian youths regard reading of books a fashion. Soviet Union is the largest producer of books in the world, bringing out more than 85,000 titles every year—one-fifth of the world's total. A Russian buys on an average 13 books, whereas the average for India is much less than even one book per head. Poverty is not the only cause for this sad state. The main cause is lack of intellectual awakening, ignorance of the power of ideas, absence of love of knowledge. If we want to develop, we must popularize good books—and read and grow.