

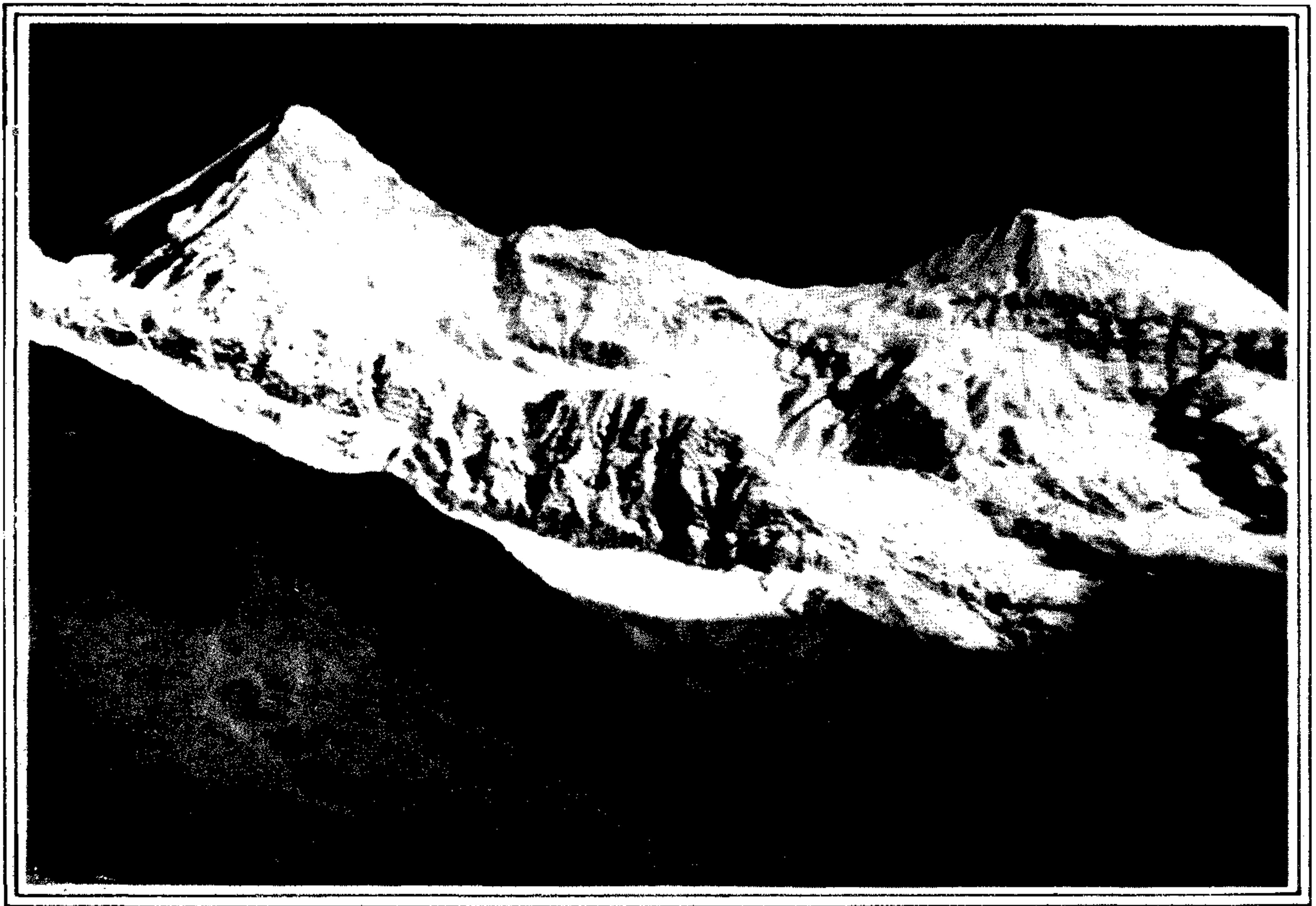
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Prabuddha Bharata

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No. 5

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

SRI RAMAKRISHNA ANSWERS

Question (asked by Devendranath Basu): 'Sir, which is higher—the conception of God with forms or that without forms?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'There are two kinds of conceptions about the formless aspect, the "ripe" and the "unripe". The "ripe" conception of the formless aspect of God is high indeed; one has to reach that through the aspect with forms. As regards the "unripe" conception of the formless aspect, it is all darkness as soon as one shuts one's eyes, as is the case with the Brahmos.'

Question (posed by himself): 'Do you know what God with forms is?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Just like water and ice. By freezing, water becomes ice; ice is water inside as well as outside. Ice is nothing but water. But look here, water has no form but ice has. Similarly the indivisible Existence-knowledge-bliss-absolute gets condensed, as it were, through one's devotion and assumes various forms like ice.'

Question (posed by himself): 'Do you know what devotion to the spiritual teacher is like?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'One is certain to perceive immediately whatever the spiritual teacher mentions. Arjuna had that devotion. One day while driving with Arjuna in a chariot Krishna looked at the sky and said, "See, friend, how beautiful is the flock of pigeons flying there." Arjuna saw it and immediately said, "Yes, Friend, very beautiful pigeons indeed." The very next moment Sri Krishna looked again and said, "How strange, friend! They are by no means pigeons." Arjuna saw them and said, "Quite so, Friend, they are not pigeons at all." Now try to understand the matter: Arjuna's truthfulness was unquestionable, he never could have flattered Krishna when he said so. But he had such great devotion to Him and faith in His words that he actually saw with his eyes whatever Krishna described to him, right or wrong.'

Question (posed by himself): 'Look here, once think of this (showing himself) before sitting down for meditation. Why do I say so?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Because you have faith here. Thinking of this will remind you of that divine Lord. Haven't you marked this? As when one sees a herd of cows, one remembers the cowherd; when one sees the son, one is reminded of the father; when one sees a pleader, one recalls the court; even so in this case. Do you understand? The mind is scattered here, there and everywhere; thinking of this (pointing to himself) it will get collected in one place and right meditation will follow when it is directed on God.'

Question (posed by himself): 'God is realizable by means of spiritual moods alone. Can He be realized when one is lacking in them?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Spiritual moods are necessary. One should cultivate a particular spiritual mood and then call on Him. "As is one's mood, so is one's gain; it is faith that is at the root. It is through a mood that love sprouts." Spiritual moods are an imperative necessity; so is faith; it is necessary to hold fast, then only one succeeds. Do you know what a spiritual mood is? Establishing a relationship with God and keeping it bright before our eyes at all times—at the time of eating, drinking, sitting, sleeping, etc.—is what is called a spiritual mood. For example, "I am His servant", "I am His child". "I am a part of Him"—this is what is called the "ripe I", the "I" of knowledge. And "I am a Brahmana", "I am a Kshatriya", "I am the son of so-and-so", "I am the father of so-and-so"—all these are the "I"s of spiritual ignorance. These should be given up, should be renounced. They bring about bondage by strengthening egoism and pride. Constant remembrance is necessary. A part of the mind should always be kept turned towards Him. It is then only that success comes. He must be made one's own by holding fast to one particular loving relationship; it is in that way alone that loving pressure can be exerted on Him. Just see, when intimacy with a person first starts or is about to start, we address him as "Sir"; as it deepens it gives place to "you"; when it reaches culmination "you" also sounds flat; then "thou, thee" become necessary. God must be made more than one's own. Then comes success. Take for example a woman gone astray. She is just beginning to love a paramour; how much secrecy, fear, coyness are there! Then when the love has grown intense, none of those emotions remain. She then stands outside her family fold, going to the extreme length of holding him by the hand in the presence of all. If that man hesitates to take care of her and desires to desert her, she puts a piece of cloth round his neck and, pulling him, says, "What, I have left home and all and have rendered myself helpless for your sake; and now you seek to desert me? Maintain me you must." Similarly a person who has renounced everything for God's sake and made Him his own, exerts pressure of love on Him and says, "I have renounced everything for You, say whether you will now reveal Yourself to me or not!"'

ONWARD FOR EVER!

He alone who is always awake to the idea of freedom, becomes free; he who thinks he is bound, endures life after life in the state of bondage. It is a fact. This truth holds good both in spiritual and temporal matters. Those who are always down-hearted and dispirited in this life can do no work; from life to life they come and go wailing and moaning. 'The earth is enjoyed by heroes'—this is the un-failing truth. Be a hero. Always say, 'I have no fear.' Tell this to everybody—'Have no fear.' Fear is death, fear is sin, fear is hell, fear is un-righteousness, fear is wrong life. All the negative thoughts and ideas that are in this world have proceeded from this evil spirit of fear. This fear alone has kept the sun, air, and death in their respective places and functions, allowing none to escape from their bounds. Therefore the Upanishad says—'Through fear of this, fire burns, the sun heats, through fear Indra and Vayu are carrying on their functions, and Death stalks upon this earth.' When the gods Indra, Moon, Vayu, Varuna will attain to fearlessness, then will they be one with Brahman, and all this phantasm of the world will vanish. Therefore I say, 'Be fearless, be fearless.'

Trickananda

REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF MOKṢA OR LIBERATION

EDITORIAL

I

As an embodied being, man experiences a feeling of unmitigated bondage from birth to death. From the first cry to the last groan, his existence is a perpetual struggle to free himself. His art and literature, his science and technology, his society and governments, his philosophy and religion—all are the results of his continual struggle to overcome bondage and limitation. The bondage is not merely physical; it is mental, moral, and spiritual too. Hunger and thirst, heat and cold, disease, decrepitude, and finally death enslave him on the physical level. Man is distinguished by his highly developed cerebrospinal mechanism. This tool, on the one hand, has made him dominant over the rest of creation, and on the other has proved an insurmountable hurdle to know and grasp the elusive mystery behind the cosmos. With a greatly developed moral sense, he would like to practise the golden rule of doing unto others as he would have them do unto him. But the brutal instinct of putting himself foremost overpowers his moral sense. From the pettiest of domestic quarrels to destructive world wars, every clash and strife exposes man's moral slavery. Overshadowing all these stands his spiritual slavery—an utter inability to know anything about the Divine Ground which is infinite truth, goodness, and beauty, and to establish an immortal relationship with It. Spiritual slavery is all the more frustrating because man feels deep within himself that he is in some inalienable way a part and parcel of God and that *freedom* is his *birthright*.

Throughout historic and prehistoric times, man has fought against this slavery at different levels and won many battles. Advances in the various branches of medi-

cine, psychology and other sciences have conferred on him a certain amount of liberty from physical, mental and moral limitations. But these are piecemeal solutions and usually tend to create more problems than they pretend to solve. Our concern here, however, is with the way to freedom shown by religion. Man's quest for spiritual freedom, owing to various geographical and cultural factors, has brought into being many faiths and religions. Though their approaches differ greatly, almost all of them promise to free man permanently, from all limitations, misery and death.

There undoubtedly are differences as to the nature of freedom promised by the various world religions. Nirvana in Buddhism is a basic tenet. Every true Buddhist, the books assure us, finally reaches that goal. Though the Hinayana school understands Nirvana in the negative sense of total extinction of personality, this opinion does not seem to accord with the true spirit of the Buddha's teachings or with his personal realizations. If the Mahayana school has taken a different stand and understood Nirvana to mean the attainment of man's infinite, inexpressible dimension, it may be considered to accord with the Buddha's personal experience and the true import of his teachings. Jainism, which posits a permanent individual self in contradistinction to Buddhism's denial of such a self, lays out a path of perfect morality and discipline to the goal of liberation—a state in which the soul enjoys infinite, indestructible, and incomparable bliss. Christianity promises man a restoration to his pristine purity and glory before the Fall and calls it salvation. Salvation, in contrast to Hindu belief, implies the act of being saved from the power and penalty of sin through the blood of Jesus Christ. Islam too holds up the ideal of a life of complete happiness in the company of God for all

those who live in accordance with the Holy Prophet's teachings.

The highest value, according to Hinduism, is *mokṣa* or freedom. So it is called the *parama-puruṣārtha*. By its great emphasis on the need for every human being to struggle for this ideal, Hinduism seems to have earned the doubtful reputation of being otherworldly. In fact, it is only asking man to grow to his full stature and not to remain stunted. Hinduism declares that man in essence is the ultimate Reality. In his present state of ego- and sense-bound consciousness, he has forgotten his real nature. So he is bound. This bondage is only an intermediary stage. If bondage were real, it could never be overcome. *Mokṣa* in Hinduism does not mean going to another place or region. Since it is regaining the lost memory of one's true nature, it is attainable here and now. There are, of course, differences of opinion about the nature of *mokṣa* between the non-dualistic and dualistic schools. Destruction of *avidyā* or ignorance and attainment of one's essential nature are, however, common to all schools. While the non-dualistic teachers speak of absolute identity with Brahman or the ultimate Reality, the dualistic teachers say that differences persist even in the state of *mokṣa*, and *jīvas* or individual souls can never attain identity with God. But they all agree that *mokṣa* puts an end to the miserable transmigratory existence and confers immortality and ineffable bliss.

II

If Brahman, the infinite Existence-knowledge-bliss, is our essential nature, how is it that we cannot perceive or experience this nature? Hindu scriptures and teachers answer that we are unable to perceive our real nature because of *avidyā* or ignorance. Questions like 'Why is this *avidyā*?' 'Whence did it arise?', 'When did it begin?' are neither logical nor necessary. Those

who have transcended this primal ignorance do not find it at all. In that state of wisdom they would only wonder how it was ever possible for them to have behaved as limited, bound beings. When the infinite nature is veiled or forgotten, want or desire springs forth. With the birth of desire, man involves himself in endless work and activity for fulfilling it. But desire is never found in the singular—it is always prolific. *Avidyā*, *kāma*, *karma*—ignorance, desire, and action—thus summarize man's relative existence with its cause.

Man's thirst for enjoyment and possessions is insatiable. It propels him relentlessly through varied experiences—bitter, sweet, and mixed—through countless births and deaths. How can anything finite satisfy the seeming thirst of the Infinite? It is said that a *jīva* or individual soul, in its mad quest for satisfaction, goes through the whole gamut of enjoyments in the bodies ranging from a clump of grass to Brahmā, the creator. But fulfilment it never finds. It is only then that the soul becomes ready to retrace its steps into itself. It learns slowly but surely that the senses, their objects, the mind, and the ego have all formed a cabal and have been duping it. The dawning of this awareness is called *vairāgya* or dispassion and is the first indispensable condition for obtaining freedom. With the onset of *vairāgya* starts the return journey, as it were, of the soul to its own infinite abode. Selfish activity then diminishes, desire is slowly checked, self-control takes root and becomes a source of contactless joy, and inwardness becomes a predominant tendency of the mind. When this inwardness culminates in the direct apprehension of the innermost Reality, the soul attains *mokṣa* or freedom. Then the crust of primal ignorance will be penetrated and shattered. When *avidyā* ceases, the taproot of bondage having been destroyed, the soul's temporality, misery, and mortality

disappear completely.

The Upaniṣads which form the bed-rock of Hinduism contain descriptions of the state of liberation and these statements have profound philosophical and mystical significance:

'Regarding this there is the following verse:

'“Because of attachment, the [transmigrating] self, together with its work, attains that result to which its subtle body or mind clings. Having exhausted [in the other world] the results of whatever work it did in this life, it returns from that world to this world for [fresh] work.”

'Thus does the man who desires [transmigrate]. But as to the man who does not desire, whose only object of desire is the Self—his organs do not depart. Being Brahman, he merges in Brahman.

'Regarding this there is the following verse:

'“When all the desires that dwell in his heart are got rid of, then does the mortal [man] become immortal and attain Brahman in this very body.”

'Just as the slough of a snake lies, dead and cast away, on an ant-hill, even so lies this body. Then the self becomes disembodied and immortal Spirit, the Supreme Self (Prāṇa), Brahman, the Light.'¹

' . . . [Therefore] one should know the nature of That alone. Knowing It one is not touched by evil action.'

'Therefore he who knows It as such becomes self-controlled, calm, withdrawn into himself, patient, and collected; he sees the Self in his own self (body); he sees all as the Self. Evil does not overcome him, but he overcomes all evil. Evil does not afflict him, but he consumes all evil. He becomes sinless, taintless, free from doubts, and a true knower of Brahman. . . .'²

That this liberation born of knowledge is attainable even while living in the body is

¹ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad*, IV. iv. 6-7.

² *ibid.*, IV. iv. 23.

strongly hinted above and in the following passages :

‘The fetters of the heart are broken, all doubts are resolved, and all works cease to bear fruit, when He is beheld who is both high and low.’³

‘If a man knows the Ātman here, he then attains the true goal of life. If he does not know It here, a great destruction awaits him. Having realized the Self in every being, the wise relinquish the world and become immortal.’⁴

III

There is tremendous amount of truth in the Upaniṣadic assertion that the mind, indeed, is the cause of bondage and liberation for mankind: for bondage if it is bound to objects; freedom from objects, that is called liberation.⁵ The sage Aṣṭāvakra teaches that *mokṣa* or liberation is dispassion towards sense-objects and bondage, the hankering for them.⁶ Since the mind contacts the objects through the senses, Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaches that ‘bondage consists in the outgoing of the senses, and liberation in their control’.⁷ So the Upaniṣads teach withdrawal of the outgoing senses and mind as the means for attaining the Ātman and thereby immortality. If the mind can be made to remain absorbed in Brahman with the same intensity as it normally remains steeped in sense-objects, Vidyāraṇya asks, who will not be freed from bondage?⁸ Liberation, according to these teachers, is not merely the culmination of the spiritual journey but also the correct practice of the preliminary steps.

Our mind and senses go out in search of sensations and satisfactions because we are

full of *vāsanā* or desires. If through the practice of self-control and concentration on the Supreme Reality the mind can be purged of its *vāsanā*, that is called *mokṣa*, and this is considered as liberation-in-life.⁹

‘The giving up of the body is not liberation,’ insists Śaṅkara, ‘nor that of the staff and the water-bowl; but liberation consists in the destruction of the heart’s knot which is nescience.’¹⁰ This knot of the heart is mainly seen as the egoism of the embodied soul. If anyone succeeds in uprooting this ego, he becomes free. ‘When there is no “I”,’ says Aṣṭāvakra, ‘there is liberation; when there is “I”, there is bondage.’¹¹ Sri Ramakrishna used to quote a Bengali couplet to this effect: ‘When shall I be free? / When “I” shall cease to be.’ Swami Vivekananda makes a remarkable statement to the same purport in a letter to a brother-disciple, ‘It is this that is called liberation-in-life—when the last trace of egoism and selfishness is gone.’¹²

Jīvanmukti or liberation-in-life is the highest achievement of man. That alone gives the real significance to the presence of intelligent life, especially human, in this space-time universe. That is the conclusive demonstration of the mastery of the transcendental truth over the phenomenal world. There may be liberation for a knower of truth after the death of his physical body. What is, however, significant to spiritually aspiring humanity is the fact of *jīvanmukti*. ‘If your bonds be not broken whilst living’, asks the great saint Kabīr, ‘what hope of deliverance in death?’ Though some philosophers do not envisage the concept of

³ *Mundaka-upaniṣad*, II. ii. 8.

⁴ *Kena-upaniṣad*, II. 5.

⁵ *Maitrī-upaniṣad*, VI. 34.

⁶ मोक्षो विषयवैराग्यं बन्धो वैषयिको रसः ।

Aṣṭāvakra-samhitā, XV. 2.

⁷ बन्ध इन्द्रियविक्षेपो मोक्ष एषां च संयमः ।

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, XI. xviii. 22

⁸ *Pañcadāsī*, XI. 115

⁹ *Viveka-cūdāmani*, 317; also see: *Yoga-vāsiṣṭha*, Mumukṣu-vyavahāra-prakarāṇa, II. 5.

¹⁰ *Viveka-cūdāmani*, 558.

¹¹ यदा नाहं तदा मोक्षो यदाहं बन्धनं तदा ।

Aṣṭāvakra: op. cit., VIII. 4.

¹² *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P.), Vol. VI (1963) p. 401.

jīvanmukti, the Upaniṣads assert it and teachers like Śaṅkara affirm it. Over and above all this is the incontrovertible fact of the existence of illumined sages who have enjoyed the blissful consciousness of liberation while yet in the body.

There is an opinion held by many that the liberated man is lost to humanity, that he is in no way helpful to it, and that his attainment of freedom is a selfish action. That this is a shallow and an utterly puerile opinion will be evident to all who think a little deeply about it. First, the liberated man has successfully lived the future life of humanity and thereby serves as an unfailing source of inspiration to the spiritually struggling men and women. Secondly, it is a fact that it is possible to help humanity more effectively on the intangible psychological, moral and spiritual levels than on the physical. Such help is infinitely superior and lasting than help rendered on the palpable physical level. Finally, a liberated man alone can love and serve the whole world without the least thought of selfish gain, without making invidious distinctions, and without looking for private or public appro-

bation. All talk of altruism and philanthropy by the so-called selfless men of the world is so much froth.

Swami Vivekananda, who is one of those rare personalities to demonstrate the fact of *jīvanmukti* in recent decades, observes:

‘The greatest men in the world have passed away unknown. The Buddhas and the Christs that we know are but second-rate heroes in comparison with the greatest men of whom the world knows nothing. Hundreds of these unknown heroes have lived in every country working silently. Silently they live and silently they pass away; and in time their thoughts find expression in Buddhas and Christ, and it is these latter that become known to us. The highest men do not seek to get any name or fame from their knowledge. They leave their ideas to the world; they put forth no claims for themselves and establish no schools or systems in their name. Their whole nature shrinks from such a thing. They are the pure Sāttvikas, who can never make any stir, but only melt down in love.’¹³

¹³ op. cit., Vol. I (1952) p. 105.

LETTERS OF A SAINT

THE LORD MY REFUGE

Sri Ramakrishna Kutir
Almora
14.8.1916

Dear—,

Day before yesterday I received a postcard of yours. I had also received a letter from you a few days earlier. Perhaps that was not replied to. In the letter written to P—, I had only acknowledged it. Don't feel depressed at my forgetting to reply to you. Whether I reply or not, I always pray to the Lord for your welfare—know this for certain. Those who take refuge in Him are indeed very dear to our heart. ‘He who adores Caitanya,¹ he indeed is my soul’—this is the inmost feeling of the Lord's devotee.

¹ Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (A.D. 1485—1533), who lived at Navadvīp, Bengal, and emphasized the path of divine love for the realization of God; he is also known as Gaurāṅga, Gaur, Nīmaī.

I feel very happy hearing occasionally from P— that you, being at the Advaita Ashrama, are contemplating Him. If alone one can offer the whole mind at His lotus feet, one can be free from all worries. But it is not possible to do so—when one attempts the Lord will spontaneously draw the mind towards Himself. The Master [Sri Ramakrishna] used to say, 'If we move ten steps towards the Lord, the Lord will approach us by one hundred steps.' If that were not so, could anyone have attained Him? Is that ever possible through human effort? Swamiji [Vivekananda] once had said to me: 'Brother Hari, do you mean to say that God is greens or fish that one can buy Him for a certain price, that is, through a specified amount of *japa* (repetition of the divine name) and a certain type of austerity? To attain Him, one has to depend only on His grace.'

'He is to be attained by the one whom He chooses.
To such a one the Self reveals His own nature.'²

Does it mean, then, that one need not perform *japa*, austerity, etc.? Certainly one must do—one should do them to one's heart's content, as far as possible. But this must be borne in mind that it is not the fact that God will reveal Himself merely because I am doing *japa* and austerity. Compassionate as He is, He will be gracious to me out of His mercy. Since I cannot be without *japa* and austerity, so I perform them. This *japa*, austerity, etc., should become as natural as breathing. This is only the means of pacifying one's heart. God-realization depends on the mercy of the Lord and not on my *japa*, austerity, etc.—it is absolutely necessary that this faith, this understanding becomes firmly rooted in one's heart.

Spiritual practice, worship, etc., are only to bring about 'wing-weariness'. If the wings become fatigued, there will be a desire to roost somewhere. Then, as there remains for the bird no other resting place than the mast, it has to resort to that. It is not possible to be resigned [to God] singlemindedly, unless the conviction is formed, after having flown for long in the boundless skies, that there is no other resting place anywhere. Therefore meditation and worship, *japa* and austerity, etc., are to be done according to the best of one's capacity; but after doing them, one will have to come to this understanding that spiritual striving and worship are of no avail. 'Let my rosary and the raggy bag (for holding the rosary) be hanging in my private cell.' Then the *sādhaka* (aspirant) will say:

'If You want to save out of Your own goodness,
Then cast your glances on Kamalākānta.³
Otherwise, such talks as realizing You through *japa*,
Well, they are as absurd as *sāṅgā* of a ghost.'

Sāṅgā means wedding. The wedding of a ghost has never occurred and will never occur: no one has attained You by performing *sādhanā* and worship and

² यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्य

तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तनूं स्वाम् ॥ *Kaṭha-upaniṣad*, I. 2.23

³ A mystic poet of Bengal.

will never attain. Merely: 'If You want to save out of Your own goodness, then cast Your glances on Kamalākānta'; then only something is likely to happen. Otherwise, why would have Śrī Rāmprasād said so:

'Why are you (my mind) crying "Mother!" "Mother!"
You won't get Her vision for sure.
If She existed at all, She would have come and shown Herself:
The All-Destroyer is no more alive.'

But this is not a cry of despair. Because, though he (Rāmprasād) knows that this is like 'crossing the ocean by swimming', still he says,

'But while my mind has understood, alas! my heart has not;
Though but a dwarf, it still would strive to make a captive of the moon.'

He, to be sure, is the Life of the life, the Self of the self; is there any other way out than attaining Him? He must be attained. But then: 'He is grasped through ecstatic love; how can you fathom Him without it?' That state also will be brought about by Him only. By continuously crying to Him with the mind and heart united, He will rise in our inmost being and reveal the truth. Then only happens, 'The seeing of the face of the Mother, the Embodiment of Brahman.'

May the Lord ere long grant you such a state of mind—I am submitting this prayer to Him. I am happy to know that you are all well. Accept my heartfelt love and good wishes. Please convey them to all at both the centres.

Ever your well-wisher,
SRI TURIYANANDA

AT THE FEET OF SWAMI AKHANDANANDA—III

BY 'A DEVOTEE'

23 February 1936; 4 P.M.

Swami Akhandanandaji has reached the Belur Math from Sargachi, just on the eve of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. The holy day would also mark the beginning of the Ramakrishna Centenary celebrations. Already many devotees have come to the Math to have the Bābā's¹ *darśan* (sight); while some devotees stood, others sat. One devotee in his eagerness to serve the

¹ That was how Swami Akhandananda Maharaj was generally called by devotees, disciples, and others.

Swami was fanning him with a big fan. Swami Akhandananda seated in a chair greeted the monks and devotees, and smilingly said just a few words, 'I have come as desired by Him, I had no idea of coming.'

24 February

Early in the morning the 'Devotee' had come from Calcutta to spend the whole day at the Math and see Bābā on this auspicious occasion.

In the old temple on the first floor, day-long worship was going on, and devo-

tional songs were being sung and amplified through a loudspeaker for the large gathering. Devotees, both men and women, were filling up every available space in the Math precincts—going to the temples, having the *darśan* of the President Maharaj (Swami Akhandananda), then waiting for *prasād* (offered food).

During the evening service, the small temple was, as it were, vibrating with the music of the *ārati* (waving of lights, etc.).

Directed by an elderly monk the 'Devotee' decided to stay on and spend his first night at the Belur Math. The revered monk told him: 'They at home will be thinking about you. But by doing so, they will be thinking about Sri Ramakrishna, about Swamiji (Vivekananda), about the Belur Math. This night is a great night. There will be *homa* (fire ceremony) for *sannyāsa* and *brahmacarya* initiations, towards the dawn. Tonight the atmosphere here will be surcharged with spirituality; it will easily induce *viveka* and *vairāgya* (discrimination and renunciation) and worldly bonds will fall off; but don't sleep away the night.'

With daybreak the 'Devotee' saw some new *sannyāsins* and *brahmacārins* filling up the Belur Math with their new bliss (*ānanda*) and consciousness (*caitanya*).² The 'Devotee' came back to Calcutta with a new dream in his mind.

Sunday, 1 March

This was the day of the public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. The 'Devotee' had come to the Math with a friend, but had not yet been able to go to

² Those who are familiar with the traditions of the Ramakrishna Order know that when probationers are administered their final vows of monasticism, they are given new names ending with the word *ānanda*. In the case of those who receive the earlier initiation of *brahmacarya* vows, the new names end with *caitanya*. The 'Devotee' here uses a very expressive pun on these two words.—Ed.

Bābā, all approaches to his room having been closed. About half past five, the 'Devotee' somehow managed to get into Akhandanandaji's room with the friend and showed him his divine Bābā. Bābā in his turn was pleased to see them and began to complain like a child: You see what a hubbub goes on all day long. They want to keep me here! But Sargachi—how peaceful it is! But then, you see, it is all the Master's work: wherever he keeps me, whatever he does through me, it is all his will.

In the evening twilight the 'Devotee' bowed down to Bābā and mused wonderstruck: 'What a divine form and figure—tired and aged, but how calm and beautiful!'

5 March

A devotee in the exuberance of his devotion had asked Bābā, 'When are you going back to Sargachi?' Bābā startled and annoyed, rejoined, 'Who are you to ask about my going? I have come here, ask me to stay. And you are asking about going!' After a little silence, he continued in a soft tone: 'I do not know when I am going. Desired by Him, I have come, directed by Him I will go, perhaps not before the "Dol Pūrṇimā"³ of our Master.'

Devotees were taking leave; Bābā asked them to attend the singing of 'Rāmanāma' downstairs, for that was the day of *Ekādaśī*.

'Dol Pūrṇimā'-Evening

Due to the 'Holi' festival the devotee could not come during the day. In the evening he found Bābā calling all assembled there and dusting *ābīr* (a kind of red powder) on their heads.

³ A Hindu festival, occurring in spring, and also called Holi, associated with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Here Akhandanandaji is identifying Sri Ramakrishna with Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

One devotee had gone out without it, he called him in and blessed him with *ābīr*.

*

Another evening the 'Devotee' found Bābā receiving the abbot of Lalbaba Ashrama very cordially; he offered him some fruits, the abbot picked up only one, and the two parted after some discussion in Hindi. Later Bābā admired him for his renunciation and service.

*

One evening after *ārati* a chair was brought into the veranda to the north of Swamiji's room in the Math building, for Akhandanandaji. The attendant could not decide which way Bābā would like to face, so he was looking quizzically. Bābā at once told him in a rebuking mood, 'Towards Dakshineswar of course; this also you have to be told!'

He was sitting in silence, when some monks and a few devotees came and sat near him. Bābā began to speak:

Ah, how grand it is to travel along the Gaṅgā! I had an idea but it was not realized; it was cut short at Murshidabad. The idea was to go from Gaṅgāsāgar (where Gaṅgā meets the sea) to Gaṅgotri (where Gaṅgā rises from the Himalayan glaciers). Let some one go—go along the western bank (which is as sacred as the holy Varanasi). At this my age I cannot go, but I shall feel happy to see someone going. Let a batch of four or five start tomorrow. Beyond Belur they will see Dakshineswar on the other side, then mills and chimneys; on this side too Serampore, then Naihati on the other side. Later on Kalna, Nava-dwip, then on the other bank Palasi and Murshidabad. Still north, the Padmā bifurcates to the east. Go along the Gaṅgā—and beg your food from the villages by the river. Take not a single paisa with you. Entirely depend upon God, otherwise travelling to places of pilgrimage by

train and with money—what kind of travel is that? You cannot see the country; of the people nothing: 400 miles, finished in one night!

Then what about preaching? Take the name of the Lord, sing His glories wherever you go. And along the Gaṅgā you will find so many *sādhus* (holy men)—real *sādhus*, living the life entirely depending upon God! Real great men—devotees of God!

I did not touch money; not even during travels; that is why Swamiji loved me so much. While travelling in Gujarat, once some dacoits would have killed me, if I had had any money with me. Ah, what a state of dependence upon God it was, always thinking of Him! Money makes us forget God. Dependence on God is true self-reliance. Dependence on money is not. Don't you see, those who earn money cannot rely upon God in the proper spirit? The two cannot go together. It is dangerous to have two legs in two boats!

*

A few days later. One day, after midday meals, Bābā was resting in a chair and was telling real-life stories about the power of phenomenal memory:

At Triveni (confluence of three rivers near Bandel, Hooghly district) I went to the house of Tarkapanchanan (a renowned pandit). There I heard stories about him: Two Tommies (privates of the British army) were quarrelling on the bank of the Gaṅgā. The Pandit was bathing in the river and was the only witness of the incident and was summoned to the court. Without understanding a bit (as he was ignorant of English), the Pandit reported verbatim every syllable uttered by the two soldiers in proper sequence of conversation.

Sir William Jones (the great Oriental scholar) was his student. I was shown the place where he learnt his lessons from the Pandit,

An artist of Murshidabad painted the portrait of a procession of the Nawab and presented it to him. At the tail end of the painting there were two pigs running away. This enraged the Nawab, he would not pay for the portrait. The artist burst into tears, saying, 'I have painted exactly what I saw.' The Nawab said, 'All right, there will be a procession again.' This time they kept a list of everything—number of elephants, horses, men on foot, even the colour of the flags. Again the artist painted and presented the picture to the Nawab who found everything according to the list and rewarded the artist.

There are men who can repeat a whole poem hearing it only once. Once I heard of such a man and went to see him. I recited '*Viśuddha-vijñānam*. . . .'⁴ At once he repeated the whole hymn to my wonder.

Another day, 5 P.M.; Math Building, upstairs room

Some elderly Swamis are present. Swami Akhandananda is seated in an easy chair. Swami Madhavananda opened a topic: 'Maharaj, you have written (on the occasion of Centenary) that seeds of *boro* crops are not sown on the soil of *āman*. What does it actually mean? Many people are asking.'

Swami Akhandananda began to explain:

Have I written it out of my own will? Early one morning the Master was speaking to me. He said, 'Write down, write down as I say.' I heard and hurried to write down lest I should forget. I was calling for someone to bring me paper and pen, but nobody was available at that hour. At last somehow I lighted a candle and started writing. I came to the meaning later on. Many young men come and ask, 'If Ramakrishna is God, why India is not becoming a free country?' The

answer is: He has sown impartially the seeds of his ideas in all directions; the harvest will be according to the soil, and also according to the toil of the people. What he has given to India and to Bengal is more than enough. They are able to bear the burden of so much. Slaves of 800 years—what can they do? They have no strength, no energy—nothing. I find in them no spirit of adventure, no determination, no discipline. Sorry to tell you that I can little rely on them. See, in the soil of free countries, how our Master's ideas are taking root, and how they are sprouting up. They will. People there have strength and energy, they have enthusiasm and earnestness, they are fit to receive the ideas.

Just see, our Master's ideas are ingrained in all of us, but the expression varies according to person. Swamiji was an infinitely vast receiver, so he could express an infinite number of ideas, and others according to their capacities.

Frankly, I may tell you, I feel myself blessed with whatever little I have received. Now go for *ārati*. *Haribol, haribol, haribol* (chant the name of Hari or God).

*

One day, after meals, Bābā was resting in the easy chair. Kanai, a young devotee from Baghbazar who was acquainted with Bābā since his days in Balaram Mandir in 1922, wanted to stay in the Math, but showed a tendency to avoid work. One of the elderly Swamis rebuked him for this and the simple-minded Kanai had reported everything to Bābā. Bābā in his reply said to him: 'Why should you be afraid? Swamiji said, "Fear is the greatest sin." Coward, go and meet the Swami and bow down at his feet. Don't be afraid of a sādhu's indignation, that will do you good. Now, if you are afraid of a man and cannot face him boldly, how will you

⁴ A hymn to Sri Ramakrishna, composed by Sri Pramadas Mitra.

face death? Death has no fixed time. It may come any time, may be right now. In the Upaniṣad is the story of Naciketas who faced Yama, the God of Death, and asked him: "What after death?" Yama replied: "Ask of me any other question." Naciketas was insisting on this alone. Just see, such a little boy and so much courage. Now recite some poem of Swamiji. Remember the poem, "And Let Shyama Dance There"? Recite it as you did in your boyhood.'

Immediately Kanai recited the poem, specially the concluding lines with a tone at once vibrant and sonant. Bābā was highly pleased and remarked, 'Just feel the strength and power packed in it. Ah, Swamiji was fearlessness personified!'

Swami Vijnananandaji, another disciple

of Sri Ramakrishna, came back from Rangoon, and on his return to Allahabad, wanted to spend a day or two at the Belur Math. After his arrival at the Math, he met Swami Akhandananda in the evening. It was a heavenly scene—the two of them embracing each other, sitting down together, and talking like two little boys about fountain pens!

Vijnanananda: 'How many fountain pens have you? Give me one.'

Akhandananda: 'Why should I give you? You have so many.'

Vijnanananda: 'All right. Are ivory fountain pens available there?'

Then they talked for some time about ivory industry of Murshidabad. Then Swami Vijnanananda retired to his room just nearby.

ON MAKING SPIRITUAL PROGRESS

SWAMI BUDHANANDA

NOT BY IMITATING 'PODO'

No one can make spiritual progress by imitating Podo.

Some of you may not yet know Podo. He is the celebrated hero of one of Sri Ramakrishna's significant parables.

'There lived in a village a young man named Padmalochan. People used to call him "Podo" for short. In this village there was a temple in a very dilapidated condition. It contained no image of God. Aswattha and other plants had sprung up on the ruins of its walls. Bats lived inside and the floor was covered with dust and the droppings of the bats. The people of the village had stopped visiting the temple. One day after dusk the villagers heard the sound of a conch-shell from the direc-

tion of the temple. They thought perhaps someone had installed an image in the shrine and was performing the evening worship. One of them softly opened the door and saw Padmalochan standing in a corner, blowing the conch. No image had been set up. The temple hadn't been swept or washed. And filth and dirt lay everywhere. Then he shouted to Podo:

You have set up no image here,
Within the shrine, O fool!
Blowing the conch, you simply make
Confusion worse confounded.
Day and night eleven bats
Scream there incessantly. . . .'

Continuing, Sri Ramakrishna himself thus unravelled the import of the parable:

'There is no use in merely making a noise if you want to establish the Deity

in the shrine of your heart, if you want to realize God. First of all purify the mind. In the pure heart God takes His seat. One cannot bring the holy image into the temple if the droppings of bats are all around. The eleven bats are our eleven organs: five of action, five of perception, and the mind.¹

We have called 'Podo' a hero, and that advisedly. He alone is a hero whom many people follow without a question. You have only to look around to find that Podo's followers are legion. What an amount of din and bustle they make in the name of religion!

In India, deities are worshipped seasonally, and so we hear of the 'puja season'. When such seasons come, you witness in some places things which tend to shatter your nerves. There are forcible extortions of money through threats, and many other forms of activity which are not only unethical but repulsive to any thinking, spiritually-disposed person. At the times of Puja, you have awesome journeys through a babble of nerve-blasting noise which continues for days on end; and all this is done in the name of religion!

It is strange to find that educated youths who should know and think better do not see the futility of such performances of pujas in which sanctity and devotion are not cultivated in true humility, but on the other hand much is done which is abhorrent to any true devotee of God.

Know it for sure: there is no chance of making any spiritual progress by the 'Podo'-way.

YEARNING FOR THE CHOSEN IDEAL

It is a truism to say that the astronauts could never reach the moon if proper fuel for the space vehicle were not procured. What is proper fuel to a space vehicle is

yearning to spiritual life. This is why Sri Ramakrishna teaches: 'Nothing whatsoever is achieved in spiritual life without yearning.' Positively speaking, he has also taught what a rich harvest of spiritual blessings yearning for God can give to an aspirant.

From what we shall quote here of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings, the reader can easily deduce to what realms of spiritual life an aspirant can travel with the fuel power of yearning for God.

Sri Ramakrishna teaches:

'How much of the scriptures can you read? What will you gain by mere reasoning? Try to realize God before anything else. Have faith in the guru's words, and work. If you have no guru, then pray to God with a longing heart. He will let you know what He is like.

'....It will not do to say that God exists and then idle away your time. You must reach God somehow or other. Call on Him in solitude and pray to Him, "O Lord! reveal Thyself to me." Weep for Him with a longing heart.... one gets everything through yearning.'²

"Pray to God with a longing heart. He will surely listen to your prayer if it is sincere. Perhaps He will direct you to holy men with whom you can keep company; and that will help you on your spiritual path. Perhaps someone will tell you, "Do this and you will attain God."³

According to Sri Ramakrishna, through the cultivation of intense yearning or sincere longing, for God, great spiritual experiences can be attained and God can be seen. He teaches:

'One should pray to God with sincere longing. God cannot but listen to prayer if it is sincere....

'You should practise calling on God every day. It is not possible to succeed in one day; through daily prayer you will come to long for God.'⁴

¹ 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, 1947), p. 53.

² *ibid.*, pp. 614-6.

³ *ibid.*, p. 644.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 678.

'Cry to the Lord with an intensely yearning heart and you will certainly see Him. People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. They swim in tears for money. But who weeps for God? Cry to Him with a real cry.... Longing is like the rosy dawn. After the dawn out comes the sun. Longing is followed by the vision of God.'⁵

'He who seeks God with a longing heart can see Him, talk to Him as I am talking to you. Believe my words when I say that God can be seen.'⁶

The three things which any aspirant needs for attaining the spiritual experiences narrated in the scriptures are: divine grace, purification of the mind, and the awakening of the *kundalinī*. None of these is easy to attain. Grace would seem an unpredictable commodity. The yogic disciplines, the practice of which helps the awakening of the *kundalinī*, are not easy for an average aspirant. But Sri Ramakrishna teaches a method of attaining these three, which is not beyond the capacity of anyone. His precepts are here:

'One can realize God through intense renunciation. But the soul must be restless for Him, as restless as one feels for a breath of air when one's head is pressed under water....

'If a devotee prays to God with real longing, God cannot help revealing Himself to him.'⁷

And that is the greatest possible expression of divine grace.

'Pray to Him with a yearning heart and weep. That will purify your heart. You see the reflection of the sun in clear water. In the mirror of his "I-consciousness" the devotee sees the form of the Primal Energy, Brahman with attributes. But the mirror must be wiped clean. One does not see the right reflection if there is any dirt on the

mirror.'⁸

The dirt of the 'mirror' is removed, the mind is purified, by the shedding of tears caused by intense longing. Again Sri Ramakrishna teaches:

'One's spiritual consciousness is not awakened by the mere reading of books. One should also pray to God. The Kundalinī is roused if the aspirant feels restless for God.'⁹

Rousing of the *kundalinī* is of supreme importance for making spiritual progress, for that is the condition precedent for gaining spiritual experiences.

Intense yearning for God, teaches Sri Ramakrishna, can dower us with coveted spiritual experiences, for it is one of the ways open to all aspirants for rousing the *kundalinī*. This yearning, to be a purposive drive in spiritual life, must be directed carefully to one's chosen ideal. Otherwise we may forcefully wander a lot without getting anywhere. Therefore yearning should be pointed to the chosen ideal only. It is important to see that this fuel power of yearning does not speedily take us nowhere.

Finally, the moot question is: if one does not have yearning at all, what does one then do? One prays to God for it, and the prayer brings it.

PRAYER THE GUIDE

Well, if the radar is helpful for navigation of vehicles on water or in air, prayer is even more helpful for navigation in spiritual life.

Sri Ramakrishna laid great stress on the efficacy of prayer for attaining worthy spiritual ends. In the *Gospel* are almost forty of his teachings about how to pray and what to pray for. These prayers when practised will not only keep our spiritual life in perspective but also help us to attain

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 592.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 652.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 604

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 814.

its supreme ends.

The basic postulate in regard to prayer as taught by Sri Ramakrishna is that God is, and listens to our prayer when it is sincere to the core.

A Brahma devotee asked Sri Ramakrishna:

'Sir, what is the way?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Attachment to God, or, in other words, love for Him. And secondly, prayer.'

Brahma devotee: 'Which one is the way—love or prayer?' Sri Ramakrishna: 'First love, and then prayer.'¹⁰

In the same conversation Sri Ramakrishna teaches how to make prayer effective:

'And one must always chant the name and glories of God and pray to Him. An old metal pot must be scrubbed every day. What is the use of cleaning it only once? Further, one must practise discrimination and renunciation; one must be conscious of the unreality of the world.'¹¹

In his teachings on prayer, Sri Ramakrishna says with great force that God listens to our prayer, and he also tells us what to pray for. We shall here cite a few of these teachings.

A devotee (Hazra) asked: 'Does God listen to our prayer for bhakti?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Surely. I can assure you of that a hundred times. But the prayer must be genuine and earnest. . . .'¹²

'Therefore one should constantly practise the singing of God's name and glories, and meditation and contemplation as well. And further, one should always pray that one's attachment to the world may disappear and one's love for God's Lotus Feet may grow.'¹³

On another occasion a devotee asked:

'Then what is the way for those who have not seen God? Must they give up all the duties of the world?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'The best path for this age is bhakti-yoga, the path of bhakti prescribed by Narada: to sing the name and glories of God and pray to Him with a longing heart, "O God, give me knowledge, give me devotion, and reveal Thyself to Me!" The path of karma is extremely difficult. Therefore one should pray: "O God, make my duties fewer and fewer; and may I, through Thy grace, do the few duties that Thou givest me without any attachment to their results! May I have no desire to be involved in many activities!"'¹⁴

A Devotee: 'How can I develop love for God?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Repeat His name, and sins will disappear. Thus you will destroy lust, anger, the desire for creature comforts, and so on.'

Devotee: 'How can I take delight in God's name?'

Sri Ramakrishna: 'Pray to God with a yearning heart that you may take delight in His name. He will certainly fulfil your heart's desire.'¹⁵

Sri Ramakrishna further teaches us to pray so that we may have discrimination: that addiction to sense pleasure may leave us and we have devotion to God; that animal propensities may leave us; that we may have a favourable turn of events for our spiritual practices; that we may not speak ill of others; that we may have love for God and may not be deluded by His world-bewitching Māyā.

According to Sri Ramakrishna's teachings, the aspirant can garner all needed spiritual resources and have the vision of God, through practice of prayer. Only, one needs to have the faith that there is this one 'Person whom we call God, He listens to prayer'.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 150.

¹¹ *loc. cit.*

¹² *ibid.*, p. 503

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 1012.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 405.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 137.

Practice of prayer is so often emphasized perhaps because most people are not really capable of practising more demanding disciplines, and also because it goes wonderfully well with all the other forms of spiritual discipline. Of course it is itself practice of *bhakti* as taught by Nārada, which according to Sri Ramakrishna is the most suitable spiritual discipline for our age.

But Sri Ramakrishna did not believe in a namby-pamby, mushy kind of petitionary prayer. He taught:

'God is our very own. . . . Therefore we should force our demands on God. He is our Father and Mother, isn't He ?

If the son demands his patrimony and gives up food and drink in order to enforce his demand, then the parents hand his share over to him three years before the legal time.'¹⁶

To what kind of prayer the Lord listens, we may all like to know. Sri Ramakrishna teaches:

'You will feel restless for God when your heart becomes pure and your mind free from attachment to the things of the world. Then alone will your prayer reach God.'¹⁷

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 21-2.

DAYS OF YOUTH

BY ERIK JOHNS; MUSIC BY JOHN SCHLENCK

'In books and temples, vain thy search.'

First Movement

Solo: Sing ye, O mountains, O clouds, O great winds.

Chorus: Sing ye, sing ye, sing His glory!

Solo and Chorus: Sing ye, O mountains, O clouds, O great winds. Sing ye, sing ye, sing His glory!

Solo: Naren stood in the hallway, filled with a strange mood and singing with joy.

Chorus: Sing with joy all ye, the suns and moons and stars. Sing ye, sing ye His glory!

Solo: He thought of the uselessness of learning that did not lead to God.

Chorus: Suns and moons and stars, sing His glory! Sing with joy all ye, the suns and moons and stars. Sing ye, sing ye His glory!

Speaker: It was late at night. Students in their rooms still studied books, their minds set on the degrees they were struggling to attain. Tomorrow they would fail or pass. Only Naren did not study. He did not dread the coming examinations or their meaning in his future, for he had come to a crossroads.

Solo: Naren was of two minds, and visions of two lives filled his youth—one the life of comfort and wealth, wife and children, power and luxury; the other a vision of the wandering monk, eating what chance brought to him, and sleeping where night found him.

Chorus: Professors encouraged him to study. They knew his brilliance and ambition could make a career that would bring him fame and leave a mark upon the world.

Solo: But Naren was not thinking of fame. Fired with the idealism of youth, he joined with those preaching reform, the Brahma Samaj, and worked to wake his sleeping countrymen.

Chorus: His father began to urge him to marry, to settle down and raise a family. He tempted him with a dowry and a future bright with fortune.

Solo: But Naren was not thinking of fortune. The divine urge was growing within him.

Chorus: The spirit of desire, the spirit of renunciation—these two were within him. But slowly desire for the world began to fade, and slowly desire of the spirit became strong until at last it held mastery over him.

Speaker: The prayers and songs of the Brahma Samaj were enough for Narendra until one day he came to realize he was no nearer God than before. He went from one religious sect to another, from leader to leader asking, 'Have you seen God?' The same question over and over, but no one answered 'Yes.' Perhaps there was no answer.

Solo: Then he remembered he had met a man at the house of a devotee in the city of Calcutta. Had not he heard it said this man lived in a blessed state? Did not devotees speak of it? What was the power of this man they called Ramakrishna?

Chorus: Setting out for the temples of Dakshineswar, Naren resolved to find the truth for himself.

Second Movement

Solo: O my mind, go to your own abode. Why do you wander in this foreign land of earth, dressed in alien garments, nodding and smiling at strangers as if they were your own?

Speaker: Narendra entered the room by the western door. Accompanied by friends, he stood out from them. He was asked to sing, and he sang with such conviction that the man called Ramakrishna passed into a mood of ecstasy.

Solo: Then Ramakrishna raised himself and led the youth onto a porch, addressing him as one long known, 'Ah, you come so late... Lord, I know you as that ancient sage born to remove the miseries of mankind.'

Speaker: Startled by this familiar address, Naren wondered, 'Who is this madman I have come to see?' Yet he crept near and asked the question he had so often asked, 'Sir, have you seen God?'

Solo: The man used simple language but spoke from a depth that marked his words and life as one. 'I see God as I see you here, though more intensely. If one weeps for Him, surely He reveals Himself.'

Speaker: To the youth it was all strange. He was bewildered by the man and his ecstasies, the devotees and their adoration. Yet could an ordi-

nary teacher have such purity? If this were a madman, why did he feel such blessedness that by a touch the universe vanished into nothingness? A thousand and one preoccupations kept Narendra Nath away from Dakshineswar, but Ramakrishna had marked him for his own, and at intervals the boy returned and in time became his disciple.

Solo: Wonderful was the bond between them, a bond of spirit without a tinge of worldliness. So close, so deep was their love that others thought them two souls in one.

Chorus: And little by little did the ties of family and fortune, rebellion and prejudice break for Narendra Nath through the grace of his Master. Little by little was the disciple led from doubt to certainty, from anguish to bliss, from bondage to freedom. Little by little, until at last he was lifted above form, above thought, above sense by the power and love of Ramakrishna.

Solo: Naren's heart overflowed with ecstasy, his mind realized that the Absolute alone could reconcile all philosophies. He had reached the culmination of his quest.

Speaker: But, as a treasure is locked up in a box, so did Ramakrishna lock up the treasure of Naren's realization, and in so doing, he said to him, 'When you have done my work, the treasure box will be unlocked again, and you will know everything, just as you do now.'

Solo: It was six long years that Naren had sat at the feet of his teacher, and now came the final days, for Ramakrishna lay with mortal illness in the garden-house at Cossipore.

Third Movement

Chorus: As he lay near death, Ramakrishna called Naren to him and, looking steadfastly into his eyes, entered into deep meditation.

Solo: Naren felt a force entering his body. He lost outer consciousness...

Chorus: ...and when he came to, opening his eyes, he found his Master weeping.

Solo: 'Why do you weep, Master?'

Chorus: ...he asked.

Solo: 'O Naren,'

Chorus: ...his teacher answered,

Solo: 'today I have given you my all... With the power transmitted by me great things will be done by you for the good of the world. Only after that will you go to whence you came.'

Speaker: That which was Ramakrishna in human form had completed its task. It had given itself to Naren wholly and entirely in the simple way one gives a flower or bestows a gift. Now the suffering body was finished. Its play was done.

Chorus: At two minutes past one on the sixteenth of August, 1886, a thrill passed through the Master's body; the hair stood on end, the eyes became fixed,

- Solo: A divine smile lit up the face and Ramakrishna entered a bliss from which he never returned to earthly consciousness.
- Chorus: And the disciples wept.... They wept. Overwhelmed by grief, the disciples wept.... Yet in the midst of their grief, calm suddenly descended upon them. Their hearts were gladdened. He who had sacrificed for them, could he have left them?
- Solo: The barriers of time and space were broken. He who had been their light and guide became a beacon for all the universe.... He was their Lord, Soul of their souls, in death as in life....
- Chorus: Our Lord, Soul of our souls, the same in death as in life.... Jai Ramakrishna! Victory to Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna! Jai Sri Guru Maharajji ki Jai!
- Speaker: But now the young disciples began to move apart. Some of them returned to their homes to please their families.... "They are still boys with bright prospects before them. Let them return to their homes and studies. That is the wisest course." But there were those who saw this would not be so. . . .
- Chorus: And a lay devotee came forward and rented for them an old house in Baranagore that they might have a monastery.
- Solo: It was to this place that Naren worked to bring his scattered brothers. He pleaded with them. He argued in a whirlwind of power that they could not resist.
- Chorus: They came to see in him the spirit of their Master incarnate.... Thus within all arose a great spirit of renunciation, a desire to taken the *sannyāsin's* vow.....
- Speaker: It was late one night before a sacred fire near a house made holy by their prayers that Naren gathered them....
- Sole: Overhead was the canopy of Indian sky and all around ineffable peace.
- Chorus: Their meditation lasted long.
- Sole: Then Naren began to tell the story of Lord Jesus... his birth, his life and the gathering of his disciples, his death and resurrection.... The boys heard, and that world wherein Paul had preached the gospel of the risen Christ and spread its message far and wide was opened up for them.
- Chorus: The very air seemed to vibrate with their fervour. Could they not deny themselves as Christ had done, for the redemption of the world? Standing before the sacred fire, the flames lighting up their faces, and with the crackling of wood the only sound, Naren and his brothers took the holy vows of *sannyās* before God and one another.... Thus they stood, a group of boys united in holy bond.
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EXCURSIONS INTO UDDHAVA-GĪTĀ

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

NEED FOR SENSE CONTROL

The world impinges upon us through the sense organs. Whether the world is real or not is another question. But our knowledge of it can come only through sense contact. When we watch a beautiful object we live in a world of sight. When we listen to melodious music we live in a world of sound. When we handle delightful objects we live in a world of touch. When we eat delicious food we live in a world of taste. Each sense organ can conjure up a new facet of the world to us. Anyone of them is enough to fetter the mind to the external world. But man generally rushes headlong into the make-believe world through all his sense organs. That is why he gets caught in the complex meshes of the world. By the time he realizes his mistake it is too late. A good deal of a grown-up man's time is taken up with fighting against the impressions gathered during his early years. The need for sense control should be learned from childhood. When I was a young man, my teacher, Swami Brahmananda, once told me: 'If you give your body and mind to the world it will destroy both; if you give them to the Lord and His service, you will enjoy bodily health and peace and happiness of mind.' First of all the mind should be withdrawn from the objects by repeated practice until they do not distract us. The desires that rise in the mind are then to be overcome. Finally, the controlled mind is to be moved towards the Divine.

These ideas are conveyed in stanzas 1 to 21 of the third chapter.¹ They are meant for the guidance of true spiritual aspirants. Through various illustrations the aspirant is warned against the unbridled use of sense

organs. Even apparently innocent pleasures can be obstacles to spiritual progress. Music, for instance, can be dangerous for the spiritual aspirant if it is not of the right sort.² Holy music, hymnody, etc., are, of course, not condemned in these verses. If music leads one Godward, it is to be welcomed. But if it is sensual music, creating a strong passionate atmosphere, then it is dangerous for the spiritual aspirant. We should learn to study the reactions in the mind produced by sensual music. Many of the worldly musicians and artistes, it should be noted, lead impure or reckless lives. Art, in the case of many of these wayward geniuses, far from helping them to reach spiritual heights, has caused their degradation. Sometimes what passes in the name of music is nothing but noise. Listening to this sort of cacophony, which is now-a-days becoming popular, can make the mind restless and unfit for any concentrated effort.

Moonlight may be very beautiful and entrancing, but if we enjoy it we must carefully study its reactions on our own mind. Very often moonlight is associated with human love and passions and not with the Divine. If one is full of impure impressions one had better avoid such things as moonlight, at least during the early period of one's *sādhana* or spiritual practice.

Absolute self-control, perfect *brahmacarya*, is to be practised by one who wants to attain to the Highest, especially through the path of *jñāna* (knowledge). All desires for enjoyment through the various senses are to be controlled—not merely the physical act but also the thought in its very subtle forms. The path of *jñāna* is a big leap for a spiritual aspirant as there are no concepts

¹The reference is to *The Last Message of Śrī Kṛṣṇa* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas).

²*L. M.*, III. 17-8.

of the personal God. It is not an easy one. Those who do not lead perfectly pure lives for many years, avoiding all physical and mental expressions of sex even in dream, can never attain the goal of *jñāna*. To talk of Advaita philosophy is one thing, but even to have a partial experience of it needs rigorous fulfilment of stringent rules. Realization of the Absolute demands absolute control of every part of the personality.

In the path of *bhakti* or divine love the difficulties are less because of the concept of the personal God. In it all the emotions have to be turned towards Him and this automatically weans one away from worldly pleasures. The pure joy one experiences in worship boosts one's morality and this makes spiritual life easier. Even the follower of the path of non-dualism tries to reduce his difficulties by practising intense devotion to his guru. The guru in turn helps the disciple to convert this personal devotion into longing for the Impersonal.

But most people belong to the mixed type. That is, they have both the feelings and reasoning well developed in them. Such people should sublimate their *bhakti* through *jñāna* and sweeten *jñāna* through divine love. They should know how the personal and the impersonal aspects of the Divine are interrelated and establish harmonious relationship with both.

But sense control, whatever the method employed to achieve it, is indispensable for the spiritual aspirant whether he is a monk or a householder. All the different forms of sense control strongly advocated in the third chapter of the book are meant to remove the obstructions and store up energy for higher purposes. Without storing up energy and then giving it a Godward turn, nothing can be achieved. So much energy is being wasted every day through the senses uselessly that little is left to help the aspirant to turn Godward. So he should be on his guard and see that he reacts only

to those stimuli that goad him towards the Divine. All other reactions are to be controlled. Be in the company of the holy or remain quite alone by yourself. It does not matter what other people think of you if you keep aloof. It is always better to remain a little reserved.

The Upaniṣadic seers prayed: 'May we hear with our ears only what is auspicious, may we see with our eyes only what is auspicious.'

FALSE HOPES—THE STORY OF PINGALA

Piṅgalā was a courtesan who was very greedy for wealth. One day, however, she was disappointed as nobody turned up to meet her.

'When through this expectation of money her countenance sank and she was very much down in spirits, then as a result of this brooding an utter disgust came over her; that made her happy.'³

She was really a very fortunate woman. Very few people come to their senses like her. They just go on repeating the same mistakes and have the same dirty experiences over again, driven by the same old impressions. My Guru, Swami Brahmananda, once told us :

'There are three classes of people. The first class learn through just seeing the mistakes and experiences of others and avoid getting into trouble. Those who learn a lesson after themselves committing a mistake or going through an experience belong to the mediocre class. The worst types are those who never learn anything even after repeated experiences and mistakes.'

Do not have any hopes for anything worldly, have only hopes for the Divine. It is this alone that brings happiness to the soul. One should feel a sort of disgust with everything sensual. This is the first sign of our real dispassion for the things of the world. And without this dispassion for

³ *ibid.*, 27.

sense objects and their enjoyment, gross and subtle, no spiritual life, no higher endeavour, becomes possible.

Really speaking, we are living on drives and hopes—and false hopes at that. This brings only misery, bondage and slavery to the senses. So by giving up hopes we feel happy. We should see that our only hope is connected with the Divine. All other hopes connected with our impulses and desires should be given up. Usually our hopes are dependent on our desires and on others. We do not centre our hopes on the Divine.

God is immanent in us as the Soul of our souls. But we do not care for Him and try to depend on others. God is the source of all bliss. Outside objects only reflect a little of this immeasurable bliss. Running after external objects means running after reflections, shadows.

The spirit of renunciation must come one day or other. It may not come to all with the suddenness that characterized Piṅgalā's. But it must become our dominant trait if we wish to gain anything from spiritual life. The impulses rise in us owing to our previous experiences, but that is no reason why we should give way to them helplessly. We must and can put them down, though this may mean a life of great strain and inner conflict for some time.

We should be very clear as to what we are really doing, and should always see that we do not follow the subtle impulses and desires, driving us to do things we ought to avoid. If we want to associate with people, we should see why they attract us. If we want to do anything we should know why we want to do it, the real motive behind our wish. We should find out the root cause of our desires and annihilate it then and there. All harmful ideas and associations, everything that is not favourable to our spiritual life, should be eliminated. True dispassion, renunciation, is a common

factor in all forms of spiritual discipline. And without this we cannot make much out of our spiritual striving.

It may take time, but the spirit of renunciation should be there before spiritual life can begin. There should be a true desire and longing for purity. That is the minimum prerequisite for starting the spiritual life. This means great strain. One has to struggle hard to control the senses and the impulses. But this early phase must be passed through by every aspirant on his way to the Goal. The spirit of renunciation is the very basis of all true spiritual striving. Without this spirit of dispassion we had better not even think of spiritual life. It will be wiser for us to take up something else as a pastime.

THE FEELING OF DISGUST

This is the first reaction to worldly pleasures when one realizes one's mistake in life. The disgust that Piṅgalā felt for her own body is the first reaction that comes to one at the end of one's worldly life. This indicates a more complete transformation than that produced by mere sin consciousness. A man who broods over his sins may still be clinging to them. But the feeling of disgust turns one instantly from worldly life to spiritual life. One who turns to spiritual life must be able to say to himself like Piṅgalā :

'Who but myself should make much of this body which consists of bony structures, such as the spine, ribs and limbs—like the ridge-pole, rafters and posts of a house—and is covered over with skin, hair and nails, with its nine doors of secretion, and full of filthy stuff?'⁴

We can find out whether we have turned to spiritual life once for all by the disgust we feel for our bodies. If we have this, other bodies—male or female—will no longer attract us. They will no longer act

⁴ *ibid.*, 33.

as pitfalls on our spiritual path. In his *Yoga-sūtras* Patañjali says:

'When one practises purity, both external and internal, one comes to have a disgust for one's own body and disgust for coming in touch with other bodies.'⁵

As we become more and more introspective, our mind becomes something like a mental X-ray and we gain a deep insight into life as it is lived all around us. First comes the feeling of disgust. This is followed by the awareness of the glory of the Ātman standing behind all the filth and dirt that constitute the human body. The real experience of the Ātman comes much later but one can grasp the principle even in the early stage.

It is not enough to have intellectual ideas. We should be able to react emotionally also. We should really feel an utter disgust for worldly pleasures. We should be able to realize with Bhartṛhari:

'Enjoyments have not been enjoyed, but we are being eaten up . . . Desires have not worn out, but we are wearing out.'⁶

GIVE A HIGHER DIRECTION TO YOUR EMOTIONS

Our urge for enjoyment is to be given a new turn. Instead of worldly objects, the Divine or the real Self should become the object of our enjoyment. You cannot get rid of desires all at once. So give them a higher turn. This is a recurring theme in the whole of the *Bhāgavatam*. Every lower emotion has a higher counterpart. Lust is a lower emotion, love is its higher aspect. Attachment is a lower emotion, devotion is its higher aspect. And so on. Evoke the

counter emotion when the lower emotions disturb you. And make the Divine the object of all these higher forms of emotion.

First of all the soul that has become a little introspective, a little less blind to the Reality, feels that everything is temporary and evanescent. Then the soul begins to yearn after something that is permanent and unchanging. After that it begins its search and finally comes to the Divine, the Soul of our souls, to its own eternal essence.

The greatest security in spiritual life lies in becoming more and more conscious of the Divine. See the Divine in all those who come in contact with you. Stop depending on them and depend more on the Divine ever present in us all.

THE SELF IS SEXLESS

The Ātman or Self is unattached to the body and mind. The idea of sex pertains only to the body and mind. The Ātman is a witness and is self-luminous. When we say 'I' we identify ourselves either with our body or with our mind. But if we identify ourselves with the Ātman our whole outlook on life changes. We will find that we are beyond all ideas of sex. This is what every sincere spiritual aspirant must do. It is wrong on our part to think we are men or women and take man-woman relationships. This is the fundamental idea behind the Hindu concept of chastity known as *brahmacharya*.

The teachings of Jesus Christ reveal a religion of perfect purity and continence. The religion of the New Testament is the religion of the monk and the nun. The Sermon on the Mount holds forth the ideal of the *sannyāsin* in its purest and most uncompromising form. In Christ's scheme of religious life there is very little place for the householder, although institutional Christianity has been trying to blur this idea. Protestantism in all its forms is

⁵ शौचात्स्वाङ्गजुगुप्सा परैरसंसर्गश्च ।
Yoga-sūtras, II, 40.

⁶ भोगा न भुक्ता वयमेव भुक्ताः
...तृष्णा न जीर्णा वयमेव जीर्णाः ।
Bhartṛhari's *Vaināgya-śatakam*, 7.

especially mistaken and wrong regarding this.

'No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.

'Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? ⁷

'And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life.' ⁸

You see, how wrong Protestantism is in all this. Ponder over the real meaning of such sayings and come to your own conclusion. Christ's religion is the religion of the monk. We should squarely face this fact, without distorting such passages to suit our desires and attachments. Christ's ideas are not at all difficult for us Orientals to understand because they have always been known and practised in the East. The West is going down because of neglecting the true import of Christ's teachings and clinging on to immorality and brutality. Sex and brutality are closely connected. The more you see men and women here the more you become convinced of this.

⁷ St. Matthew, 6 : 24-5.

⁸ *ibid.*, 19 : 29.

REAL CHILDREN OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

In one of his letters to a brother-disciple, Swami Vivekananda wrote:

'From the very date that he (Sri Ramakrishna) was born, has sprung the Golden Age (Satya-yuga). Henceforth there is an end to all sorts of distinctions, and everyone down to the Chandala will be a sharer in the Divine Love. The distinction between man and woman, between the rich and the poor, the literate and the illiterate, Brahmanas and Chandalas—he lived to root out all. And he was the harbinger of Peace—the separation between the Hindus and Mohammedans, between Hindus and Christians, all are now things of the past.' ⁹

We can become children of Sri Ramakrishna if we are prepared to live spotlessly pure lives physically and mentally. A person who does not make an energetic attempt at eliminating all gross and subtle desires for money and sex has no right to call himself a child of Sri Ramakrishna. Like Christ, Sri Ramakrishna too stood for uncompromising purity. Those who want to have both sense enjoyment and spirituality have no place here. 'I don't want amphibious types of men who will be half monks and half householders,' wrote Swami Vivekananda once. People who are 'amphibious types' can never be properly trained in spiritual life. There is very little that can be done for them. Their time has not come yet.

⁹ *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas), Vol. VI (1963) p. 335.

FIRST MEETINGS WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA: DURGA CHARAN NAG (NAG MAHASAYA)

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

It was evening. In his dwelling in Calcutta Durga Charan was having a heated argument about religion with his neighbour and friend Suresh Chandra Dutta. Neither seemed to be able to win over the other to his belief. This was not a solitary occasion when they differed from each other. They indulged in such debates often. Though their religious views were as poles asunder, strangely enough they were fast friends, deeply attached to each other.

The only child of Dindayal Nag and Tripurasundari, Durga Charan (1846-1899) was brought up in a small village called Deobhog in the district of Dacca. He lost his mother when he was eight years old and was brought up by his aunt. Born of a poor family, he had to struggle hard for his school education. He had married at an early age, and after his wife's death had married a second time at the stubborn insistence of his father. He studied allopathic medicine at Calcutta for a year and a half but could not continue. Next he studied homoeopathy and soon made a reputation as a doctor. He might easily have become wealthy if his code of ethics had not been strict. Service of others seemed to be the great mission of his life. Not content with his philanthropic activities, Durga Charan received his initiation from his family preceptor, Kailash Chandra Bhattacharya, and earnestly began spiritual practices. While studying medicine he published 'Lessons for Youths', pertaining to moral and religious instruction and distributed them free of charge. One of his favourite hobbies was composing religious songs.¹

¹ Sarat Chandra Chakravarty published Durga Charan's five beautiful songs on Mother Durga and Mother Kali (*Pratibāsi*, Vol. II, No. 9, pp. 145-7).

The second son of Madhav Chandra Dutta and Trailokyamohini, Suresh had his school education at the Church Mission Society. He joined medical college but could not continue long. Jogesh, his elder brother, not long after his conversion to Christianity, had to live separately. In the meanwhile, Suresh developed a fascination for the Brahma movement. In fact, he had great faith in Brahmoism. Though Durga Charan also visited the Brahma Samaj several times in the company of Suresh and admired the activities of Keshab Chandra Sen, he was an out and out orthodox Hindu at heart.

Durga Charan was then living alone in a small cottage at Kumartuli.² His father was living at Deobhog and his second wife, Sarat Kamini, whom Durga Charan had married about five years previously, had been sent to Deobhog to nurse the old father.³ One day when the two friends were discussing a religious topic, Durga Charan observed, 'Days are flying fast in futile discussion. Human life is useless unless one realizes the truth.' In reply Suresh⁴ said that he had heard in the Sadharan Brahma Samaj

² He had hired a two-storeyed house close to Suresh Chandra's at Hathkhola in 1880. When his father and wife left for Deobhog he went back to his earlier residence, obviously a cheaper one, at Kumartuli.

³ Gurupada Bhowmick: *Śrī-Śrī-Mahāvīrat Jugal Līlā* (Biography of Durga Charan Nag in Bengali), Introduction, p. 4. Also *The Saint Durgacharan Nag* (Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras-4, 1928), p. 42.

⁴ Suresh Chandra Dutta (1850-1912) was the first among Sri Ramakrishna's devotees to publish a book on the Master. *The Sayings of Paramahansa Ramakrishna* was first published on December 23, 1884. A later edition comprising a short biography of Sri Ramakrishna and his 950 teachings became very popular. Being junior to Durga Charan, he used to call the latter *Māmā* (maternal uncle).

of a great saint living at the Dakshineswar temple. For some reason or other he had forgotten to inform Durga Charan for two months or so. Now he communicated to Durga Charan what he had heard of the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. The narrative fascinated Durga Charan. He grew impatient to visit the saint that very day. He persuaded Suresh to accompany him.

It was some time in April, 1882 (Bengali era 1289, month of *Caitra*).⁵ Finishing their morning meal in a hurry they left for the temple of Dakshineswar, the location of which was unfamiliar to them. After walking a long distance, they inquired of a passer-by who told them they had left the village of Dakshineswar behind them. They retraced their path and finally arrived at the Dakshineswar temple at about two o'clock.

Walking more than nine miles in the hot sun had been tiring, but the prospect of meeting the holy man made them ignore the strain. They moved about and came upon Pratap Chandra Hazra, sitting in front of Sri Ramakrishna's room, who gave them the wrong information that Sri Ramakrishna had gone to Chandannagar. He advised them to come on some other day. Greatly disappointed, they were about to go away when they observed somebody⁶ within that room smilingly motioning to them to enter. They stepped into the room and found a middle-aged man seated facing north on a small couch with his legs stretched out.

They soon fell under his spell. The man was of medium height and very frail-looking.

⁵ Gurupada Bhowmick : op. cit., p. 34. Also *The Saint Durga Charan Nag*, p. 43. According to Binodini Mitra's *Śrī Śrī Durgācaran Nāg* (Bengali) p. 34, Durga Charan was 35 when he met Sri Ramakrishna. In fact his age was 35 years 7 months some odd days when he met Sri Ramakrishna.

⁶ cf. : *The Saint Durga Charan Nag*, pp. 44-5. According to Akshay Kumar Sen's *Śrī Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa Punthi*, 2nd ed., p. 298, Sri Ramakrishna was chatting with Pratap Chandra Hazra that time.

He was wearing a short beard. His face, with a divine smile and introspective eyes, had an attraction all its own. He spoke with a slight but charming stammer, in rustic Bengali. He was a little over forty-six. It struck the visitors that he must be Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

As was his wont Sri Ramakrishna saluted them first. Suresh Chandra, like other Brahmos, made obeisance to him with folded palms. Durga Charan prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna and wanted to take the dust of his feet, but Sri Ramakrishna withdrew his feet to prevent him. This hurt Durga Charan. Greatly aggrieved, he thought that perhaps he was not pure enough to touch the feet of the holy man.⁷

They seated themselves on the mat spread on the floor. Sri Ramakrishna took no time to size up the visitors. Durga Charan was in his thirtysixth year and Suresh younger than him by four years. Of dark complexion, Durga Charan was very lean and thin, careless about his dress and hair. His face, with untrimmed beard, was remarkable for the pair of lustrous eyes. An embodiment of humility, as he was, he would walk slowly with head bent down. 'Mercy', 'I am nothing', 'What do I know?' were the words often heard from his lips. He would always present himself with

⁷ Suresh Chandra gives a different version. He records in the words of his friend, Durga Charan, 'The day I visited Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) for the first time, I wanted to take the dust of his feet at the time of taking leave of him. When Thakur withdrew his legs I realized the wickedness of my heart.' (Suresh Chandra Dutta : *Śrīmat Rāmākṛṣṇa Paramahansa Dever Saṅkṣipta Jīvanī* (Bengali), p. 52). A similar narration of the incident may be found in Gurudas Burman : *Śrī Śrī Rāmākṛṣṇa Carita* (Bengali), p. 208. To reconcile these two views it may be concluded that Durga Charan simply prostrated himself before Sri Ramakrishna on meeting him and tried to take the dust of his feet before taking leave of him,

folded palms before holy men.⁸ Later Sri Ramakrishna spoke of him as a 'blazing fire'.

Sri Ramakrishna made some preliminary inquiries about them. He then plunged into religious discourse. He said 'Live in the world as the mudfish lives in the mud. One develops love of God by going away from the world into solitude now and then, and meditating on God. After that one can live in the world unattached. The mud is there, and the fish has to live in it, but its body is not stained by the mud. Such a man can lead the life of a householder in a spirit of detachment.' And again: 'Live in the world unattached. Be in the world, but not of it. Just see that the dirt of the world does not touch you.'

These words of Sri Ramakrishna became indelibly impressed on his mind. He was amazed to find that Sri Ramakrishna had touched the deeper strings of his heart. His words hit their mark. Durga Charan had not been finding joy in worldly life. In the past, he had often been seized with the idea of renouncing the householder's life. Now Sri Ramakrishna's words solved his problems once for all.⁹

In the meantime Durga Charan was trying to appraise the Paramahansa with a clinical eye, noting carefully his special features. He was looking attentively at Sri Ramakrishna's face when the latter asked, 'What are you looking at?' Durga Charan replied, 'I have come to see you, that is why

⁸ Once Sri Ramakrishna told Narendranath, pointing to Durga Charan: 'He has genuine humility. There is no hypocrisy behind it.' cf.: *The Saint Durgacharan Nag*, p. 53.

⁹ True to the words of the Master, Durga Charan attained the highest perfection in the householder's life. Swami Vivekananda told of him, 'A few men, one or two, may be seen to attain the highest freedom by the true fulfilment of the householder's Dharma, as we have amongst us Nag Mahasaya, for instance'. (*The Complete Works*, Vol. VI (1963), p. 507).

I am looking at you.' Following some questions and answers, Sri Ramakrishna asked him, 'Have you grasped the idea of this place (meaning himself)?' Durga Charan made a frank reply, 'Such I have never seen before. You are perhaps that very one, for whom my soul hankered ever since my birth.'¹⁰

Next, Sri Ramakrishna asked them to go to the Panchavati and meditate a little there. They obeyed him. After about half an hour, Sri Ramakrishna took them with him to show them round the temples. Sri Ramakrishna went ahead and they followed. After visiting the other temples Sri Ramakrishna finally entered the Kali temple. There he underwent a strange transformation. He behaved just like a child before its mother. He went round and round Mother Kālī several times. He bowed down to touch the feet of Śiva and Kālī with his head. The ecstatic behaviour of Sri Ramakrishna moved the visitors, especially Durga Charan, deeply.

They partook of the *prasāda* (consecrated food) of Mother Kālī given them. Finally Durga Charan and his friend took leave of Sri Ramakrishna just before dusk. Sri Ramakrishna bade them farewell with the parting words, 'Do come again. Repeat the visit; then only can the acquaintance deepen.' It seems they returned on foot to Hathkhola where they lived in Calcutta.

Durga Charan could hardly judge that day whether Sri Ramakrishna was a holy man, a saint or an incarnation of God. But the visit inflamed him with a keen desire for the realization of God. From that day he carried constantly in his bosom that burning flame. He lived the Master's ideal of life in the world, unstained by worldliness. Sri Ramakrishna compared him to the legendary king Janaka. Comparing him

¹⁰ Sarat Chandra Chakravarty: 'Nāg Mahāśaya', *Udbodhan*, Vol. VIII, No. 9, p. 270.

with Swami Vivekananda, Girish Chandra Ghosh observed that Swamiji's sense of 'I' grew so big that Mahāmāyā (Power of Cosmic Illusion) could not bind him and Nag Mahasaya's so small that he escaped Her noose. He was 'a real saint of the Golden Legend'.

He did not visit Sri Ramakrishna many times, much less than many others did. However, the latter's divine power ignited

in Durga Charan a flame of spirituality which, when it blazed fully later on, attracted even monks to seek his holy company. Very justifiably it has been told of him: 'He was a living illustration of the saying in the *Imitation of Christ*, "Dying to self and living eternally to me."'¹¹

¹¹ *Prabuddha Bharata*, May 1900, p. 69.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

IN THIS NUMBER

Questions and answers are from: Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1956. References: Questions 1 and 2, p. 375; Question 3, p. 397; Question 4, p. 376; Question 5, p. 377.

The words quoted in 'Onward For Ever!' are from *The Complete Works*, Vol. VII (1958), pp. 135-6.

Mokṣa or liberation should not be understood to represent a post-mortem achievement of the human soul. The *advaitic* or non-dualistic thinkers have really done a great service to humanity by properly emphasizing the fact of *jīvanmukti* or liberation-in-life. The tendency on the part of some thinkers to judge a *jīvanmukta* from the worldly-man's point of view needs to be corrected. The *jīvanmukta's* Himalayan stature defies measurement by the worldly man's footrule of namby-pamby welfarism. The *Editorial* of the month, while clarifying these points, reflects on the wider implications of the *mokṣa*-concept.

Progress in spiritual life is sure in the case of all sincere aspirants, but it can be painfully slow in many. In some cases the journey may be balked by avoidable inner obstacles.

It is to one's advantage to know what these obstacles are likely to be. Show and empty noise have nothing to do with spirituality. Even if one gets thrilling spiritual experiences, there is no reason to make any noise about them; there is even less reason when one has grave inner deficiencies. Yearning directed to the chosen ideal, and whole-hearted prayer are unfailing in their effects. In this month's Essay on Applied Religion, Swami Budhananda discusses three important aspects of spiritual progress in the light of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings.

This is the second part of the three-part libretto on Swami Vivekananda, dealing with his years of studentship in college, discipleship under his Guru at Dakshineswar, and finally the taking of monastic vows by him and other brother-disciples at Antpur. The first part—Days of Childhood—was published in our January issue. Both Erik Johns and John Schlenck are members of the Vedanta Society of New York. For more details we refer our readers to the prefatory note published with the first part.

This is the sixth instalment of the 'Excursions'. In this part of his remarks, Swami Yatiswarananda strikes an uncompromising note in favour of the monastic

ideal represented by Buddha, Christ, Ramakrishna, and other such world teachers. For the circumstances in which these talks were given and for some other details, we refer the readers to the prefatory note to this serial published with the first instalment in January, 1973.

It is said that Sri Ramakrishna selected his disciples with the skill of a jeweller. Each of these disciples manifested in his

own life a particular aspect of the Master's multi-faceted character. Durga Charan Nag, a jewel of a disciple, became the very embodiment of humility and egolessness—a wonderful facet of Sri Ramakrishna's divine personality. As the Master had instructed him, Nag Mahasaya lived in the world and remained absolutely untouched by it. How the future relationship between the Master and disciple was foreshadowed even in their first meeting, is brought out well in this write-up by Swami Prabhananda.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

EDUCATION AS EXISTENTIAL POSSIBILITY: BY GARI LESNOFF-CARAVAGLIA, Published by Philosophical Library, New York, 1972, pp. xv+108, Price 7.50.

After the second world war existentialism has become the fashionable creed of many persons throughout the world. Though it was originally a religious predicament that gave rise to existentialism, this creed has started looking beyond, sometimes negating even religion. Philosophers, literary critics, social and political theorists, and economists have extended the domain of this doctrine. Now it is making its inroads into educational theory. The existential thought of the Italians has a powerful impact on educational theory. The author introduces in this volume the philosophy of Nicola Abbagnano, the chief exponent of Italian existentialism. Abbagnano's existentialism differs considerably from the theories of Heidegger and Sartre. Existentialism emphasizes the uniqueness of the individual and pays greater attention to the significance of individual choice and the awareness of death. Abbagnano emphasizes man's faith in himself and man's ability to take up a positive attitude to what he can do in the world. This is an approach which implies hope and faith. The author had the benefit of receiving the approval of the Italian thinker. But as she herself admits, the application of Abbagnano's thought to educational practice will involve a ratio of 1:2 between teacher and student. In democracies where mass education is a must, this is an impossibility. Should education for death be an essential part? Opinions differ. The book, however, opens up new possibilities in educational

theory. These possibilities could be best realized if Abbagnano's theories were supplemented by the Buddhist and Vedantic systems of thought.

DR. P. S. SASTRI

CLASSICS IN CHINESE PHILOSOPHY: BY WADE BASKIN, Published by Philosophical Library, 15 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y., 10016, 1972, pp. 737, Price \$20.00.

China has a great place in history, for its quest after the roots of civilization and culture. Scholars of East and West agree that China has been a cradle of cultural values, with a deep sense of the finer goals of life. Hence we need to know more and more about the thought-currents of the philosophers who have directed the course of that civilization. Their cherished values have come down to us through their great 'classics'.

The problem for most of us is how to understand these writings, shrouded as they are in perhaps the most difficult current language. Though interpretations are many, they often disagree; thus a reliable collection in English is always welcome. Wade Baskin, the present editor, has done a difficult job in presenting concise accounts of life-histories of the principal philosophers plus excerpts from their main writings. The coverage is wide: from Confucius (551-478 B.C.) to our own contemporaries like Mao Tse-tung (1893-) and Yu-Lan Fung (1895-), with convenient chronological arrangement.

'What leads to universal happiness?' was the question engaging the closest attention of Confucius, Lao Tzu, and their followers. This was in the true Buddhist spirit, since the basic ques-

tion tormenting Buddha was why misery should be a universal, permanent fact of life and what to do to get rid of its causes. This question as well as the quest for the springs of immortal joy is eternal. 'Wisdom, love, liberation, goodness, kindness, compassion, respect for right values, purity, simplicity' etc., are the remedies suggested by the wise, based on the nature of the cosmic order. For many decades the Chinese philosophers had thus been preoccupied with the subjective universe.

The approach changes over to the objective universe with the advent of Shang Yang (400-338 B.C.) who took a legalistic view of things. His main concern was with political stability, and law and order.

Huai-nan Tzu (180-122 B.C.), Wang Ch'ung (27-97 A.D.), Kuo Hsiang (d. 312 A.D.) etc., tried to revive the old traditions on idealistic lines. Fa-tsang (643-712 A.D.) built up a system of objective idealism in which the cosmic mind is the basis of phenomenal manifestations within the limits of time, space and causation. Several other Chinese philosophers examined the different schools of Buddhism to formulate the aim of man's brief existence.

In contemporary China, the defenders of old values are rather rare, with the change-over to the worship of nationalism, materialism, deification of

political leaders, and assertion of the national ego. However, Mao Tse-tung, who is quoted in some length, may be regarded to act as a 'spokesman for one-fourth of the human race'. Thus it is essential to understand China in depth—a country with great traditions. In this, Wade Baskin renders a good service.

—SRI H. G. KULKARNI

BOOKS RECEIVED

GEMS FROM THE VEDA: BY M. P. PANDIT, Published by Ganesh & Co., Madras-17, pp. 102, Price Rs. 6/-.

NYAYARAKSHAMANI OF SRIMAD APPAYA DIKSHITENDRA, VOL. I: EDITED BY PD. S. R. K. SASTRI, PD. N. R. SASTRI AND DR. P. SRI RAMACHANDRALU, Published by Sri A. D. Granthavali Prakasana Samiti, Secunderabad-26 (A.P), pp. 537, Price Rs. 20/- (Ordinary), Rs. 25/- (Deluxe).

KULARNAVA TANTRA: BY M. P. PANDIT, Published by Ganesh & Co., Madras-17, pp. 128, Price Rs. 10/-.

THE UPANISHADIC APPROACH TO REALITY: BY SWAMI SATCHIDANANDENDRA SARASWATI, Published by Adhyatma Prakasha Karyalaya, Holenarsipur, Hassan Dt., Karnataka State, pp. 102, Price Rs. 2.25.

NEWS AND REPORTS

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION VIVEKANANDA SMRITI MANDIR

KHETRI (RAJASTHAN)

REPORT FROM APRIL 1972 TO MARCH 1973

Founded in 1958, in the palace of the Maharaja of Khetri, the noted disciple of Vivekananda, this Centre is for the time being the only regular Centre of the Ramakrishna Mission in Rajasthan. Besides being a place of pilgrimage for admirers of Vivekananda, the Centre conducts:

(a) *Maternity Home and Child Welfare Centre*, staffed by a trained midwife, two *dais*. In the current year it handled 103 indoor delivery-cases; its staff made 3678 ante-natal and post-natal visits. All these services are free. Homoeopathic medicine was also distributed.

(b) *Sarada Shishu Vihar*: a 'Balwadi', run on Kindergarten lines, begun in 1965 for children. Currently 272 students were on the roll (174 boys and 98 girls), of whom over 70 belonged to Hari-

jan and other backward classes; 52 were given full and 13 half concession in fees. It has a library of 855 books, and an adjoining Recreation Park. All students were given vitamin supplements and poor children were given clothings, books, and stationery. The children celebrated important religious, cultural, and national festivals, and prepared some dramas for annual celebrations.

(c) *Library*: contains 5268 books (153 added during the year). 3525 books were issued. Daily average attendance at the Reading Room was 60.

(d) *Cultural and Other Activities*: Scriptural classes as also discourses on the *Gita* and the Upanishads in Hindi and English were given for inmates; and public discourses at Pilani, Khetri Copper Project, Jaipur, Ajmer, etc.

The birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda were celebrated with public meetings; the children of the School were fed each time. Besides these, birthdays of Sri Krishna, Sri Rama, Buddha, and other religi-

ous functions were observed with appropriate programmes. Christmas Eve was also solemnly celebrated. The concluding functions of the three-week annual celebration included several lectures; film-shows on Holy Mother and dramas were also held to inculcate high ideals. For the younger children, a 'Bala-mela' (a children's fair) attracted children from all the schools of Khetri, Pilani etc., with competitions, and exhibition of children's handiwork. For Primary and Higher Secondary Schools, competitions were also held in speech, essay, recitation, and handwriting. Discourses were organized on the *Sri Ram-charit-manas*, and a devotional and classical music programme was organised with eminent artistes.

Needs: Sarada Shishu Vihar School Rs. 95,000/-
Library and Reading Room Rs. 5,000/-
Permanent funds Rs. 200,000/-

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

NEW DELHI

REPORT FOR 1972-73

The activities of the Centre during the period under review were as follows:

Religious Work: Regular religious classes and discourses were held on Sundays in English to stimulate the spiritual aspirations of the people. The effect was visible in the active participation of the public in large numbers in the celebrations of the birthdays of the great teachers, *bhajans*, worship and Ramanama-sankirtanam on Ekadasi days, and weekly discourses in Hindi on *Sri Ramcharit-manas*.

Medical Work: *Free Tuberculosis Clinic*: The number of beds in the observation wards was 28, equally divided between male and female patients.

The Clinic is fully equipped for general treatment and also for surgical operations. There is also a laboratory for clinical bacteriological work. Milk and tiffin were supplied free to all free-ward indoor patients. Costly medicines like antibiotics, etc., were also supplied free to them and also to all out-patients whose monthly income was less than Rs. 300/-. Number of patients who received medicines: 1,661.

The number of outdoor cases treated in the Clinic during the year was 2,549 (1,22,826 repeated cases) of which 1,679 were new. In addition, 215 indoor cases were treated in the observation wards.

Under the Home Treatment Scheme doctors and Health visitors were deputed to allotted areas to establish contact, educate suspects in health rules and give treatment to those who are unable to attend the Clinic in person.

Outdoor Homoeopathic Dispensary: The dis-

pensary is serving the people of the locality, especially its poorer sections, since its inception in 1929. During the year under review 78,011 were treated of which 6,217 were new.

Celebrations: The birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda and also of Sri Ramachandra, Sri Krishna, Christ, Buddha, Guru Nanak, Tulsidas, and Chaitanya were observed with due solemnity, worship, *bhajan*, readings from the scriptures, and discourses.

Library and Reading Room: During the period under review daily average of visitors to the reading room was 389. In all, 1060 new books were added during the year and the total number of books (including children's section) stood at 26,014. The number of books issued was 21,458. The reading room received 16 newspapers and 132 periodicals during the period.

University Students' Section Library: In all 552 students (307 boys and 245 girls) were given membership to this library. On an average 136 students used the Library daily, borrowing an average of 298 books. The library had 3,639 textbooks at the end of the year.

Sarada Mahila Samiti: During the year under review, the Secretary addressed its monthly meetings, and expounded *Katha-upanisad*. Monthly *bhajan* meetings, bi-monthly study circle, and weekly class on *Bhagavad-gita* were also held.

Sarada Mandir: With the active help of the Sarada Mahila Samiti, this Sunday school for children of the age group 6 to 14 years was conducted. The average attendance was about 40.

Needs: For the Free Tuberculosis Clinic:

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| (a) Endowment for the maintenance of each free bed | .. | Rs. 25,000 |
| (b) Laboratory Instruments | .. | Rs. 5,000 |

For the Ashrama:

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| (a) For urgently needed additional water supply (New pipes, reservoir, pump, etc.) | .. | Rs. 10,000 |
| (b) Steel Almirahs (six) for storage of records & materials | .. | Rs. 6,000 |

For Social & Cultural Work:

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|--|----|------------|
| (a) Automatic Diesel-Electric Generator set for emergency lighting | .. | Rs. 40,000 |
| (b) Needed Improvements in the Acoustics and the Public Address System of the Auditorium | .. | Rs. 15,000 |
| (c) 16 mm. Movie Film Projector | .. | Rs. 7,000 |
| (d) Slide Projector | .. | Rs. 2,000 |