

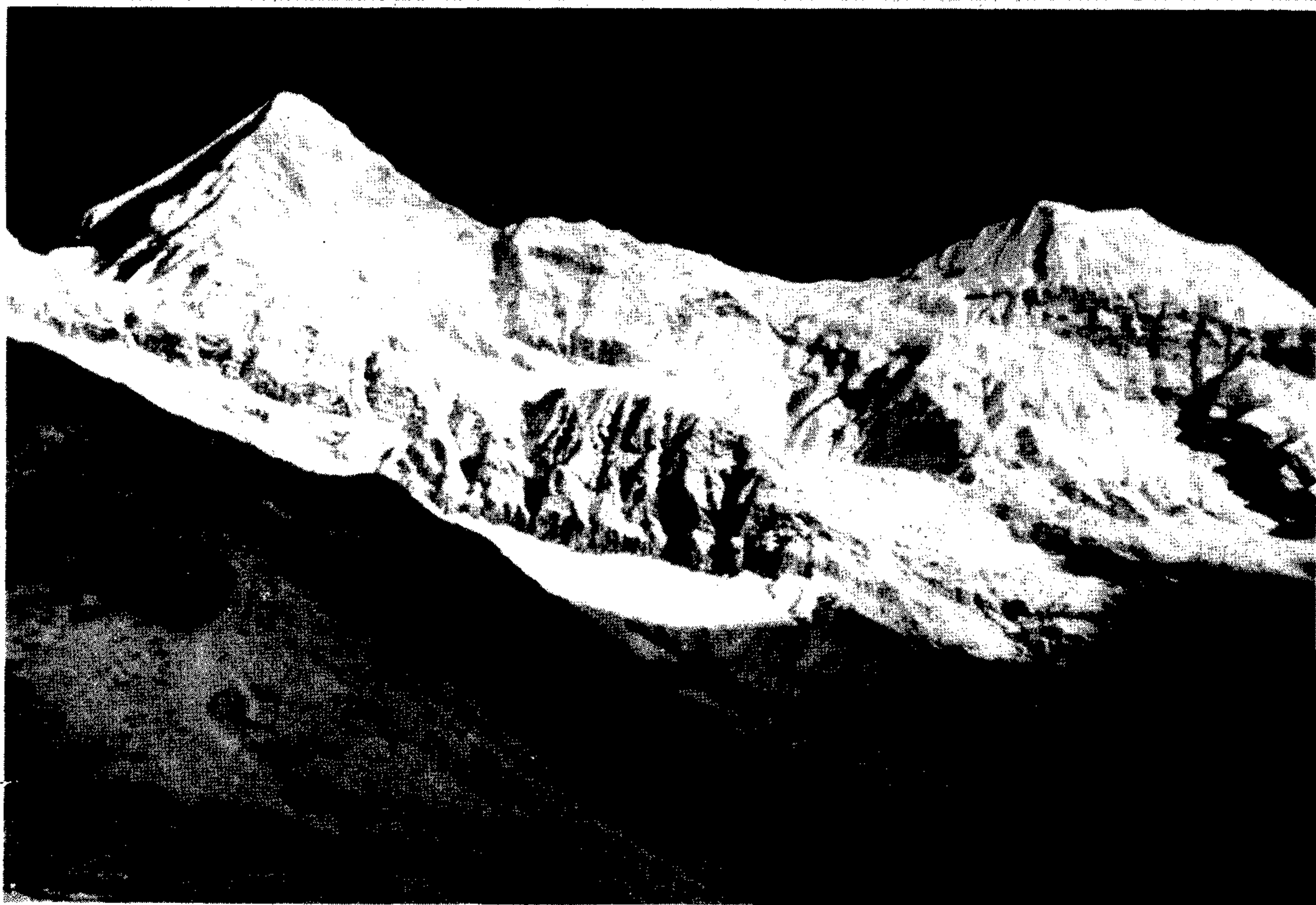
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No. 11

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

SRI RAMAKRISHNA REMINISCES

'During my boyhood God manifested Himself in me. I was then eleven years old. One day, while I was walking across a paddy-field, I saw something. Later on I came to know from people that I had been unconscious, and my body totally motionless. Since that day I have been an altogether different man. I began to see another person within me. When I used to conduct the worship in the temple, my hand, instead of going toward the Deity, would very often come toward my head, and I would put flowers there. A young man who was then staying with me did not dare approach me. He would say: "I see a light on your face. I am afraid to come very near you."

'You know I am a fool. I know nothing. Then who is it that says all these things? I say to the Divine Mother: "O Mother, I am the machine and Thou art the Operator. I am the house and Thou art the Indweller...."'

*

'I vowed to the Divine Mother that I would kill myself if I did not see God. I said to Her: "O Mother, I am a fool. Please teach me what is contained in the Vedas, the Puranas, the Tantras, and the other scriptures." The Mother said to me, "The essence of the Vedanta is that Brahman alone is real and the world illusory."... After the realization of God, how far below lie the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Purana, the Tantra!'

*

'I used to roam at night in the streets, all alone, and cry to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, blight with Thy thunderbolt my desire to reason!".... Everything can be achieved through bhakti alone.... Can a man blessed with the grace of God ever lack Knowledge? At Kamarpukur I have seen grain-dealers measuring paddy. As one heap is measured away another heap is pushed forward to be measured. The Mother supplies the devotees with the "heap" of Knowledge.

'After attaining God, one looks on a pundit as mere straw and dust. Padmalochan said to me: "What does it matter if I accompany you to a meet-

ing at the house of a fisherman? ¹ With you I can dine even at the house of a pariah.”

‘Weeping, I prayed to the Mother: “O Mother, reveal to me what is contained in the Vedas and the Vedanta. Reveal to me what is in the Purana and the Tantra.” One by one She has revealed all these to me.’

*

‘During my boyhood I could understand what the sadhus read at the Laha’s house at Kamarpukur, although I would miss a little here and there. If a pundit speaks to me in Sanskrit I can follow him, but I cannot speak it myself.’

*

‘Ah, it is true I did not study myself but I have heard much. I remember all that. I have heard the Vedas, the Vedanta, the Darsanas [philosophies] and the Puranas from good and reliable scholars. After hearing them and knowing what they contained, I made a garland of them all (the books) by means of a string and put it round my neck, offered it at the lotus feet of the Mother, saying, “Here are all Thy scriptures, Puranas and the like. Please grant me pure devotion.”’

*

‘When I renounced everything with an offering of flowers at the Lotus Feet of the Mother, I said: “Here, Mother, take Thy holiness, take Thy unholiness. Here, Mother, take Thy dharma, take Thy adharma. Here, Mother, take Thy sin, take Thy virtue. Here, Mother, take Thy good, take Thy evil. And give me only pure bhakti.” But I could not say, “Here, Mother, take Thy truth, take Thy falsehood.”’

*

‘At the time of performing Sandhya and worship, I used to think, according to scriptural prescription, that the Papa-purusha [personification of evil] within has been burnt up. Who knew then that there was actually a Papa-purusha within the body and that it could be actually burnt and destroyed? A burning sensation came on the body from the beginning of the Sadhana. I thought, “What is this disease?” It increased by degrees and became unbearable. Various kinds of oils prescribed by physicians were used; but it could by no means be alleviated. One day, while I was sitting under the Panchavati, I saw that a jet-black person with red eyes and hideous appearance came reeling, as if drunk, out of this (showing his own body) and walked before me. I saw again another person of placid mien, in ochre-coloured dress with a trident in his hand similarly come out from the body, attack vehemently the other, and kill him. The burning sensation in the body decreased for a short time after I had that vision. I suffered from that burning sensation continually for six months before the Papa-purusha was burnt up.’

¹ Reference to Mathur Babu, who was of the fisherman caste. The orthodox Brahmin will not enter the house of one from such a caste.

DEATH AND ITS CONQUEST

EDITORIAL

I

Fear, classed as a basic human instinct by William James, and as an emotion by William McDougall, relentlessly rules modern man's life as it did our Cro-Magnon ancestor's. Of all the fears swaying human life, the fear of death is unquestionably the greatest. So death has been called the 'king of terrors'. Man of course has been a fighter and a challenger of nature down the millenniums. He has also many conquests to his credit. He has not passively submitted to the dominance of death. If the ancient Pharaohs tried to triumph over physical destruction by building the amazing pyramids and practising embalming, modern man has tried—and is trying vigorously too—to outwit death through biomedical researches and life-prolonging drugs and apparatuses. Experts in the field are talking of 'slowing down' man's biological 'clock' or 'manipulating' his genes through genetic engineering to bestow on him the longevity of a Methuselah. However, either now or in the foreseeable future, man's hopes of considerably beating back death, or winning over it, are extremely bleak.

Decay, death, and disintegration are essential aspects of the inexorable temporal phenomenon whose characteristics are change and transience. As long as time remains a vital dimension of the physical and mental cosmos, death remains inevitable. Furthermore biologists point out that unicellular organisms, which reproduce asexually, are immortal as physical individuals. 'All of a sudden, with sexual generation, we see the appearance of an entirely new and unforeseen cyclical phenomenon: the birth and death of the individual.'¹ If man is happy with and proud of his sexu-

¹Lecomte du Noüy: *Human Destiny* (The New American Library of World Literature, Inc., New York, 1956), p. 52.

ONWARD FOR EVER!

Through education comes faith in one's own Self and through faith in one's own Self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant. In New York I used to observe the Irish colonists come—down-trodden, haggard-looking, destitute of all possessions at home, penniless, and wooden-headed—with their only belongings, a stick and a bundle of rags hanging at the end of it, fright in their steps, alarm in their eyes. A different spectacle in six months—the man walks upright, his attire is changed! In his eyes and steps there is no more sign of fright. What is the cause? Our Vedanta says that that Irishman was kept surrounded by contempt in his own country—the whole of nature was telling him with one voice, 'Pat, you have no more hope, you are born a slave and will remain so.' Having been thus told from his birth, Pat believed in it and hypnotized himself into believing he was very low, and the Brahman in him shrank. While no sooner had he landed in America than he heard the shout going up on all sides, 'Pat, you are a man as we are, it is man who has done all, a man like you and me can do everything: have courage!' Pat raised his head and saw that it was so, the Brahman within woke up. Nature herself spoke, as it were, 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.'

Sri K. M. S.

ality and cerebro-spinal equipment, he should grasp the fact that the evolutionary process has endowed him with these gifts at the cost of the physical immortality of the primitive bacterium and amoeba. 'Life would betray us', remarked Maurice Maeterlinck, 'if it could not bring us death.' Life and death are two aspects of the same phenomenon, whose real nature is unknown to our ordinary minds. If we accept the first, the second inevitably follows, like the shadow its physical object. Seeking immortality of the physical body is a pitiable puerilism which is born of gross and crippling materialism.

Man's extreme dread of death stems from two basic sources: first, an inordinate clinging to and thirst for life; second, an utter ignorance about the nature of death. The former is an instinctual inheritance from his bestial ancestors and the latter an unpardonable childishness which he refuses to outgrow. Death, as it is generally understood, is the cessation of all vital bodily functions, such as circulation and respiration, followed by rigor mortis and putrefaction. In the eyes of the immediate survivors who consign the remains to fire or sepulchre, that is the 'end' of that human being. The nature of death as experienced by the dying, the subjective view of the experience, is unknown to others. Lazaruses are more legendary than real. And real-life 'Lazaruses' either have nothing to report, or report things which may not be different from popular superstition about the after-life, and which in any case are received with head-shaking scepticism. Referring to the dead, Maurice Maeterlinck once remarked wryly but with plausibility, 'Whatever they have been in their lives, they will still be in their death.'

Self-consciousness, which distinguishes man from almost all the higher animals, forms the focus of his sense of personality, and this strengthens the clinging to life in

most humans. Though we involuntarily lose this self-consciousness nightly in our sleeping hours—and even during the waking hours when we become emotionally or intellectually absorbed in something—, we do not realize that *self-ness* and *consciousness* do not in fact concern the gross physical body, but pertain to something deeper and subtler. H. G. Wells, the great English scientist and social philosopher, has these penetrative remarks to make about the conscious human self, towards the end of the monumental work in which he collaborated with Julian Huxley and G. P. Wells:

'And yet this conscious human self dies nightly in sleep, and we cannot trace the stages by which in its beginnings it crept to an awareness of its own existence....

'Some of the best things in our lives are the least individual things. When a man is exalted by high aims, possessed by some exquisite efforts or occupied by profound study, he becomes altogether self-forgetful. In moments of great passion he "forgets himself". These are no metaphors. *The conscious self is not the whole of man* (italics not the author's).

'Personality may be only one of Nature's methods, a convenient provisional delusion of considerable strategic value.'²

But from a higher view-point, this very self-awareness is axiomatic evidence for the deathlessness of man. For, who can conceive of his own destruction? Try howsoever we may, we are left with an inextinguishable flame of witness-consciousness, looking upon our own imaginary destruction. As Swami Vivekananda once observed:

'It requires no priests or spirits or ghosts to tell us that we shall not die. It is the most self-evident of all truths. No man can imagine his own annihilation.'

²H. G. Wells, *et. al.*: *The Science of Life* (Cassell and Company Ltd., London, 1931), p. 852.

The idea of immortality is inherent in man.³

Readers who are acquainted with the great Ramana Maharshi's life may recall here the transforming incident in the Saint's life when he, as a young boy, was suddenly seized with the fear of death. He however did not succumb to it, but straightway proceeded to dramatize his own death scene. But then, he became convinced once for all that he was the immortal Ātman, the indestructible Witness of all passing phenomena, internal and external. He soon left his home and retired to a cave in Tiruvannamalai, South India, and became absorbed in deep meditation, subsequently attaining the highest illumination.

At death, of course, the body, which is the only grossly perceptible link that a man has with his near and dear ones and with the environment, disintegrates and perishes. Does it mean that that human being is annihilated? No, not at all. Because, as man did not begin in the womb, he will not end with the tomb. Strict logical reasoning demands a prenatal existence for man and a post-mortem survival. However, what existed before birth and persists after death is not the physical body. A well-known physiological fact is that the physical body is completely renewed excepting possibly the neuro-cerebral cells—through the process of cell-destruction and production, in a slow, imperceptible but thorough-going cyclical process extending over a near-seven-year period. Though new nerve-cells are not produced, a definite percentage of them keeps on dying in the process of ageing. If our individuality or personal identity were centred entirely in the body, we would be dead and destroyed many times over during a normal human lifetime. This, nevertheless, is utterly repudiated by our inner

experience, by the persistence of personal identity practically throughout life. Psychologists may call it 'ego', but a deeper and more fundamental insight available through religion asserts that it is the spiritual self in man. It is in any case clear that essential man is a non-physical entity whose tenancy in a transient body is an integral part of a beginningless career which does not end with the death of the body. As Victor Hugo says with justifiable assurance :

'When I go down to the grave, I can say like so many others, "I have finished my day's work", but I cannot say, "I have finished my life". I shall begin again next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare, I close on the twilight to open with the dawn.'

As Muhammad once declared, 'The grave is the first stage of the journey into eternity.' And we may add that it is good to remember that every individual is slowly but surely moving towards his spiritual destiny, and every death is another chance to resume afresh the march.

II

Corresponding to the several planes or levels of man's life here on earth, one may say man has several 'bodies'. He lives for many hours of the day on the physical plane, subject to physiological laws, fulfilling his primary urges and needs. He has hunger and thirst, and so has to eat and drink. He has the sex-urge and parental instincts, and so seeks a mate and brings up a family. He has to fight, struggle and compete with fellow-beings for self and family-preservation. He has to guard against nature's harshness and the hazards of accidents and disease. Man does all these while identified with his physical body, since these are confined largely to the gross physical plane. Vedānta calls this

³ *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P.), Vol. V (1959), p. 270.

gross body the *annamaya-kośa* or sheath of food.

At the same time man has a mental aspect to his life. He has the instinct of curiosity and so wants to know the nature of his environment. He thinks, studies the outside world, and arrives at certain conclusions. He keeps on learning and acquiring experiences. Our science and technology, discoveries and inventions, and through these some amount of mastery over nature, are all due to our intellect and mind. In fact, a modern man with some degree of culture finds greater satisfaction in his intellectual life than in the physical. Vedānta identifies this aspect of man's psycho-neural life with two imperceptibly subtle sheaths, namely, *manomaya-* and *vijñānamaya-kośas*, mental and intellectual sheaths.

The activities of all these three sheaths, in the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep, are powered by the *prāṇamaya-kośa*, the vital sheath.

Vedānta also speaks of a still deeper and subtler sheath—the *ānandamaya-kośa*, or sheath of bliss—whose activities are manifest in the emotions such as love and altruism in the waking state, and in the experience of joy in the deep sleep state. Furthermore, it is this sheath with the purified intellect that experiences states of divine emotions and ecstasies. Finally, and deepest and subtlest of all, is the inmost spiritual self of man, the Witness of all these sheaths and their activities.

Vedānta says that the 'subtle body' is comprised of the intellectual, mental and vital sheaths. This subtle body is not destructible by gross forces, and at the death of the physical body, the spirit, clothed with the subtle body, leaves the gross body behind to take up another suitable one. The subtle body, we should remember, carries with it all the impressions of actions and experiences done and gained in the whole lifetime and even those before. Death, like

sleep, is only a hiatus in conscious life, and the spirit begins its new life in another body with all the maturity it has earned in its previous lives.

About the theme of death, Śrī Kṛṣṇa says in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that the spiritual essence in man leaves behind a decayed body to take up its abode in a fresh one, just as a man discards worn-out clothes and puts on new ones. Death, according to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is only a change of state, similar to our changes from childhood through adolescence, adulthood, middle age, to old age. Just as a child or an adolescent should not regret leaving behind his or her particular stage and growing into the next, so at death no one should grieve to leave the physical body. But in actual life, it is found that death is considered an inevitable calamity by the vast majority. Most of these regard even the arrivals at 'middle age' or 'old age' as regrettable but unavoidable events. Psychologists dealing with persons facing such transitional periods say that men and women need 'education' to face and accept these life-stages.⁴ Not only is it necessary to face them, but it is still more necessary to avail oneself of them for one's spiritual growth and maturity. We should learn to leave behind complexes of adolescence and youth—refuse to be 'eternal adolescents'—and learn to grow, to develop the nobler aspects of human personality, the most important of them being the spiritual, throughout life. This kind of conscious, determined, steady effort at growth helps prepare a person to face death. Since the encounter is not unanticipated and there has been some preparation for it, death will not greatly frighten him. He will show a degree of courage and calmness which will be rare in others. As the author of the *Imitation of Christ* advises:

⁴ vide C. G. Jung: *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd. London, 1947), Chapter on 'The Stages of Life'.

'Thou oughtest so to order thyself in all thy thoughts and actions, as if today thou wert about to die.'

'If thou hadst a good conscience, thou wouldst not greatly fear death.'

'It were better for thee to avoid sin than to escape death.'

'If to die be accounted dreadful, to live long may perhaps prove more dangerous.'

'Strive now so to live, that in the hour of thy death thou mayest be able to rejoice rather than fear.'

'Learn now to die to the world, that thou mayest then begin to live in Christ.'⁵

These words of the author of the *Imitation* echo what the Teacher of the *Bhagavad-gītā* advises. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, pointing out the strict connection between the thoughts of a dying man and his after-life course, says:

'Whoso, at the time of death, leaves his body remembering Me alone and goes forth—he attains My Being; concerning this there is no doubt.

For whatever object a man thinks of at the final moment, when he leaves his body—that alone does he attain, O son of Kunti, being ever absorbed in the thought thereof.

Therefore at all times constantly remember Me and fight. With your mind and intellect absorbed in Me, you will surely come to Me.'⁶

By the use of the terms, 'at all times' and 'constantly', Śrī Kṛṣṇa implies a practice and discipline covering one's whole life. Only when the thought of God becomes an unconscious as well as conscious, persistent mental stream, will it be possible for the mind to be full of God at the time of death. By the mention of both mind and intellect, Śrī Kṛṣṇa emphasizes the need to cultivate the 'subtle body', including *manomaya-* and *vijñānamaya-kośas*, which becomes the vehicle for the spirit to migrate to its next abode. There are some people who read these and similar verses in the *Gītā* and

begin to argue, 'Oh, after all one has only to remember God at the last moments of life. Why bother about Him now?' Such arguments are naive and irresponsible, for the mind can be expected to do a thing spontaneously only when it has been previously drilled and trained. This rule is especially applicable to thoughts in the dying moments, when all worldly attachments conspire to drag the mind down to the body.

III

In addition to its direct meaning, death can also well be interpreted and understood in derived and metaphorical senses. When, for instance, someone remains insensitive or irresponsive to something, we say that that person is 'dead' to so-and-so. Since growth and assimilation are signs of life, where these are absent that person or situation can be considered as dead. When, again, something may cause death, that thing is itself called 'death'. Spiritual teachers, saints and scriptures have used the word 'death' in these secondary and figurative senses, and warned spiritual aspirants to be alert regarding these ways of dying. On the other hand, 'dying to oneself' or the destruction of the little ego or individuality is urged.

'Inadvertence surely is death, I declare', says Sanatsujāta, a sage, to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the father of the Kauravas, in a dialogue abounding in wisdom. An aspirant on the path of God-realization is constantly exposed to dangerous temptations and backslidings. Inadvertence makes him, spiritually speaking, 'accident-prone'. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty—of spiritual liberty too. The main characteristic of inadvertence is to remain dissociated from God-consciousness. This leads one into materialistic entanglements which completely eclipse the source of spiritual light and security. Therefore Sanatsujāta declares the converse of this assertion: 'Immortality is being advertent always.' Of course, being

⁵ *The Imitation of Christ*, I. xxiii.

⁶ *Bhagavad-gītā*, VIII. 5-7.

advertent to one's spiritual nature, of being attuned to God.

In the *Dhammapadam*, the Buddha also teaches that heedlessness is death. He intended the teaching to make his followers ever alert to walking the path and seeking shelter in the dharma. He says:

'Heedfulness is the path to the Deathless (or nirvana); negligence is the path of death. The heedful do not die; the negligent are like unto the dead.'

Śaṅkara also warns seekers of Reality to beware of carelessness while being devoted to the ideal. He says, 'One should never be careless in one's steadfastness to Brahman.'⁷ Incidentally he refers to Sanatsu-jāta's utterance quoted above. Śaṅkara here compares the inadvertent mind, straying from the ideal of Brahman, to the play-ball dropped carelessly at the head of a flight of steps. Such an inadvertent mind may end in its own ruin. So he says:

'There is no greater danger for the wise seeker than carelessness about his own real nature. From this comes delusion, thence egoism; this is followed by bondage, and then comes misery.'⁸

Swami Vivekananda was often telling his followers and countrymen, 'All expansion is life, all contraction is death.'⁹ This statement has very profound implications. As growth is a sign of life, ceasing to grow is going towards death. While expansion of oneself to include every living being in the world is a sure sign of spiritual growth, concentrating all one's interests on one's own welfare is the sign of spiritual decay and death. There is often found a tendency among spiritual aspirants to narrow down their concern and sympathy to their own little circle and to their dear self with a view to avoiding involvements and distract-

tions. If the mind that is so 'narrowed' is turned entirely to God, then that 'contraction' is right and significant. For it is really 'expansion'—God being the infinite Reality. But if the gathered mind is devoted to one's own body and ego, then it is contraction, which will prove spiritually harmful. Self-expansion which covers the whole universe is real *life*, because it is the achieving of the vision of One in the many. The universe as a whole can never die, and so such a person becomes immortal. Swami Vivekananda says:

'There can be no physical death for us and no mental death, when we see that all is one. All bodies are mine; so even body is eternal, because the tree, the animal, the sun, the universe itself is my body; then how can it die? Every mind, every thought is mine; then how can death come? The Self is never born and never dies. When we realize this, all doubts vanish. "I am, I know, I love", these can never be doubted. There is no hunger, for all that is eaten is eaten by me. If a hair falls out we do not think we die; so if one body dies, it is but a hair falling.'¹⁰

Saints and mystics advise spiritual aspirants to 'die' first, and then aspire for the Kingdom of God. Here of course they mean a figurative death and not a literal physical disintegration. Dying to oneself, destroying selfishness and desire, qualifies one to enter the Kingdom of God which is eternity. 'The kingdom of God is for none', asserts the German mystic Meister Eckhart, 'but the thoroughly dead.' 'Who dies not before dying', says Abraham von Frankenberg, disciple, editor and biographer of Jacob Boehme, 'perishes when he dies.' This, again, seems to be one explanation of Christ's saying, 'He that saveth his life shall lose it.'

As the life of the senses and carnality narrows one's mental horizon to this mate-

⁷ *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, 321.

⁸ *ibid.*, 322.

⁹ *The Complete Works*, Vol VI (1963), p. 320.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, Vol. VII (1958), pp. 93-4.

rial world, life of enjoyment and fulfilment of desires are considered by saints as death. 'To be carnally minded is Death', declares St. Paul. 'Death lies in the senses', teaches Swami Vivekananda. 'Life on the plane of the spirit is the only life; life on any other plane is mere death.'¹¹

IV

All great religions of the world teach emphatically that death can and should be conquered. They all point out various effective ways of triumphing over death. Because religions have discovered the immortal in man and the universe, in the microcosm and the macrocosm. Neither medical science nor psychology has the final answer to death. Because their concern is either the body or mind, both of which are material—differing only in levels and degree of materiality—and not spirit. Maurice Maeterlinck observes rather cynically though with a great amount of truth: 'Great physicians, great surgeons believe they are cheating death, but do not cheat her any more than they cheat fate, which is only one of her names. They cheat only their patients.'¹² Sigmund Freud, on whose contributions modern western psychology has leaned heavily, wrote a book called *The Future of an Illusion* to prove that God was only a magnified image of human parents that man builds up for obtaining gratification and security which he believes parents give him during childhood. But this God-idea, said Freud, was only a fantasy. He advocated that man should dispense with such an illusion, and learn to endure life, however hard it may be, without it. But what about facing death? Freud's own death gave no positive hints about it; it was in fact a pathetic event as

depicted by his physician and friend Max Schur. Taking the hand of the physician at his bedside, Freud said, 'My dear Schur, you certainly remember our first talk. You promised me then not to forsake me when my time comes. Now it is nothing but torture and makes no sense any more.' Schur reassured his patient that he had not forgotten. He further says in his book, *Freud: Living and Dying*: 'When he was again in agony, I gave him a hypodermic of two centigrams of morphine. He soon felt relief and fell into a peaceful sleep. I repeated this dose after about twelve hours. He lapsed into a coma and did not wake up again.' Yet had he cherished the 'illusion' of religion, Freud would have borne the torture manfully and serenely because it would make great 'sense' even to suffer the agonies of death when one has the strength of religious conviction. A person with that glowing faith and conviction on his death-bed stretches his hand to hold that of God and not the hand of a physician, who is a mere mortal like himself.

Religion has solved the mystery of man, and incidentally of life and death. When man knows the truth as revealed by religion, that he is a part and parcel of God—or identical with Him, as the non-dualistic school of Vedānta teaches—, then he ceases to cling to life or to dread death. Without knowing the 'eternal relation of the eternal soul with the eternal God', death is invincible. In one of the Upaniṣads¹³ there are stirring poetic utterances which declare that the knowledge of God is the only way to immortality. Swami Vivekananda was very fond of these verses and has very effectively used them in his famous paper on Hinduism presented at the Chicago Parliament of Religions. Towards the end of his brilliant exposition of Māyā in 'Māyā and Illusion'—a lecture delivered in

¹¹ *ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 267.

¹² Maeterlinck: *The Great Beyond* (Philosophical Library, Inc., New York, 1947), pp. 12-13.

¹³ *Svetāśvatara-upaniṣad*, II. 5; III. 8.

London—he again quotes those Upaniṣadic verses, envisioning, so to say, the scene of their first utterance :

‘I see before me, as it were, that in some of those forest retreats this question [of the soul’s bondage and freedom] is being discussed by those ancient sages of India; and in one of them, where even the oldest and the holiest fail to reach the solution, a young man stands up in the midst of them, and declares, “Hear, ye children of immortality, hear, ye who live in the highest places, I have found the way. By knowing Him who is beyond darkness we can go beyond death.”’¹⁴

In Sri Ramakrishna, whom his chief disciple declared to be ‘the fulfilment of Indian sages, the sage for the time’, we find this fact re-stated and re-demonstrated. He struggled hard to realize his eternal relationship with God, achieved that knowledge, dwelt blissfully in God-consciousness, and shared that knowledge and bliss with others for the rest of his life. He faced heroically a prolonged, painful cancer, and finally gave up the body in an act of will. He used to say that a human being is helpless before the events of birth, marriage, and death—a person cannot choose any of them : they are forced upon him or her by destiny. Readers of Sri Ramakrishna’s biography know that he chose all of them and thus proved the human potentiality to conquer destiny, to triumph over birth and death.

But here we are concerned with his last, protracted illness, how he endured it cheerfully even during its terminal stages, and how he departed from this world joyfully. People who visited him during those final months never felt that they were entering the room of a patient suffering from a fatal disease—such was the blissful atmosphere in that room ! To enquirers about the state of his illness, he used to smilingly reply,

‘Let the body and its pain take care of each other ; thou, my mind, be always in bliss!’ When Pandit Sasadhara said to him, citing scriptural authority, that a spiritual soul like him could cure his illness through his own will power, he exclaimed: ‘You call yourself a pandit, and you can make such a suggestion ! This mind has been given up to God once and for all. How can I withdraw it from Him and make it dwell on this worthless body?’ And he did not do any such thing. One day, Hari (later Swami Turiyananda) went near the Master’s bed and enquired how he was. Sri Ramakrishna began to complain about the great pain and burning sensation in the throat. But Hari felt differently. He later said: ‘The more the Master complained, the clearer it was to me that I was being tested. Finally I couldn’t control myself any longer. I burst out, “Sir—whatever you may say, I see you only as an infinite ocean of bliss!” At this, the Master said to himself with a smile, “This rascal has found me out!”’ One of his biographers graphically describes his *mahāsamādhi*, or the final samādhi from which he never came back to earthly consciousness:

‘Then, suddenly, a thrill passed through Ramakrishna’s body, making its hair stand on end. The eyes became fixed on the tip of his nose. The face smiled. Ramakrishna was in samādhi. This happened at two minutes after one o’clock, early on Monday morning, August 16, 1886.’¹⁵

May the examples and teachings of the sages and saints of all climes and races inspire and guide our lives in such a way that we can declare, as they did, with our dying breath: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is thy sting. O Grave, where is thy victory?’¹⁶

¹⁵ Christopher Isherwood : *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (Methuen & Co., Ltd., London, 1965), p. 304.

¹⁶ I *Corinthians*, XV. 54-5.

¹⁴ *The Works*, Vol. II (1963), pp. 103-4.

LETTERS OF A SAINT

57, Ramkanta Basu Street
[Calcutta]
16.10.1918

Dear B——,

Accept my blessings and loving embraces for Vijaya. I was very sorry to know of your illness. I hope you are now completely cured and in good health. I felt greatly concerned to hear that Dr. Basu was ill. May he be rid of the illness and may he recover his former state of health by the Lord's grace—this is my sincere prayer to Him. You must have felt sorry that you could not come here during the time of the [Durgā] Pūjā. But we were pleased to know that you were engaged in nursing Dr. Basu. What worry for you? 'I eat and drink and go about merrily. The Mother is there and all responsibility is Hers.' Professor Geddes is a high-minded person; the opinion he has expressed after reading Swamiji's [Vivekananda's] books is very appropriate. If he, though greatly lacking time, can translate it [Swamiji's teaching] into action then there is no doubt that a special purpose will have been served. But will it happen?

I have read your book and almost finished it. My health is comparatively better. The Mother's worship has been celebrated with great *eclat* this time at the Kasi Advaita Ashrama. If Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda] could have gone there, the degree of joy surely would have been much more; but due to his sudden illness that was not to be. Now he is well and it seems that he may be able to go to Kasi before Kālī-pūjā. Even now Maharaj is weak and is under restrictions of diet.

It will be for the good if the War [presumably, First World War] ends, but will it happen? If you look at the signs, that hope seems to be only a remote possibility. It will be as the Mother wills. 'Without Her will not even a leaf moves'—this is the truth. We may or may not understand the realizations of the saints, but truth cannot be denied. Whatsoever way the Mother ordains, that is for the good. Sri Sri Ma [the Holy Mother], Sarat Maharaj [Swami Saradananda], and others of that house [Udbodhan] are all well. Only... K—— is suffering a little owing to ear trouble. In the [Belur] Math the Pūjā alone was done. Owing to the illness of Maharaj, the image [of Durgā] was not brought; but as the worship was done in the consecrated 'pitcher', there was no deficiency of joy. Ram Babu and others in this house are all well. S——, P—— and all others convey their Vijaya prostrations, love, and embraces. Accept my good wishes and love.

Ever your well-wisher,
SRI TURIYANANDA

WHAT MAKES A MAN?

SWAMI ASHOKANANDA

I

Under this title I wish to discuss the constitution of a human being—how he originated and how he came to be what he is. Certain things about him are obvious; other things are buried in profound mystery. However, I shall try to give you the main facts about the origin of man and his nature as taught by our Vedāntic philosophy.

I think we can begin profitably with some general statements. As I have often pointed out, if you do not want to be too logical or superfine about it, you can say that man is made up of three entities: really speaking and in essence, he is Spirit; then there is the mind; and there is this body. Of course, the question at once arises how these three dissimilar entities can be combined; we recognize that there is a sort of opposition among them. Various philosophical efforts have been made to derive matter from mind and mind from Spirit, or, conversely, Spirit from mind and mind from matter, so that a basic unity could somehow be established among them; but I do not think these efforts have succeeded. However that may be, for the sake of our discussion let us say that we are made up of body, mind, and Spirit. Vedānta must explain these three entities if it is to explain what makes a man.

Now, before I give you the Vedāntic explanation of these entities, I would like to discuss them a little. Let us start with our physical being, and let us consider it in two aspects. We know that in one respect this body originates from our parents and inherits certain physical characteristics from them. In another respect, it is a part of a vast world of matter and dependent upon that world. For instance, if atmospheric pressure increases, my body will be crush-

ed; or if the weight of the air decreases, then my body will just burst. Air pressure, temperature, oxygen—all these things are necessary in their present condition for my body's existence. Although it might sound a bit theoretical, it is true to say that every physical particle exists in relation to the rest of the world of matter; if there is any major change anywhere else, then this little particle is also bound to change. So in order to explain my physical being, I shall have to explain the origin of this universe and then think of my body as a part of it.

I could also think in these two respects of my mind. Where does the mind come from? Does it, like the body, originate from the parents? Yes, you can think that some characteristics of the mind are derived from the parents, because there are indeed sometimes startling similarities between parent and child. However, while there may be some similarities, there are many things in an individual that cannot be traced to his ancestors. How, for instance, do you explain a Shakespeare from such commonplace parents? Or, if everything is inherited, how can you say there is any possibility of progress? Everyone would be a repetition: parents would be repeated in their children; children would repeat themselves in *their* children; there would be no change for anyone. If, on the other hand, you think that in every person infinite possibilities are latent and that the possibilities in the parent can become actualities in the children, then you must admit that matter has the potentiality of infinite Spirit, of infinite mind, and of course of infinite matter. Well, if you want to take that view of matter I have no objection, but you should be more careful about your language. If you think of matter as something that has infi-

nite Spirit and infinite intellectual talents involved in it, give it some other name. Don't call it matter, because matter as it is ordinarily defined is not what is meant by mind or by Spirit. And, of course, there will always be this question: how can these three dissimilar things be contained in one thing?

The fact is, when you want to think of the origin of the mind in the same way as you have thought of the origin of the body, you come across great difficulties. I think I might as well tell you the Vedāntic view in this regard: we say that the mind is not derived from the parents; the mind is our very own, it has not come from anyone else.

But considering the mind in another respect, it is a part of the cosmic or universal mind. Some of you might wonder here whether the supposition of a universal mind is justified. We do not see mind everywhere; we do not see, for example, mind in dead matter; we see mind only in living beings. Are all these minds joined together? And if so, how are they joined together? You may say that between one thinking being and another there is probably a gap which is filled by matter with no mind there. Yet I think we have to admit that minds are interrelated, connected—and this not only in and through the medium of matter, but directly. I think enough research has been done today to prove that minds are related to one another independently of matter or of the senses.

But is there a cosmic mind? I think inferentially we can say there is. If you look upon this universe as a system, as a cosmos, and if you consider the presence here of life, of mind, and even of consciousness, then however spotty those things might appear, you have to admit that the power that holds this universe together must be more than material, must not be less than conscious, must be at least mind. Otherwise you could not explain how mind,

life, and consciousness are held in their proper places and given scope for proper function. Now, if you once conceive that there must be a cosmic or universal mind, it becomes easy for you to think that our minds, however separated and small they might appear, are parts of this cosmic mind.

Now let us come to Spirit, which is consciousness itself. I should tell you here that consciousness is not the same as mind. This is proved by the fact that there is such a thing as the unconscious mind. If consciousness were essential to the mind, then wherever there is mind there should be consciousness. But modern psychologists and our own experience confirm that the whole of our mind is not conscious. It is as though part of a mansion were illuminated, while the rest was in darkness. If light were an essential ingredient of the house, then every part of it would be illuminated. But since part is in darkness, light must be something separate from it. Our philosophers have always maintained that consciousness is not essential to the mind; it is a thing apart. They have associated consciousness with Spirit—neither with the mind nor with the body.

For practical purposes it will be well to think first of the soul, then of the Spirit. The soul is what we call in Sanskrit *jīvātman*. Sometimes this is translated as the 'individual soul', but that does not help much. The individual soul is, of course, contrasted with the universal soul, God; but what *is* the individual soul? According to one prominent view of Hindu thought, the soul in its own true nature, which is Spirit, is pure and perfect, but somehow it becomes associated with the mind and the body, and such an association clouds its glory. Just as dependence on other people is a confession of weakness—it being out of weakness that the desire for, the necessity of, and the actuality of dependence come—so this association of the soul with mind and body pre-

supposes a certain weakness and lack in the soul.

But if the soul is presumed to be perfect and pure, then how can there be any weakness in it? Well, there it is. These are the facts. As Swami Vivekananda once said in a lecture in this country, we Hindus are not ashamed to admit that not all problems are capable of solution. Philosophy cannot take up everything and give an adequate answer for it. It cannot. To assume that it can, is itself dogmatic. But what we can do in our pursuit of truth is to ascertain facts. Whether or not these facts can be brought under a logical construction is a secondary consideration; first we should become aware of facts.

Now, these are the facts: The soul in its true nature is indeed pure. And yet when we look at the soul as associated with the body and the mind, we do not find it so; indeed this very association presupposes some kind of weakness, some limitation. That also cannot be denied. If you say it is a contradiction, we shall accept that contradiction. Vedāntic philosophers have called it *avidyā* or *māyā*, which is sometimes translated as 'ignorance'. But it is not just a simple ignorance; it is a sort of hallucination, or delusion. It is not just a lack of knowledge. If somebody asks me, 'Did you know that the Pacific Ocean is six miles deep in such-and-such a place?' I could say, 'No, I was ignorant of that.' That is one kind of ignorance. Another kind is to have some knowledge, but not the correct knowledge. The Vedāntic teachers illustrate this by telling of the illusion you have when you mistake a rope in the dusk for a snake. Here was a rope lying across the road; why did you not see it as a rope instead of mistaking it for a snake? Well, that is this peculiar kind of ignorance, and that is what they have called *māyā*.

There is no reason why the soul should not know itself for what it is. It is pure

and endowed with all perfection; therefore it is independent and has no necessity of depending upon mind or body or of trying to derive something through its association with them. And yet it has not that knowledge of itself. Somehow it bungled there—or seems to have bungled. When a philosopher, after wading through the body and the mind, comes across the soul and sees it face to face, the soul smiles at him. 'Did you say that I bungled? Look at me. Do I look like a bungler?' 'No, you look all right'—he has to say that. 'You look all right.'

Yes, when you have penetrated these barriers of body and mind and have faced yourself, when you have known yourself directly without this intervention and confusion, you have not the least doubt that you are all right. And then, as is said in a Sanskrit text, you will say: 'Oh, how wonderful I am. Salutations to myself!'¹ 'I find myself to be this infinite Being, like an infinite ocean, in which universes are rising and falling like waves.' There are many such statements in our religious literature: when a person knows himself, comes upon himself suddenly, he is just stunned by the glory of himself. There is no egotism or boastfulness about it. There is just the recognition of a wonderfulness about oneself. All these ideas of pettiness, puniness, limitation, dependence, struggle and frustration—all these things drop off; he cannot even remember them. If he finds a time to remember, he knows they never belonged to him and he smiles at them, just as a grown-up man smiles at the timidities and fears of his childhood.

Well, there it is: in the juxtaposition of these three principles there is involved an opposition, or contradiction, that cannot be explained. But however that may be, we say that the soul, or *jīvātman*, is Spirit in-

¹ *Aṣṭāvakra-saṃhitā*, II. 11.

volved in matter and mind. This 'involvement' is what gives the sense of self-identity. When I say : 'I am this, I am that ; I was born in such-and-such a place ; I want to do this in future years ; I like this person ; I don't like that person', and so on and so forth—there I feel myself to be an individual, a soul, and I call others also souls.

Where does this soul, or *jīvātman*, come from ? And where does it go ? It is enough to say here, just as we said in regard to the mind, that the soul is not derived from parents. The soul and mind remain together. They come and they go ; that is to say, they come into the body at conception, they get out of the body at death. This association of the Spirit with the mind and with these changing bodies is, as I said, the state of ignorance, and as long as that ignorance, or *māyā*, persists, this coming and going also will persist. That is the Vedāntic view about it.

So here is the situation. About the body, we can say that it has an origin and also that it has a certain position in the expanse of matter. About the mind we should not say that it is derived from parents or some other sources ; it is our own. We can also say of this mind that it is a part of the larger mind. And about the Spirit, we say that when Spirit is known by itself, it is perfect and need not be explained in relation to time or space or circumstance ; but if we speak of the Spirit as bound up with mind and matter—that is to say, if we speak of it as the soul—then we should say it comes and goes, and its present position in time and space requires explanation.

Now, if you want to explain man, you have to consider all these things. For instance, in order to explain man's body, we should probably explain the origin of universal matter. But we cannot just start with matter. Why ? Because whenever we want to think something we have to have a mind ;

so our starting point has to be the mind. Further, it is the *conscious* mind we start with. Some would say, therefore, that we have to start with consciousness, not even with mind. This conclusion becomes further strengthened if we remember that for the mind to fulfil its function rightly—to get at truth, to judge and make an intelligent estimate of whatever fact is brought before it—it should have a sense of value. Our philosophers have always said that value does not belong to mind, value belongs to consciousness. Proof of a thing does not belong to the mind, nor to any operation of the mind, such as deduction or induction. We know that machines can make these same kinds of inferences ; they are, in fact, found to be more accurate and quick than the human mind. What is it, then, that judges truth and value ? After one has gone through the whole mechanism of logical thinking and feels, 'Yes, it is proved, it is true, it is good'—what is it that says that ? It is consciousness that says it.

Consciousness—*caitanya* is the Sanskrit word for it—is its own proof. There has to be some principle which does not require to be proved but which itself is the proof of everything else. If you say it is just an assumption that consciousness does not require to be proved—all right, tell me if there is a principle beyond consciousness. If there were, then I would say that we should take recourse to *that* to prove the truth of consciousness. But there is nothing else. Consciousness has been found to be beyond conditions, beyond all possibility of mutation. It is imperishable and eternal, and when it is realized as such, you of course cannot think of anything beyond it. Just as the sun reveals itself by its own light, so consciousness is its own proof, its own validity. And just as the sun reveals other things as well as itself, so consciousness reveals the value of the workings of the mind or of anything else.

So, you see if we have to think correctly, if we have to understand our present position, we should not start with matter but with consciousness. I think you will admit the justice of such an approach. And that is how our philosophers, the Vedāntists, start. I shall give you now a general idea of their statements about the making of a man, how man comes into existence. But

as I have already indicated, since you cannot explain man as separate from the rest of the universe—as separate from the world of matter or the world of mind—you will also have to explain how those worlds came into existence. Well, let us see how it happens.

(To be concluded)

THE RESPONSES OF TRADITIONAL AND LIBERAL RELIGION TO THE FIRESTORM OF CHANGE AND TO THE RESPONSE OF THE COUNTER CULTURE

DR. DONALD SZANTHO HARRINGTON

We have discussed elsewhere the gradual deterioration of the cult, the core experience and tradition from which both our western culture and its far-flung civilization have sprung; then the disruption of civilized procedures brought on by the exponential speed of technological change which has left western man in a state of confusion, shock, anxiety, and alienation, but as yet shows no signs of abatement. I have tried to describe the most significant counter-movement that has so far emerged, the Counter Culture as it is called here in the United States, but which has its counterparts throughout the western world, and is visible in all parts of the world, a kind of silent witness to the fact that our western technoculture has become a world-wide phenomenon.

Here I assume the more positive task of describing the efforts being made by religious forces to respond to this deterioration of the cult and disruption of civilization. For background let me remind you of the sense in which I am using these somewhat

unfamiliar words: myth, cult, cultus, culture, and civilization.¹

Both traditional and liberal religion have felt threatened by science's having undermined many of the myths on which the cult was established, and technology's sudden superimposition of a radically new kind of civilization upon the one which had prevailed for several thousand years up until sixty or seventy years ago.

But they have felt even more threatened by the response of the Counter Culture with its rebellion against established mores, its refusal to fit into the most elementary customs and relationships, its weird hairdress and wild costumes, its disassociation of itself from both the religious and secular establishments. Traditional and liberal religion both have, initially, found little in common with it, and even less constructive coming from both the religious and secular establishments. Traditional and liberal religion please contrariness, combined with a some-

¹ *Prabuddha Bharata*, March, 1974

times intense desire and declared intent to overthrow all Establishments, have served to alienate much of religious leadership, even though there has probably been more effort to understand the Counter Culture within the churches than outside them. But the balance of these ambivalent responses has been quite different with traditional than liberal religion.

The undermining of the mythology of traditional religion began as early as the seventeenth century with the left wing of the Reformation, but got under way in earnest in the middle of the nineteenth, with the rise of a historical as contrasted with a dogmatic approach to the understanding of Biblical texts. This undermined the Biblical base of revelation as it became more and more clear that one could not understand any text without knowing how and when it came into being, the purposes for which it was written, the historical context of its emergence, and what it meant to those who had created and interpreted it at the time of its appearance. The divine Word was gradually discovered not only to have been framed by mere men in accordance with their particular needs and the needs of the institutions of their time, but to have been interpreted also by mere men, across the ages, not in the terms of the time it was written but in the terms and needs of each subsequent period of human history. Churchmen, even orthodox churchmen, began to discover how hard it is to stay dogmatic about such material.

In addition to this historical undermining, the spread of the scientific spirit and world view gradually destroyed any possibility of the acceptance of highly particularistic religious myths as literal truth. Fundamental dogmas like the Virgin Birth, bodily resurrection, and the doctrine of the Trinity became less and less believable, and as a result there was a gradual washing out of religious authority, and a weakening of the

entire structure of personal ethics and public morality that had been erected upon it.

During the early part of the twentieth century, 'modernism' as it was called, permeated more and more the thinking of the traditional religious groups, including the Roman Catholic and the main-line Protestants. Along with this was a burgeoning interest in social service and social action, sparked by Walter Rauschenbush and John Haynes Holmes, but spreading rapidly through all the churches except for the Fundamentalists. The shock, pessimism and despair following World War I, threw a dam across this evolving liberalism within the traditional churches for almost a generation. By rigorously separating religious from secular-scientific concerns, traditional religion managed to reaffirm the absolute authority of Biblical revelation for some twenty-five years. But quietly, under the surface, the erosion of Biblical myths as a valid basis for our scientific-technological culture went steadily on, undermining the dam, which shortly after World War II was swept away in the flood of the 'Death of God'. That too has proved to be short-lived, and traditional religion continues by and large to affirm the authenticity of revelation and relevance of its myths, hoping to ride out the storm of technological change, the protest of the Counter Culture and the rebellion of the young. This is true both of the vast bulk of the Roman Catholic Church and the main-line Protestant churches, and even more so of the Fundamentalist sects which are growing rapidly, trading on their seeming relevance in the new apocalyptic mood sweeping the world.

But if the vast majority of these churches have sought to maintain the old myths and dogmas in their old meanings, insisting that science has nothing whatsoever to do with religion and that the Bible is Truth, no matter who wrote it or under what cir-

cumstances it came into being, there have been notable exceptions of far greater importance than their numerical size.

Pope John XXIII opened up the Roman Catholic Church in a more fundamental way than ever before, calling into question important aspects of both faith and practice, taking radical steps to rebuild the bridge between Roman and Protestant Christianity, Roman Christianity and the free churches, and Christianity and Judaism, shifting the emphasis generally from debate over dogma to Christian life and work, setting in motion the incredibly difficult task of democratizing the once-monolithic top-to-bottom style of government of the institution so that there might evolve during the rest of this century a Church governed more from the bottom up. The ensuing years have produced the Berrigan Brothers and their associates, Sister Elizabeth McAlister, the radical experiment at St. Brigid's in New York of a team ministry of equals, and lay-led experiments in Catholic worship, life and work in the heart of the slums like that at Emmaus House in the Bronx (New York City).

There have been exceptions among the traditional Protestant churches as well. Many of us have attended Washington Square Methodist Church and Judson Memorial Church, here in Greenwich Village, and experienced services, not rejecting traditional theology, but placing the emphasis elsewhere than on theological issues; joyous, celebrative, song-drenched and joy-suffused events, and all of them with a strong social message. One finds a magnificent use of the arts at St. George's Episcopal Church here in New York, and a strikingly different Jazz Ministry at St. Peter's Lutheran Church with jazz services every Sunday afternoon and a specialized ministry to the jazz community. Last December we attended a multi-media, psychedelic Christmas-revolution service at Glide Me-

morial Methodist Church in San Francisco, the building crammed with young people singing, dancing, hugging and kissing each other, surrounded by the din of a band of electric guitars playing both folk and traditional Christmas carols in earsplitting enthusiasm. I will have to be frank and say that the message did not seem to me much, a simple reiteration of tired revolutionary slogans without any real content or much Christmas hope. Instead, the minister played to his congregation's revolutionary fervour and alienation for the big cheer releasing a considerable amount of energy in emotional catharsis. Frankly it was the kind of experience that I think short-circuits rather than stimulates revolution. Yet it certainly seemed relevant to most of the young people present. My professor son-in-law's dry comment, (he is a bit over thirty), was, 'I don't think that's the religion of tomorrow. That's the last gasp of the religion of yesterday.'

The Episcopal Church has further had her Bishop Pikes, and Malcolm Boyds, and there are other churches deep into the service of their fellow men like the Free Church in Berkeley, a place the hippies trust and rely on as a centre for comfort, consolation, inspiration, and sustenance.

Thus far this kind of effort at relevance has had little effect on the Fundamentalists, probably because they already have the intense emotionalism and crisis psychology centred on the old eschatological formulas of two thousand years ago, which provide a significant if temporary diversion from the contemporary world's confusion and meaninglessness.

What of liberal religion? What has been its response to the undermining of the myths and the firestorm of technological change? By liberalism I mean the Unitarian Universalist movement, the Ethical Culture Societies, the Liberal Quakers, and some liberal Protestant churches, but mostly the Unita-

rian Universalist Churches and Fellowship.²

Liberal religion was in a better position to absorb the shock of modern science and the technological age than traditional religion, because of its undogmatic character and its early social service and action emphasis. Unitarian Universalism had from the beginning rejected those myths which could no longer be reconciled with a scientific world view. Instead it had put its emphasis on doing the will of God and following in the footsteps of Jesus. For the last hundred years the emphasis among Unitarian Universalists has fallen more and more upon the free mind, the changing and advancing character of truth and the emergence of a world society of brothers crossing all barriers of sect, class, nation, faith or race. Thus we have had almost one hundred years of experience at this business of spiritually 'hanging loose'. We have been hanging so loose that many question today whether we have any substantive beliefs at all. *Can* Unitarian Universalists believe? —is a question seriously and hotly debated among us.

This openness, however, made it possible for us to welcome science and its discoveries even though they might undermine religious myths and dogmas. In fact we made it our 'thing to do' to participate in such undermining, and emphasized it as the main

point of difference between ourselves and our more orthodox brethren. Too often we took pride in this difference as though somehow it made us better than they. It did maintain the basis for a continuing communication and relationship between the religious and the scientific and the secular communities, which still persists and may yet provide the bridge by which religion may cross over from an anti-scientific to a pro-scientific, and science from an anti-religious to a pro-religious posture.

Among Unitarian Universalists there has occurred also a considerable secularization of religion, a more and more emphatic shifting of authority from the tradition of Biblical revelation to experiment, reason, individual pragmatic judgment and democratic social consensus. As might be expected this was accompanied by an increasing emphasis upon social action for building a better future, the kingdom of God on earth—the traditional focus of Western religion. Our churches became more and more actively involved in social and political uplift.

Thus a large part of our movement was able to understand, welcome and even embrace the youth and hippie rebellions, and the Counter Culture. Unitarian Universalists were already hanging loose and had incorporated the secular and social action emphasis into this life style. In recent years the religious education curriculum had become philosophically more and more pragmatic and less and less religious. Church assemblies came to resemble political conventions. In some parts of the movement the style of worship changed radically, especially among the Fellowships, with the emphasis shifting from formal worship as a central focus of church life to informal human relationships. In most of the Fellowships and in some of the Churches hymns were no longer sung, the Bible no longer read, and prayers a tattered memory. Ser-

²In support of this stress on the role of Unitarian Universalist groups, Vedantists can easily add much data. Since the time of Emerson and the Boston Brahmins, Unitarians (combined in recent years with the Universalists) have been among the most hospitable and devoted friends of Hindu teachings and teachers in the West, notably the Swamis of our Order. Swami Vivekananda's loyal friends from this group were remarkably many, and many of his lectures and talks were in Unitarian churches. In recent times, John Haynes Holmes—Dr. Harrington's predecessor in the Community Church of New York—was a great friend of India and of Mahatma Gandhi in particular; and Dr. Harrington well continues the tradition. —Ed.

mons were de-emphasized and group discussion substituted. Some churches regularly gave their people the option of either attending worship service, or, if they preferred, participating in an adult class, discussion group, or workshop. Laile Bartlett's books, *Bright Galaxy*³ and *Moment of Truth*,⁴ described the growing informality of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship movement as the wave of the future for our Church, and the difference between old and new came to be expressed in the contrasting styles of the Starr King School for the Ministry in California with its easy-going informal permissiveness, and the more academically-oriented Meadville Theological School in Chicago.

For many years, and especially between 1940 and 1965, the movement seemed to be growing very rapidly. For its size it claimed to be the fastest growing religious movement in the country. It was a cohesive and coherent elite bent to the task of reworking the old Judeo-Christian images to make them over for a new more universalist era. But in the mid-1960's the growth curve began to level off, and during the last three years to decline. The movement today faces decreasing congregations, declining church school enrolments, and declining financial contributions. More seriously, there is a weakening of morale and spirit, a feeling that somehow the movement has lost its way, is no longer vital, no longer significantly religious. While it seems not declining nearly as rapidly as the more traditional churches in the West, and thus to have some advantage from its affinity to the Counter Culture rebellion, it is nonetheless showing signs of serious incoherence as a movement and a lack of serious consensus among its individual and institutional members. The

Unitarian Universalist movement lacks a common faith, or any continuing community consensus, and when it confronts a crisis today it has a tendency to fly apart.

And what seems to have happened now is that we have reached a crisis in the life of western man, a moment of decision when no-decision is as much of a decision as one or another choice. 'The free mind', the reiteration of 'individual freedom of belief', is no adequate answer to the despairing cry of today's generation for meaning. Nor is the agreement to disagree an adequate summons to lift the heart and organize the energies of modern man. I for one have become convinced that our liberal concept of freedom is faulty. For far too long we have been emphasizing what we do *not* have to do and what we do *not* believe. We have stressed each individual's right to believe whatever he can, and have said that everyone's belief must be respected and tolerated whatever it may be. This has prevented us from reaching any common concept of truth or right, and from being able to stand as a movement together. It has tended to paralyze the process of working through our conflicts, of developing real beliefs and advocating them with commitment, daring and sacrifice. We should have become a deeply committed community with a common cause, but instead we have been fragmenting ourselves, taking sides as theists or humanists, etc., and when the deep divisions have come we have found that we have no common ground of faith upon which to stand. We have used our freedom as diletantes rather than as devotees, and therefore by serious men and women cannot be taken seriously.

The fatal flaw in our viewpoint has been, I believe, our misunderstanding of the nature of freedom. Freedom is never an end in itself. It is only the necessary condition for finding and refining a living faith. If it is regarded as an end in itself, it dissolves.

³ Laile Bartlett: *Bright Galaxy*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1960

⁴ Bartlett: *Moment of Truth*, Beacon Press, 1970

It cannot be maintained as an end in itself but only as the condition of the search for a living faith.

This is true not only for an individual, but also in a communal sense, indeed in a universal sense. Unless we use our freedom to find a faith in which and by which we can live, with ourselves, with our fellowmen, with our God, our freedom becomes mere looseness and ultimately physical and spiritual degradation.

Martin Buber has put it better than anyone I know in his little book *Between Man and Man*. He writes:

'There is a tendency to understand...freedom,...as at the opposite pole from compulsion,...But at the opposite pole from compulsion there stands not freedom but communion....*At the opposite pole of being compelled by destiny or nature or men there does not stand being free of destiny or nature or men but to commune and to covenant with them.* To do this, it is true that one must have first become independent; but this independence is a foot-bridge, not a dwelling-place...*Compulsion in (religion) means disunion, it means humiliation and rebelliousness. Communion in (religion)... means being opened up and drawn in. Freedom in (religion) is the possibility of communion; it cannot be dispensed with and it cannot be made use of in itself; without it nothing succeeds, but neither does anything succeed by means of it: it is the run before the jump, the tuning of the violin, the confirmation of that primal and mighty potentiality which it cannot even begin to actualize.* 'Freedom—I love its flashing face: it flashes forth from the darkness and dies away, but it has made the heart invulnerable. I am devoted to it, I am always ready to join in the fight for it,...I give my left hand to the rebel and my right to the heretic; forward! but I do not trust them. They know how to die, but that is not enough. I love freedom, *but I do not believe in it.* How could one believe in it after looking in its face? It is the flash of a significance compris-

ing all meanings, of a possibility comprising all potentiality. For it we fight, again and again, from of old, victorious and in vain.

'It easy to understand that in a time when deterioration of all traditional bonds has made their legitimacy questionable, the tendency to freedom is exalted, the springboard is treated as the goal and a functional good as substantial good. Moreover, it is idle sentimentality to lament at great length that freedom is made the subject of experiments. Perhaps it is fitting for this time which has no compass that people should throw out their lives like a plummet to discover our bearings and the course we should set. But truly their lives! Such an experiment, when it is carried out, is a neck-breaking venture.... But when it is talked about and talked around in intellectual discussions and confessions and in the mutual pros and cons of their life's "problem" it is an abomination of disintegration. Those who stake themselves, as individuals or as a community, may leap and crash out into the swaying void where senses and sense fail, or through it and beyond into some kind of existence. But they must not make freedom into a theorem or programme. To become free of a bond is destiny; one carries that like a cross, not like a cockade. Let us realize the true meaning of being free of a bond: it means that a quite personal responsibility takes the place of one shared with many generations. Life lived in freedom is personal responsibility or it is a pathetic farce. 'I have pointed out the *power* which alone can give a content to empty freedom and direction to swaying and spinning freedom. I believe in it, I trust those devoted to it.'⁵

Our problem, then, is that we have not really been responsible, have not really used our blessed freedom to achieve a vigorous and vital, common faith. At the opposite pole from compulsion we have put freedom when we should have put communion. We

⁵ Martin Buber: *Between Man and Man*, Beacon Press, 1957, pp. 91, 92

have largely dismissed from our lives the Power which alone could give content to our freedom and provide the context for the emergence of a living faith. But there is no escape from communion at all levels of life, no escape from the responsibility of living with our fellowmen, with environing nature, and from coming to terms with the Destiny which guides the universal reality of life, which from time immemorial men have called God.

It is not freedom that we should have been celebrating all of these years, but communion, the kind of continuing communion which leads to a mutual, evolving covenant with Reality, with Truth, a covenant with obligations assumed and promises accepted. In order to commune and make covenant with our fellowmen, with nature and with destiny, we must have a faith regarding them and know what we ourselves believe our relationship with them must be. We have been worshipping freedom as a glittering golden calf rather than using it to arrive at covenants of mutual responsibility in the affirmation of the commandments of life within our given context. We have neglected what Buber calls so simply 'the power which alone can give a content to empty freedom....'

We have made the same kind of mistake in church membership policy. We have tried to build an institution on the basis of the free mind, admitting to membership anyone who expressed a wish to belong, irrespective of his beliefs or condition, only to find that sometimes we have little basis for doing anything together, except to quarrel. When all of the ministers and people get together in General Assembly it has become increasingly hard to find significant agreement, and our movement is beginning to come apart. Anthony F. C. Wallace has described the problem rather well in an article in *Zygon*. Recognizing that over and over again in history movements arise

to revitalize existing cults and cultures, and that that in a sense is the great purpose of the Unitarian Universalist movement, he says:

'Although revitalization movements proselytize, they are not indiscriminate in their recruitment of disciples and followers, at least in their early phases. To the contrary, the successful movement is an elite group that requires new members to undergo a strenuous and transforming rite of passage; that excludes as much as possible the pure opportunist, the compulsive joiner, the lazy and cowardly; and that seeks only the true believer who will commit his life to the cause. Thus our new faith at first must be, while open to all, exclusive of the uncommitted; membership must be a prize; the aspirant must reach out for the way of salvation. Otherwise the faith would be diluted by desultory believers who continuously consume the energies of the devout without change in themselves or contribution to others. The organization must not become dependent for its self-respect, as some religious organizations now are, upon feeling righteous for performing unsolicited favours for those who do not believe in it and upon securing half-minded attention to evangelically pleasant and half-hearted expressions of agreement from those who out of courtesy have been persuaded to listen to its message.'⁶

I suspect that our Churches and Fellowships are more handicapped by 'desultory believers, compulsive joiners and pure opportunists' than most of us would like to admit. Too often there is nothing beneath our differences on which we can take a stand together, except our commitment to be tolerant of the differences themselves. Such a movement is no answer to the problems of the civilization that is crumbling around us today.

Alvin Toffler has observed that 'when a whole system is composed of a number of

⁶ Anthony F. C. Wallace, in *Zygon*, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 80

sub systems, the one that tends to dominate is the one that is least stable'.⁷ It is the same in a society of people where there is no unifying faith. The least stable can soon come to dominate and eventually paralyze its functioning.

Toffler has made a number of suggestions for future development which are along the same line of basic need as I am suggesting here. Thus, for example, he suggests 'we need to initiate...a continuing plebiscite upon the future'.⁸ We should look forward to 'social future assemblies',⁹ asking people to choose a preferable future from among a range of alternative futures. These assemblies could dramatize the possibility of humanizing the future and might possibly unleash powerful constructive forces, 'the forces of conscious evolution'.¹⁰ At least they would find out where a majority of the people stand, on what they want in life. He believes that 'this is the supreme instant, the turning point in history at which man either vanquishes the processes of change or vanishes, at which, from being the unconscious puppet of evolution he becomes either its victim or its master'.¹¹

'Change is life itself. But change rampant, change unguided and unrestrained, accelerated change overwhelming not only man's physical defenses but his decisional processes—such change is the enemy of life'.¹²

One might substitute the word 'freedom' for the word 'change', and paraphrase these statements, indicating that freedom that is not translated into a living, evolving faith, a real communion with the universal process and all one's fellowmen, very quickly becomes chaos, and as such an enemy of

life. Indeed an enemy of freedom itself. Where I differ with Toffler is that he thinks this can all be accomplished without the specific revitalization of the cult—of religion. This I doubt.¹³

What is required of us today is a shift of emphasis towards faith, along the line of tension between freedom and faith. It will not mean the abandoning of the free mind in favour of a blind creed, nor the substitution of naive credulity for rigorous questioning. It will mean that we will discipline ourselves to use our freedom to find a new continuing consensus of faith and communion thereby with the Power around, among and within us. It will mean searching our great Judeo-Christian past, our own living tradition for those eternal truths which remain as everlastingly true today as when they were first discovered. It will mean creating social mechanisms by which there can emerge a continuing community consensus within the liberal religious movement, a consensus which summarizes what we believe in and are willing to stand for, and to die for if necessary—a consensus always open to challenge from new truth, but one by which we are not afraid to live.

The Judeo-Christian cult must be renewed through an understanding of its symbols, myths and images, and their present and past significance or insignificance. We should be able to cast off the parts of our past which are no longer of use, consciously and deliberately, at the same time that we affirm that part of our heritage which contains continuing significance for our own time. We should be able to find a common ground as between religion on the one hand and science and technology on the other, from which to project a future along the past lines of development—a scientific and technological future with a new spirit-

⁷ Alvin Toffler: *Future Shock* (Bantam Edition, 1971), p. 476

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 478

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 485

¹⁰ *loc. cit.*

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 486

¹² *loc. cit.*

¹³ Compare our Editorial essay in March, 1974—*Ed.*

ual emphasis and point, and new and sounder democratic controls, but solidly founded on the cultic structures of the past. And eventually we shall have to appropriate feed-in from the special insights of the Oriental cults.

Science and technology have not only created a new world, but a united world, a

real world civilization. We must now bring into being by reworking the great mythical images of the past which can be supported by scientific knowledge, a religion capable of working harmoniously with science and technology for a significant future, and inspiring a bright new era in the life of mankind on this earth.

GURU NANAK'S MESSAGE TO MANKIND

JUSTICE R. S. NARULA

Prophets, sages, and reformers have been coming to the world from time to time to bring us out of darkness and to show us the true light. The literal meaning of the word *guru* is 'he who removes darkness'. That is why most of our sages have been considered as gurus. The soul in each human being is the same: each soul is a ray of the same sun, namely, God; each emanates from Him and ultimately goes back into Him, like the rays of the sun at sunrise and at sunset. It is then asked why the purity of the soul cannot be seen and felt by us. The clue to the answer lies in another analogy: each soul is like a mirror which is covered with a thick layer of dirt, or a gem covered with mud. The souls within most of us are covered with an opaque layer of the effects of our past deeds. The gurus and the sages have been repeatedly telling mankind the ways and means to remove that covering so that we may be able to see and enjoy the shine of the gem of the real soul.

It is often asked why humanity has not been able to cleanse itself of bad thoughts and deeds in spite of the guidance given by large numbers of gurus and sages from time to time. The answer was given recently by a noble soul, referring to the story in which an ingenuous poor man, whose

naked feet were daily pricked by thorns in the jungle, asked a holy man why a large number of persons could not be engaged to collect and burn all those thorns once for all. The reply of the holy man was that it would be not only an impossible but also a useless endeavour, as fresh thorns would again appear and spread over the ground. He told the poor man that the way to save his feet from the thorns was to put on a pair of sandals and not to try to burn the thorns. For the same reason, no prophet has either tried to or aimed at or succeeded in completely eradicating evil from the world. All of them have tried to help humanity by prescribing different kinds of sandals to save those who put them on from the thorns of evil. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was one such sage. Though the essential features of the sandals prescribed by every guru or prophet are bound to be the same, their specifications have to be different for different persons in different times and different situations.

Guru Nanak's time was not of any hoary past. He was with us in a human body less than five centuries ago. The basic guidelines laid down by him for a successful and peaceful spiritual and social life, were not for any particular man, section of humanity, caste, religion or sect,

but for all human beings. He did not whisper any mantras in the ears of his disciples, but spoke to all humanity without distinctions. Not only did he prescribe no rituals or formalities, but he was in fact strongly opposed to any such outer forms or dogmas.

He preached the oneness of God and the brotherhood of man. His creed has been described in a single sentence in Punjabi, which may be translated thus: 'Earn your livelihood by honest labour, share the proceeds of your toil with others, and worship the Almighty.'¹ He also taught—love mankind and worship God. Loving mankind and the true worship of God appear to me to be merely two facets of the same thing; they amount to saying the same thing in two different ways. If you worship God and perceive Him in every human being, you are bound to love everyone, since love is worship and worship is love. It cannot be said that I truly love Him if I profess to see Him in everyone, but still have hatred for even one person. It was said by Guru Nanak in his *Gurbani*:

'If you are desirous of playing the game of love,

Enter upon the path with your head on the palm of your hand;

Once you set your feet on this path, You do not then delay or avoid laying down your head.'²

The reference to the head on the palm is intended to convey that if you love Him, you place your intellect and volition at His feet. This attitude—resignation to His will—psychologically results in relieving a person of all tension, as he does not then consider himself responsible for any good or bad deed, or any honour, or any set-back. Guru Nanak's follower takes all these

things to have been ordained by God.

There is another relation between love and worship. Human beings have often been persuaded to 'worship' God by intimidating them with various kinds of dangers and calamities, such as going to hell, rebirth in a lower species, etc. Guru Nanak did not put people in fear of the Lord, but directed his followers to worship Him out of love, affection, and reverence. That is why Guru Nanak's prayers to the Lord are not rituals, but outpourings of intense love.

We have yet to see any normal human being who does not have in him these three, namely: (1) the desire to exist; (2) the desire to acquire knowledge; (3) the desire to be happy. The nature of existence has often been compared to a dream or an illusion. But Guru Nanak's philosophy does not agree with that notion. He says that life is real, and the soul must take advantage of the blessing of the human form, inasmuch as it can attain salvation, by merger with the Lord, only when embodied in a human form. Human life has been described by Nanak as a great opportunity for attainment of the Truth.

All are likely to be struck by the repeated use of the word *sach* (*satya*), and its derivatives in the writings of Guru Nanak. He said, 'Truth is the highest of all things, but higher still is truthful living.' He has identified Truth with one God. His Truth includes and transcends the concept of the world's reality. He said: 'Know the Truth. That Truth is the Creator and Truth is the Sustainer. Truth creates Its own Self. It is unknowable and transcendental.'³ Again he said: 'Truth is the Lord, Truth is the Creator; Truth is the Cause of all, and Truth is the Refuge.'⁴

Guru Nanak has answered the question as to how Truth can be attained and the

¹ किरत करो, वंड लुको ते नाम जपो । These are not the Guru's exact words; but his teachings have been put in these words for the sake of brevity.

² 'Salok Waran To Wadhik', *Adi Granth*, p. 1412.

³ 'Rag Wadhans Mahila', 1, *Adi Granth*, p. 580.

⁴ 'Sri Rag Mahila', 5, *Adi Granth*, p. 52.

dividing wall of ignorance thus demolished: 'Guru Nanak says that the dividing wall can be demolished by resigning to His will.'⁵

He also laid emphasis on humility and selfless service. He extended humility to the extreme in referring to himself at different places in his *Gurbani*, as '*neech*' (low one). He said once:

'I am the lowliest of the low born. Even of the lowliest, I am the lowermost.

I seek their company. Association with the so-called big people is of no use. God blesses with His mercy those who care for the neglected.'⁶

He also demonstrated in his own life that without realization of the Reality, high-placed persons can never come close to the poor and the down-trodden and see the same Lord in them as in kings and chiefs. That is why great stress has been laid by Guru Nanak's followers on caring for the neglected. By doing so, one invites the mercy and blessings of the Almighty.

Essentially, the unity of man is linked with the unity of God. That is why Guru Nanak laid great emphasis on the equality of all mankind irrespective of place of birth, religion, caste, creed or sex. He preached that social inequalities should be ignored and said that the highest sect would be that which regards all men and women as one's equals. He not only preached but also practised equality. Himself a high class ksatriya, his constant companions were Mardana, a Muslim, and Bala, a Sidhu Jat. The institution of *langar* (community dining)—started by Amar Das, the third Sikh-guru—is based on this aspect of the emphasis in Guru Nanak's teachings. Inter-dining, with the high and the low, the rich and the poor, all sitting together on the same mat, is a continuing example of the practice of equality, and illustrates the

doctrine that all men are blessed with the same divine light. Guru Nanak rejected the caste system. Sikh temples are open to all—Hindus, Muslims, Christians, etc.—without any exception. Before Guru Nanak's time sudras were not admitted to temples. He attacked and put an end to that practice. In Muslim places of worship, women were not allowed since they were regarded as inferior to men. But Guru Nanak's *Bani* (Asa Di War) lays great emphasis on the equality of the sexes. He comprehended the breadth and diversity of the whole of existence and did not believe in any kind of narrow-mindedness. He preached practical religious socialism.

Guru Nanak believed in the dignity of labour and confidence in the individual. He said, 'He who earns his bread by his own hard and honest labour and shares it with others, knows the true way of life.'⁷ The object of this kind of selfless service of fellow-beings, which we call *seva*, was to bring out in the worker the intense love which tends to be aroused while devoted to such service. A person engaged in *seva* is blessed with humility and radiates intense love: his little ego is attenuated.

Guru Nanak thus practised and preached humanism of the highest kind. His teachings are universal and are not in conflict with those of any other religion. They aim at a commonwealth of religions for the good of mankind. He believed that religion should be rational and have a scientific outlook instead of fostering superstitions. He shunned the idea of inauspicious moments or days, ill omens, danger of misfortunes arising from eclipses and other natural phenomena, with the need of particular forms of prayer or worship to ward them off. He did not believe in self-mortification or in denial of worldly pleasures, but emphasized the necessity of balanced living by accepting the hard realities of life. His

⁵ 'Japji', *Adi Granth*, p. 1.

⁶ 'Sri Rag Mahila', 1, *Adi Granth*, p. 15.

⁷ 'Rag Sarang Di War', *Adi Granth*, p. 1245.

scientific outlook becomes apparent from his rejection in his *Gurbani* of the myth that the earth was carried on the horns of a bull, and by his telling mankind that there were innumerable such earths, and solar systems, beyond our own. Guru Nanak's *Bani* is full of sermons which strike at the very root of conjectural myths, superstitions, and certain other aspects of mythology. He preferred the true and common-sense view of life which is compatible with the scientific findings and hypotheses of recent times. His religion is modern in outlook, is full of

optimism, based on equality, fraternity, and the ideal of freedom for mankind.

The relevance of Guru Nanak's teaching today lies in these ideals, with their universal approach and practical application. Let us endeavour to practise and follow them in order to reshape not only our own destinies and lives, but also those of everyone around us in this world of hypocrisy, strife, and self-aggrandizement. By thus following in his footsteps, let us reduce as far as possible the ever-increasing gap between what we profess and what we practise.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA : TOTA PURI

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

In his thirtieth year, Sri Ramakrishna, the 'mad priest' of Dakshineswar, had been having a respite in his arduous struggles for the conquest of the mysteries of the spiritual world, when one winter morning (January 1865)¹ he seated himself on the

¹ About this date, Swami Saradananda gives the following hints (*Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1952):

(a) 'Tota Puri, the Paramahansa, came two or three months after the Master had had that vision [of Kṛṣṇa who merged in his person]—p. 242.

(b) 'Tota came to Dakshineswar probably by the end of 1865. A few months after it, Haladhari retired from his service ... and Akshay ... was appointed in his place.'—p. 249.

(c) 'Akshay ... was appointed in the Vishnu temple in A.D. 1865, a short time after the revered Acharya Tota Puri came there [Dakshineswar].—p. 282. And in his Bengali version, *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-Līlā-prāsaṅga*, Vol. II, Appendix, p. 446: Bengali year 1271 (A.D. 1864-65), Totapuri's coming to Dakshineswar and Thākūr's [Sri Ramakrishna's initiation into *sannyāsa*.'

Another authority Sashibhushan Ghosh has suggested Bengali year 1273 (A.D. 1866-67) as the year of Tota Puri's visit. (*Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-deva*, Udbodhan Office, 1917, p. 260)

steps of the bathing ghat which led to the roofed terrace, on either side of which stood in a row six temples of Śiva. East of the terrace was a large court, in the centre of which stood two temples, the larger dedicated to Kālī and the smaller to Rādhākānta. The Gaṅgā at his feet stretched north and south, offering to his view a rich scene with its adornments of villas, gardens, porticos, and brick terraces. Sri Ramakrishna sat there letting his gaze wander over the beautiful panorama, but not for long, for his mind—indrawn as it was—soon lost itself in the experience of bliss in which he found himself almost constantly in those days. Of medium height, slender almost to leanness, he wore a short untrimmed beard. His eyes were remarkably bright, but often half-closed in inwardness. In those days he was called

The auspicious day for bathing at the estuary of the Gaṅgā was 'Pauṣ Saṅkrānti', which in Bengali year 1271, came in the middle of January 1865. Considering the circumstantial evidence we may conclude that the visit took place sometime in January 1865.

simply the 'mad priest' by most outsiders, 'junior Bhattacharya' by the employees of the temple, 'Gadadhar' by his elder relations and 'Ramakrishna' by a few.² He was not there long when his eyes fell on a new arrival, a wandering monk. The priest looked closely up at him.

The monk 'was very tall and robust with magnificent physique, resolute and indestructible—a rock with the profile of a lion'.³ Tota Puri,⁴ as he was called, was probably in his fifties. Against the background of his matted hair and long untrimmed beard, his impressive countenance was lit with the serene glow born of spiritual knowledge. Typical *paramahansa* (the highest order of monks) that he was, his only possessions were a pair of tongs, a brass water-pot, and a piece of skin to sit on.

As soon as Tota Puri's eyes fell on Sri Ramakrishna, he started with an expression of surprise and delight. He at once recognized in the latter a highly qualified spiritual aspirant. He felt drawn to this young priest. He went to him and said with abrupt directness, 'Ah, you seem to be well-qualified. Would you like to practise Vedāntic disciplines?' The other stood up, greeted him politely, and said, 'I know

² Swami Saradananda feels that Tota Puri gave Gadadhar the famous name of Ramakrishna when he initiated him into *sannyāsa* (*Great Master*, p. 254). Some others hold that Mathurnath Biswas was the first to use that name. Still others think it was the Bhairavi Brahmani. But a specific mention of Ramakrishna Bhattacharya as a priest of the Kālī temple in the trust deed executed by Rani Rasmani on 18 Feb. 1861, sets at rest the first and last of these three, at least. It is quite probable that his parents gave him the name.

³ Romain Rolland: *The Life of Ramakrishna* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P., 1947), p. 62.

⁴ Sri Ramakrishna used to refer to his Guru, Tota Puri, as Nangta, perhaps because he remained naked (*nangta* in Bengali means 'naked'), or because he wanted to avoid referring to his guru by name (*Great Master*, p. 479).

nothing of what I should do or not; my Mother knows everything; I shall do as She commands.' The innocent simplicity of the young man charmed the ascetic, though a fleeting smile must have crossed his face. However, he readily said. 'All right, go and ask your mother. But come back quickly for I'll not stay here long.'

As Tota was soon to learn, Sri Ramakrishna depended entirely on Kālī, the Divine Mother, as a kitten on its mother. As his biographer aptly puts it:

'... the Master was not capable of taking the initiative in doing anything. The child of the divine Mother as the Master was, he now depended entirely and placed full reliance upon Her and felt highly delighted in being moved about and guided by Her any way at any time. The divine Mother, for Her part, took upon Herself all his responsibility and, with a view to accomplishing a particular purpose of Hers, cast him, without his knowledge, into quite a new mould.'⁵

He therefore went to the temple of Kālī to seek permission of the Mother.

Soon he reappeared, in a state of divine semi-consciousness, his face beaming with joy. His Mother had told him, 'Yes, learn from him; it was to teach you that the ascetic has come here.' He said to Tota Puri, 'Yes, Mother has asked me to learn Vedānta from you.'⁶ It took little time for the other to discover that his prospective disciple had gone to ask leave not of his human mother but of the Divine Mother enshrined in the temple. Staunch non-dualist that he was, Tota Puri must have felt amused. Though he considered such

⁵ *ibid.* p. 249. According to some other biographers Sri Ramakrishna himself felt the desire for practising non-dualism some time before Tota Puri appeared.

⁶ Gurudas Burman: *Śrī-Śrī-Rāmakṛṣṇa-Carit* (Bengali) (Pub. by Kalinath Sinha, 13 Nikasipara Lane, Calcutta), p. 74.

faith in any god or goddess as mere superstition, the veteran teacher did not hurt the young man's feelings, for he was confident of ridding him of such odd ideas through the teachings of Advaita.

Before proceeding further in telling how the great spiritual heritage of India was transmitted from guru to disciple, we should take a look into the past of the two extraordinary personalities who met at Dakshineswar temple that day.

Born and brought up in a remote Bengal village, Sri Ramakrishna had been for over a decade already, a priest at this Dakshineswar Kālī Temple. Since childhood his longing for God-realization had grown into an all-consuming passion, leading to the vision of the Divine Mother, and soon complete God-intoxication. To outsiders he appeared a madman, giving up even the priest's duties in his endless search for God. But to a select few, notably his teacher the Bhairavi Brahmani, the young man was none other than an Incarnation of God. Under the Brahmani's tutelage he had successfully practised all the disciplines of the Tantras, then of Vaiṣṇavism, culminating in his resplendent vision of Kṛṣṇa, who merged in his person. He had manifested that great ecstatic love, the *mahābhāva*, and at the peak of his spiritual ascent had lost his own individuality and seen Śrī Kṛṣṇa in himself and in the whole universe. Thus attaining to such fulfilment of the worship of the Personal God, he now had heard the command of his supreme Guide, the Divine Mother, for the final assault on the citadel of the mystery of the Impersonal God.

While Sri Ramakrishna 'was indeed a living reflection of all that happened before the mirror of his eyes, a two-sided mirror turned both out and in'⁷, Tota Puri with his iron constitution, physical and mental, seemed 'void of emotions and

loves'.⁸ Though co-travellers in the pathways to God, the two had more striking dissimilarities than similarities in their personality make-up.

Born of a pious Hindu couple somewhere in the northwestern part of India, Tota (the name given him at birth) was sent to a monastery when he was a mere child. His parents, not having any offspring for some years, seem to have vowed to dedicate their first-born to the life of *sannyāsā*, as was the custom in that part of India.⁹ Accordingly the boy was given to the *mohanta* (abbot) of a large monastery, who was a renowned yogī. So widely had spread the abbot's fame that people used to hold an annual fair in his honour and present tobacco and other gifts to the monastic community.¹⁰

This community belonged to the 'Puri' denomination, one of the ten monastic orders established by *Śaṅkarācārya*. The members used to go absolutely naked and were hence called 'Naṅga' or 'Nāga' sādhus. The monastery, near Ludhiana in the Punjab, had a very austere discipline. Turning their backs on the world, the aspirants observed strict rules, including personal poverty and did hard manual work. From Tota Puri, Sri Ramakrishna learnt of the monastery and the training the aspirants received there:

'There were seven hundred naked spiritual aspirants... Those who were beginning to learn meditation were asked to do so on cushions; for they might feel an ache in their legs if they were to sit and meditate on hard seats, and their unaccustomed minds might come to think of their bodies instead of God. Then afterwards, the deeper their meditation became, the harder were the seats on which they had to sit. And at last they had to sit on pieces of skin only or on

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 63.

⁹ *Great Master*, p. 484.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 483.

⁷ Rolland, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

the bare ground to practise meditation. They were also made to observe strict rules regarding everything, viz., eating, drinking, etc. As regards their dress, the disciples were also made to practise gradually how to remain naked. As man is bound by eight fetters of shame, hatred, fear, egoism regarding one's birth, lineage, custom, pretentiousness and so on, they were taught to give them up one by one. Afterwards when they developed deep concentration of mind they had to go and travel from one place of pilgrimage to another, at first with other monks and later alone and then return. The naked sannyasins had such rules.¹¹

Thus, far from the worldly life, Tota was brought up under the affectionate care of all-renouncing monks. His qualities of head and heart drew the attention of the head of the community who began taking special care of him. His keen intellect¹² too helped him to master the scriptures in a short time. When he was found qualified he was initiated into the practice of non-dualism. Tota Puri, as he was called after formal initiation into monastic life, was submitted to strict rules of discipline having the sanction of age-long experience behind them.

'His mind assimilated his teacher's instruction and used always to carry it out in practice exactly according to his teaching. He does not seem to have suffered much from the deception and hypocrisy of his mind.... His simple mind reposed its trust in God sincerely and was going forward slowly along the path pointed out by his teacher to be trod

by him. While it was going forward it never cast behind a single covetous glance of ungratified wish, toward the sins and temptations of the world. This was why the saint came to the conviction that his individual effort, perseverance, self-reliance and self-confidence were all in all.'¹³

[During his subsequent years of wandering] 'He was merged in spiritual practices on the holy river Narmada, where he lived alone for a very long time and attained the immediate knowledge of Brahman along the path of Nirvikalpa samadhi. The old monks of that place bear witness to this fact even now.'¹⁴

Thus, forty years of hard discipline had brought him to the pinnacle of enlightenment. He however continued his life of rigorous discipline and spiritual practice,¹⁵ and in due course he succeeded his master as the head of the monastery.¹⁶

Nevertheless he still preferred the wandering life of an illumined soul. Free as the wind, he wandered over the country, teaching and encouraging Vedāntic discipline wherever he could find a sincere aspirant. One may think that Swami Vivekananda had such an ideal monk in view when he wrote:

'Have thou no home. What home can hold thee, friend ?

¹³ *The Great Master*, pp. 484-5.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 250.

¹⁵ '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 Gospel*, p. 670). 'It is the same with the mind [as with the brass pot]. Unless one brightens it daily with meditation, it becomes unclean' (*Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, pub. by Advaita Ashrama, 1964, p. 194).

¹⁶ Recollecting Tota Puri's words, Sri Ramakrishna said: 'That one only who was found amongst the naked sannyasins to have attained the true state of Paramahansa was elected by all to the seat of the Mohanta of the community when it fell vacant. ... They placed that person alone on the Mohanta's seat from whose mind the attraction for gold was found to have really vanished and gave him the charge of money and other valuable property.' (*Great Master*, p. 484).

¹¹ *loc. cit.*

¹² Sri Ramakrishna regarded highly Tota Puri's intellect. Regarding the younger Naren, Sri Ramakrishna one day said, 'What a subtle mind he has! Nangta also could understand things that way, in a flash—the meaning of the *Gita*, the *Bhagavata*, and other scriptures' ('M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 600004, 1947), p. 717.

The sky thy roof, the grass thy bed,
and food
What chance may bring; well cooked
or ill, judge not.
No food or drink can taint that noble
Self
Which knows Itself. Like rolling
river free
Thou ever be, Sannyasin bold!...¹⁷

Now the itinerant monk in course of a pilgrimage to the estuary of the Gaṅgā for a holy bath as well as visit to the temple of Jagannath at Puri, happened to come to the Dakshineswar temple on his way.¹⁸ No doubt he had come the whole way on foot, and arriving at the Temple garden he went first to the portico of the bathing ghat where he came across the extraordinary young man sitting on its steps.

As was his custom Tota Puri never rested under a roof. He passed the nights always under a tree or the blue canopy of the sky, alike in storm and sunshine, never, during these wandering days, remaining more than three days in any place. He settled himself, quite likely at Sri Ramakrishna's suggestion, under the shade of the Panchavati, and lit the sacred fire (*dhuni*). Sri Ramkrishna's description gives us a glimpse of the daily life of Tota Puri there:

'This is why at Dakshineswar, the "naked one" had his seat under the Panchavati where he resided and kept a Dhuni lighted near him. His Dhuni burnt uniformly in rain or shine. It was near the Dhuni that the "naked one" took his food and rest. When again, forgetting all worries and anxieties the whole of the external world lay happily at the dead of night in the arms of the rest-giving sleep like a child in its mother's lap, the "naked one" would get up and make the Dhuni brighter; he

would then sit down in his posture steady and firm like the mount Sumeru and merge his mind in samadhi, restful like the motionless flame of a lamp in a windless place. In day-time also Sri Tota meditated most of the time; but he did it in a way that people could not know it. This is why he was very often seen to be lying at full length like a corpse with his body covered from head to foot with his wearing wrapper. The people thought he was sleeping.¹⁹

After Tota Puri settled himself under the Panchavati, the two great souls began discoursing upon various sacred matters, veiled and mysterious as they are, in that calm and serene atmosphere. Tota Puri initiated preliminary discussions with his new-found disciple. Among other things he discussed the preparations to be made for initiation into the mysteries of Advaita Vedānta. The disciple had to be formally initiated into monastic life. Sri Ramakrishna readily agreed to renounce the world. It was then pointed out that he had to give up his sacred thread and tuft of hair, and to perform the *śrāddha* and other similar ceremonies. Sri Ramakrishna hesitated a little, but finally agreed, with the stipulation that these ceremonies should take place in secret, to spare the worries and anxieties of his old mother, Chandramani Devi, who was living with him at Dakshineswar. The teacher seemed to appreciate this sentiment, for he at once said, 'Very well, I will initiate you in private when the auspicious moment comes.'

All talks between master and disciple were no doubt held in Hindi, the only medium of communication between the two. It is almost certain that in this very first talk, Tota Puri introduced his favourite subject, the fundamental tenets of the Advaita. In later days Sri Ramakrishna would often quote some of these:

'I learnt Vedanta from Nangta:
"Brahman alone is real; the world is

¹⁷ *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama), Vol. IV (1962), p. 395.

¹⁸ According to Gurudas Burman (*loc. cit.*) Tota Puri visited Dakshineswar on his way to the estuary of the Gaṅgā. But Swami Saradananda (*op. cit.*, p. 250) states that it was on Tota Puri's return journey from that holy place.

¹⁹ *Great Master*, pp. 479-80.

illusory.”’

‘Nangta used to say, “The world exists in mind alone and disappears in mind alone.”’

‘Nangta used to say that the mind merges in the buddhi, and the buddhi in Bodha, consciousness.’

‘Nangta used to instruct me about the nature of Satchidananda Brahman. He would say that It is like an infinite ocean—water everywhere, to the right, left, above, and below. Water enveloped in water. It is the Water of the Great Cause, motionless. Waves spring up when It becomes active. Its activities are creation, preservation, and destruction. Again he used to say that Brahman is where reason comes to a stop. There is the instance of camphor. Nothing remains after it is burnt—not even a trace of ash.’²⁰

Tota Puri sometimes introduced parables to drive home his point of view. He narrated often the story of the tigress and the herd of goats, a parable which later became a favourite with Sri Ramakrishna. One may wonder what was Sri Ramakrishna’s contribution in such dialogues. It can be inferred that his childlike nature prompted him to lay bare his own life and experiences to the teacher whom he had accepted as guru. When he learnt that the disciple was already married, Tota Puri reassured him saying, ‘What does it matter? He only may be regarded as really established in Brahman whose renunciation, detachment, discrimination and knowledge remain intact in all respects in spite of his wife being with him....’²¹ Thus the preceptor prepared the background for the understanding of the Advaitic doctrines.

On the appointed day, long before day-break,²² the disciple observed the preliminary rites and the *virajā-homa* before the

sacred fire and received from the guru the *kaupīna* (loin-cloth) and ochre cloths, the emblems of the life of renunciation. Then they repaired to the thatched cottage beneath the Panchavati. Here, under the direction of his guru, Sri Ramakrishna withdrew his mind from all sense objects and tried to plunge it into contemplation of the Absolute. The only obstacle in the way of reaching the unconditioned state was the radiant figure of the Divine Mother. However, assisted by the guru’s forceful instruction and through firm discrimination his spirit crossed beyond the multiplicity of relative existence and finally lost itself in *nirvikalpa-samādhi*. When this *samādhi* continued for three long days, Tota Puri became dumbfounded by the comparison with his own strenuous efforts of forty years to achieve such a state. But there was something more for him to marvel at, as the days passed. As with other gurus of his, Sri Ramakrishna was soon to begin correcting Tota Puri’s deficiencies in spiritual life. And Tota Puri, having come with the announced intention of staying not over three days, actually remained at Dakshineswar for eleven months. During that time he passed through a series of events which helped him right some of his wrong ideas. Sri Ramakrishna later summed up the transformation thus:

‘Nangta had attained *Brahmajnana* through discrimination saying “not this, not this”, in the Vedantic way. Nangta would not however accept Sakti (Power) of Brahman as a reality. He would say that *Sakti* of Brahman was an illusion (*maya*), and was unreal (*mithya*), and with this idea he would trifle with *Sakti*. But during his eleven months’ stay here Mother Kali taught him the truth of non-duality, namely that Brahman and *maya-sakti* are identical. Likewise Brahman and *Sakti* are identical.’²³

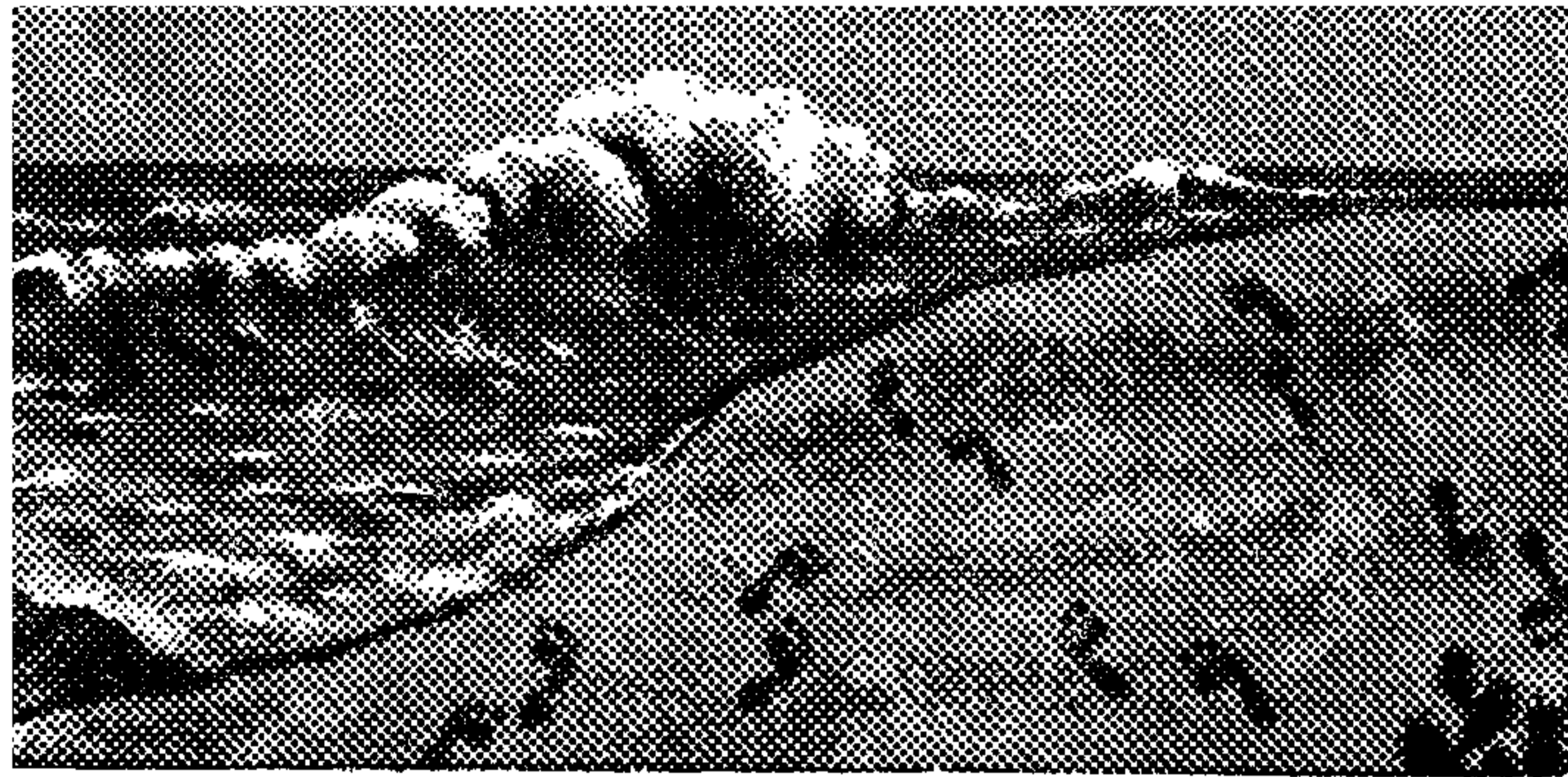
(Continued on p. 440)

²⁰ *Gospel*: pp. 240; 952; 381; 304 (in that order).

²¹ *Great Master*, p. 270.

²² Swami Saradananda (op. cit., p. 252) strongly implies that Sri Ramakrishna’s initiation into *sannyāsa* (monastic vows) took place very shortly after Tota Puri’s coming to Dakshineswar.

²³ *The Complete Works of Swami Abhedananda* (Ramakrishna Vedanta Math, Calcutta) Vol. X, p. 640.



HUMAN TRENDS

A BREEZE OF ECUMENICAL CHANGE ENTERS A CATHOLIC MONASTERY

[When the holy Pope John XXIII proposed to call the now-famous Ecumenical Council, someone put to him this question, 'What earthly purpose could a council, a summoning of church fathers from all over the world, now serve?' He strode to a window of his study and threw it open, saying, 'We expect the Council to let some fresh air in here.'

These words of the Pope have proved to be prophetic. In the wake of the Ecumenical Council, a liberality, inter-faith understanding and communication seem to have swept into the 'exclusive' Roman Catholic Church, at least in some quarters of the vast empire of St. Peter. One such is the Order of Prémontrés which is headquartered at Averbode near Antwerp. Swami Vidyatmananda, Assistant Minister at the Centre Védantique Ramakrichna Gretz, France, here recounts his fascinating experiences when he participated in a spiritual retreat conducted by an Antwerp Raja-yoga group, at Averbode.—*Ed.*]

The monastery of Averbode near Antwerp was founded in the twelfth century. It is the headquarters of the Roman Catholic order of Prémontrés, who follow the rule of St. Augustine. At present the order has about two thousand members, some sixty-five of whom stay at Averbode. There are other establishments in Belgium, and branches in Denmark, Brazil, and the United States. The monks work as parish priests; they conduct colleges and do writing and publishing. But their speciality is the keeping alive, through study and repetition, of ancient church chants in praise of God the Father, Jesus, and Mary. The monks attend their church seven times daily, spending a total of about five hours there,

singing together these old Latin hymns.

Averbode monastery is composed of a group of large buildings on extensive lands, in northeastern Belgium, surrounded by farms and pine forests. The whole is dominated by a richly-decorated church, which is nearly entirely composed of choir—that part of a Christian house of worship where, traditionally monks, or other choristers, sit in facing rows to sing their offices. The living quarters of the monks open off of spacious window-lined corridors that surround an inner garden. Oil portraits of previous abbots (the present abbot being the fiftieth) decorate the walls. The dining hall is in the antique style, but the kitchen is as up-to-date and well-equipped as any

serving the most modern restaurant. The two most beautiful rooms are the chapter house, walled in carved wood, where the monks assemble to hold their regular 'business' meetings; and the baroque sacristy in which the rich altar vestments and vessels are kept. There are two guesthouses. At the rear of the property is a printing plant. Church papers and religious magazines issue from this plant.

With the passage of time, the spiritual malaise that affected Catholicism generally, was also felt at Averbode. But following the liberalization encouraged by Pope John XXIII, a new spirit emerged at the monastery. The members began to interest themselves in the problems of modern man, and also to seek ways to deepen their own spiritual lives. A vigorous retreat programme was inaugurated, which allowed lay people to retire for a time from the world and devote themselves to spiritual practice in a monastic atmosphere. The monks also modernized their personal style. Except when in church, they abandoned their voluminous white habits in favour of trousers and shirts. Many of the younger men wear their hair long.

In Antwerp there is a yoga group headed by a dynamic Belgian couple named Rama and Sita Saenen. They conduct what is called the Raja Yoga Center, to which adults of all ages come to learn *asanas* (yogic postures) and sing *bhajans* (devotional singing in groups) together. In addition, Rama conducts hatha yoga classes in clubs and public school buildings. A total of about seven hundred students are enrolled. On his periodic trips to Europe, Swami Ranganathananda visits the Center, giving talks and associating with the members. And Swami Ritajananda and Swami Vidyatmananda of the Centre Védantique Ramakrishna at Gretz, France, spend a day or two with the group when time permits.

One of the two guesthouses at Averbode is designated as a conference centre. That is to say, the complex of sleeping and meeting rooms, together with complete food services, can be rented by any appropriate group for a week-end or even longer as an agreeable site for an assembly of its members. During the past year the Raja Yoga Center has conducted retreats one week-end a month at this Averbode conference centre.

One of the public rooms of the conference centre serves as dining room and auditorium. The other is a kind of chapel. It has a carpeted floor, and at one end there is a platform with a structure that can be used as an altar. The students provide themselves with carpets or cushions. *Asanas* are done here, and there are periods of *bhajan*, meditation, and religious instruction. Rama and Sita bring a large coloured picture of Sri Ramakrishna, which is installed on the altar throughout the week-end.

On the week-end of March 23-24, 1974, Swami Vidyatmananda participated in the retreat of the Raja Yoga group at Averbode. What he experienced was unexpected and indeed astonishing. He could only see it as tangible evidence that Sri Ramakrishna's gospel of religious harmony is bearing fruit, with old orthodoxies softening in favour of a new spirit of religious reconciliation and search for truth.

The monastery does not insist that those using the conference centre should subscribe to the religious policies of Averbode. But for the Raja Yoga group Christianity is a valid and respected way. Accordingly, on Sunday morning, between the *bhajan* session and the commencement of the *asana* period, one of the Averbode monks was invited to come to the conference centre to perform Mass. He seated himself on the floor of the chapel room, just in front of the portrait of Sri Ramakrishna, facing the yoga students, who were also seated on the

floor. The priest asked the Swami to take a place on his right. The priest was wearing his white robe, but to express sympathy for the students had draped an Indian *chadar* (shawl) over it. Before him on a platter, on the floor, was a tumbler of wine (an inexpensive rather tall pottery tumbler) and a plate piled with sliced white bread that had been broken into pieces.

The priest, seated, read a modernized version of the Mass in the language of the region, which is Flemish. He then gave a short sermon, which included several quotations from Sri Ramakrishna's *Gospel*, also in Flemish. Then followed the Eucharist. Still seated on the floor, the priest lifted up the tumbler of wine, symbolizing the saving blood of Jesus, and consecrated it. He drank a little. Then, turning to the Swami, he said in French (as the Swami does not understand Flemish): 'Because of the friendship of our faith', and handed the cup to the Swami. Surprised, but wishing to participate appropriately, Vidyatmananda accepted the cup, took a sip, and looking to the priest for assent, passed it on to Rama. Thus the consecrated wine passed from hand to hand, those wishing to communicate doing so. The same procedure was followed in the case of the bread, symbolizing Christ's body, sacrificed to redeem man. Thus in this venerable monastery was celebrated the holy Mass in a new way, to exemplify brotherly participation among aspiring people.

That evening the monk responsible for receiving guests came to conduct the Swami to the vesper service. He said, 'You are one of us and will sit with us in the choir.' So Vidyatmananda joined the sixty or so white-clad monks, his gerrua *dhoti* and *chadar* contrasting with the white robes of the others, and tried to follow as best he could

the Latin of the beautiful Gregorian chants.

After the service, the abbot, the Reverend Konraad E. Stappers, received the Swami. A distinguished-looking elderly man, he spoke in English, expressing hospitality and affection, and inviting a return visit at any time. He gave the Swami a copy of the quarterly magazine published by the monastery. It was a surprise, on opening the issue, to find that nearly a whole page of this Catholic review had been given over to a reprint of a poem by Swami Shivananda of Rishikesh, identified as a 'religious renovator of India.' While the verse gives expression to ideas acceptable to any Christian, the fact that the counsel of a Hindu swami was published in this Catholic journal gives further evidence of an encouraging new order of things noted throughout the entire extraordinary week-end. Translated from Flemish back into English, the verse reads:

Let your whole life

be a life of prayer.

For to live is to serve,

to live is to give,

to live is to forgive,

to live is to control the senses,

to live is to strive for perfection,

to live is to love.

To live means:

to make other people happy;

To live is to share your possessions
with others.

To live is:

always to think of God and

to know yourself to be connected
with him.

To live means:

to be courageous,

pure and

kind.

To live means:

to be good and

to do good.

—S.V

NOTES AND COMMENTS

IN THIS NUMBER

Reminiscences are taken from : 'M' : *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 600004, 1947 ; and Swami Saradananda : *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, Madras, 1956. References : *Gospel* : No. 1, p. 880 ; No. 2, p. 505 ; No. 3, p. 323 ; No. 4, p. 357 ; No. 6, p. 763 ; *Great Master* : No. 5, p. 366 ; No. 7, pp. 148-9.

The words quoted in 'Onward For Ever!' are from *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV (1962), p. 483.

The subject of death, though engaging man's attention almost from the time of his appearance on this planet, has in recent months become a theme of unprecedented discussion and controversy. Doctors and jurors, sociologists and anthropologists, ethicists and moralists, church-leaders and preachers, all present different arguments and viewpoints which sometimes confuse rather than clarify the issue. There is, for instance, the subject of euthanasia or mercy-killing, controversy over which has raged for decades and is still continuing. In fact the present wave of interest in death has been activated by the question whether patients, old and/or terminally ill, should be kept alive through the increasingly long periods of meaningless existence now offered by medical science, or be allowed to pass away naturally and peacefully.

But our approach to the theme of death goes deeper and questions the very meaning and purpose of human life and death. Man has a spiritual destiny which each soul pursues through life after life, sometimes unconsciously and blunderingly, at other times consciously and determinedly. Prophets and incarnations, saints and mystics

of all countries and times have said with one voice that man is a traveller who is Eternity-bound, and life and death are only the road and the rest-house for him until he arrives at Eternity. The *Editorial* discusses this theme from the religious point of view. As preparation for death is closely linked with old age, we would refer our readers to the *Editorial* essay on 'Senescence and Spiritual Life' published in September 1973, as supplementary to this discussion.

Depending on how we look at him, man can be considered a physical, psychological or spiritual being. While the materialists and materialistic psychologists deny the spiritual dimension of man, Vedānta, without absolutely denying body and mind, declares man's essential spiritual nature. To account for the inexplicable linkage between spirit on the one hand and mind and body on the other, Vedānta posits the doctrine of māyā. The Spirit is only, as it were, linked with matter and mind, but not really so. It is a difficult task to expound this intricate point of Vedānta in an easily comprehensible manner. In 'What Makes a Man?', Swami Ashokananda—who was a former Editor of the *Prabuddha Bharata*, and for over thirty-five years the head of the Vedanta Society of Northern California—remarkably succeeds in this task. The second part of this article will be published in a forthcoming issue.

'What Makes a Man?' was the first of a series of lectures by the Swami on the Origin and Destiny of Man. It was given at the Old Temple in San Francisco on Wednesday, March 4, 1953. It is being published now in the *Prabuddha Bharata* by the kind permission of the Vedanta Society of Northern California.

Dr. Donald S. Harrington is, we hope,

rather well-known to our readers. He is the leader of the reputed and influential Community Church of New York. 'The Responses of Traditional and Liberal Religion to the Firestorm of Change...' formed the fourth of his Minns Lecture Series of 1972, the inaugural one of which we published in our March annual number. In the present lecture, Dr. Harrington turns the searchlight of analysis on his own Unitarian Universalist Church and other liberal religious groups. This deep-going analysis, we are sure, will be found helpful by other Churches and religious organizations in dealing with the crises within or outside in society.

Guru Nanak (A.D. 1469-1538), the founder of Sikhism, was the first of a line of ten Gurus, of whom Guru Govinda Singh was the last. By his saintliness which did not spurn the humble duties of a householder, his broad heart which embraced all castes among the Hindus and stretched its arms to enfold Muslims too, and his liberal teachings—the core essentials of religion void of meaningless rituals and forms—, Nanak founded Sikhism. As students of Indian cultural and religious history know, his religion and followers played a vital role in keeping alive the ancient ideals of this land amidst uncertain political conditions and widespread religious ferment. In 'Guru Nanak's Message to Mankind', Hon. R. S. Narula, Chief Justice of the Punjab High Court, spotlights the important teachings of this great prophet of mankind and shows their relevancy to the needs of contemporary society. The

article, incidentally, is the edited version of a talk delivered by the author on 11 November 1973 at the Ramakrishna Mission, Chandigarh. We hope our readers will appreciate its appearance in this month when Guru Nanak's birthday will be celebrated by his followers all over the world.

Had not Sri Ramakrishna practised and realised the disciplines and ideals of Advaita Vedānta, he might not have become the greatest religious harmonizer that history has known. For it is only through the realization of the impersonal God that the 'thread which runs through the jewels of the various religious truths', is distinctly perceived. Tota Puri, the sage who taught him Advaita, arrived just at the time when Sri Ramakrishna had successfully finished his spiritual quests according to all Hindu disciplines which have the personal God in view. Tota was not then aware of his role in the drama of Sri Ramakrishna's life, nor was the latter as to his own coming role in teaching Tota. But the 'Scriptwriter' and 'Stage Manager' of the drama, namely, the Divine Mother, knew it all, and that was more than enough! The encounter of Tota with Sri Ramakrishna was a most unusual meeting of two almost diametrically opposite types of 'constitutions'. Romain Rolland has in a most effective simile compared them to the 'Rock of Gibraltar' rising above the 'Ganga'. Tota no doubt fulfilled his mission and in turn also received a fulfilment. An inspiring account of their 'First Meeting'—which, we may venture to say, ended only after eleven months—is brought to our columns this month by Swami Prabhananda, a monk of the Ramakrishna Order.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

THE VISIONS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA : COMPILED BY SWAMI YOGESHANANDA, Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras—600-004, 1973, pp. viii+142, Price Rs. 4.50

The book under review has a definite purpose to serve. Those who are interested in supersensuous experiences will find in this book a systematic account of such experiences of the Great Master Sri Ramakrishna. The compiler, Swami Yogeshananda, of the Order of Sri Ramakrishna, has in an objective and scientific manner provided authentic instances of the supersensuous experiences of the Master. Though the Preface states that all the material is drawn from the great biographies and accounts already available, and mainly from Swami Saradananda's *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* and Mahendranath Gupta's *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, still the author has done a wonderful job of selecting and giving a connected chronological account of the spiritual 'material' which Sri Ramakrishna brought for us from the 'other side' of transcendental existence. The study is interesting for students of psychology and mysticism, and of comparative religion, as well as for devotees.

There is one basic question, which Marie Louise Burke has herself raised in her Foreword to the book: 'Are we not here [that is, in the life of Sri Ramakrishna] witnessing Religion at its very source?' All true religion, the reviewer likewise believes, stems from such basic transcendental experience of the Infinite. It is only those very few, who have had the experience of the Infinite, that can lay the true foundations of religion and philosophy. A religion which is not mystically based, is just 'material' for the psychology of religion, which however is not capable of touching the core of reality. Sri Ramakrishna's life may evoke interest in a para-psychologist, but to stop at that level is not to begin to grasp Sri Ramakrishna.

The compiler has done very well in his attempt to focus attention on the most significant incidents, out of the many, that may serve the purpose of the academic specialists; but he has rightly warned that 'the deepest samadhi' to which Sri Ramakrishna frequently returned 'is the contentless consciousness... not lending itself to description'.

We welcome this compilation of the objective accounts of Sri Ramakrishna's mystic visions. The book is a very useful, concise introduction to a deeper study of the Great Saint, in whose life, as the Swami says, 'is revealed a realm, which

is beyond ordinary experience, yet attainable' here and now.

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KULARNAVA TANTRA : [READINGS] BY M. P. PANDIT, Published by Ganesh & Co., Madras-17, 'Second Edition', 1973, pp. 128, Price Rs. 10/-.

The Kularnava Tantra is one of the foundational texts of the Siva advaya or Sakta-advaita school. The definitive text, by Sir John Woodroffe, was published long ago. The present text contains Woodroffe's Introduction to the Tantrik Texts Series (of which Kularnava seems to have formed the first), and the Readings by Sri M. P. Pandit. The eleven chapters and Appendix present a clear summary of the text of this Tantra.

Kula is Sakti, and *akula* is Siva. Their unity is *hauka*. In rendering this unity, Mr. Pandit is eager to rely mainly on Sri Aurobindo's works. Sri Anrobindo himself was a great *sakta*. After explaining *kula-dharma*, the author proceeds to explain the *amnyas* (traditions). He considers only five *amnyas*, while in reality we have six, or *shad-amnyas*. When he speaks of the five *makaras*, he ignores *dakshinachara* and relies exclusively on *vamachara*. Gaudapada's *Subhago-daya-stuti* would give us the correct way to interpret the fifth 'Ullasa' (section) of the original text. The chapters on Yoga, Guru, and Diksha are very valuable. Elucidating the *purascarana* or repetition of the *mantra*, the author speaks of *pranava* or *omkara*, at the beginning and also at the end of the *mantra*. One is not clear whether he refers to the five *sakti-pranavas*, or to the Upanishadic one. If the latter, he is wrong.

The Appendix gives the Tantric definitions of some important words. The text would be truly valuable if the original Tantra were included.

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NEWS AND REPORTS

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION—SHILLONG

REPORT FOR THE YEARS 1963-64 to 1972-73

The Ramakrishna Mission started its activities in the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills in 1924 with a primary school at Shella, about 45 miles from Shillong. Activities were gradually extended to Nongwar, Shillong and Cherrapunji. The Shillong Centre, started in 1929, was officially recognized by the Mission Headquarters in 1937, with Cherrapunji, Nongwar and Shella Centres as its branches, although the Cherrapunji Branch in 1949 became an independent Centre with Shella and Nongwar as its branches.

The Shillong Centre, still growing, is active mainly in educational, cultural, medical and religious fields. Data below are for the year Apr. '72 through Mar. '73 unless otherwise noted.

Educational, Cultural and Religious: (1) Library and Reading Room had 7,569 books including textbooks, and children's books, 6 newspapers, 38 periodicals. 1,693 books were issued. (2) Students' Home (completely free, exclusively for tribal and scheduled caste boys) had 29 students. (3) 205 religious discourses and scriptural classes were held, of which 56 were in the Ashrama itself. *Ramnam-sankirtan* was held on each *Ekadashi* day in the Ashrama, and also in some other parts of the town on occasion. Public meetings and *bhajans* were also occasionally organized in the Ashrama. (4) Birth anniversaries of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda were duly observed, as also Janamashtami, Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Sivaratri, Christmas and similar holy days. (5) The Shrine: since, with development of the Centre, the shrine had proved inadequate for the larger gatherings, it was renovated and ex-

tended, with its Prayer Hall, and consecrated by His Holiness Swami Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, February 18, 1971. (6) Publications: A small Publication department for books in Khasi, Garo, Assamese, Bengali and Mizo languages, produced several books in 1963-65, in connection with the Swami Vivekananda Centenary. It maintains a sales-counter where publications on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and Vedanta literature are available in various languages, along with relevant pictures and portraits.

Medical: The Charitable Dispensary includes a Pathological laboratory, X-ray unit, Electrotherapy and Surgical sections, and a Homoeopathic department. In the current year 37,873 cases were treated, of which 24,593 were new cases. 116 surgical operations were done; vaccinations were given to 3,629 persons. A Mobile Dispensary, serving the tribal population, visiting interior villages twice weekly, treated in this year 20,603 patients in about 40 villages.

East Bengal Evacuees Relief: The Ashrama participated in relief operations in Dawki sector of Khasi Hills (Apr. 13, 1971—Jan. 15, 1972) and in Tura sector of Garo Hills, Meghalaya (Aug. 8, 1971—Jan. 22, 1972). In the 'Dawki sector' it took entire charge of medical, educational and cultural work, plus food-clothing-and-garment-distribution in two camps totalling 12,681 refugees. The mobile dispensary van visited the camps thrice a week, its work including small surgical operations as well as medical and Homoeopathic work. 58,783 cases were treated in all. Foods distributed included 9,054 kg. of milk powder and 2732 kg. sugar; 1,672 kg. baby food; 27 kg. biscuits; 227 kg. barley and 61.9 kg. glucose. Educational work included conducting a school (class I to IV) with 435 boy and girl pupils and six

qualified refugee teachers supervised by a monastic member of the Order who was a qualified Headmaster. In both Camps, the mission conducted various celebrations and social functions, as well as daily prayer and *kirtana*, etc. Extensive distribution of clothing and blankets was also done.

In the 'Tura sector', similar work was done in one large Camp with 8,790 refugees. A Dispensary was maintained at the camp-site, with two qualified residential doctors, plus a Homoeopathic section; 57,099 cases were treated in all. Milk powder totalling 3,125 kg. was distributed, with 499 kg. sugar, 997 kg. Baby food; 72.6 kg.

Barley, and 6.9 kg. of glucose. Educational activities included supplying 350 textbooks to a primary school in this camp, plus the appropriate celebrations, and daily prayer and *kirtana*, etc. Distribution of clothing and blankets was also on large scale.

This Relief work received extensive help and support from the Ramakrishna Mission of Bombay and the Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama in Ranchi. From Ranchi also, twelve trainees of the 'Divyayan' (residential institute under that Ashrama, for training Adivasi youths) served as volunteers in the above-noted Camps.

(Continued from p. 432)

And as to his own role in this lesson:

Once I fell into the clutches of a Jnani (Tota Puri) who made me listen to Vedanta for eleven months. But he couldn't altogether destroy the seed of bhakti in me. No matter where my mind wandered, it would come back to the Divine Mother. Whenever I sang of Her, Nangta would weep and say, "Ah! What is this?" You see, he was such a great janani and still he wept.²⁴

The wisdom of his protégé impressed the

preceptor so much that the latter began addressing him as Paramahansa²⁵ and this name became very popular later on. Thus peace and tranquillity settled on Tota Puri's mind and he finally left Dakshineswar to complete his pilgrimage. Sri Ramakrishna never heard further news of him; but later on, some of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples wandering in north-west India, learned many details in connection with Tota Puri's greatness.

²⁴ *Gospel*, p. 760.

²⁵ Gurudas Burman : op. cit., p. 76.