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

THUS SPOKE SITA ON SHRI RAMA

Sita taught the truth about Rama to Hanumana,

“Dear child, Hanumana! know Shri Rama to be the Ultimate Reality, Parabrahman, the immutable One, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. He verily is all-pervading and beyond mind and words. He is above all qualities of name and form that denote all things both gross and subtle. He is the Supreme Self, blissful, pure, calm, unchanging, spotless, all-pervading, self-revealed and stainless. And know me to be the Primeval Prakriti, the Power behind the Universe which creates, sustains and destroys all creations. Being united with this Lord of men who is the Supreme Self, I untiringly create this phenomenal universe. The unwise ones, devoid of knowledge, think that this Universe is created by the immutable Reality who is Rama.

The birth of Shri Rama in the pure house of Raghu, his going with Vishwamitra and saving the sages' sacrifice, his deliverance of Ahalya from her old curse, his breaking the bow of Shiva in the court of Janaka, his

marriage with me, his curbing the pride of Parashurama, his living in the city of Ayodhya, his living with me in the forest for twelve years, his going to Dandaka forest, and killing of the demons Viradha and Maricha in disguise, the abduction of an illusory Sita (*Chaya-Sita*) by Ravana, the deliverance of Jatayu and Kabandha, Shabari's worship of Rama, Rama's friendship with Sugriva and killing of Vali, his search for Sita thereafter, the making of the bridge over the ocean, his seize of Lanka, his destruction of the ten-faced Ravana along with Ravana's sons, his gift of Lanka to Vibhishana, his return to Ayodhya thereafter along with me, and finally his coronation—all these are my creations; but the unwise ones think that Shri Rama, the indwelling Self of all, has done all these activities. Shri Rama is beyond movement, beyond phenomenal existence, beyond grief and fear; He has neither anything to do nor anything to reject; He is the embodiment of bliss, and the immutable one.”

(*Adhyatma Ramayana*, Adi-kanda:32-45.)

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This month's EDITORIAL is on SITA: INDIA'S IDEAL OF PERFECTED WOMANHOOD.

SURENDRA NATH MITTER by Swami Chetananda is the concluding part of the article published earlier in March issue.

THE SIX FLAMES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S COSMIC SACRIFICE by Swami Atmarupananda of the Vedanta Society, San Diego, U.S.A. is a detailed discussion on the six *paramitas* or the principal steps leading to enlightenment according to the Mahayana School of Buddhism.

SHRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE INTENSER VISION is by Swami Satprabhananda of Shri Ramakrishna Math, Belur.

NEW TRENDS IN JAINISM TODAY is by Shri Chandulal Mehta of Bombay, who is rendering active service in propagating the Jaina religion in modern society of both East and West.

SWAMIJI AND HIS WESTERN WOMEN DISCIPLES is an inspired and scholarly account of Swami Vivekananda's impact on some of his Western women disciples. This is contributed by Pravrajika Brahmaprana of Sarada Convent, Santa Barbara, California, U.S.A.

SITA: INDIA'S IDEAL OF PERFECTED WOMANHOOD

(EDITORIAL)

Sita is one of the greatest woman characters of the world literature, perhaps the noblest, but certainly the purest. Her heroic nobility was untarnished, her purity immaculate, her devotion to Rama an act of total self-surrender to God. Through these qualities she transmuted a life of ceaseless suffering into a life of perfected womanhood. It is a tale of conquest of suffering through purity, patience, and devotion. Sita's patience is superhuman, which only could make her retain the royal nobility and the pristine purity of life in the face of the most unspeakable sufferings in a world of frightening loneliness. All nobility, all purity, and all patience—that is Sita. Valmiki tells us that she was born of Mother Earth (*bhūtalat utthita*), the very symbol of patience. Creator did not allow the least touch of worldliness in her veins. She was born of no human being. She was attainable only to the greatest of heroes (*Viryashulka*)¹,

to the best of men (*Narashrestha*). She was Sita, the loftiest symbol of womanhood that India could ever dream of.

Sita's father Janaka, a sage-king of India, was proud of her. He called her *Pranairvahumata* or 'dearer than my life' and *Surasutopama*² or 'a daughter of the gods'. He knew the worth of his superhuman daughter. That is why he instituted so hard a test for her suitors like the breaking of Shiva's bow which could be carried only by five hundred strong men on an eight-wheeled chariot. Kings and princes whoever tried to break it, failed. King Sudhanwa failing to break the bow, besieged the capital of Mithila, and Janaka had to fight and slay him. Finally Rama, the greatest among men and illustrious (*Narashrestha Mahayasha*)³, broke the bow and obtained her hands.

1. *Valmiki Ramayana*, Bala Kanda, Ch. 66.

2. *Ibid.*, Ch. 67, 71.

3. *Ibid.*

Before banishment when Rama elaborated the fearful prospects of the forest life, she ignored those frightening ideas, and said "with fear yet urged by pride and love", "O Rama, if my father, the Lord of Mithila, had known thee as a man in form only, but a woman at heart, he would never have united me to thee. Alas! Men in ignorance speak of Rama as resembling the sun in splendour while in reality he is not so"⁴.

Like a Kshatriya maiden she had her own independent set of values which she refused to part with. When Rama asked her to stay at home and elaborated her duty towards elders who would be staying at the palace, she did not like the advice. On the contrary, she even called Rama a woman as he felt diffident of giving protection to a justly married wife, "Having married me as a virgin and having lived with me so long, why do you hand me to other people like a *sailusha*, a man who lives on woman?" Then she categorically said to Rama, "I am a Kshatriya girl, and I will not go under the control of other people, of Kaikeyi or Bharata. ... If I cannot live without you for a minute, how do you ask me to live that long time?" Rama, the embodiment of Dharma, had to yield to this heroic utterances of a chaste heart. Rama said, "I know what high courage you possess. I go to the forest because of my parents' order which may not be neglected, I have made up mind in that you shall go with me. Be my partner in all that I have to do in the forest."⁵ Rejoicing at her victory, Sita prepared herself by giving away all her possessions to others. She was indeed going to be a 'partner' to Rama's ascetic life in the forest. Rama felt happy to admit her greatness, "My family is honoured by you. ... You have made me

do a thing which is worthy alike of you and my house."⁶

After Sita won Rama's consent to follow him to the forest life of exile, Valmiki calls her 'glorious' (*Yashaswinim*) and 'wise with Knowledge' (*Manaswinim*).⁷ Rama felt obliged to show all respect not only to her spirit of sacrifice and faithfulness, but also to her wisdom. To Lakshmana he gave the standing order to bring her any flower or fruit which she might like to have.⁸ Rama never forgot her royal upbringing and offered the food she liked.⁹ While ferrying across the Ganga, the Princess of Janaka prayed to the Mother-river to bless and safely return Rama to his kingdom.¹⁰ A similar prayer she offered while crossing the river Kalindi on boat.¹¹

In the forest when the demon Viradha was trying to carry away Rama and Lakshmana, Sita came forward to sacrifice her own life for them, "O Viradha—leave them alone, and take me instead, and eat me up. Bears and tigers are going to eat me up. Why should I fall a prey to them? You eat me and release them." When Rama observed all the traditional rituals of '*Vastuhoma*' and '*Vaishvadeva*' on the completion of their hut at Chitrakuta, she vowed offerings to gods and goddesses. She was Rama's partner in religious ceremonies too (*sahadharmini*).

Before leaving sage Sutikshna's cottage, Sita like a true Kshatriya woman, handed over the respective weapons to Rama and Lakshmana and remonstrated them for not properly following the dharma of the Kshatriya, the caste of heroes and fighters. Then Sita cautioned them not to use weapons indiscriminately. She told the story of Rishi

4. *The Ramayana of Valmiki*, Translated by Hari Prasad Shastri, Shanti Sadan, 29 Chepstow Villas, London-W, 11. 1952. Ch. 30.

5. *Ayodhya Kanda*, Ch. 30.

6. *Ibid.*, Ch. 41.

7. *Ibid.*, Ch. 39, 41.

8. *Ibid.*, Ch. 55, 28, 29.

9. *Ibid.*, Ch. 96.

10. *Ibid.*, Ch. 52.

11. *Ibid.*, Ch. 55.

and the sword. The King of gods left a sword with a Rishi to take care of it. The Rishi's attention and contemplation were slowly diverted only to the sword. Instead of innocence, cruelty entered into his soul, and he had a fall. Sita asked Rama to be cautious against any unwise use of the weapons which might destroy the merits of his dharmic life, "When Kshatriya, trained to fight, finds his weapons ready, or when agni finds fuel near, then there is danger. It provokes him to exhibition of power."¹²

After telling Rama the story of the Rishi with the sword, Sita expressed her humility and genuineness of conviction, "I am not teaching you, but only reminding you what you already know, out of affection and respect for you." (*Snehat cha bahumanat cha smaraye twam na shikshaye*). Rama only said that he was pleased (*Paritushthah*) for these affectionate words of timely wisdom, and praised her, "You are the true follower of your dharma, and therefore, dearer to me than my life." (*Swadharma-charini me twam pranebhyopi gariyasi*).¹³

Ravana's abduction of Sita and her confrontation with the mightiest of demons filled the pages of Valmiki's epic with a spirit of unbending heroism and tragic nobility. While Sita was being forcefully taken away by Ravana, She, the royal lioness, began to inveigh Ravana with the hardest possible words absolutely without fear :

"O Jackal, thou desirest a she-lion but art no more able to possess me than grasp the light of the sun! Thou wretch who seekest to carry off the beloved spouse of Raghava! Dost thou desire to lift up the Mandara Mountain with thy bare hands or live at ease after drinking poison? O Thou, who seekest to bear away the beloved wife of Rama, thou art endeavouring to carry a blazing fire in thy robe or walk on iron spikes. ... The disparity between thee and Rama is as that between a jackal and a lion, a brook and an ocean, the nectar of the gods and sour barley gruel ;

between gold and iron, sandal and mud, an elephant and a cat, an eagle and a crow, a peacock and a duck, a swan and a vulture."¹⁴

"For this outrage, bereft of thy senses by fate, thou shalt O Ravana, meet with a terrible retribution, bringing about thine end."¹⁵

Why with all the power of chastity did she not curse Ravana to instant death? Valmiki tells us in the Aranya-kanda that the sages requested Rama to free themselves from the disturbances of demons who might arouse curse from their lips. A curse uttered in wrath, even justified wrath, at once strips the individual of all the merits of asceticism and penances. A curse from Sita, 'The fire of chastity', would have certainly killed Ravana. But that would have exhausted her merits and thus decreased the power of Rama. She was the guiding power, the motive force, the supremely important cause, the Shakti behind Rama's exploits in establishing righteousness over unrighteousness. It was her sacrifice, patience and chastity which were the source of Rama's strength for such a long and colossal war. Moreover, she knew that she had not taken Rama's permission for such an act. To Ravana Sita said, "O Ten-necked One, by the power of my asceticism, I could reduce thee to ashes instantly had I Rama's mandates."¹⁶

The abduction of Sita, the daughter of Mother Earth, brought a mood of universal gloom. Valmiki wrote, "Beholding Vaidehi carried through the air, the glorious sun, oppressed with sadness, lost its brilliance and became but a pale disc."

Ravana, defeated in his threats and persuasions, finally surrendered at Sita's feet in order to win her, "O Vaidehi, do not fear to contravene dharma ; the ceremony that shall consecrate our union is sanctioned by the Veda ; I press thy tender feet with my

12. Aranya Kanda, Ch. 15.

13. Ibid., Ch. 9, 10.

14. Ibid., Ch. 17.

15. Ibid., Ch. 49.

16. Sundara Kanda, Ch. 22.

heads; grant my prayer speedily! I am thy slave and ever obedient to thee! May these words inspired by the torments of love, not prove fruitless; never before has Ravana bowed his head before a woman."¹⁷

Hearing these words, "Vaidehi, though still distressed, ceased to tremble and placed a blade of grass between herself and Ravana." She understood that Ravana would threaten or entice her, but would never be able to break her chastity by any use of force. Why did Ravana bow down? Chastity is like a girdle of fire which keeps an individual away from all powers on earth. With that strength, Sita, even in the confinement of Lanka, could speak to Ravana, "Thou art not able to tempt me with wealth and riches; as the light of the sun cannot be separated from the sun, so do I belong to Raghava. Having rested on the arms of the Lord of Men, how should I depend on any other?... O Vile wretch; but, dog thou art, thou didst not stand before those tigers, Rama and Lakshmana."¹⁸ Just as Ravana's infatuation was endless, Sita's rejection of Ravana was complete. "Bind or destroy this insentient body, I have neither desire to preserve it nor my life, O Titan, for I will never submit to dishonour," She said. Terrible looking female titans were engaged to watch and threaten her as soon as she was taken to Lanka. "Threatened by those terrible monsters, the Princess of Mithila, unable to rest, remembering her Lord and beloved brother-in-law, under the weight of terror and sorrow, swooned away," wrote Valmiki.¹⁹

After Hanumana's burning of Lanka, Ravana's persuasions and threats began with redoubled zeal. Depending only on her faith in the infallibility of Rama's super-human power which she had one day witnessed during the breaking of Shiva's

bow in her father's court, Sita just continued to survive. When Ravana approached her, she said with all the power of her faith in Rama, "Soon shall my protector Rama, accompanied by Saumitri, draw out thy life's breaths, as the sun with its rays dries up shallow water. ... Whether thou takest refuge in the abode of Kuvera or terrified, descend into Varuna's realm, thou shalt assuredly perish, struck down by the son of Dasharatha, like a mighty tree felled by lightning."²⁰

At this moment Valmiki describes a rather humorous episode in order to create a contrast. A female titan named Dhanyamalini, approaching Ravana, embraced him and said, "O Great King, enjoy thyself with me, what need hast thou for this human being who is wretched and whose countenance is pale? O King of the Titans, it is not with her that the gods have destined thee to taste the exquisite pleasures that are the reward of the strength of thine arms."²¹

When Ravana's threats reached ghastly proportions, Sita answered heroically, "Devour me, if you wish, I will never accede to your request." But human suffering must have a limit. Groaning in her grief and overcome with indignation, Sita gave way to despair, and finally began to cry aloud, "O Rama! O Lakshmana, O My Mother Kaushalya, O Sumitra, ... Thus indeed is the saying of the sages: 'neither man nor woman can die ere the hour strikes', since tormented by the savage titans and separated from Rama, I am still able to survive an instant."²² At this moment sanity and compassion arose in one of the female titans surrounding Sita who was almost at the point of death. A female titan, Trijata, who was aged and prudent, came to defend Sita from the tortures of the other female titans. To them she said, "Ye wretches, devour me,

17. Aranya Kanda, Ch. 55.

18. Sundara Kanda, Ch. 21.

19. Aranya Kanda, Ch. 56.

20. Sundara Kanda, Ch. 21.

21. Ibid., Ch. 22.

22. Ibid., Ch. 25.

but do not lay hands on Sita, the daughter of Janaka and the beloved daughter-in-law of King Dasharatha. Last night, I had terrible dream causing my hair to stand on end, foretelling the overthrow of the titans and the triumph of this woman's husband."²³

But Sita's despair gradually deepened when no news came either from Rama, or of her rescue from this hell of fire. Feeling the imminence of death she cried, "O Rama, O Lakshmana, O Sumitra! O Mother of Rama! O My Mothers! I am about to perish, miserable as a ship floundering in the sea battered by the storm."²⁴

Suddenly the ray of hope flickered in the gloom. Hanumana arrived. Hearing from Hanumana the welfare of Rama and Lakshmana, Sita, trembling with delight of a fresh lease of life, said to Hanumana, "Verily the wise say that happiness visits a man even it be at the end of hundred years."²⁵

Hanumana's first impression of Sita whom he had never seen before, brings out at once her towering greatness. While searching in every nook and corner of Lanka, Hanumana suddenly saw Sita. "Surrounded by female titans, emaciated through fasting, sorrowful, having frequent sighs, immaculate as the moon's disc in its first quarter, resplendent with a radiance which now shone but dimly, she seemed like a flame wreathed in smoke"—this is Hanumana's description, and again,

Clad in a soiled robe of yellow silk, divested of every ornaments, she resembled a lotus pool stripped of its flowers. Oppressed, racked with grief and tormented, she likened unto Rohini pursued by Ketu. Her face bathed in tears, distressed, worn out by privation, plunged in anxiety and separated from kith and kin, no longer able to behold Rama and Lakshmana but only

titans, she appeared like a gazelle surrounded by a pack of hounds.²⁶

Then comes Valmiki's own appreciation of Sita through the words of Hanumana,

"Me thinks that if Rama had turned the whole earth, with its boundaries, upside down for her sake, it were fitting! Were the dominion of the Three-Worlds on one side and Sita, born of Janaka, on the other, the former would not equal a fraction of the latter; such is the virtuous daughter of the magnanimous king of Mithila, who is wholly devoted to her Lord."²⁷

The pious Hanumana wondered that since even after touching Sita, "the fire of chastity", Ravana had not been burnt, he must have the merit of tapas conserved in his favour or that he must be a 'mahatma'.²⁸

Chastity is a power which protects not only the person concerned, but a whole society following the path of Dharma. When Hanumana started burning Lanka, Sita by the power of her chastity saved Hanumana from being burnt up in the all-consuming fire, "O Fire, if I am true to my husband ... if I have any good left, and *punya* left, be cool to Hanumana."²⁹ But when Hanumana offered to carry her straight to Rama, Sita refused,

"O Monkey, furthermore, being wholly devoted to my Lord, I am unable to touch the body of any save Rama. When I was forced into contact with Ravana's limbs, I was helpless without a defender and was no longer in control of my person."³⁰

Even death would be preferable to her than abandoning the dharma of a chaste wife for the sake of a few years of life. To Hanumana She only gave the pearl which one day had adorned her head, as a testi-

23. Ibid., Ch. 27.

24. Ibid., Ch. 28.

25. Ibid., Ch. 34.

26. Ibid., Ch. 15.

27. Ibid., Ch. 16.

28. Ibid., Ch. 34.

29. Ibid., Ch. 55.

30. Ibid., Ch. 37.

mony to the fact that she still breathed only for the sake of Rama.

She uttered her prayer to be conveyed to Rama, "I have but one month to live, O Son of Dasharatha! After that month I shall die; I swear to thee, this is the truth I speak! Deliver me from the hands of that cruel and wicked Ravana, O Hero, as Kaushiki was delivered from hell." And she asked Hanumana "to repeat these words again and again to Rama."

When Hanumana was ready to depart from Lanka, Sita, inspired by filial affection, said to him, "If, O Child, thou judged it opportune, then, O Irreproachable Friend, remain here in some hidden spot today; tomorrow having rested, do thou set out. Thy proximity, O Monkey, will make me forget mine overwhelming grief a while."³¹ This mother-aspect of Sita was evident even earlier when she told Hanumana about Lakshmana, "Rama was his father, and I his mother all these years."³²

Upto the moment of her rescue Sita's hope, dream, meditation, and thought were centred on Rama. Her one-pointed devotion to Rama and unflinching chastity awed many of the titans including the mother and the consorts of Ravana. Finally when Ravana was killed along with all his sons, his brother Kumbhakarna, his relations and generals, bringing a total destruction on Lanka, the unfortunate consorts of Ravana, amidst their sobs, began to lament without ceasing, saying, "Not heeding the advice of thy friend, who ever offered thee prudent counsel, to our destruction thou didst bear Sita away and thus the titans have fallen and we shall perish this day on account of thy fault." Through tears they now began to glorify Sita's greatness and denounce Ravana's blunder.

31. Ibid., Ch. 38.

32. Ibid., Ch. 56.

"By offering insult to the illustrious Sita, who surpasses Arundhati and Rohini, thou didst commit an unpardonable offence! She is more patient than the earth itself, the prosperity of prosperity itself, the beloved consort of Rama, of faultless limbs, who was the splendour of the lonely forest where she dwelt. By bearing that unfortunate one away assuming a disguise and without being able to enjoy the anticipated delight of union with Maithili, thou hast brought about thine own destruction!"

Ravana's chief wife Mandodari cried in the same vein, "O My Lord, the asceticism of that lady faithful to her husband, has consumed thee! Since all the gods and their leaders with Agni at their head feared thee, thou wast not instantly destroyed when thou didst lay brutal hands on that slender-waisted lady."³³

When Hanumana finally brought the news of Ravana's death, Sita gained confidence and began to praise the mighty Hanumana for all his heroism, in words born of royal culture,

"Thy speech which is characteristic, urbane and dictated by the eight-fold intelligence is worthy of thee. Thou, the exceedingly virtuous son of Anila, art deserving of praise! Assuredly boldness, superior skill, energy, endurance, steadiness, constancy, and humility, these brilliant qualities and many others are all to be found in thee!"³⁴

Hanumana then begged her permission to kill the female titans who had so long tortured her. Sita answered with the magnanimity and forgiveness of a philosopher-saint,

"All that has happened to me is on account of an evil fate and the consequences of some fault committed formerly. One reaps the fruits of one's actions. Do not speak thus, O Long-armed Warrior, the path of destiny is inexorable! It was inevitable that these circumstances should overtake me and, in this conviction, I wish in compassion to protect the slaves of Ravana. It

33. Ibid., Ch. 38.

34. Yuddha Kanda, Ch. 113.

was under the orders of Ravana that these women ill-treated.”³⁵

Valmiki made Rama show respect to Ravana when he lay dead in the battle field. Now he brings out of the emaciated and forlorn Sita, a calm and poised woman of knowledge and nobility who could utter words of compassion and wisdom absolutely without the least tinge of jealousy and revengefulness so common to all women who suffer unjustified suffering for a long time. By accepting all suffering with infinite patience, she transcend even their memories which now turned her virtually into a sage, and said,

“A Superior-being does not render evil for evil, this is a maxim one should observe; the ornament of virtuous persons is their conduct. One should never harm the wicked or the good or even criminals meriting death. A noble soul will ever exercise compassion even towards those who enjoy injuring others or those of cruel deeds when they are actually committing them. Who is without fault?”³⁶

After the death of Ravana and the conquest of Lanka when most unexpectedly and unceremoniously Rama asked Sita to leave him and choose any other man as her husband, Sita stood up with her natural heroic nobility which is born of a chaste life. Like a she-lioness she answered that Rama's words were not appropriate as neither She nor Rama were vulgar woman and man (*Prakrita Prakritamiva*) and added,

“When in Lanka, thou didst dispatch the great warrior Hanumana to seek me out, why didst thou not repudiate me then? As soon as I have received the tidings that I have been abandoned by thee, I should have yielded up my life in the presence of that monkey, O Hero...But thou, O Lion amongst Men, by giving way to wrath and by thus passing premature judgement on a woman, hast acted like a common man (*laghuneva manushyena*)...and thou hast failed to appreciate fully the nobility of my conduct.”

35. Ibid., Ch. 115.

36. Ibid.

Then like a heroine She stood as the arbiter of the situation. It is she who decided to pass through fire ordeal, and ordered Lakshmana, “*Raise a pyre for me O Saumitri*”, (*Chitang me Kuru Saumitre*). This is the only remedy for my misery. These unjust reproaches have destroyed me. I cannot go on living!”³⁷

The happy reunion with Rama was, however, short-lived. With the mounting of secret public suspicion about Sita's living in Ravana's country, Rama got unsettled. His name as an upholder of Dharma was getting tarnished. Knowing fully well that Sita was ever-pure, noble, and ever-devoted to him, only to satisfy the people Rama banished her. Now royal courage and fortitude supported her spirit. Left alone in the moment of helpless despair, Sita told Lakshmana that she could have killed herself by drowning in the Ganges, but in her womb remained the future generation of Rama's dynasty and it was her duty not to kill that possibility. Lakshmana only submitted with all humility that he had been ordered to banish her on the further bank of Bhagirathi. Sita fainted in fear and shock. But regaining consciousness She spoke in words which only a woman of loftiest purity and renunciation can speak,

“Assuredly this body of mine has been created for misfortune and is its supporter from this time forward... O Raghava, thou knowest I am truly pure and that I have been bound to thee in Supreme Love, yet thou hast renounced me in fear of dishonour because they have reproached and consumed thee, O Hero, ... O Prince of Raghava, it is for thee to keep my fair name untarnished! The husband is as a God to the woman, he is her family and her spiritual preceptor, therefore, even at the price of her life, she must seek to please her Lord!”³⁸

Then comes one of the holiest as well as the most tragic moments in Valmiki's

37. Ibid., Ch. 118.

38. Uttara Kanda, Ch. 48.

Ramayana. Sita made her last request to Lakshmana, the alter-ego of Rama (*Dwitiya antaratma*). "Repeat these words to Rama, it is all I ask of thee. Having borne witness that I am far advanced in pregnancy do thou depart." Lakshmana bowed to the earth, circumambulated her, began to sob aloud, and finally said, "I have never raised mine eyes to thy face and have had ever but looked at thy feet, O Irreproachable one. How should I in his absence dare to gaze upon one whom Rama has abandoned in the lonely forest?"

*Drishta purvam na te rupam padan drishta
tavanaghe
Kathamitra the pashyami Ramena
rahitam vane.*

Bowing finally down at her, Lakshmana hastily returned in tears. 'Crushed by misfortune' She still retained her inner strength and looked 'illustrious' (*duhkhe bharavanata yashashiwini*).³⁹ Sitting dumbfounded on the deserted bank of the Ganga amid the forests she sat alone looking with a last hope on the departing chariot of Lakshmana on the other bank. Then she burst out into loud sobbing that echoed through the darkening forests.

* * * *

The last scene in the great drama of Sita's life is the acme of the Ramayana. Listening to the melodious chantings of his own life at the gate of his royal pavillion where Rama was conducting a big ritual in the company of ascetics and brahmins, he recognised Lava and Kusha the two child ascetics and singers, as his own sons. Now his filial affection goaded him to send messengers to Valmiki with the words,

"Should She so desire it... tomorrow at dawn let Maithili, the daughter of Janaka, attest her purity on oath in my presence, before the assembly!" Rama, in order to avoid public suspicion in all possible ways,

did not forget to ask the whole kingdom "to bear witness to the vow that Sita will make!"⁴⁰

"Inspired by curiosity" a vast multitude, the critical subjects of Rama along with law-giving sages and ministers all gathered in Rama's court at the appointed hour. With her two sons and her protector-father Valmiki, Sita entered with "her head bowed, her palms joined, choked with sobs, her mind absorbed in Rama." Now it was the great Valmiki to utter the last glorification of Sita to the vast multitude who doubted her illustrious life. To the assembly the sage said, "During my countless years I have practised asceticism. May I never reap the fruits thereof, if Maithili be guilty." The fire of suspicion was finally quenched. It was for Rama now to surrender to Rishi's words and to Sita's unimpeachable chastity. To Valmiki, Rama asked for forgiveness in the presence of the multitude,

"Oh Brahmin, though wholly convinced of her innocence, it was from fear of the people that I cast off Sita, do thou pardon me." Then Rama spoke again, but this time his words were addressed more to the subjects than to Valmiki or Sita,

"I acknowledge these twins, Kusha and Lava, to be my sons! I desire to make peace with the chaste Maithili amidst this assembly."

As if to atone for his mistake of acting against his own conscience, acting against a chaste wife most heartlessly in order to propitiate his subjects, Rama now spoke once again to the vast multitude assembled, "I wish to be reconciled with the chaste Vaidehi in the presence of this assembly."⁴¹

It was for this moment of approbation of her great life not only by Rama but by the world at large, that Sita had made so long a heroic struggle to survive in the most

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid., Ch. 95.

41. Ibid., Ch. 96.

impossible circumstances. This success was acquired by the terrible price of life-long suffering. Now she stood with the final determination not to enter into that life which brought her untold suffering, but to rise above it. Sita who would respond with all eagerness to a single word from Rama, today stood in great, sublime silence. Today when life with all its treasures was finally at her feet, She cared it no more than a torn, rejectable garment. She prepared her mind to transcend life, this vast vale of tears. Death is inevitable for all. With her great power of chastity she today snatched the power of death to overcome her. Detached from life, from her children, even from her all-beloved Rama, Sita stood with the profound calmness of a victorious heroine and a transcendent yogini. Finally she uttered the last words of her illumined life, "If in thought, I have never dwelt on any but Rama, may the goddess of Mother Earth receive me."⁴²

To the astonishment of all, her words proved irrevocable. Mother earth did indeed accept her, on her lap, just as one day she had offered this illustrious daughter to the world in order to teach the highest ideals of chastity, nobility, devotion, and the power and glory of true womanhood.

Valmiki added the last words of consolation,

Sita, having re-entered the earth, thus proving her fidelity and the sacrifice being completed, Rama, in the extremity of grief, not beholding Vaidehi, regarded the world as a desert, and he dismissed the kings, bearers, monkeys and titans and the host of leading brahmins, having loaded them with treasure.

Taking leave of them, the lotus-eyed Rama, who was ever absorbed in the thought of Sita, returned to Ayodhya. The joy of the house of Raghu never sought another consort but, in every

sacrifice, he set up a golden image of Janaki in her stead.⁴³

Millenniums have passed since the days when Sita lived on earth. But in India she still remains the most burning ideal of loftiest womanhood. Vivekananda's words of passionate reverence to Sita, is true for all times and all ages:

You may exhaust the literature of the world, that is past, and I may assure you that you will have to exhaust the literature of the world of the future, before finding another Sita. Sita is unique; that character was depicted once and for all. There may have been several Ramas perhaps but never more than one Sita! She is the very type of the true Indian woman, for all the Indian ideals of a perfected woman have grown out of that one life of Sita, and here she stands these thousands of years, commanding the worship of every man, woman and child throughout the length and breadth of the land of Aryavarta. There she will always be, this glorious Sita, purer than purity itself, all patience, and all suffering. She who suffered that life of suffering without a murmur, she the ever-chaste and ever-pure wife, she the ideal of the people, the ideal of the gods, the great Sita, our national God she must always remain. And every one of us knows her too well to require much delineation. All our mythology may vanish, even our Vedas may depart, and our Sanskrit language may vanish for ever, but so long as there will be five Hindus living here, even if only speaking the most vulgar patois, there will be the story of Sita present. Mark my words: Sita has gone into the vitals of our race. She is there in the blood of every Hindu man and woman, we are all children of Sita. Any attempt to modernise our women, if it tries to take our women away from that ideal of Sita, is immediately a failure, as we see every day. The women of India must grow and develop in the footprints of Sita, and that is the only way....⁴⁴

Perhaps, because I have seen both sides of the world. ... I know that the race that produced Sita—has a reverence for woman that is unmatched on the earth.⁴⁵

43. Ibid., Ch. 99.

44. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Mayavati Memorial Edition). Volume-III, Pp. 255-256.

45. *Complete Works* Vol. V, Pp. 230-31.

42. Ibid., Ch. 96.

SURENDRA NATH MITTRA

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

(Continued from the March issue)

Both of them arrived at Dakshineshwar and found the Master sitting under the bakul tree in an exalted mood. As soon as they greeted the Master, he said to Surendra: "Well, Suresh, why, when you're drinking wine, do you have to think of it as ordinary wine? Offer it first to Mother Kali and then drink it as her *prasad*. Only you must be careful not to get drunk. Don't let yourself stumble or your mind wander. At first you'll feel only the kind of excitement you usually feel, but that will soon lead to spiritual joy."² Both Ram and Surendra were astonished.

The Master never asked Surendra to give up drinking altogether, but thenceforth he could not drink at parties or whenever he felt like it. Following the Master's advice, he offered a little wine to the goddess every evening before drinking it himself. Curiously enough, this action filled him with devotion. After a while he began to cry plaintively like a child for the Divine Mother, and wanted to talk only of Her. He would often become absorbed in deep meditation. Shri Ramakrishna's subtle spiritual influence

gradually transformed Surendra, and the bad effects of wine could not harm him anymore.

What happens when God holds a person? First, his sensitive ego is crushed and he becomes humble; second, he does not enjoy mundane things and his mind dwells in God; and third, he feels an irresistible attraction for God and holy company. It was obvious that the Master had taken responsibility for Surendra. He knew that Surendra was a gem covered with worldly mud. A little washing removed the mud, and he then took Surendra into his inner circle. The Master never scolded Surendra for his bad habits. By pouring out his love and affection for this disciple, he conquered his heart.

One day while Surendra was meditating in his shrine, an idea came to him. He decided to test Shri Ramakrishna's divinity. He thought if the Master would appear before him in the shrine, he would consider him to be an avatar. Strangely enough, Surendra clearly saw the Master three times in the shrine. All his doubts were dissolved.

Surendra had a very responsible position in his office, but from time to time he would feel an overwhelming desire to leave everything and go to the Master. One day he left his office to go to Dakshineshwar even though he had not finished his work. When he arrived he found that Shri Ramakrishna was preparing to go to Calcutta. Seeing Surendra, the Master said: "It is good that

2. *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, in the entry for September 28, 1884, M. gives the following version of the Master's advice to Surendra: "Look here, Surendra! Whenever you drink wine, offer it beforehand to the Divine Mother. See that your brain doesn't become clouded and that you don't reel. The more you think of the Divine Mother, the less you will like to drink. The Mother is the giver of the bliss of divine inebriation. Realising her, one feels a natural bliss."

you have come. I was anxious about you and was going to Calcutta to see you." Surendra was amazed and delighted to know that Shri Ramakrishna had been thinking about him. He humbly said, "If you were going out to see me, then please come to my house." The Master agreed and went with Surendra to bless his house.

Surendra's love for the Master grew deeper and deeper. The Master also loved Surendra dearly. Swami Saradananda wrote in *Shri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*: "The Divine Mother showed him [the Master] that four suppliers of provisions for him had been sent to the world.... Surendra Nath Mittra, whom the Master called Surendar and sometimes Suresh, was, he said, a 'half supplier.'... And Surendra...used to make arrangements for the food and bedding for those devotees who spent nights with the Master at Dakshineshwar to serve him."

There is a saying: "If you have money, give in charity. If you don't repeat your mantram." Shri Ramakrishna appreciated Surendra's large-hearted nature. On February 22, 1885, M. recorded the following conversation in *The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*:

Master (to Surendra): "Come here every now and then. Nangta used to say that a brass pot must be polished every day; otherwise it gets stained. One should constantly live in the company of holy men.

"The renunciation of 'woman and gold' is for sannyasis. It is not for you. Now and then you should go into solitude and call on God with a yearning heart. Your renunciation should be mental....

"For you, as Chaitanya said, the disciplines to be practised are kindness to living beings, service to the devotees, and chanting the name of God.

"Why do I say all this to you? You work in a merchant's office. I say this to you because you have many duties to perform there.

"You tell lies at the office. Then why do I eat the food you offer me? Because you give your money in charity; you give away more than you earn. 'The seed of the melon is bigger than the fruit,' as the saying goes.

"I cannot eat anything offered by miserly people. Their wealth is squandered in these ways: first, litigation; second, thieves and robbers; third, physicians; fourth, their wicked children's extravagance. It is like that...."

The devotees listened with great attention to Shri Ramakrishna's words.

Surendra: "I cannot meditate well. I repeat the Divine Mother's name now and then. Lying in bed, I repeat her name and fall asleep."

Master: "That is enough. You remember her, don't you?"

Surendra observed that some of Shri Ramakrishna's disciples were practising spiritual disciplines under his guidance at Dakshineshwar. Naturally the desire to do likewise came to him. After informing the Master about his plan, he came one day to Dakshineshwar with a bed and other personal things and spent a couple of nights there. This greatly upset his wife, however. She said to him, "You may go anywhere you like during the daytime, but at night you must not leave home." Although Surendra's wife prevented him from spending nights at Dakshineshwar, his mind was crying for God. His body was at home, but his mind was with the Master.

It is not easy to become a disciple of an Incarnation of God such as Shri Ramakrishna. The way such divine teachers discipline their followers is often difficult to understand. Sometimes it is through love, sometimes through indifference, and sometimes through harshness. The lives of these teachers are established in truth, and they preach the truth, which is God himself. Therefore they always insist that their

disciples be steadfast in truth. Once Surendra told the Master about a pilgrimage he had just taken:

Surendra: "We were there [at Vrindaban] during the holidays. Visitors were continually pestered for money. The priests and others asked for it continually. We told them that we were going to leave for Calcutta the next day, but we fled from Vrindaban that very night."

Master: "What is that? Shame; You said you would leave the place the next day and ran away that very day. What a shame!"

Surendra (*embarrassed*): "Here and there we saw the babajis [Vaishnava holy men] in the woods practising spiritual discipline in solitude."

Master: "Did you give them anything?"

Surendra: "No, sir."

Master: "That was not proper of you. One should give something to monks and devotees. Those who have the means should help such persons when they meet them."

Surendra was rich, aristocratic, and extremely sensitive. M. described how one day in 1881 the Master crushed Surendra's ego at his own home:

Surendra approached the Master with a garland and wanted to put it around his neck. But the Master took it in his hand and threw it aside. Surendra's pride was wounded and his eyes filled with tears. He went to the west porch and sat with Ram, Manomohan, and the others. In a voice choked with sadness he said: "I am really angry. How can a poor brahmin know the value of a thing like that? I spent a lot of money for that garland, and he refused to accept it. I was unable to control my anger and said that the other garlands were to be given away to the devotees. Now I realize it was all my fault. God cannot be bought with money; he cannot be possessed by a

vain person. I have really been vain. Why should he accept my worship? I don't feel like living any more." Tears streamed down his cheeks and over his chest.

In the meantime Trailokya was singing inside the room. The Master began to dance in an ecstasy of joy. He put around his neck the garland that he had thrown aside; holding it with one hand, he swung it with the other as he danced and sang. Now Surendra's joy was unbounded. The Master had accepted his offering. Surendra said to himself, "God crushes one's pride, no doubt, but he is also the cherished treasure of the humble and lowly."...

When the kirtan was over, everyone sat around the Master and became engaged in pleasant conversation. Shri Ramakrishna said to Surendra, "Won't you give me something to eat?" Then he went into the inner apartments, where the ladies saluted him. After the meal Shri Ramakrishna left for Dakshineshwar.

On another occasion, on April 15, 1883, Surendra invited the Master and the devotees to attend a festival to the Divine Mother Annapurna in his home. The courtyard had been covered with a beautiful carpet, over which was spread a white linen sheet. Bolsters were placed here and there. The Master was asked to lean against one of them, but he pushed it away, since they were mostly used by rich, aristocratic people for comfort. Shri Ramakrishna practised what he taught. He said to the devotees: "To lean against a bolster! You see, it is very difficult to give up vanity. You may discriminate, saying that the ego is nothing at all; but still it comes, nobody knows from where.... Perhaps you are frightened in a dream; you shake off sleep and are wide awake, but still you feel your heart palpitating. Egotism is exactly like that. You may drive it away, but still it appears from somewhere. Then you look sullen

and say: 'What! I have not been shown proper respect!'"

One day in January 1882, Kedar, one of Shri Ramakrishna's devotees, pointed to Surendra, Ram, and Manomohan and said to the Master: "Sir, when you have graciously given shelter to these souls, why do you put them into more trials and tribulations? Please be merciful to them so that they may be saved forever." "What can I do?" replied the Master. "What power do I have? If the Mother wills, she can do so." With total indifference he walked away and sat down in the Panchavati. It was evening. Surendra could not bear such indifference from his beloved Master. He went to Shri Ramakrishna and began to cry. He confessed all of his moral lapses and sought the Master's help. Shri Ramakrishna saw that these tears of repentance had washed away the impurities from Surendra's mind. He blessed him, saying, "May the blissful Mother make your life blissful."

Just as a fresh breeze clears away the stuffiness of a room, so also the presence of a holy person removes the worldly atmosphere from a house. It is a common custom in India to invite a holy person to one's home and feed him. Whenever Surendra had an opportunity he invited the Master to his home or to his garden house at Kankurgachi, which was right next to Ram's. Surendra's Calcutta home gradually became one of Shri Ramakrishna's parlours, where he would meet the Calcutta devotees. Once the Master came there unexpectedly. Surendra was not at home then, and the cab fare had to be paid. He would have taken care of it if he had been there. The Master said to the devotees: "Why don't you ask the ladies to pay the fare? They certainly know that their master visits us at Dakshineswar. I am not a stranger to them." This guileless remark made the devotees laugh.

The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna records

two visits made by Shri Ramakrishna to Surendra's garden house—one on December 26, 1883, and the other on June 15, 1884. On the first occasion he met a monk there and had some refreshments. On the second occasion Surendra arranged a festival and invited many people. It was a grand affair, and the Master went into deep samadhi several times during the devotional singing. Surendra loved to give joy to others in this way. That day the Master said: "What a nice disposition he [Surendra] has now! He is very outspoken; he isn't afraid to speak the truth. He is unstinting in his liberality. No one that goes to him for help comes away empty-handed."

An avatar's words, actions, and behaviour are inscrutable to ordinary human beings, because they are divine. M. described what happened when the festival was over: "After resting a little the Master was ready to leave for Dakshineswar. He was thinking of Surendra's welfare. He visited the different rooms, softly chanting the holy name of God. Suddenly he stood still and said: 'I didn't eat any *luchi* at mealtime. Bring me a little now.' He ate only a crumb and said: 'There is much meaning in my asking for the *luchi*. If I should remember that I had't eaten any at Surendra's house, then I should want to come back for it.'" This is the way the avatar plays with his devotees. Sometimes he is the magnet and the devotee is the needle, and at other times the devotee is the magnet and he is the needle.

Surendra was one of the important householder disciples of Shri Ramakrishna. Not only was he one of the Master's suppliers, but he also had many "firsts" to his credit. In 1881 Surendra inaugurated the birthday festival of Shri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. The first two years he bore all the expenses himself, but from the third year other devotees shared them with him. It was through Surendra that Swami Viveka-

nanda first met Shri Ramakrishna in November 1881 at Surendra's Calcutta home. Again, it was Surendra who first took Vivekananda to Dakshineshwar.

Surendra also had the first oil painting of Shri Ramakrishna made. In it the Master is pointing out to Keshab Chandra Sen the harmony of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other religions. When Keshab saw the picture, he said, "Blessed is the man who conceived the idea." Shri Ramakrishna also saw the painting and observed: "Yes, it contains everything. This is the ideal of modern times."

On December 10, 1881, Surendra took the Master to the studio of the Bengal Photographers in Radhabazar, Calcutta, as Shri Ramakrishna had expressed an interest in the mechanics of photography. The photographer explained his art and showed him how glass covered with silver nitrate takes an image. Later the Master used this example to illustrate how one can retain the impression of God if one's mind is stained with devotion. While they were there, Surendra had the photographer take a picture of the Master. As Shri Ramakrishna was being photographed he went into samadhi. This studio portrait was the second of the three photographs taken of the Master while he was living.

Shri Ramakrishna had to move from Dakshineshwar to Shyampukur, Calcutta, in September 1885, for his cancer treatment. About that same time Surendra got permission from the Master to perform the worship of Mother Durga in his house, a celebration previously held every year but discontinued after some mishaps had occurred. His brothers were apprehensive and superstitious about holding the worship, but Surendra was determined to carry it out anyway by himself. His only regret was that the Master could not come because of his illness. At the time of the *sandhi puja* (an auspicious period between the second and

third days of the worship), however, the Master entered into deep samadhi in his room in the presence of his disciples and Dr. Sarkar. About a half an hour later he returned to outer consciousness and said: "I saw a luminous path open up between here and Surendra's house. Through Surendra's devotion the Mother was manifest in the image there and her third eye was emitting a divine light. The usual series of lamps were burning before her, and Surendra, sitting in the courtyard, was weeping piteously and calling, 'Mother, Mother.' All of you go to his house now. He will feel much comforted to see you." Accordingly, Swami Vivekananda and other devotees went to Surendra's house and were amazed to find that the Master's vision had corresponded to the external events in every detail.

Gradually Shri Ramakrishna's condition grew worse, so the doctors advised the devotees to move him out of the city, since the polluted air of Calcutta was harming him. A garden house was found in Cossipore, but the rent was eighty rupees a month, a large amount in those days. When Shri Ramakrishna heard this he called Surendra to him and said: "Look, Surendra, these devotees are mostly poor clerks and have large families to maintain. How can they pay the high rent of the garden? Please bear the whole of it yourself." Surendra gladly agreed. Moreover, he contributed for other expenses as well, and now and then bought things, such as straw screens for the windows of the Master's room to reduce the sun and heat coming in.

Surendra was now a wholly changed person. M. several times described his devotion and divine intoxication. On April 13, 1886, the first day of the Bengali year, M. wrote:

It was eight o'clock in the evening. Shri Ramakrishna sat on his bed. A few devotees sat on the floor in front of him.

Surendra arrived from his office. He carried in his hands four oranges and two garlands of flowers. Now he looked at the Master and now at the devotees. He unburdened his heart to Shri Ramakrishna.

Surendra (*looking at M. and the others*): "I have come after finishing my office work. I thought, 'What is the good of standing on two boats at the same time?' So I finished my duties first and then came here. Today is the first day of the year; it is also Tuesday, an auspicious day to worship the Divine Mother. But I didn't go to Kalighat. I said to myself, 'It will be enough if I see him who is Kali herself, and who has rightly understood Kali.'"

Shri Ramakrishna smiled.

Surendra: "It is said that a man should bring fruit and flowers when visiting his guru or a holy man. So I have brought these.... (*To the Master*) I am spending all this money for you. God alone knows my heart. Some people feel grieved to give away a penny; and there are people who spend a thousand rupees without feeling any hesitation. God sees the inner love of a devotee and accepts his offering."

Shri Ramakrishna said to Surendra, by a nod, that he was right.

Surendra: "I couldn't come here yesterday. It was the last day of the year. But I decorated your picture with flowers."

Shri Ramakrishna said to M., by a sign, "Ah, what devotion!"

On April 17, 1886, M. wrote:

It was about nine o'clock in the evening. Surendra and a few other devotees entered Shri Ramakrishna's room and offered him garlands of flowers....

Shri Ramakrishna put Surendra's garland on his own neck. All sat quietly. Suddenly the Master made a sign to Surendra to come near him. When the disciple came near the bed, Shri Ramakrishna took the garland

from his neck and put it around Surendra's. Surendra saluted the Master. Shri Ramakrishna asked him, by a sign, to rub his feet. Surendra gave them a gentle massage.

Several devotees were sitting on the bank of the reservoir in the garden singing to the accompaniment of drums and cymbals.... The music was over. Surendra was almost in an ecstatic mood.

Shri Ramakrishna passed away on August 16, 1886, at the Cossipore garden house. Some of his young disciples had to return to their homes against their wishes, while others had no place to go. They were like orphans. One evening, early in September, while Surendra was meditating in his shrine, Shri Ramakrishna appeared to him and said: "What are you doing here? My boys are roaming about without a place to live. Attend to that before anything else." Immediately Surendra rushed to Swami Vivekananda's house and said to some of the disciples: "Brothers, where will you go? Let us rent a house. You will live there and make it our Master's shrine; and we householders shall come there for consolation. How can we pass all our days and nights with our wives and children in the world? I used to spend a sum of money for the Master at Cossipore. I shall gladly give it now for your expenses."

Accordingly, a house was rented at Baranagore, near the Ganga, at eleven rupees per month. Surendra paid the rent and provided food and other necessities for the monastic disciples of the Master. M. mentioned in the Gospel: "Surendra was indeed a blessed soul. It was he who laid the foundation of the great Order later associated with Shri Ramakrishna's name. His devotion and sacrifice made it possible for those earnest souls to renounce the world for the realization of God."

Surendra did not live long, however. He died of dropsy on May 25, 1890, at the age

of forty. When he was seriously ill, Swami Adbhutananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda went to see him. Surendra at that time offered them five hundred rupees to build a shrine for the Master, but Swami Ramakrishnananda told him: "Wait until your health is better. Later we shall talk about it." But Surendra never recovered. Before his death, though, he set aside one thousand rupees to be used for purchasing

land near the Ganga for a monastery dedicated to the Master. Because of the great love the monastic disciples had for Surendra, they decided to keep this money for something special. When Belur Math was built, this money was used to purchase the marble flooring for the original shrine room where Shri Ramakrishna was installed by Swami Vivekananda for the good of humanity.

(Concluded)

THE SIX FLAMES OF THE BODHISATTVA'S COSMIC SACRIFICE

SWAMI ATMARUPANANDA

From approximately 400 B. C. until the first century A. D. Buddhism in India gradually split into two divergent streams: the Mahayana or 'Great Career' and the Theravada, also known as Sthaviravada or 'Doctrine of the Elders'.¹ This split possibly served only to formalize a divergence going back all the way to the Buddha's own disciples. Perhaps it reflects two approaches taught by the Buddha himself to different classes of disciples. All great teachers have varied their teachings according to the temperaments of their different disciples.

However that may be, once these two streams split, they swelled with time into broad rivers and developed a complex variety of thought-currents, which became forma-

lized into definite philosophical schools. Within the Theravada there developed schools like Sarvastivada and the Sautrantikas. And within the Mahayana there developed the two major schools known as Shunyavada and Vijnanavada, as well as other subsidiary schools. But in spite of this proliferation of schools within each stream, the two streams maintained their respective identities. That is to say, all of the schools belonging to a particular stream, no matter how diverse, shared certain common aspects.²

Perhaps the primary difference between these two 'careers' or 'courses'—from which various subsidiary differences arose—was the difference in conception of the ideal to be attained. In the Theravada it was the state of the *arhat* or 'Worthy One'. The Arhat was one who had extinguished the flame of desire, extinguished the light of selfhood from which desire had arisen, and destroyed the ignorance which had given rise to the sense of selfhood. He had attained to

1. The term Theravada actually refers to one particular school within the second stream; but since it is now the only surviving school of that stream, the term is often used in a generic sense to indicate the stream itself. Another term often used is the Hinayana or 'Lesser Career', but that is a derogatory term used by the Mahayana for the other tradition. Technically the best term for the stream would be the Shravakayana, but that is unfamiliar to most, and so we have used the term Theravada.

2. For many centuries even this division into two streams was not exclusive, as monks of both traditions continued to live side by side in the same monasteries.

Nirvana and thereby the round of birth and death had come to an end for him. As long as his body continued, he was an inspiration and guide to others, but with bodily death he disappeared forever in Nirvana. No longer was there any personhood or any self-consciousness or existence. Nirvana as described by followers of the Theravada often sounded like eternal death, the snuffing out of life's flame.

In contrast to the ideal of the Arhat, the Mahayana developed the ideal of the *bodhisattva* or 'being of enlightenment'. The Bodhisattva sought, not extinction, but *anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*, 'unexcelled supreme enlightenment'. And he sought it, not for himself alone, but for the sake of all beings. That is, he sought illumination so that he could be a light to show others the path to supreme fulfilment. He renounced the freedom of final Nirvana in order to lead others through the forest of relative existence. For that purpose he retained an enlightened sense of selfhood, though through his wisdom he knew it to be empty, *shunya*.

Along with this shift from the apparently life-denying ideal of the Arhat to the enlightenment-affirming ideal of the Bodhisattva, the Mahayana also developed its own view of the path leading to enlightenment.

For the Theravadins the Four Noble Truths occupied the very centre of the doctrine and path. These state that: (1) there is pain (*duhkha*); (2) there is a cause of pain (which is desire or *trishna*); (3) there is cessation of pain (which is Nirvana); and (4) there is a path leading to cessation (which is the Noble Eight-fold Path or *arya-ashtanga-marga*). In time, the idea of pain was so emphasized that a tendency to avoid the world of pain at all costs developed. A great revolution, however, took place in the Mahayana: the emphasis shifted from pain to compassion (from *duhkha* to *karuna*), and suffering became welcomed if undergone for the good of others. To the advanced

Bodhisattva there was nothing painful or pleasurable in the universe.

Likewise the eightfold path,³ so central to the Theravada, was given little importance by the Mahayana, being replaced by the six *paramitas*. The word *paramita* is derived in two ways: (1) from *parama*, meaning 'perfection'; and (2) from *param ita*, meaning 'gone to the other shore' and implying a transcendent perfection.⁴ The six *paramitas* or perfections, the centre of the Bodhisattva's career, are *dana* or charity, *shila* or conduct, *kshanti* or forbearance, *virya* or heroic strength, *dhyana* or meditation, and *prajna* or wisdom.⁵

The six *paramitas* were extolled in the highest terms and were used to contrast the positive ideal of the Bodhisattva with the life-denying ideal of the Arhat and Pratyekabuddha.⁶ All six *paramitas* were found in the Theravada, but were never given pre-eminence. The Mahayana, however, saw them as the direct means of enlightenment, and therefore as bearers of enlightenment; they were thus regarded as true 'transcendent perfections'. They were not just relative and hence dispensable means, but when perfec-

3. *Samyag-drshhti* (right understanding), *samyak-samkalpa* (right intention), *samyag-vak* (right speech), *samyak-karmanta* (right action), *samyag-ajiva* (right livelihood), *samyag-vyayama* (right exertion), *samyak-smrti* (right mindfulness), and *samyak-samadhi* (right concentration).

4. There is the famous *prajna-paramita mantra* which is, *pare pare paragate, parasamgate bodhi svaha*: 'To the other shore, to the other shore, gone to the other shore, the Wisdom which is completely gone to the other shore, *svaha*!'

5. Eventually the Mahayana added four more *paramitas* at the end of the list, making a total of ten: *upaya-kaushalya*, *pranidhana*, *bala*, and *jnana*. But these never assumed the same importance as the original six.

6. The Pratyekabuddha is, as the name implies, one who is enlightened (*Buddha*) alone (*pratyeka*); that is, he seeks and attains to Buddhahood by his own individual efforts and passes away into final Nirvana without ever having taught the saving dharma to others.

ted were expressions in Samsara of the transcendent state of illumination.

Since the six *paramitas* were, and are, the heart of the Bodhisattva's path, a deep understanding of them brings understanding of the heart of Mahayana practice. Therefore we have attempted in what follows a modern explanation of the *paramitas*, in harmony with the tradition, emphasizing their practical significance.

Even a quick glance at the six *paramitas* shows the wonderful comprehensiveness, the harmony and balance of their conception. They naturally fall into three pairs, the members of each pair balancing and completing each other.

First, *dana* (charity) is coupled with *sila* (conduct); that is, selfless giving is coupled with self-control. Then *kshanti* (forbearance) is coupled with *virya* (heroic strength); that is, the power to forbear and endure is coupled with heroic power to strive and achieve one's goal. And *dhyana* (meditation) is coupled with *prajna* (wisdom); that is, control of mind is coupled with direct insight into the Supreme Truth.

The first pair prepares the soil for spiritual life—an expanded heart and reduced egotism through charity, together with ethical training. Around that is built a tank—the walls of endurance and waters of strength. Out of that grows the bud of meditation which blossoms into the lotus of insight.

Not that the perfections are stepping stones, practised one by one, one being perfected before the next is taken up. No, all are practised to some extent from the beginning, but there is a progression in emphasis, from *dana* to *shila* and on eventually to *prajna*. However, it is only in the perfection of *prajna* that all the others become true perfections, not just practices.

Dana

Charity or *dana* is first of the *paramitas*.

Why should it be? Because, in general, without the expanded heart and reduction of egotism fostered by charity, all of our practice—even in self-control—will lead to frustration and not to transcendence which is its true aim. All the more true is this for the aspiring Bodhisattva, whose whole career is founded on the development of compassion (*karuna*) for all living beings. Compassion is primarily developed and manifested through charity.⁷

What is to be given? There are no restrictions, even life itself. But neither should one lose discretion. Gifts should always be appropriate for the particular time, place and circumstance, and should conduce to the wellbeing of the recipient. If this is observed, one should give to the wicked as well as the virtuous, with no thought as to friend or foe. Life itself should be held as a sacrifice for others, but never thrown away unless the occasion demands it: since the Bodhisattva is seeking the welfare of all beings, this life is not his own and cannot be thrown away lightly.

How should he give? It is said in Mahayana texts⁸ that one should give with courtesy, respect and joy; indeed, the giver has more reason to rejoice than the recipient. Having made a gift, one should not think either of one's own generosity or of one's

7. Shri Ramakrishna once said in a state of ecstasy: 'Talk of compassion for beings! Insignificant creatures that you are, how can you show compassion to beings?... No, no; it is not compassion to *jivas* but service to them as Shiva.' (*Shri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, vol. 2, p. 939.) But he also said, 'Maya entangles a man and turns him away from God. But through *daya* one realizes God.' (*The Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*, p. 456.) 'Compassion' is a word, and like any word it can be given different connotations. The compassion taught by the Bodhisattvayana is identification with others so that their joys and sorrows are felt as one's own.

8. See Har Dayal, *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhist Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1975), p. 176.

loss ; therefore, it is said, give with humility and give quickly.

How can the Bodhisattva give with joy ? Because of (1) his love for all beings and (2) his love for *bodhi*, enlightenment. This means that all of his gifts are inspired both by his immediate love for the world and by his steady orientation towards his ultimate goal of *bodhi*. The latter orientation makes of each gift a means of realization.

Through exercise in *dana* the Bodhisattva comes to love all beings as a mother would love her only child.⁹

Without self-control, however, compassion and charity are often synonyms for sentimentality and emotional involvement. Sentimentality serves only to dissipate one's energies and to weaken character ; emotional involvement weaves a web of attachment which ensnares the aspirant as well as those he seeks to help.

Shila

Shila means character or moral conduct, and comes from the Sanskrit root *shil*, 'to practise' ; for our character is built of nothing but repeated practice, which we call habit.

Training in moral conduct is the foundation for spiritual life according to all great traditions. Why ?

Habits of thought and action are the banks which direct the flow of our life's energy-stream. When we come to spiritual life we find that the ideal is attractive, but the current of our life continually carries us in an opposite direction. Through long practice in self-control our habits—the sum-total of which we call character—are changed and the current of our life's energy becomes pliable to redirection, sublimation.

Shila thus means something much deeper than the self-control imposed on all by the

customs and laws of society, which is just a minimal suppression of animal instincts in the interests of social life. *Shila* indicates a whole-hearted control which comes with complete restraining of the conscious and unconscious levels of mind, having as its conscious goal the attainment of *bodhi*.

Through self-control the banks of habit which keep the current of our life directed towards the world are gradually dismantled and the world-bound current is dammed up. At the same time aspiration redirects the current towards *bodhi*. But *shila* also constructs new banks of spiritual observance which keep the current bound towards *bodhi*, giving strength and stability to aspiration.

Shila preserves energy, brings life into harmony with aspiration, activates and strengthens the will, purifies and steadies the mind, and it also makes the Bodhisattva a blessing to other beings through his loving and exemplary conduct.

The essence of *shila* is the control of body, speech and mind (*kaya*, *vak*, *manas*), and traditionally consists in renunciation of ten actions ; abstention from causing harm to life, from stealing, from unchastity, from lying, from slander, from harsh speech, from frivolous speech, from covetousness, from malice, and from unorthodoxy.¹⁰ The first three abstentions relate to bodily action, the next four to speech, and last three to mind. As can be seen from the list, the Buddhists were especially strict concerning control of speech, and often in their writings they come down heavily on light talk.

Though various benefits are said to arise from the practice of *shila paramita*, the highest motives for its practice are two : Do right (1) simply because it is good to

9. *Lankavatara Sutra*, 244:8.

10. *Pranatipatad viratih*, *adattadanad v.*, *kamamithyacarad v.*, *mrsavadad v.*, *paisunyard v.*, *parusyad v.*, *sambhinnapralapad v.*, *abhidhyayad v.*, *vyapadad v.*, *mithyadrshter v.*

do so, and (2) because it is a means of leading others to enlightenment.

Kshanti

The third *paramita* is *kshanti* or forbearance, known more often as *titiksha* in the Vedantic tradition where also it is considered a requisite for success in spiritual life. This is of three types according to the Bodhisattvayana: (1) endurance of heat and cold, hunger and thirst, privation, prolonged labour, and so on; (2) forbearance of insult and injury; and (3) acceptance of the dharma through faith and insight. The first is physical, the second social and moral and hence mental, and the third spiritual. The first is endurance, the second is forbearance, the third is surrender.

Though the third may seem to have little to do with forbearance, it is *kshanti* in the sense of lowering resistance to the truth, a resistance all of us have to some extent in the beginning. It denotes a willingness to accept that our present experience is deluded and to put our faith in enlightenment, and also a willingness to suffer for the sake of that faith rather than renounce it for 'worldly practicality'.

Why is *kshanti* essential? Spiritual life isn't a path of lotuses leading steadily from bliss to yet greater bliss. Many obstacles have to be overcome, including the vast store of karma accumulated over many lives. This requires great patience and persistence—qualities included in *kshanti*. Moreover, spiritual life requires renunciation of the struggle for existence in the midst of a competitive world, and a willingness to act from spiritual principles rather than motives of worldly utility. This too requires great power of endurance.

For the Bodhisattva, however, *kshanti* is not a willingness to 'take up one's cross' with gritted teeth, ready with grim determination to face suffering. *Kshanti* is the power

to transform suffering into joy: This he does out of (1) love for all beings and (2) his steady vision of the Ideal. It is not the ebullient joy of festivity, but the quiet, inner joy of meaningfulness. For when our life is oriented towards an ultimate and eternal (timeless) goal, and when our actions are integrated with our aspiration for that goal, then all of life's experiences—our joys and our sorrows—are possessed of meaning; and this meaningfulness awakens an undercurrent of joy which is constant amidst the storms of life.

Since the Bodhisattva serves all beings, and since other beings are often totally ungrateful, forbearance of insult and injury is particularly important. The Bodhisattva practises this at three levels: (1) with the body, as he doesn't strike back; (2) with speech, as he doesn't use harsh or critical words; and (3) with the mind, as he doesn't think evil of those who harm him.

Virya

The fourth *paramita* is *virya*, which means heroic strength. This is closely related to *kshanti*.

In the first pair of *paramitas*, *dana* is our attitude towards the world while *shila* is our attitude towards self. Similarly *kshanti* is our attitude towards the world, while *virya* is our attitude towards the ideal. Forbearance allows us to extricate ourselves from the intricate net of the world, whose warp is attachment and woof is aversion. But if *kshanti* frees us from lower involvement, *virya* bursts through all obstacles on the way to spiritual attainment.

On the positive side, *kshanti* is the power that harmonizes one's own life with cosmic life, while *virya* is what carries one undauntedly both towards *bodhi* and towards the service of all beings. *Kshanti* is the power to suffer; *virya* is the power to do. When

the two are joined, our action is spiritual, benevolent, idealistic, aimed at the welfare of all beings, undaunted in the face even of great difficulties.

Kshanti unbalanced by *virya* is *tamasika*—mere weakness and dullness; whereas *virya* unbalanced by *kshanti* is *rajasika*, or reckless and restless and egocentric. Often we are slaves of others and adopt a servile attitude out of weakness and fear, and cover our weakness with the belief that we are allowing ourselves to be injured out of compassion. But *virya paramita* shows us that we must never lapse into dullness, weakness or timidity. Every moment one must manifest power in all one's actions, mental, verbal and physical.

When *kshanti* and *virya* are joined, every action takes on the nature of *tapasya* or austerity and results in the accumulation of *tejas*, spiritual power.

There are many exquisite passages on *virya* in the Mahayana scriptures. One example, taken from the *Bodhicaryavatara* of Shantideva, is:

This world, enslaved by passion, is powerless to accomplish its own weal; then must I do it for them, for I am not impotent like them. Shall another do a lowly task while I am standing by? If I in my pride will not do it, better it is that my pride perish.... Then with firm spirit I will undo the occasions of undoing; if I should be conquered by them, my ambition to conquer the threefold world would be a jest. I will conquer all; none shall conquer me. This is the pride that I will bear, for I am the son of the Conqueror Lion! ... Surrounded by the troop of the passions man should become a thousand times prouder, and be as unconquerable to their hordes as a lion to flocks of deer ... so, into whatever straits he may come, he will not fall into the power of the passions. He will utterly give himself over to whatever task arrives, greedy for the work ... how can he whose happiness is work itself be happy in doing no work? He will hold himself in readiness, so that even before a task comes to him he is prepared to turn to every course. As the seed of the cotton-tree is swayed at the coming

and going of the wind, so will he be obedient to his resolution; and thus divine power is gained.¹¹

The Bodhisattva is encouraged to be energetic not only in pursuit of enlightenment and in the service of all beings, but also in acquisition of learning. Early Buddhism had no use for learning. But later, the Mahayana stressed the need not only for religious erudition but for secular as well. The aspirant should have a thorough liberal education and be master of what were then the five traditional branches of learning: philosophy, logic, grammar, medicine and technical arts and crafts. For this helps him in teaching the people spiritual truth, in healing the sick, and in conferring on them material benefits.

Dhyana

In Patanjali's *Yoga-Sutra*, *dhyana* or meditation comes seventh out of eight steps. Among the *paramitas* it is fifth out of six. The reason is simple: true meditation is a difficult task requiring long preparation. Though one should practise some form of meditative discipline from the beginning of spiritual life, it is only at a comparatively advanced stage that the practice begins to bear great results. Meditation as a state rather than as an attempt comes only after long preliminary training.

So much is written on meditation nowadays, that we need not develop the theme here. Suffice it to say that the preliminaries to the practice of meditation according to such authorities as Shantideva are solitude and renunciation, purification of emotions through the four Brahma-viharas, and the development of concentration.

The four Brahma-viharas or sublime states are friendliness (*maitri*), compassion

¹¹. Quoted in Ananda Coomaraswamy, *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism* (New York: University Books, Inc., 1964), pp. 235-36.

(*karuna*), unselfish joy at the welfare of others (*mudita*), and nonattachment (*upeksha*). These four attitudes are one by one to be roused and directed towards all beings in the universe. The need for this practice is especially great for one following the path of the Impersonal, for it helps integrate, purify and expand the emotions.

The *Ratnamegha Sutra* reveals the importance of *dhyana*:

All phenomena originate in the mind, and when the mind is fully known, all phenomena are fully known. For by the mind the world is led ... and through the mind karma is piled up, whether good or evil. The mind swings like a firebrand, the mind rears up like a wave, the mind burns like a forest fire, like a great flood the mind bears all things away. The Bodhisattva, thoroughly examining the nature of things, dwells in ever-present mindfulness of the activity of the mind, and so he does not fall into the mind's power, but the mind comes under his control. And with the mind under his control all phenomena are under his control.¹²

The Buddhists, it must be said, excelled in the development of meditative techniques. They taught the aspirant through a graduated process, leading from the normal human state of distractedness to full control of mind, step by step.

Prajna

According to Buddhism, as well as to Advaita Vedanta, perfection of the mind through meditation is not itself the means of liberation: liberation comes through knowledge, insight into the truth. In the Bodhisattvayana this transcendent knowledge of the truth is known as *prajna*, the sixth of the *paramitas*.

There are three levels of *prajna*: (1) *shrutamayi* or that heard from the teacher and scriptures; (2) *chintamayi* or that arising from reflection on the truth heard;

and (3) *bhavanamayi* or that developed by cultivation and realization. It is this third form that culminates in the transcendent perfection of *prajna*, the true *prajna paramita*. The first two are practices. The third begins as practice and ends in realization of the transcendent *prajna*.

Prajna is defined by the Vijnanavadins as *sarvajneyavarana-jnana* and as *paramartha-jnana*. *Sarvajneyavarana-jnana* is all-comprehending knowledge or omniscience. *Paramartha-jnana* is immediate knowledge of the ultimate truth, the *Dharmakaya* or ultimate Buddha-nature. The first is knowledge of the relative; the second is of the Absolute and transcendent.

The Madhyamakas or Shunyavadins define *prajna* as direct experience of Shunyata or Emptiness, which is of two types. One is direct knowledge of the emptiness of conditioned existence in general and of every particular within it; that is, the Bodhisattva realizes that all things are devoid of self-nature, that in fact there is no 'thing' at all. The other type of Shunyata experienced by the Bodhisattva through *prajna* is the *paramartha* or ultimate truth of Emptiness; that is, the Bodhisattva experiences the Emptiness of the *Dharmakaya*, which is devoid of all conception, all categories of thought, all words and definitions, all things and 'thingness', all relationship, beyond even existence and non-existence. This ultimate Shunyata, deified under the name of *Prajna Paramita*, is worshipped as the Mother of the Buddhas.

Knowledge of Shunyata purifies all of the *paramitas*. For example, only one who knows the highest truth about the giver, the gift, and the recipient can be perfect in charity or *dana*. The Bodhisattva should think, therefore, when practising *dana* that the donor, the recipient and the gift are all non-existent. *Prajna* is the source of the Bodhisattva's moral strength, as the knowledge of Shunyata roots out all attachment.

12. Quoted in Har Dayal, op. cit., p. 100.

For an enlightened Bodhisattva, the six *paramitas* become spontaneous expressions in Samsara of his transcendent state.

According to the Mahayana, *prajna* is nondifferent from *karuna* or compassion; for *prajna* when turned towards the world of sentient beings expresses itself as *karuna*. Thus the compassion of the perfected Bodhisattva is a spontaneous expression of his enlightenment. And the 'marriage' of *prajna* and *karuna* gives birth in the Bodhisattva to *upaya-kaushalya* or 'skilfulness in means'. This makes the Bodhisattva skilful in leading sentient beings to enlightenment. Through *upaya-kaushalya* the Bodhisattva knows the inner tendencies of beings as well as a vast variety of means whereby beings of differing natures can be led to enlightenment. In short, *upaya-kaushalya* is the ability to suit the teaching to the taught.

Nowadays many wrongly assume that the Bodhisattva does not seek enlightenment but rather renounces his own spiritual evolution for the service of other beings. That is a dangerous misrepresentation, for how can the Bodhisattva help another satisfactorily unless he knows at the very deepest level whom he is helping, that is, the complete truth about the one he helps? He can't. What the Bodhisattva does vow to do is to renounce final absorption of his enlightened personhood in Mahaparinirvana in order to help others to enlightenment. And also, he seeks enlightenment not for himself alone but *bahujana-sukhaya, bahujana-hitaya*, 'for the happiness of the many, for the welfare of the many.' But it is enlightenment that he seeks.

Conclusion

These are the six flames of the Bodhisattva's cosmic sacrifice:¹³ *dana* or charity,

13. The metaphor of sacrificial fire is not traditional, but it harmonizes well with the spirit of the path.

shila or conduct, *kshanti* or forbearance, *virya* or heroic strength, *dhyana* or meditation, and *prajna* or wisdom. His sacrifice is cosmic because he offers it not within the confines of a sectarian sanctuary, but on the altar of his universal vision and love, in the sanctuary of the cosmos. The aspiring Bodhisattva first ascends the cosmic altar through production of the determination to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings (*bodhichittotpada*). Then having fanned the flames of this six-tongued fire through his intense aspiration, he offers into it all self-interest, all limited ideas and desires and ambitions, his sense of individual selfhood itself, until he becomes the very light which shines through these six flames.

Having dissolved himself into this cosmic fire he enters—according to traditional belief—into the company of the celestial Bodhisattvas who continue to work for the wellbeing and eventual enlightenment of all beings. No longer is his work limited and laborious, but from the high and universal plane where he dwells now, his very existence is an effortless blessing on all beings; and from there he can incarnate as needed to give direct service to sentient beings.

Whether or not one believes it possible to attain the final goal of the celestial Bodhisattva with his powers of knowledge and action approaching those of the Avatars, one must bow before the beauty and nobility of the basic ideal—to seek enlightenment for the sake of all beings out of a universal love and sympathy, since all beings are in misery. As Shantideva says in the *Shiksha-samuccaya*, 'When fear and sorrow are dear neither to me nor to others, then what distinguishes my self that I should protect it and not others?'¹⁴ One must also admire the beautiful symmetry and practical wisdom enshrined in the stages of the path, a path

14. *Shikhasamuccaya-karika*, 1.

which is universal in its appeal due to its impersonal and comprehensive nature.

In the Bodhisattvayana, the usual conflict between sacred and secular, between spiritual

practice and mundane duty, between work and worship, and between service of man and worship of God is avoided by a vision of spiritual life which embraces the whole of life and all existence.

SHRI RAMAKRISHNA AND THE INTENSER VISION

SWAMI SATPRABHANANDA

The young God-seeking Narendranath's first question to Shri Ramakrishna on his first visit was, "Have you seen God, Sir?" The instant and confident reply from Shri Ramakrishna was, "Yes, I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense. God can be realised. ... One can see and talk to Him as I am doing with you. But who cares to do so?" This question of the disciple and his Master's confident reply have restored faith in God and religion in modern times. Vivekananda himself remarked, "For the first time I found a man who dared to say that he had seen God, that religion was a reality to be felt, to be sensed in an infinitely more intense way than we can sense the world."

Here Shri Ramakrishna was seeing Vivekananda in front of him and at the same time was seeing God in a much intenser form than the physical form of Vivekananda. Shri Ramakrishna's words prove that visions vary from the grossest in physical form to the finest, the mystical and the divine. Asked by Shri Rama how he visualises Him, Hanumana replies:

*"Dehabuddhya Dasohamiti, Jivabuddhya
Tvadamshakam
Atmabuddhya tvamevaham itime
nishchita matih."*

"When I think I am a body I am your servant, when I think I am spirit then I am

your part and when I feel I am Atman (Self) I am yourself." This clarifies that the knowledge manifests according to the levels of consciousness. Degree of knowledge varies according to an individual's capacity of visions. If the capacity is limited to gross visions he sees gross only, and if it is of vital or intellectual or mental or blissful nature, the vision of the external world also changes accordingly. Shri Krishna also told the same thing to Arjuna while imparting him the intenser vision in the 11th Chapter of the Gita:

"Divyam dadami te chakshuh pashya me yogamaishvaram." "I shall bestow upon you the Divine Eye by which you can have an intenser vision of My Universal Form."

Advaita Vedanta asserts that at the highest and the most purified level of human consciousness, this universe ceases to exist in its earlier form. Everything seems permeated with divinity. Vivekananda says that, according to Shankaracharya, "the universe as it appears, is real for all purposes for everyone in his present consciousness, but it vanishes when the consciousness assumes a higher form ... in the same way as the idea of silver superimposed on a shell or that of a serpent on a rope, is true for the time being, and in effect, is dependent upon a particular condition of the mind."

The Upanishads speak that an individual being has got five sheaths above his soul.

These are *Annamaya Kosha* (gross body), *Pranamaya* (subtle body with five vital forces), *Manomaya* (mental body with subtle organs), *Vijnanamaya* (intellectual body), and *Anandamaya Kosha* (body of bliss or divine happiness). Behind all these sheaths stands the Immortal "I", the "Self", which says "my body", "my mind", thus unconsciously separating the body or the mind from the Real Possessor, the "Self", the real "I". The individual being which ordinarily experiences itself as "I", visualises all the five sheaths or dimensions as "Mine". We always use the words—my body, my organs, my senses, my mind, my intellect, my bliss or happiness, etc., without knowing that we are asserting the superiority of the real "I", the 'Self' above body and mind.

This relation of "I" and "Mine" extends to the whole universe as "My world" in which the "I" also exists as a part of the world. The study of this relationship of "I" and "Mine" is the rational aspect of religion, the Jnana-yoga, "the Science of religion". Investigations into the real nature of individual "I" in the internal world is called religion, and investigation into the nature of the external world is called the external sciences of the world. The inner "I" is our essential Divinity which religion helps us to manifest. They are not contradictory. It is only due to the existence of "I" that "My universe" exists. It is this "I" which starts manifesting the "Mine" through body, mind, bliss in the form of 'my body' and 'my knowledge' and 'my bliss'.

The fundamental need is to investigate the real nature of "I" beyond the five dimensions or sheaths. This investigation of "I" automatically brings out the nature of the five sheaths, namely gross, vital, mental, intellectual and blissful, which cover the immortal Self-within. This investigation is called Subject-Object-Discrimination, or the *Drig-Drishya-Viveka*. The *Drig* or the Subject is "I", and *Drishya* or the Object

is the whole five-dimensional entity ranging from the body to the whole universe.

Swami Vivekananda says that man is not progressing from error to truth, but from lower truth to higher truth. The present day scientists are progressing from the gross universe to finer universe. The only difference is in naming the Truth as Force, Energy, Element, etc. At present they have reached only upto the fourth dimension of the physical world and termed it as the time-dimension of the universe. They are yet to discover the finer spiritual layer behind our body-mind and establish the fifth dimension or spiritual force. Our scriptures and seers have done all these scientific investigations in the internal world long back and clearly brought out the Real Entity which is covered by the five sheaths or Koshas. This Real Entity, the real individual "I", the Atman has been equated to the universal "I" or Brahman. Individual soul is nothing but the universal Soul, according to Shankaracharya.

To get the knowledge of the totality of the Real Entity, our visions also must be clear and "much intenser". When Shri Ramakrishna first viewed Narendranath as gross body, he instantly visualised the Real Entity, which is God or Brahman, and hence remarked "Yes, I see Him just as I see you here, only in a much intenser sense". Shri Ramakrishna's intenser vision pierced through the five dimensions of any body in front of him, in order to reach the Real Entity within.

When Narendra afterwards cautioned Shri Ramakrishna that he was getting too much attached to him who is none but the son of Viswanath Datta, Ramakrishna's reply was clear, "It is because I see Narayana (God) in you."

Shri Ramakrishna's intenser vision had many dimensions. He would not only see the indwelling God inside living beings, but could see the purpose for which an individual

Soul had taken a particular human form. Long before Narendranath saw Ramakrishna, the latter had the vision of one of the perfected seven sages who would be born in this age to assist him in his task of spiritual regeneration of the world. "Hardly had I seen Narendranath when I knew that he was that Rishi," said Ramakrishna. Similarly he saw in a vision that the Divine Mother was offering him a spiritual son. "Very soon Rakhal (Swami Brahmananda) came, and I recognised him at once as that boy," he said. Once again he saw in vision that a *bhairava*, a companion of Shiva, would come to assist his work. When Girish became intimate, Ramakrishna identified in him that Bhairava.

Shri Ramakrishna had attained a still higher level of 'this intenser vision' when he could see divine visions not in samadhi but in the normal waking state with full external consciousness. It is in such a state that he had the vision of Shri Chaitanya and Shri Nityananda, Shri Rama and Lakshmana, Shri Sita and Hanumana, Shri Radha and Krishna, and Jesus Christ. He said, "Formerly I was in such an exalted condition that I could see all these things with my naked eyes, but now I see them in samadhi." (*Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna*: p. 332).

But the most exalted kind of intenser vision that Ramakrishna had, was the recognition of moving and living Gods in inanimate objects like images. The image of Bhavatarini was for him a living reality. It would breathe, talk and guide him unerringly. The image of Ramlala, the child-Rama, became fully living to him, just like any other child. To Ramakrishna, Ramlala would walk, swim, talk, pout his lips, make faces, sob, shed tears, and climb on his lap. "I actually saw and did these things," Ramakrishna would later speak in tears of genuine emotion of mother Kaushalya.

When such a state becomes habitual to a person his 'Eye of Shiva' opens. The

capacity of intenser vision is attained. Shri Ramakrishna could look at a person just like a glass case. His vision would at once penetrate beyond the physical and mental body of the person, and could discover clearly the hidden causes or impressions in the person's deepest psychic levels.

This is the deep mystic vision which Wordsworth attained in rare moments and recorded in his immortal poem *Tintern Abbey*.

.....that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on.—
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul.
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

Drik-Drishya-Viveka speaks of man's highest level of consciousness which enables him to see God everywhere. This highest consciousness itself is God—*Prajnanam Brahma*, says Shankaracharya. And this can be attained when a person has been purified of all worldly desires, of all thoughts of little 'Self', of the little I, when the "I-Thou" relation has been brought to nil by the cessation of body-consciousness, a state which can be attained in perfect meditation.

Drik-Drishya-Viveka writes,

"*Dehabhimane galite vijñate paramatmani
Yatra yatra mano yati, tatra tatra
samadhayah*".

(When the body-consciousness is gone, one knows the One all-pervading consciousness everywhere. Wherever the mind goes, the seer sees only God and attains the highest consciousness in samadhi.) That is why, Shri Ramakrishna, in moments of divine consciousness, would go to samadhi by seeing a person, or listening to a sound or a song. Swami Vivekananda spoke of this

intense vision to the Western people (*Compl. Works* 2:165) “So when you see religion able to shake your belief. Then you have and God in a more intense sense than you real faith.”

NEW TRENDS IN JAINISM TODAY

CHANDULAL MEHTA

Two thousand and five hundred years ago when Lord Mahavira began to preach his own doctrine in India, the world of culture and civilisation was a smaller one. Communication with the world outside was virtually impossible, except through a few merchant routes. Mahavira found India a sufficiently big country to preach his message. His followers did their best to preach the doctrine even to distant corners of India in those days. One scholar on Jainism wrote,

“Mahavira left behind him a strongly organised religious Order, through whose efforts the animal sacrifices fell into disuse and non-violence became firmly established as a rule of life even amongst those classes of people who did not join the Order. His followers gradually spread over the whole country. Jaina monks were to be found on the banks of the Sindhu already at the time of Alexander’s invasion. A band of Jaina monks under Bhadrabahu migrated to the South and spread the religion throughout the Deccan, with Shravanabelgola in Mysore as their central seat. Royal patronage was also bestowed upon the faith, and it is claimed that the great Maurya emperor Chandragupta himself joined Bhadrabahu’s march to the South as his disciple. A very old rock inscription at Shravanabelgola commemorates his visit to the South; a cave is dedicated to him, and the hill on which it exists is known as Chandragiri”.¹

Today, however, global scene has changed. From the middle of the nineteenth century Indian religious preachers like Raja Rammohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen went outside India to preach the Brahmo religious ideas. But the greatest impact was created by the Hindu Monk Swami Vivekananda who crossed the seas and went to the so-called Mleccha land, inspite of all resistance of the orthodox Hindus. Yet it is his preaching and its tremendous impact in the West, that not only saved Hinduism from degeneration, but also established the universal and the rational religion of Vedanta as the religion for modern man. Vivekananda was insistent that Indians must go out and preach the life-giving message of India’s spiritual religion all over the West. That is why he said,

“You must go out to preach your religion, preach it to every nation under the sun, preach it to every people.... The first manifest effect of life is expansion. You must expand if you want to live. The moment you have ceased to expand, death is upon you, danger is ahead. ... One of the great causes of India’s misery and downfall has been that she narrowed herself, went into her shell as the oyster does, and refused to give her jewels and her treasures to the other races of mankind, refused to give the life-giving truths to thirsting nations outside the Aryan fold. That has been the one great cause; that we did not go out, that we did not compare notes with other nations—that has been the one great cause of our downfall, and every one of you

1. *The Cultural Heritage of India* Vol. 1 (Edited by Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan and others); The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta-29. (1959), P. 401.

knows, that little stir, the little life that you see in India, begins from the day when Raja Rammohan Roy broke through the walls of that exclusiveness. Since that day, history in India has taken another turn, and now it is growing with accelerated motion."²

Buddha himself preached his religion walking over hundreds of miles in north India. After 300 years of Buddha, king Ashoka sent his own son and daughter as monk and nun outside India to preach Buddhism. Many Buddhist monks known as 'Theraputtas' settled in the Middle East and Eastern portion of the Mediterranean Sea, spreading far and wide the message of Buddhism.

Jainism has remained an exception to this commonly accepted norms of propaganda and spread of religious thoughts because of the constraints imposed on it by the conservative and orthodox Jain society which does not permit its learned Munis to use mikes or to visit foreign countries in order to quench the religious thirst of thousands of Jains residing abroad. This is really a sad picture. Jains living in foreign countries have their roots in India. If the Jain Munis go there, it will be very beneficial to the Jains residing there because they will avail themselves of these learned Munis' knowledge and get inspiration from them on religious and spiritual matters. Except orthodox Jainism, no other religion in the world considers it sinful or an act of irreligion in sending out preachers and learned monks to foreign lands.

Many religious organisations of India are carrying on their religious and spiritual ministration through their various centers all over the world. If Jainism does not bring certain constructive changes in its outmoded and orthodox norms or restric-

tions, the world will lose much of the best in Jainism.

Today when the whole world stands on a volcano of nuclear weapons and the people do not see any ray of hope, the principles of non-violence and compassion towards all living beings preached by Lord Mahavira will bring solace to many. Through these principles, mankind can still hope for peaceful co-existence. The world of today is heading towards self-destruction in the absence of right kind of understanding. We cannot imagine what will happen if the people of other lands and rich nations are deprived of the true understanding and practice of Non-violence (Ahimsa) as preached by Lord Mahavira. Jainism can contribute greatly in creating harmony and peace through the basic principles of Non-violence, compassion and peace-loving ideology of '*Live and let live*', when they are preached by the learned and enlightened Jain Munis throughout the world.

It is a matter of utmost concern that young generation of Jain society abroad has no regard for religion or religious life. The youth has not been rightly guided. In the name of freedom or '*free thinking*' the Jain youth has become licentious and the secular culture of the West and its life-style have made them cynics, especially in foreign countries. They have become directionless and lack right understanding about true religion. In fact, Lord Mahavira was himself a revolutionary. We can sum up his revolutionary work and ideas as under:

- (1) He campaigned for Truth.
- (2) He led the people against the killings of animals in holy sacrifices.
- (3) He was also against casteism.
- (4) He had high respect for women.
- (5) Social service—(service to mankind) is also a part and parcel of Jainism.
- (6) He believed firmly that every moment

2. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati Memorial Edition). Vol. 3, P. 223, 272, 317.

of life should be used in constructive and creative activities.

(7) He preached the principles of 'Aparigraha' (Non-possession).

(8) The fact that there is Jiva (life) in plants and trees proved by Jagadish Chandra Bose in modern times was found by Lord Mahavira 2500 years ago. Power struggle and possessiveness are making many nations mad with imperialistic desires. Non-possessiveness ('Aparigraha') laid down by Lord Mahavira tells that one should not possess wealth or things more than required.

In India, not very long ago, we witnessed a miracle wrought by the principle of Non-violence. Mahatma Gandhi was greatly inspired by the principles of Satya (Truth) and Ahimsa. He lived up to these ideals and became victorious in his non-violent struggle against the British and India became an independent nation. This great soul of India had met the Jain Muni Srimad Rajchandraji and was deeply impressed by him.

After the long period of twelve years of meditative life and penance, '*Kevalajnana*' (pure knowledge) dawned on Lord Mahavira. He set out in order to enlighten the people. He went round the country spreading his light of knowledge. His was a glorious example because he practised what he preached. He was both *Prabhavak* and *Pracharak*.

During the last sixty years many worthy procedural or ceremonial changes have taken place in Jainism. Munishri Nanchandji started using mike fifty years back. One Jain Munishri has settled down in America. Another Munishri had been to Nairobi for the opening ceremony of the Jain temple. A well-known Jain Muni has

been spreading the principles of Jainism in foreign countries for the last 14 years. Not only that, due to his pioneering work there, many Americans have become vegetarians. A Jain nun has gone with her three hundred disciples to Toronto (Canada) in March this year. Jain daughters are adopting Bhagvati Diksha (becoming Jain Nuns). Three Jain nuns of Tithal are going to America, U.K. and Africa for preaching the message of Jainism. Apart from religion what is important is to guide people to live life as a true human being and not as a mere sensate being.

The above changes took place due to new outlook developed and adopted by the monks of the Jain religion. Lord Mahavira preached the principles of 'ANEKANTA-VADA'—the second important doctrine of Jainism. This principle tells us that the Reality is many faced and does not exclude contradictory features. Truth is multidimensional. Our outlook should be broad and expansive and not narrow like that of a frog in the well.

Many Munis and Sadhvis are taking keen interests in uplifting the down-trodden masses by various means as preached by Lord Mahavira. "SOCIAL SERVICE" and other social service centres are being built under the guidance and supervisions of Jain monks who are also building hospitals, schools and colleges. Some are conducting spiritual retreats on meditation and yoga sadhana. Some others are training youths to build up the future of India and preaching Jainism in foreign countries.

Qualified Munis and Sadhvis will go to foreign countries to preach Jainism in the near future. The lay followers should encourage and help them in all possible ways.

SWAMIJI AND HIS WESTERN WOMEN DISCIPLES

PRAVRAJKA BRAHMAPRANA

Mrs. Blodgett, a Chicago lady, once described her unforgettable experience at the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 and Swami Vivekananda's sudden impact on the American people:

When that young man got up and said, "Sisters and Brothers of America," seven thousand [actually, four thousand] people rose to their feet as a tribute to something they knew not what; and when it was over and I saw scores of women walking over the benches to get near him, I said to myself, "Well, my lad, if you can resist that onslaught, you are indeed a god."¹

This electrifying moment was the beginning of Swami Vivekananda's deep and multifaceted relationship with American women.

What was Swamiji's power that, for the first time, an Oriental could make such an impression on American society? What was his message that men and women found so irresistible and convincing; his charm, so magnetising? What, in fact, did Swamiji see in American women, and American women, in Swamiji? Without question, Swami Vivekananda and American women clicked; it was a relationship that was meant to be—spontaneous, natural, and eternal.

Behind Swamiji's voice, was another voice—the voice of his God-intoxicated master Shri Ramakrishna. Before Swamiji embarked on his missionary debut in the West, Holy Mother divulged a vision she had received of him after the Master's passing, in which Shri Ramakrishna's form had entered into Swamiji's body, signifying

that the Master would work through him. So great was Swamiji's regard for Holy Mother, that when he heard this, he alternately danced and wept with joy and said, "Ah! it is all right now. It is the will of the Mother!....The Mother Herself has spoken!"²

Shri Ramakrishna, whose virgin wife Holy Mother was to him none other than the goddess in the Dakshineswar Kali temple, had trained his young monastic disciples to see all women as he did—manifestations of the Divine Mother. And Swamiji did just that. In a letter written to his brother-disciples on 25 September 1894, Swami Vivekananda laid bare his feelings:

I am almost at my wit's end to see the women of this country!... They are like Lakshmi (the Goddess of Fortune) in beauty, and like Sarasvati (the Goddess of Learning) in virtues—they are the Divine Mother incarnate and worshipping them, one verily attains perfection in everything. Great God! If I can raise a thousand such Madonnas, Incarnations of the Divine Mother, in our country before I die, I shall die in peace.³

Not only did Swamiji see God dwelling in American women, he taught his disciples—as he had been taught—how to awaken this divine sight. One of his students, Mrs. Roorbach, recalled that at Camp Taylor, California "he often said everything is one; Divine Mother is in everything, and he insisted for one of his teachings that we look upon every relation, whether brother or husband, or father, or mother or sister, as Mother regardless of sex. We were to

1. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, Vol. V: *A New Gospel* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1987), 198-199. [hereafter referred to as *New Discoveries*].

2. His Eastern and Western Disciples, *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 1 (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1979) P. 383.

3. Advaita Ashrama, *Letters of Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970), P. 141.

tell ourselves that everyone we saw was Mother."⁴

Swami Vivekananda was, perhaps, the first preacher who did not lie to the American women. He preached the Atman-ideal, the divinity dwelling within every man and woman. Nowhere did he even hint that women were, in any way, weaker, less capable, or more dependent than men in realizing their true nature or any other feat. On the contrary, he wrote:

Nowhere in the world are women like those of this country. How pure, independent, self-relying and kind-hearted! It is the women who are the life and soul of this country. All learning and culture are centered in them.... I am struck dumb with wonder at seeing the women of America.⁵

Swamiji was uncompromising in his perception of women and unflinching in enacting it in the world he lived in. At the turn of the century, he was without question far ahead of his time in protesting:

Buddha and Christ are two great "bubbles" the world has known.... Jesus fell short, because he did not always live up to his own highest ideal; and above all, because he did not give women an equal place with men. Women did everything for him, yet not one was made an apostle.⁶

It was no secret that Swamiji blasted the priestly caste in India for depriving women of their right to scriptural knowledge and preached a return to the India that had produced Gargis and Maitreyis, knowers of Brahman.⁷ Nor was it a secret that Swamiji's

dream was to awaken the women in India as well as America by making women disciples, establishing a women's math, and administering vows to women in a parallel religious order, ultimately governed by women. He prophesied:

Without the grace of Shakti nothing is to be accomplished. What do I find in America and Europe?—the worship of Shakti, the worship of Power. Yet they worship Her ignorantly through sense-gratification. Imagine, then, what a lot of good they will achieve who will worship Her with all purity, in a Sattvika spirit, looking upon Her as their mother! I am coming to understand things clearer every day, my insight is opening out more and more. Hence we must first build a math for Mother. First Mother and Mother's daughters, then Father and Father's sons—can you understand this?...⁸

In the summer of 1895, at Thousand Island Park, and in the fall of 1899, at Ridgely Manor, Swamiji spontaneously unfolded his dream, bestowing brahmacharya and sannyasa on men and women. At one time he wrote: "One of my new Sannyasins is indeed a woman (Madame Marie Louise who became Abhayananda). The others are men. I am going to make some more and take them over to India with me. These 'white' faces will have more influence in India than the Hindus."⁹

At Ridgely Manor, just as the grand summer gathering of swamis, relatives, and friends came to an end, Sister Nivedita and Mrs. Ole Bull received their brahmacharya and sannyasa in a quiet, informal ceremony. In a 11 November 1899 letter to Josephine MacLeod, Sister Nivedita described this momentous beginning in her life and, inadvertently, in American women's Eastern monasticism:

On Sunday afternoon Swami insisted on my coming and packing with him, & as I worked he took out a couple of silk turbans to give the girls.

4. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda: His Second Visit to the West, New Discoveries* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1973), P. 547. [hereafter referred to as *Second Visit*].

5. Advaita Ashrama, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* Vol. VI., (9th ed. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972), P. 252-253. [hereafter referred to as *C.W.V.*]

6. *C.W.V.*, Vol. VIII, P. 28.

7. *C.W.V.*, Vol. VII, P. 214-215.

8. *Ibid*, P. 484.

9. *C.W.V.*, Vol. V, P. 105-106.

Then two pieces of cotton cloth—gerua colour—for Mrs. Bull. He called me to my room, where Mrs. Bull sat writing, to give these, & left the turbans on one side.

First he shut the door—then he arranged the cloth as a skirt & chudder round her waist—then he called her a sannyasi & putting one hand on her head & one on mine he said: “I give you all that Ramakrishna [Paramahansa] gave to me. What came to us from a woman [the Divine Mother] I give to you two women. Do what you can with it...”¹⁰

Though Mrs. Ole Bull never claimed to be a sannyasini, her private diary entry for 5 November 1899 discloses that on that day “Swamiji gave the Sanyasi cloth and charge of work under S.R.K. and the Mother.”¹¹

From Swamiji’s dream, American convents, under the guidance of the Ramakrishna Order, sprang up in America as early as 1947,¹² when the first brahmacharya vows were administered at the Sarada Convent in Santa Barbara; and later in the 1950s,¹³ the Shri Sarada Math was established in India, a women’s order parallel to the Ramakrishna Order.

The dedicated Western women disciples of Swami, who forged ahead with their guru’s plan by serving India—the Sister Niveditas and Christines and the Mother Seviars—were, no doubt, an important part in Swamiji’s official mission. But they were not the only part. There were others—many others—both prominent and ordinary—who by virtue of their relationship with an extraordinary historical figure became historical personalities in their own right. These Western women were unique witnesses to Swamiji’s life in ways that no Eastern or Western man could ever be. They camped, retreated, and travelled with him; they

shared their homes, families, and food with him. Western women had the special privilege of observing Swamiji in a wide range of situations and moods—whether in a lecture or by letter, at an elegant dinner or in the kitchen, and in nirvikalpa samadhi¹⁴ or illi humour. Swamiji brought religion home to the American women—sometimes by a look, a witty aside, or a sound scolding; but many times it was through silence that he transmitted spirituality. Mrs. Edith Allan described her experience when she went for an interview with Swamiji at the Turk Street flat, in San Francisco. After she was ushered upstairs and into the front parlor,

Swamiji soon entered. He was dressed for the street in his long overcoat and round black turban, and he was chanting softly. He sat on a chair on the opposite side of the room... “He continued chanting softly,” Mrs. Allan recalled, “in his incomparable way.” Presently he said, “Well, madam!”

“I could not speak,” she related, “but began to weep and kept on weeping as though the floodgates had been opened.” He let her weep on and on—“for about half an hour,” she once recalled; and when the purging flood of tears had subsided a little, he said, “Come tomorrow about the same time.” That was all. “As I went from his presence,” she recalled years later in her reminiscences, “my problems were solved and my questions were answered, though he had not asked me anything.”¹⁵

Swamiji and Western women shared many close and diverse relationships. In Miss MacLeod—or Tantine, as she was called—he found a generous friend and “lady missionary,” whose influence in American society opened doors to the wealthy, politically prominent, and intellectually esteemed. Sister Nivedita was a dedicated disciple, publicist, and chronicler of

10. Marie Louise Burke, *New Discoveries*: Vol. 5, P. 141.

11. Ibid., p. 142.

12. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1957), P. 400-401.

13. Ibid., P. 408-409, 427.

14. Swami Nikhilananda, “Swami Vivekananda at Thousand Island Park,” *Inspired Talks, My Master, and Other Writings*, 2nd ed. (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1970), P. 14-15.

15. Burke, *Second Visit*, P. 409-410.

Swamiji's life and mission. Then there was Christine—a beloved daughter and worker in his plan for the uplift of Indian women. In Mrs. Ole Bull a mother—but what a mother! whose financial and social prowess paved the way for the inauguration of the Vedanta Society of New York, the establishment of Belur Math, the publication of Swamiji's books, and Swamiji's meeting with some of the best minds in America. Then there were the Hale girls, with whom Swamiji could relax and confide in like a brother. And with Sarah Bernhardt and Madame Calve—the world famous, one an actress and the other, an opera star—Swamiji was a personal philosopher and well-wisher whom they welcomed into their lives as a companion and guide.

Swamiji once said: "As I grow older I find that I look more and more for greatness in little things. I want to know what a great man eats and wears, and how he speaks to his servants."¹⁶ The Western women who met and knew Swami Vivekananda—and there were many more—served to chronicle this important and personally inspiring aspect of Swamiji's mission. They lived with him so that we could know Swamiji better.

Swamiji's purity was the golden link that ran through all his relationships with women. He said at one time, "I make all of them call me 'father' or 'brother'. I don't allow them to come near me with any other feeling, and gradually they have all been straightened out..."¹⁷ Though living in Victorian America, Swamiji allowed Western women an almost unheard of closeness and informality, but never familiarity. In this connection:

One Sunday when he was happily preparing a dish in the Home of Truth kitchen [in San

Francisco], some butter splattered from a frying pan onto Mrs. Allan's dress—a new green dress that she was wearing proudly for the first time, its splendour uneclipsed by anything like an apron. "I carried on at a great rate over this tragedy," she recalled, "but Swamiji continued chanting, going about his work without taking the slightest notice. Later a friend sponged the spots with gasoline, and they completely disappeared. I felt like a fool."¹⁸

Swamiji was completely at home with his purity. On one hand, he was a keen observer and could laugh at America's absurd sense of decorum in the straitlaced 1890s:

You have to keep yourself always covered from neck to foot in the presence of women, [he wrote]. You cannot so much as mention the normal functions of the body.... You can blow your nose a thousand times into your handkerchief—there is no harm in that; but it is highly uncivilised to belch. Women sometimes are not embarrassed to expose their bodies above the waist...but they say that to go barefoot is as bad as being naked.¹⁹

Swamiji—true to his inner vision of womanhood—never emanated even a gesture of prudishness or made his women followers feel they were an "opposite sex." At one time he told Josephine MacLeod, "Always remember, you are incidentally an American, and a woman, but always a child of God. Tell yourself day and night who you are. Never forget it."²⁰

But on the other hand, one could not live with Swamiji without feeling his purity—a power which he transmitted to others. Once on a trip to Egypt with Madame Calve, Josephine MacLeod, and a few other travelling companions, Swamiji demonstrated this power in a tender and breathtaking way. Madame Calve wrote:

16. *Complete Works of Sister Nivedita, Vol. I* (Calcutta: Secretary of Ramakrishna Sarada Mission, 1972), P. 137.

17. *C.W.V., Vol. VIII*, P. 474.

18. Burke, *Second Visit*, P. 413.

19. *C.W.V., Vol. VII*, P. 470-471.

20. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1964) P. 234. [hereafter referred to as *Reminiscences*].

One day we lost our way in Cairo. I suppose, we had been talking too intently. At any rate, we found ourselves in a squalid and ill-smelling street, where half-clad women lolled from windows and sprawled on doorsteps.

The Swami noticed nothing until a particularly noisy group of women on a bench in the shadow of a dilapidated building began laughing and calling to him. One of the ladies of our party tried to hurry us along, but the Swami detached himself gently from our group and approached the women on the bench.

"Poor children!" he said, "Poor creatures! They have put their divinity in their beauty. Look at them now!"

He began to weep. The women were silenced and abashed. One of them leaned forward and kissed the hem of the robe, murmuring brokenly in Spanish, "Humbre de Dios, humbre de Dios!" (Man of God!). Another with a sudden gesture of modesty and fear, threw her arm in front of her face as though she would screen her shrinking soul from those pure eyes.²¹

Not only did Swamiji possess the compassion of a god, he bore other Christ-like qualities which drew his Western women followers to him like a magnet. One rainy night in July 1895, Mrs. Mary Funke and Christine Greenstidel came to Swamiji, at Thousand Island Park:

Miss Dutcher, who let them in, called Swamiji from the upstairs veranda to the little parlour, and the young women, overwhelmed in his presence, forgot all their rehearsed speeches. The words tumbled out: "We have come to you just as we would go to Jesus if he were still on the earth and ask him to teach us."²²

According to the *Vedanta and the West* article, "Swamiji in Southern California": "During Swamiji's visit with the three [Mead] sisters, the impact of his spiritual power was such that they felt, as one of

them put it, as if Christ himself were in their midst."²³

To some of his more staunch Western women followers, Swamiji was known as "the King" or "the Prophet," Christlike epithets, befitting one who walked like a king among men and possessed the beauty, grace, and bearing of a god. In this connection, Sarah Fox remembered when Swamiji gave a lecture in Oakland:

He entered the church auditorium from the street entrance and without any ado walked down the aisle nearest the wall to the front of the church in long, slow, measured steps. This wonderful man, clad in an ochre robe and wearing a turban, looked as if he feared nothing and cared for nothing. He seemed like an immense wave going along; his back was straight as a rod, yet his entire bearing was a perfect blending of dignity and grace. He looked out over the congregation. Then after what seemed like an hour, he said, "Ladies and gentlemen..."²⁴

Once Josephine MacLeod witnessed an awesome phenomenon during one of Swamiji's Los Angeles talks on "Christ's Message to the World." She wrote: "Perhaps the most outstanding lecture I ever heard was his talk on 'Jesus of Nazareth,' when he seemed to radiate a white light from head to foot, so lost was he in the wonder and power of Christ."²⁵

From eye-witness accounts of his Western women followers, when Swamiji stood before his audiences, he clearly conveyed much more than words. At times, he appeared transfigured. On 22 April 1955, in a taped conversation with Swami Pavitrananda, former head of the New York Vedanta Center, Mrs. Montgomery described her experience:

21. Ibid, P. 267.

22. Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries, Vol. III: The World Teacher* (Calcutta; Advaita Ashrama, 1985) P. 143.

23. Brahmacharini Usha [Pravrajika Ananda-prana], "Swamiji in Southern California." *Vedanta and the West* (Vol. 158, Nov.-Dec. 1962) P. 56.

24. Burke, *Second Visit*, P. 295-296.

25. Burke, *New Discoveries: Vol. V*, P. 221.

I went to the Vedanta House and I sat on a front seat so that I wouldn't miss anything, and Swami entered by a side door. Immediately I knew there was something extraordinary about him. He was very unassuming, very calm, and entered and took his place on the rostrum. But there was something about that presence, that you couldn't take your eyes off of him; he fascinated you. And as he sat in the chair, his head was the most perfect that I had ever seen. And it was perfectly poised, and power seemed to emanate from it. I was fascinated. He looked like a living Buddha. And as he rose to speak (The voice was extraordinary: it was mellow, resonant, but [with] a great purity) veils just seemed to fall from your eyes, because he gave you an entirely different impression of... the relationship of the individual to the Divinity. I remember, as I looked at him, there seemed to me that there was an ocean of consciousness back of him, and, in some way,... that focussed and flowed through his words.²⁶

Without question, Swamiji's lectures were a powerful media through which he transmitted spirituality to his Western audience, both male and female. Tantine remembered:

Once Swamiji was lecturing in New York. He was at his best and the audience seemed to be in a rapture. There was not a sound, they hung on his lips. Then suddenly he stopped, bowed to the audience of, perhaps, a thousand people, and left the platform. It was so abrupt that the audience wondered what had happened to him. Later Tantine asked him. Swamiji replied, "I felt such an inflow of strength that had I continued, it would have spoiled my message. All these people would have become my disciples. I don't want disciples. I want everyone to get free by their own efforts."²⁷

Lecturing took its toll on Swamiji. After his first visit to the West, Swamiji confided that he had exhausted his power to grant nirvikalpa samadhi by giving lectures in America and England. However, he still possessed the Christlike ability to transform lives by a look or a touch.²⁸ While Swamiji

was staying at the Mead residence, in South Pasadena, Sister Lalita happened to be a fortunate recipient of his inadvertent touch. Sudhira, or Helen Hall, in whom Sister confided the experience, retold the story:

At the Monterey [Rd] house the bedrooms were upstairs. One morning they were coming down to breakfast, and Sister was behind Swamiji, and she got a little unsteady on the steps. The steps were steep and shallow... She put her hand on his shoulder to steady herself, and the world just went away. She was in another place, in another consciousness, and she never remembered getting down the rest of the steps. But somehow [Swamiji] got her into the dining room and seated her, and then he took over... He was so charming and so entertaining and so much fun that nobody noticed that Sister was all blanked out—that she was in another place. That's all she ever said about it. But just touching his shoulder took her there. From that moment on, Swamiji was *God* to Sister.²⁹

Not only did Swamiji see divinity in Western women, but he allowed them the privilege of glimpsing some degree of his own vast spiritual personality. Edith Allan recalled, "Once when walking along the street with Swamiji after a lecture, all at once he seemed to me so big, as though he towered above ordinary mortals. The people on the street looked like pygmies, and he had such a majestic presence that people stepped aside to let him pass by."³⁰ Perhaps, Tantine best summed up what so many Western women saw in Swamiji. She wrote: "The thing that held me in Swamiji was his *unlimitedness*. I could never touch the bottom—or top—or sides. The amazing size of him!"³¹

(To be concluded)

28. Swami Nikhilananda, "Swami Vivekananda at Thousand Island Park," P. 13.

29. "Friends of Sister Lalita—Reminiscences," Extract from transcription of interview: Swami Chetanananda interviewing Helen Hall (Sudhira), Hollywood, 10 August 1983.

30. His Eastern and Western Admirers, *Reminiscences*, P. 399-400.

31. Ibid. P. 250.

26. Transcript from tape.

27. Swami Atulananda, *With the Swamis in America and India*, ed. Pravrajika Brahma-prana (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, Nov. 1988) P. 292.

PERIYA PURANAM

(A Review-article)

PERIYA PURANAM: of Sekkizhaar, (in condensed form) by G. Vanmikanatha,

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The *Periya Puranam*, one of the seminal texts of Shaiva Siddhanta, rendered into English (condensed form) by G. Vanmikanathan, is a valuable production of the publication department of the Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

I feel that this publication has done a great service to all in general and to the Shaivites in particular. The readers will thank the translator for his effort to acquaint the non-Tamilians, those who are not conversant with Tamil literature, with the great saints of Tamil culture, their way of life and teachings. It has been rightly said by Aldous Huxley that "the perennial philosophy is primarily concerned with the one Divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things, lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly or immediately apprehended except by those who have fulfilled certain conditions namely, making themselves loving, pure in heart and pure in spirit."

The *Periya Puranam* contains the lives of 63 great saints each of which throws a light from which a spiritual aspirant is benefitted. Our sincere thanks go to the writer and the translator for their effort to give the world something of immense value.

It is worth noting that in the history of Shaivism, the list of canonized Saints begins with the name of Sundarar and the list of the canonical books with that of Sekkilar's great work. J.M. Nallaswami Pillai wrote the stories of some of the lives as told by Sekkilar, in English. The lives, however, were not complete. We therefore are indebted to the author for his successful effort to present an annotated translation. The stories of *Periya Puranam* of Sekkilar had

also been adopted into the Sanskrit language in two volumes. One is the *Upamanyu Bhakta Vilasam* and the other *Shiva-Bhakta-Vilasam*.

A study of the Epic and a look at the history of its evolution, prove the fact that in every age there have been some men and women who, by virtue of their penance, fulfilled the conditions of sadhana and realised the Truth. They know the 'Path of God'. The later aspirants have to tread the path they had shown, and that is possible only by a study of their lives. *Periya Puranam*, in this respect, is a great composition and a great gift to humanity. *Periya Puranam* means the lives of the great men who are considered sometimes even greater than saints. It is worthwhile to devote a few lines in this article about Saint Sekkilar whose labour for years could produce a work as valuable as it is.

Sekkilar was an inhabitant of the Chinolepur district. His childhood name was Arul-Moli-Devar. He was a bright scholar and very honest in character. The chola Monarch had a very favourable report about him and invited him to accept the post of Chief Minister in his capital city named Uttama Pallo Parravanayar. In course of their talks, Sekkilar mentioned the names of the great saint Sundarar. Before this, the King was very much interested in the Jaina epic *Jivaka Chintamani*. But after the discussion with Sekkilar his mind changed and the king requested him to write in elaborate details, the lives of the great Shaiva Saints and offered necessary money for the purpose. (1139-40 A.D.)

Sekkilar left for Tillai (Chidambaram) with necessary funds to start his work. He prayed to Lord Natarajan to help him in his undertaking. Natarajan was pleased to advise him to begin his work with the word 'ulahalam' (all the worlds). Sekkilar followed the order of the list of Sundarar and divided his poems into 11 Sargas. Sundarar

spoke of 60 saints but by addition of Sundarar's parents and Sundarar, the number increased to 63. The great epic of 4253 verses begins with the birth and wedding of Sundarar and ends with his ascent to the heaven.

The readers must feel inquisitive as to what happened in connection with Sundarar's marriage. According to the legends Sundarar was an attendant of Lord Shiva in the heaven. Two of the maids of Shiva's consort were in love with him. So, all of them (the three) had to take birth in the world because any attachment of this nature was not permissible in the abode of Shiva.

Sundarar was thus born as the son of Sadayar (and Issaijna) who was the priest of a temple in the district of Arcot. In his childhood one day he was playing on the road with his friends. Accidentally the king of the place was passing by that road. He was very much attracted to see Sundarar and in his mind it occurred that the child possessed some divine qualities. He approached the child's parents and with their permission took him to his place. When Sundarar attained the marriageable age, a bride was chosen for him. When the marriage ceremonies were about to begin, an old man appeared there and declared that the bridegroom was his slave and that he would not allow this marriage. The people who had assembled there to witness the marriage, were dumbfounded.

The old man took Sundarar to the temple and disappeared. Sundarar, however, realised that the old man was none but God Himself who had intervened to redeem him from worldly bondage. He also became sure that in due course Lord Shiva would take him to his celestial abode. The life of Sundarar teaches men as to how the Lord trains up his devotees through trials and makes them fit to live in his abode. Sundarar refers to God as the all-merciful. The usefulness of the study of the lives of the saints is great in the sense that it helps

the readers to realise that whatever God does, He does for their best. Pain and pleasure therefore, make no difference to them. A feeling of contentment reigns over them.

We often use the word spirituality which in Sanskrit may be translated as 'adhyatma'. The word is meaningful. It means the way of life which paves the way to realise the Self. The Self is no physical existence. Indeed the body is its abode but it does not relate to the body. In the form of knowledge It spreads all over the body but yet remains untraceable and unperceived. Where there is intense desire to know It, It becomes knowable, and the one who knows It, cares not for anything else. Love which signifies equating everything perceivable, is the sure path to realise this Self. Love of God purges not only the body but also purifies the thoughts. Mind is a two-petalled flower. The lower mind causes attachments, while the upper mind leads to realisation of the futility of the objects of attachment and of truth in the form of love.

The special characteristics of *Periya Puranam* are now discussed.

In the first place in writing the lives of the great saints, Sekkilar, except in two cases, did not refer to their respective castes but mentioned about their profession by which they earned their livelihood. Generally people take it for granted that a saint is one who cuts off all his family connections, and lives as an ascetic. He lives all alone, and fully dedicates to God only. The saints of *Periya Puranam* are not necessarily ascetics in the above sense. They were married men and lived with wives and children. They worked hard for their livelihood. There were also some who accepted service for the maintenance of their families. Asceticism means renunciation. But it does not strictly mean avoidance of duties. On the contrary, the saints of *Periya Puranam* were more dutiful to their kith and kin. But, under all

circumstances, they were away from hatred, jealousy, theft, killing, hurting anybody, anger or any ill-feeling. They renounced attachment and desire. They equally embraced the so-called pleasures and pains, considering them as gifts of God. By nature they were introvert and avoided all external ambitions or attractions. In thought, word, and deed, they wished the welfare of all. In them there was no pretention or pride. They lived a humble life with all the noble qualities of head and heart, and did whatever good they could do to others. Further they were true devotees. Surrender to God was their goal. They prayed to God for cleansing their sins and worshipped Him to remove the illusions which stood as the screen between man and God. In their behaviour, they remained humble and considered every man and woman as bro-

ther or sister. They bore in their heart a hankering for seeing the lotus feet of the Lord. They remained eager to contact the devotees and enjoyed getting a chance to serve them. To them a devotee was none but Shiva Himself. Service of every kind, even sweeping the premises of temples, gave them the highest pleasure.

A thorough study of *Periya Puranam* will convince one that caste, colour, vegetarianism or non-vegetarianism, are no obstacles on the path of God. For attaining liberation or mukti, Love of God and of His creation is the only path.

It must, however, be remembered that this love develops step by step by constant effort and hankering of the heart. To attain the final stage, it may take several births.

PRACTICAL HINTS FOR SPIRITUAL LIFE

The Teacher

It is a mysterious law of nature that as soon as the field is ready the seed must come, as soon as the soul wants religion, the transmitter of religious force must come. "The seeking sinner meeteth the seeking Saviour." When the power that attracts in the receiving soul is full and ripe, the power which answers to that attraction must come.

Who wants? That is the question. We get whatever we want—that is an old, old law. He who wants, gets.

So the teacher must be able to know the spirit of the scriptures. The network of words is like a huge forest in which the human mind loses itself and finds no way out.

For the knowledge that the physical science requires is simply intellectual and depends on intellectual strength; a man can have in such a case a gigantic intellectual power without the least development of his soul. But in the spiritual sciences it is impossible from first to last that there can be any spiritual light in that soul which is impure. What can such a soul teach? It knows nothing. Spiritual truth is purity. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God". In that one sentence is the gist of all religions.

When spiritual forces are transmitted from the teacher to the taught, they can only be con-

veyed through the medium of love; there is no other medium that can convey them. Any other motive, such as gain or name, would immediately destroy the conveying medium; therefore all must be done through love.

This eye-opener of religion is the teacher.

Some power, real and tangible, goes out from the teacher and begins to grow in the mind of the taught.

There is nothing higher and holier than the knowledge which comes to the soul transmitted by a spiritual teacher.

Beyond these is another set of teachers, the Christs of the world. These Teachers of all teachers represent God Himself in the form of Man. They are much higher; they can transmit spirituality with a touch, with a wish, which makes even the lowest and most degraded characters saints in one second. Do you not read of how they used to do these things? They are not the teachers about whom I was speaking; they are the Teachers of all teachers, the greatest manifestations of God to man; we cannot see God except through them. We cannot help worshipping them, and they are the only beings we are bound to worship.

Swami Vivekananda

(Compiled from *Bhakti Yoga*)

THE MOTHERHOOD OF GOD

Advanced proofs of a pamphlet shortly to be issued by the Prabuddha Bharata Press, being the full report of a lecture delivered in New York on the 8th January 1899, by the Swami Abhedananda.

But the more we comprehend God as immanent and resident in Nature, the more clearly we understand that God is our Father as well as Mother.

When we see that Nature or the feminine principle is inseparable from the Being or the masculine element, when we realise that Nature is not passive and powerless but the Divine energy, then we understand that God is one stupendous whole in whom exist both the masculine and feminine principles. Then we no longer separate Nature from God but on the other hand we recognise Nature as a part of the manifested Divine energy.

The tendency of modern science is towards that end. The doctrine of evolution, correlation of forces, persistence of energy, all these clearly prove that the phenomena of the whole universe and the various forces of the external and internal world are but the expressions of one eternal energy. The theory of evolution explains only the mode in which that eternal energy produces this phenomenal universe. Science has disproved the old theory of creation out of nothing, through the fiat of an extra-cosmic God; on the other hand she has shown that something can never come out of nothing. Science teaches that the universe existed before creation in a potential state in that energy and gradually through the process of evolution the whole potentiality has become kinetic or actual. That eternal energy is not an unintelligent energy; but she is intelligent. Wherever we cast our eyes either in the external or internal world, we find the expression not of a fortuitous or accidental combination of matter and mechanical forces, but of regular laws guided by definite purpose. This universe is not a chaos but a cosmos, one harmonious whole. It is not an aimless chain of changes which we call evolution but there is some orderly hidden purpose at every step of evolution. Therefore that energy is intelligent. We may call this self-existing, intelligent, eternal cosmic energy, the Mother of the universe. She is the source of infinite forces and infinite phenomena. This eternal energy is called

in Sanskrit, Prakriti, Latin Procreatrix, the creative power of the universe.

Tvam para Prakritih sakshat Brahmanah
paramatmanah,
Tvatto jalam jagat sarvam tvam jagat janani
Shive.

"Thou art the Para Prakriti or the divine energy of the Supreme Being. Of Thee is born every thing of the universe, therefore Thou art the Mother of the universe." All, all the forces of Nature are but the manifestations of this Divine energy. She is called all powerful. Wherever there is the expression of any force or power in the universe, there is the manifestation of the eternal Prakriti or the Divine Mother. It is more appropriate to call that energy mother than father, because like a mother, that energy holds within her the germ of the phenomenal universe before creation, develops and sustains it, projects it on space and preserves it when it is born. She is the Mother of the trinity, creator, preserver and destroyer. She is the source of all activity. She is the Shakti i.e. force in action. A creator, when deprived of his creative power, is no longer the creator. As the creative power is one of the expressions of that eternal energy, so the creator or Brahma is looked upon by the Hindus as the child of the universal Divine Mother: so is the preserver and the destroyer. The Hindus have understood this eternal energy as the Mother of the universe and have worshipped Her from prehistoric time; from the Vedic period. Here you must remember that this divine energy is not the same as the powerless and passive nature, which was rejected and ignored by the Hebrews and the Christians. You must not mistake this worship of the Divine Mother for Nature-worship. In the Rig Veda the most ancient of the Hindu Scriptures we read:—The Mother Divine says: "I am the Queen of the universe, the giver of all wealth and fruits of works. I am intelligent and omniscient. Although I am one, by My powers I appear as manifold. I cause war for protecting men, I kill the enemy and bring peace on earth. I stretch out heaven and earth. I have produced the Father. As the wind blows by itself, so I produce all phenomena by My own will. I am independent and responsible to none. I am beyond the sky, beyond this earth, My glory is the phenomenal universe; such as I by My power."