

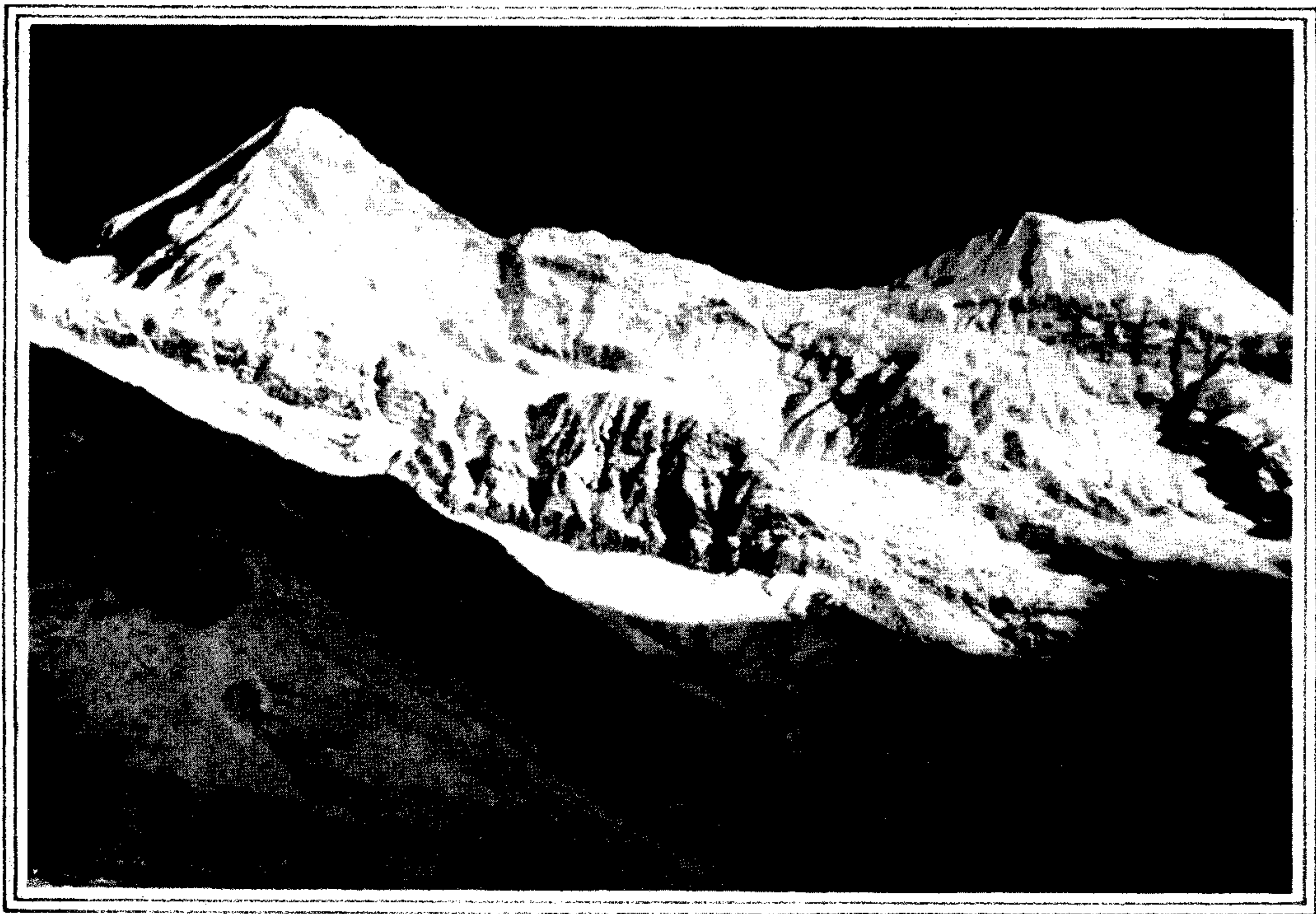
# Prabuddha Bharata

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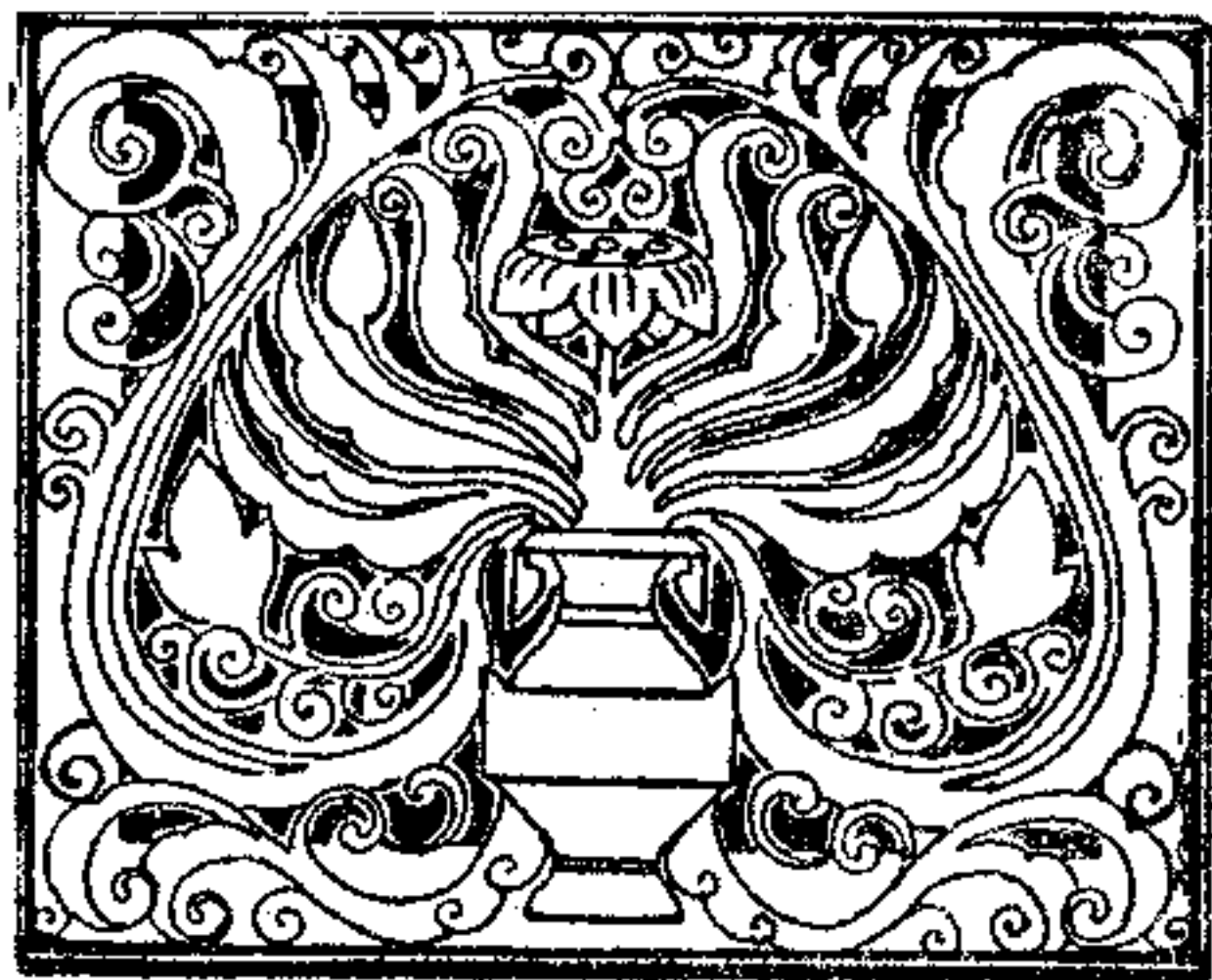
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# Prabuddha Bharata

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A MONTHLY JOURNAL OF THE  
RAMAKRISHNA ORDER

FEBRUARY 1975

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Morning Sun over Nandakhat, Central Himalayas

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# Prabuddha Bharata

VOL. LXXX

FEBRUARY 1975

No. 2

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

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA REMINISCES

'After I had experienced samadhi, my mind craved intensely to hear only about God. I would always search for places where they were reciting or explaining the sacred books, such as the *Bhagavata*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Adhyatma Ramayana*. I used to go to Krishnakishore to hear him read the *Adhyatma Ramayana*.

'What tremendous faith Krishnakishore had! Once, while at Vrindavan, he felt thirsty and went to a well. Near it he saw a man standing. On being asked to draw a little water for him, the man said: "I belong to a low caste, sir. You are a brahmin. How can I draw water for you?" Krishnakishore said: "Take the name of Siva. By repeating His holy name you will make yourself pure." The low-caste man did as he was told, and Krishnakishore, orthodox brahmin that he was, drank that water. What tremendous faith!

'Once a holy man came to the bank of the Ganges and lived near the bathing-ghat at Ariadaha, not far from Dakshineswar. We thought of paying him a visit. I said to Haladhari: "Krishnakishore and I are going to see a holy man. Will you come with us?" Haladhari replied, "What is the use of seeing a mere human body, which is no better than a cage of clay!" Haladhari was a student of the *Gita* and Vedanta philosophy, and therefore referred to the holy man as a mere "cage of clay". I repeated this to Krishnakishore. With great anger he said: "How impudent of Haladhari to make such a remark! How can he ridicule as a "cage of clay" the body of a man who constantly thinks of God, who meditates on Rama, and has renounced all for the sake of the Lord? Doesn't he know that such a man is the embodiment of Spirit?" He was so upset by Haladhari's remarks that he would turn his face away from him whenever he met him in the temple garden, and stopped speaking to him.'

\*

'Ah, in those days before beginning to meditate on the chosen Ideal, I imagined that I was thoroughly flushing out the inside of the mind! You see there exist various kinds of dirt and dust (bad thoughts and desires) within

the mind. I imagined that I was washing them off and was then making the chosen Ideal sit there. Do just like that.'

\*

'God made me pass through the disciplines of various paths. First according to the Purana, then according to the Tantra. I also followed the disciplines of the Vedas. At first I practised sadhana in the Panchavati. I made a grove of tulsi-plants and used to sit inside it and meditate. Sometimes I cried with a longing heart, "Mother! Mother!" Or again, "Rama! Rama!"

'While repeating the name of Rama, I sometimes assumed the attitude of Hanuman and fixed a tail to the lower end of my backbone. I was in a God-intoxicated state. At that time I used to put on a silk robe and worship the Deity. What joy I experienced in that worship!...'

\*

'I saw the visions described in the scriptures. Sometimes I saw the universe filled with sparks of fire. Sometimes I saw all the quarters glittering with light, as if the world were a lake of mercury. Sometimes I saw the world as if made of liquid silver. Sometimes, again, I saw all the quarters illumined as if with the light of Roman candles. So you see my experiences tally with those described in the scriptures.

'It was revealed to me further that God Himself has become the universe and all its living beings and the twenty-four cosmic principles. It is like the process of evolution and involution.'

'By constant meditation on the glorious character of Hanuman I totally forgot my own identity. My daily life and style of food came to resemble those of Hanuman. I did not feign them, they came naturally to me. I tied my cloth around the waist, letting a portion of it hang down in the form of a tail, and jumped from place to place instead of walking. I lived on fruits and roots only, and these I preferred to eat without peeling. I passed most of the time on trees, calling out in a solemn voice, "Raghuvir!" My eyes looked restless like those of a monkey, and most wonderful of all, my coccyx enlarged by about an inch. It gradually resumed its former size after that phase of the mind had passed on the completion of that course of discipline. In short, everything about me was more like a monkey than a human being.'

\*

'I saw Sita in a vision. I found that her entire mind was concentrated on Rama. She was totally indifferent to everything—her hands, her feet, her clothes, her jewels. It seemed that Rama had filled every bit of her life and she could not remain alive without Rama.'



## ONWARD FOR EVER!

There is this strongly conservative tendency in human nature: we do not like to move one step forward. I think of mankind just as I read of persons who become frozen in snow; all such, they say, want to go to sleep, and if you try to drag them up, they say, 'Let me sleep; it is so beautiful to sleep in the snow', and they die there in that sleep. So is our nature. That is what we are doing all our life, getting frozen from the feet upwards, and yet wanting to sleep. Therefore you must struggle towards the ideal, and if a man comes who wants to bring that ideal down to your level, and teach a religion that does not carry that highest ideal, do not listen to him. To me that is an impracticable religion. But if a man teaches a religion which presents the highest ideal, I am ready for him. Beware when anyone is trying to apologize for sense vanities and sense weaknesses. If anyone wants to preach that way to us, poor, sense-bound clods of earth as we have made ourselves by following that teaching, we shall never progress. I have seen many of these things, I have had some experience of the world, and my country is the land where religious sects grow like mushrooms. Every year new sects arise. But one thing I have marked, that it is only those that never want to reconcile the man of flesh with the man of truth that make progress.



## SPIRITUAL ARCHERY FROM THE MUNDAKA-UPANISAD

### EDITORIAL

#### I

In the great epic poem of the *Mahābhārata* we come across the interestingly portrayed important incident of Draupadī's *svayam-vara*.<sup>1</sup> Draupadī, as all those acquainted with the *Mahābhārata*-story know, was the only daughter of King Drupada of Pāñcāla, and became the wife of the five Pāṇḍava brothers. *Svayam-vara* was an ancient Indian royal custom by which a Kṣatriya princess used to choose her husband from a gathering of heroic and handsome princely suitors. Usually on such occasions a prince had to prove his strength, proficiency, and fitness by successfully performing a difficult martial feat. On this occasion Drupada had devised a very formidable test. An aerial target, a fish made of gold, was to be pierced by shooting five arrows in quick succession through an opening in a rotating wheel. The archer had first of all to bend and string a tough steel bow, and then to take aim at the target by looking at its reflection in a tub of water kept immediately below it. The story goes on to say that while none of the warrior princes could accomplish the feat, Arjuna, who was then in the disguise of a brāhmaṇa, stepped forward, easily bent the bow and strung it, aimed at the aerial target by looking at its reflection, and successfully shot five arrows through the turning wheel and grounded the target. Draupadī threw round Arjuna the marriage garland. Later by a strange turn of events, she was married not only to Arjuna but to all the other four brothers as well.

#### II

Just as the epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*, can be considered as narra-

<sup>1</sup> *Mahābhārata*, 'Adiparvan', Chs. clxxxi-v.



tives of ancient historical and legendary events, they also can be looked upon as symbolical or allegorical representations of eternal truths. Many look upon the *Rāmāyana*-story of Sītā's abduction and captivity as an allegory for the bondage of the human soul in this psycho-physical 'island', namely the human body. Her rescue and reunion with Śrī Rāma is similar to the attainment of freedom by the human soul after the realization of its identity with God.<sup>2</sup> Mahatma Gandhi looked upon the story of the *Mahābhārata*—particularly the war of Kurukṣetra—as a symbolic and poetic portrayal of the perpetual conflict in the human heart between the forces of good and evil.<sup>3</sup> Thus the preoccupation of the Hindu mind with the spiritual theme—its problems and solutions—is reflected in these age-old epics even as it is in the language of everyday intercourse.

The skill-demanding test devised by Draupadī's father, in which Arjuna alone was successful, seems to us to have a deep spiritual significance. It seems to symbolize the subtle, inward and intricate process of spiritual concentration, meditation, and enlightenment.

First of all there was the mighty bow to be bent and strung. Then there was the rotating wheel with its opening, through which the target was to be hit with sharp arrows. Furthermore the archer had to aim at it, not directly, but by looking at its reflection in water. The process of meditation, in brief, is similar to this. The mind has to be purified and concentrated at least to some extent, even to understand and utilize *aum* or any *mantra*—here signified by the bow—effectively. The target of Brah-

man cannot be aimed at directly but with the aid of some 'reflection' of it, through a symbol, a *mantra*, an idea, or a holy personality. Then there is the wheel of *avidyā* or ignorance, obscuring the Reality. Since *avidyā* has its sole support in the Reality, which is also the target, there is always a way through it, by which the soul can pass into the Reality.

Finally there was the ideal archer Arjuna himself. How did he succeed in a venture where the other foremost warriors of his time had failed? The *Mahābhārata* says that the others came forward in the arrogance of their strength and skill, in a spirit of competition and hatred for rivals, and above all with an overmastering sense of egotism. On the contrary, Arjuna, in the brāhmaṇa's disguise, was all humility both inner and outer. Nevertheless he was self-confident. When he approached the bow, he did not straightway put his hand to it. He circumambulated and bowed to it respectfully, mentally saluted God, and then took it up to bend and string it. Each one of the five arrows he shot, by aiming with the aid of the reflected image, hit that target. This achievement was entirely due to his power of concentration and one-pointed mind. According to a popular story, Arjuna, even as a student of archery under Droṇa, had mastered this power of concentration. When he was asked by his teacher to aim at the eye of a bird perching on a branch, he did this so intently that he was not perceiving anything else—the teacher, the playground or playmates, the tree, the branch—than his target. Surprisingly he could not even see the bird, but saw only its eye! Thus Arjuna exemplified the basic qualities needed by a practitioner of meditation: humility, devotion to God, and one-pointedness.

### III

The *Mundaka-upaniṣad*, one of the most poetical of the Upaniṣads, significantly and

<sup>2</sup> For instance, vide Swami Vivekananda: *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U. P.), Vol V (1959), p. 415.

<sup>3</sup> Mahadev Desai: *The Gita According to Gandhi* (Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1948), pp. 132-3.



suggestively uses the bow-arrow simile for the act of meditation on and the union with Brahman, the Ultimate Reality.<sup>4</sup> The teacher in the Upaniṣad, Aṅgiras, asked the disciple Śaunaka to take up the mighty bow of *aum*, the holy word-symbol of Brahman, provided by the Upaniṣad; to fix to it the arrow of his own self sharpened by constant contemplation of the Reality; to impart to this the force made available by the withdrawal of senses from their objects; and thus to pierce the target of Brahman. He warns that the disciple should not yield to any inadvertence in this venture, and urges that, like the arrow, he should become one with the target.

Students of the Upaniṣads and the Hindu traditions are likely to be aware of the high place that the mystic syllable *aum* is accorded in spiritual exercises. While no physical idol or image is upheld or advanced by the Upaniṣads, the word symbol of *aum* is recommended as the best aid for reaching the indivisible Brahman. *Aum* is a discovery of immense significance, by the Upaniṣadic seers. They said that it is one with both the *Saguṇa-brahman* (Brahman with attributes) and *Nirguṇa-brahman* (Brahman without attributes). The *Māṇḍūkya-upaniṣad* identifies the manifested and unmanifested Brahman with the four quarters (parts) of *aum*: three (that is, the letters of the word) that can be uttered, and the fourth which is transcendental and beyond verbalization. *Aum* can be equated with what the Greek and Christian traditions designate as *Logos* or the 'Word'. Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā* says that He is '*pranava* or *aum* in all the Vedas'. *Aum* is called the *anāhata-dhvani*, the unstruck sound, by the yogis. Sri Ramakrishna said that it ceaselessly issues from Brahman as the roar from the ocean; by following the trail of *aum*, he said further, one finally reaches Brahman. Repetition of *aum* and

dwelling on its meaning—which is Brahman—on the one hand confer concentration of mind, and on the other remove all obstacles to it.<sup>5</sup> This is achieved by gradually converging the undercurrents of subconscious and unconscious thought-processes towards the spiritual ideal, and so naturally leading the conscious mind towards concentration and one-pointedness. *Aum* thus achieves a psychological miracle by integrating the personality and thereby destroys the very source of mental obstacles. Even when a worshipper of the personal God receives initiation with a *mantra* pertaining to his *Iṣṭa-devatā* or Chosen Deity, that *mantra* invariably has *aum* at its beginning. Therefore even for such a worshipper, meditation on the meaning of *aum* becomes a necessary step in attaining the vision of his Chosen Deity. That is why *aum* is compared to a mighty bow by the Upaniṣad. Śaṅkara remarks insightfully that just as the bow is instrumental in causing an arrow to penetrate the target, so is the syllable *aum* in making the arrow of the self enter into the target of the immutable Brahman.

The self or the embodied soul is compared to the arrow which has to be honed to one-pointed sharpness through constant meditation. We should remember that this arrow of the self is to be shot at a target that is not outside but is hidden deeply within oneself—namely, Brahman. In its present state of worldly bondage, the self is, as it were, obtuse and blunt. Attachment to the sense-objects and an almost overpowering desire for enjoyment, selfishness, egotism and passions all make the self dull and distracted. Its forgetfulness of its inherent infinite divine nature makes it go outward and seek fulfilment from shadowy sense-objects and hollow worldly objectives. This thirst for sense-experience is what this Upaniṣad calls *pramāda* or inadvertence, and

<sup>4</sup> *Muṇḍaka-upaniṣad* [M. U.], II. ii. 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> See Śaṅkara's commentary on M. U., II. ii. 4, and Patañjali: *Yoga-sūtras*, I. 29.

it warns the practitioner of spiritual archery to beware of this. If we analyse our distractions and disturbances which prevent true contemplation and meditation, we usually see that they are the result of our cravings and ambitions. The remedy for them is sense-control and a strong spirit of detachment or dispassion. Purification of mind is the real honing process for the arrow of the self. Mental purity and spiritual penetration are but two aspects of the same psychological quality.

Brahman, the target, cannot be directly aimed at. Its reflection in the various thought-waves and egoism, actually brings into being the phenomenal self. In the procedure of meditation here recommended, the phenomenal self becomes the arrow which with the discriminating mind can go straight back to the origin of the reflection, namely Brahman. Śaṅkara with his brilliant insight makes this point very clear:

'The soul or embodied self is surely the arrow—the soul that is but the supreme Self in Its conditioned state, that has entered here into the body as the witness of the modifications of the intellect, like the sun etc. into water. That soul like an arrow is shot at the Self Itself that is the Immutable. Therefore Brahman is called the target since, just as in the case of a mark, It is aimed at with self-absorption by those who want to concentrate their minds.'<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning, the spiritual seeker

takes up these truths on simple faith in the words of the guru and of the scriptures. But faith gradually becomes a fact of awareness as he attains greater and greater purity. What may seem at first like quibbling on the part of the preceptor and the holy books comes to be realized as an enduring spiritual truth.

Two stanzas later in this section of the *Mundaka-upaniṣad* we read that the teacher Aṅgiras is proffering his blessings and good wishes to the disciple—and others who are like him—for a safe journey to the 'far shore, beyond darkness'. What is the nature of this darkness? This darkness is *avidyā*, nescience, which is constituted of the three qualities of *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* (serenity, activity, and inertia), and which is very changeful. In the archery-test devised by Drupada, let us remind ourselves once again, the turning wheel symbolized the primal, changeful *avidyā* (darkness), by passing through which only could the arrows reach the target.

Let us, as the Upaniṣad exhorts, take up the mighty weapon of *aum* and fix to it the arrow of our own self, made pure and one-pointed through loving contemplation and dispassion. By withdrawing the mind from the various sense-objects, let us speed towards the goal of the Godhead, seated deep within our own hearts, and thus attain eternal bliss and immortality. Let us not forget to remain humble and prayerful, like Arjuna, for achieving success in this art of spiritual archery.

<sup>6</sup> Śaṅkara on *M. U.*, *ibid.*



# LETTERS OF A SAINT

## THE LORD MY REFUGE

25-4-20

[Varanasi]

My dear——,

You might have already come to know of the passing of Latu Maharaj [Swami Adbhutananda] through a telegram. Such a wonderful final departure is not generally seen. I had observed that these last days he used to remain indrawn all the time. From the day of his illness he was completely absorbed in meditation. His gaze was fixed at the centre of his brows. He had entirely and perfectly withdrawn his senses from all external objects. Though always full of awareness, yet he was unconcerned about anything. One day when the dressing [of his wounds] was going on, he asked me, 'What is this illness? What are the doctors saying?' I answered: 'The illness is nothing much: it is only weakness. You have nearly destroyed the body by not taking enough food; now there is no strength even to move. If you can eat and gather some strength, it will all be cured.' And he responded, 'It will be only good if the body goes.' I said, 'You shouldn't say so. As the Master [Sri Ramakrishna] does, so will it be.' He replied, 'I know that, but then it is painful to us.' After this there was not much conversation. He had been used to calling P—— from time to time. He used to eat from his hands. If at any time he did not eat something, P—— would say, 'Then I too won't eat anything.' Immediately Latu Maharaj would eat. But the night before his demise, he did not eat anything. P—— said, 'You haven't taken any food, then I also won't eat.' Latu Maharaj said this time, 'Don't eat'—a statement absolutely devoid of all *māyā* (attachment).

Next morning when I went to see him, he had high fever. I checked his pulse—it had stopped. The doctor came and examined his heart—he couldn't get any sound. The temperature was 102.6°. Latu Maharaj was fully conscious; but there was no external movement. In the morning he had had one motion. It was quite a clean, ordinary evacuation. But on other days he used to sit up for this purpose; that day he could not any more sit up. Even after much importunity he could not be persuaded to take anything more than a few drops of pomegranate juice and a few of water. When milk was offered he showed extreme displeasure. Yet he had on the contrary taken with great joy the *caranāmṛt*<sup>1</sup> of Śrī Viśwanātha [Śiva, the Lord of the Universe]. The attendants started applying ice packs and eau-de-Cologne to his head. I left him after 10 a.m., promising to see him again at 4 p.m. It had been decided that Dr. Sripat Sahay too would come there at that time.

After returning to my quarters and taking bath and food, I was resting a little. Then I got the news that Latu Maharaj had left this world for his own abode, at 12:10 p.m. Immediately I arranged for sending wires to you and S—— and went to No. 96, Hadarbag House, to see him for the last

time. When I arrived I saw he was, as it were, sleeping, reclining on the right side with his hand resting on a side pillow. I felt his body—it was as warm as when he had had fever. Who could understand that he had entered into the eternal sleep—only his face wore a more tranquil expression. Everyone staying at the Math was present, and they all began to sing the Name of the Lord. For about three hours there was intense *bhajan* (devotional singing) of God's Name. After 4:30 p.m. he was propped up suitably in a sitting posture; and after doing some worship and waving of lights in the prescribed manner, he was brought down [to the ground floor].

The beautiful expression of his face seen at the time when he had been seated and worshipped, cannot be communicated to you through writing. Such a tranquil, compassionate and extremely blissful gaze I had never before seen on the face of Latu Maharaj. Earlier [in life], the eyes used to be half closed, but now they were wide and fully open. What feelings of love, graciousness, equanimity and compassion I witnessed in those eyes—all that is beyond description. Whoever saw that face, that expression, was charmed. There was not a trace of sadness. A radiance of blissfulness was issuing from him, as if he were greeting all with love. The scene at that time was awe-inspiring and touching in the extreme. It was as if to fulfil his name of Adbhutananda (*adbhuta* means 'wonderful') that the Lord showed that wonderful scene. When his body and bed were decorated with new clothes, garlands, and sandal paste, and brought before all, the assembled people were filled with amazement at the lustre of his face and began to exclaim, 'Blessed, blessed indeed [is the person].' Such a death-defeating passing is verily extraordinary and uncommon. Undoubtedly, it was a clear manifestation and a luminous instance of the endless glory of the Lord.

When for a while the neighbours and all others—Hindu and Moslem alike—had seen and saluted him to their hearts' content, Latu Maharaj was carried to Kedarghat by the sannyasin devotees of our Lord. From there he was taken in a boat to Manikarnika ghat on the Gāṅgā. There, after performing the preliminary worship etc., the final auspicious rites as per prescribed tradition were completed by immersing the body in the river [*jala-samādhi*].

Those who have seen the supremely blissful form of Latu Mahadaj in those last moments have all got in their minds firmly imprinted the inspiration of a great spiritual truth. Blessed is Guru Maharaj (Sri Ramakrishna)! Blessed is his Latu Maharaj!

Your servant

Sri Hari

[SRI TURIYANANDA]

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*Caranāmṛt*: the water in which the image of the Deity is bathed: it is considered very sacred.

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# SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: A BIRTHDAY HOMAGE

SRI H. R. GOKHALE

A true appreciation of the significance of Swami Vivekananda today will be possible only if we realize the state of the country at the time of his birth. In 1863, Swamiji's birth-year, the outlook for the country was a bleak one. Barely five years had passed since the first struggle for independence (the so-called Sepoy Mutiny) had been put down. India was a conquered nation and its inhabitants were a subject race. In its society, numerous constricting walls—which the Swami was later to tear down—ran across the length and breadth of the country, dividing its people into a multitude of castes and sects. Well within living memory, the Government of the East India Company had considered it necessary to pass a law prohibiting suttee. Infant marriage and child widows were all too common, and not even ten years had elapsed since the enactment of a law permitting Hindu widows to remarry. The country was sunk in superstition and poverty. The religions of the Indian sub-continent, and more particularly Hinduism, were on the defensive. Too often its practitioners were excessively and even obsessively concerned with questions of ceremonial and ritual pollution, leaving themselves open to the gibe that their religion was a 'kitchen religion'—or one of 'touch-me-notism'—, the underlying, ancient basic truths having been forgotten.

It was into such a world and nation that Vivekananda came like a beacon to dispel the darkness that shrouded his countrymen. To say that, is not to belittle the role of earlier pioneers in the fields of religious and social reform, like Raja Rammohan Roy and Swami Dayananda Saraswati, to name only two—not to mention his own Guru Ramakrishna Paramahansa. But Vivekananda was unique.

His was a many-sided personality. Of his contributions to the Vedānta philosophy, the teaching of the various paths of Yoga, and other and varied fields of the Swami's work, there are many who are more competent than myself to expound. There are however several aspects of his personality which are of as direct relevance and significance to every one of us in the India of today as to the India in which he was born. Among these were his universality, his spirit of service, his courage, his strength, and his emphasis on these in his teachings.

Vivekananda's master and preceptor Ramakrishna had in his lifetime attained the experience of the truths and spiritual fulfilment of diverse faiths—from within; and it was this universality and acceptance in his teachings, which he imbibed from his Master, that marks out Vivekananda from other religious teachers and makes him the harbinger, the pioneer of the modern era. The opening words of the Swami's first address at the Chicago Parliament of Religions, delivered with characteristic spontaneity, in marked contrast to the formal delivery of the others—'Sisters and Brothers of America'—are symbolic of the man and his work. His appeal and message were never sectarian. He preached to all mankind, and was the forerunner of the philosophic and spiritual 'counter-blast from the East'.

This spirit of universalism was equally enshrined in the duty which was laid on his fellow *sannyāsins* in the resolutions as to Aims and Objects, passed at the first meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission (5 May 1897), as for instance, the '...establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of one undying Eternal Religion'.



Another facet of the Swami's life and work which has particular relevance today is his role in the struggle against the poverty of his countrymen, though he himself was sworn to poverty. Generally, a true Hindu *sannyāsin* is thought of as a dreamy, other-worldly person, fragile in body if strong in spirit, indifferent to the happenings in this world, and concerned only with eternity. But though rich in spirit and spiritual power, yet in many other respects Vivekananda was the antithesis of this traditional image of a *sannyāsin*. He was perhaps outstanding among the saints in that while he realized that man cannot live by bread alone, he yet emphasized the basic fact that man cannot live in this world without bread. His stress upon the imperative need for fulfilling the basic wants of the poor, will find ready acceptance from the sincere believer and the professed agnostic alike.

The vision which came to the Swami on the Rock at Kanyakumari, was that of consecrating himself to the service of India, particularly to the service of her starving, oppressed and outcast millions—and thence to all humanity. This vision was to inspire him throughout his life, and in turn was responsible for the living, institutional memorial to his work in the form of the Ramakrishna Mission. Recognizing as he did that an empty stomach is no good for religion, he first set upon himself the task of attending to the material needs of the poor. In fact, it is noteworthy that in the resolutions of the first meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission, it was set forth that the Mission's method of action would be: '(a) To train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses; (b) to provide and encourage arts and industries; and (c) to introduce and spread among the people in general Vedāntic and other religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of

Sri Ramakrishna.' These directly followed the reference to the establishment of fellowship among different religions, quoted earlier.

Undoubtedly India has had from ancient time its preachers and religious orders; yet Vivekananda was again a pioneer in that he sought to institutionalize his movement and adopt a modern form of organization for his work and that of his followers. The Ramakrishna Mission can perhaps be said to be one of the first if not the first Hindu Order of *sannyāsins* to adopt constitutional or legal forms for implementing its work.

Swami Vivekananda furthermore was in his life and work the embodiment and exponent of two universally admired qualities—courage and strength. It is not easy for us today, when communication satellites circle the globe, to visualize the situation which obtained in the last century. A trip from India across the 'black waters' to the land of the 'mlechhas' often meant excommunication. To brave the risk of social ostracism and to proceed unknown and alone to a foreign land was an act demanding greater mental and physical courage than even the historic swim across the shark-haunted choppy sea to the offshore rock at Kanyakumari. Yet another example is to be found in the selfless service which he, along with the members of his Order, performed at the time of the Calcutta plague of 1898.

This willingness to involve himself in what the pious may regard as mundane affairs is itself an example of the Swami's supreme spirit of sacrifice. Although he was an adept in spiritual exercises, having attained *nirvikalpa-samādhi* (the highest state, in which even one's sense of 'I'-ness is annihilated) during the lifetime of his Master, yet he did not—as would have been easy for him and as he sometimes yearned to do—spend his life in meditation and seeking salvation for himself and possibly for a few select disciples. Rather he strove to



bring his mission to all, and particularly to those who needed it most, namely, the weak, the ignorant, and the down-trodden.

Plato has in a famous simile compared mankind to prisoners in a dark cave who, fettered and shackled, are able to see only their own images or shadows cast on the walls by a fire lit behind them; and being thus dazed, lead a life of illusion with no knowledge of reality. In this world, says Plato, a philosopher is one who is able to liberate himself from these fetters, escape into the sun and see the world as it is. But even of these, according to him, it is only those philosophers who, after having seen the light, return to the darkness of the cave to liberate and to enlighten their imprisoned brethren, that can be regarded as the guardians of society, the philosopher-kings; and they alone are fit to rule. It is to this category of rare souls, of philosopher-kings, that Vivekananda belongs.

It is often the lot of great men who become legends in their own lifetime, that reverence for them as individuals goes along with ignorance of their teachings—the people who honour them having no time remaining for the things that their great men considered important. It is also the experience of pioneers that their most original contributions are often lost to sight because of their very success. The revolutionary ideas put forward by them become either catch phrases or at best part of the common

stock of ideas which are talked about but rarely taken seriously by the public. In the case of Vivekananda, it is very necessary to guard ourselves against both these dangers; and occasions like his birthday celebrations give us an opportunity to remind ourselves of his exhortations and of our responsibility to the great ones.

More than one hundred and ten years have passed since Vivekananda was born, and it is a little over seventy years since his spirit left its body. The India which he loved is now free and has taken its rightful place in the comity of nations. But we are in as much need of his example and teachings today as ever before. The threats caused by narrow divisive forces and the poverty of our people are still with us. It is all the more necessary for free India to bear in mind his message of tolerance and his emphasis on strength-giving religion and man-making education. The Upaniṣadic declaration, '*nāyamātmā balahīnena labhyaḥ*'—“This Ātman is not attained by the weak”—the keynote of many of his lectures, will still strengthen us.

Vivekananda's emphasis on strength, courage, tolerance, love of humanity and amelioration of the physical as well as the spiritual conditions of the people, the willingness to learn and broad catholicity, are qualities which every one of us, whatever be his own private views of religion, can well admire and seek to emulate.



# MAN'S JOURNEY TO HIS DESTINY

SWAMI ASHOKANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

There are, in fact, people who have attained to this intuitive state, this superconscious state of perception. The difficulty is that even if we see such intuitive people, our own lack of intuition prevents us from perceiving them as such; but they exist in this world. As a matter of fact, it is quite possible that there are more intuitive beings in this universe than we think. The Hindus maintain that this physical world is only one of the many planes of the phenomenal universe and that above it are planes of existence peopled by beings superior to ourselves. Not only are there gods—wonderful beings with wonderful bodies, but still deliberative, after all, and rather pleasure-seeking, liking to dance and sing, and so on—but there are other beings living in still higher planes who are intuitive, contemplative. They have been purified of their material instincts, however fine these may have been, and have become aware of their own spiritual nature. It is said that when a person who has attained to a high degree of spiritual development here on earth dies, he goes to one of those worlds and lives in the company of similar beings. You may think this is one of those fairy stories common to all ancient peoples. I do not think so. I myself believe such beings exist, if for no other reason, at least for the reason that it is difficult for me to think that the tremendous creative power that we see manifest in this phenomenal universe has been exhausted by bringing into existence these miserable creatures called men, who are neither beautiful, nor celestial, nor illumined. I do not think the creative power of the universe is so poor. It must have brought out other beings at least more perfect in outer form. As regards

inner form, I should certainly not think that God, or whoever created this universe, reached the acme of his creation with the human race, of whom only two or three individuals have attained the inner glory of Buddhahood or Christhood. Surely he must be able to create endless numbers of such glorified beings.

As a matter of fact, there *are* such beings. Sri Ramakrishna used to tell a story about Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who even in his lifetime was looked upon as an Incarnation of God. One day Śrī Kṛṣṇa said to his devoted friend Arjuna, 'Come, friend, I shall show you something.' They went to a deep forest, and he pointed out a huge tree, covered with big clusters of blue-black berries. Śrī Kṛṣṇa asked Arjuna, 'What do you see hanging from the branches of that tree?' And Arjuna replied, 'Why, I see clusters of black berries hanging there.' 'Come,' Śrī Kṛṣṇa said, 'let us go a little closer.' When they went closer they found these were not berries at all; each was a Śrī Kṛṣṇa (Śrī Kṛṣṇa, you know, had a blue-black complexion). And he said, 'You see, in this tree, which is the phenomenal universe, there are all these Incarnations of the Lord—an infinite number of them.'

This story was in reference to the idea that creation—if you think of it as creation—is nothing but differentiation. When this Absolute Divinity, Brahman, begins to manifest Himself as this universe and as individual souls, homogeneous being becomes, as it were, heterogeneous—that is to say, marked with distinctions. In the first stage it is as though an artist had sketched faint pencil lines on the paper here and there. These distinctions cannot even be called forms;



they are just the beginnings of forms. They are so close to the Godhead that they cannot be separated from It. There is a world there, a phase of this phenomenal universe where it touches the pure being of God. There is a demarcating line where the Absolute, pure Divinity, is, as it were, just entering into differentiation. If you ever reach that boundary line, you will find on this side of it godlike beings of the status of Divine Incarnations; they are not creatures in any sense. If you want to be strictly logical, you might say that they are created beings, but in value they are so godlike that you cannot really say they have been created by God; their very nature is God. So this is the fact that Śrī Kṛṣṇa pointed out to Arjuna.

Why, then, should I at all think that the creative power of God has reached its culmination in man? I am naturally inclined to think that creation or manifestation has gone on and on and that when I reach the very height of this phenomenal universe I shall come upon a world perfect in every respect, godlike inside and outside, and find beings who are themselves also godlike. You might call them intuitive beings. We have called that highest world *brahmalo*ka or *satya*loka—‘the world of Divinity’ or ‘the world of Truth’. Whereas in this world it is all dead matter with spots of consciousness here and there, in *brahmalo*ka everything is divine: the outside is divine, the inside is divine, form is divine, substance is divine.

You may say there is not much fun in that. How do you know what is fun? You have chewed bitter roots all your life; your mouth has become so bitter that you cannot taste anything any more. To taste the joy of that other world requires great training—a purification of the mouth, as it were. The real fun is not in seeing differences but in seeing unity, the same Divinity everywhere. That is the lesson one learns after a great deal of experience in this stupid universe.

At last we come to know that to see difference is death, to see sameness is life; to see difference is self-destruction, to see sameness is self-regeneration; to see difference is bondage, to see sameness is liberation. It takes a long, long time, it requires many bitter experiences before we turn away from our foolish perception of this universe; but when we do, we see extraordinary things and then we become convinced.

In India it is our strong belief that every soul is destined to pass from the instinctive stage to the deliberative stage, then to the intuitive stage, and on to liberation. Liberation is neither subconscious, conscious, nor superconscious, but absolute, and therefore it cannot really be called a state or a stage; it cannot be spoken of in any terms. But then we need not speak about it: it is very easy for those who have reached the height of the superconscious or intuitive state to plunge into this Absolute and become entirely free; there is no problem about it. Our present concern is the soul's passage from one stage to another.

Some of you may ask: ‘Isn't it just an assumption that every soul will pass from one stage to another and eventually attain liberation? What is the guarantee?’ The guarantee is in this: each of these states is limited. You cannot say that the instinctive state, the deliberative state, or even the intuitive state is infinite. If you do, you are mixing up your terms. The phenomenal, by the very fact that it is a phenomenon, is limited. It is like a wave; it never stands still. In a photograph a particular phenomenon stands still in time, but in actual experience no phenomenon stands still because the power that brings it into existence is dynamic. Dynamism is, by nature, change, and therefore it exhausts itself. The very power that brings any finite being into existence destroys that finite being.

Swami Vivekananda often said that in



this phenomenal world greatness itself is the origin of smallness, life itself is the origin of death, strength itself is the origin of weakness. He said that powerful nations spell their own death, because in exercising that power they are spending it, and very soon it is gone. Yes, destruction is inevitable for every phenomenal existence. Therefore that power which has brought about the instinctive or subhuman existence for the soul will, by its very working, become exhausted. The soul, having experienced a certain stage of existence again and again, exhausts that stage; it no longer reacts to those experiences with any enthusiasm, and it is pushed out. Thus every soul bound up in the instinctive state will be forced out of that condition into the deliberative or conscious state. It has to be so. Then, since even the deliberative state is limited, the soul will be forced out of it into a still higher state. There is no escaping this. That is the reason we believe that every soul will pass through these stages until it has reached its own highest state, which is self-realization, self-knowledge. Its self-forgetfulness will be destroyed; it will no longer be tied down to phenomena or form. It will know itself as it truly is, and therefore the whole force of karma and reincarnation will come to an end. Let us call this whole process evolution in the inner sense. So long as souls are instinctive and not deliberative, how far they will go ahead depends upon nature. But when the soul reaches the deliberative state, it becomes possible for man to study his condition.

It is at this point that the age of philosophy begins, or, first, the age of prophecy. History has shown that when a large number of men have become educated and capable of thinking for themselves, individuals have arisen among them who are apparently endowed with superior wisdom. They have been called prophets and have been thought to be the mouthpieces of God, or at least

to have had a superior knowledge for the guidance of men, a knowledge which has been tested and found beneficial. We find that in the beginning of their civilizations men have made much of their prophets. We still need them among ourselves despite our vaunted intellectual knowledge and abilities. However, the need of prophets is greatest in the early days of a civilization, and this need has been met among almost every people.

Then comes the age of education and culture. Prophets are supplemented, if not replaced, by philosophers, scientists, saints, and sages—all of whom contribute new ideas and new knowledge. They think pro and con; they speculate, analyse, judge, amend, and so on. This is the age in which people begin to ask: What am I? Why am I here? How have I become what I am? Is this the best state, or is there a state of supreme good? Is it possible for me to reach such a state? If it is possible, how am I going to reach it? Why am I not able to make the progress I want? Then a great deal of analytical study starts. I would say that civilized man is today in this age of questioning and study.

Now, what keeps us in this deliberative state? Why are we held here? I told you in the beginning that we are here for experience: in our present state we feel that we have to have experience; experience fulfils us. We think there is no other knowledge possible for us than knowledge of the outside world derived through the senses. Or, to put it more truly, we want no other kind of knowledge; we want to know things outside ourselves. Why do you think it is so?

In other talks also, I have again and again dwelt on this idea: when I forget my infinity and think of myself as finite, infinity does not become nonexistent because of my own stupidity; it is still there, and certainly it will assert itself. What it does is this: it appears, as it were, outside of me as this



boundless universe—infinite in space, endless in time, limitless in possibility. And just because I *think* I am this small being, I do not actually become this small being; I am still the infinite reality. I am still this universe, and therefore it is still of vital concern to me. That is why I cannot give it up. That is why I have built this skull and have put in it these precious things called eyes to goggle outward; I have all these hawklike fingers to grab things; I have these feet by which I can move around. All these senses are eager to repossess the universe because it is myself. I cannot escape it.

Of course, it must be admitted that I don't know I am this universe. If I knew it, then I would not think I have to experience it through the senses. In spite of all this philosophizing, I cannot say that I am this person or that person or this clod of earth or this sky or these stars—it is just not so. You see, this is the peculiar situation: the universe is in fact me; and yet in my present perception it is not me. As long as this situation lasts, I cannot give up this outside world. That is why a soul in the deliberative state is held down here.

### III

The Hindus have an extraordinary concept about this deliberative state in which we are held. They say that every human being is born burdened by certain debts and that his whole life is a process of repaying them. What are these debts? Three of them are the debt to the *pitrs* or ancestors, the debt to the *ṛsis*, and the debt to the *devas* or gods. The debt to the ancestors is partly paid off when one has brought forth a son so that the line can be continued. The debt to the *ṛsis*, or the sages and saints, is paid when one has oneself cultivated the *śāstras* or scriptures—that is to say, when one has become educated. And the debt to the gods is paid by mak-

ing offerings to them.

There is a good deal more to the repayment of these debts than you might think. What kind of son are you expected to bring into the world? One who will turn out to be a gangster or an idiot? No! You must bring forth the best son you can. For ages and ages in every civilized community, the family has accumulated and transmitted culture. Therefore, parents have the responsibility of giving birth to and bringing up good children who will not only continue the family traditions, but will enhance them, will add something to them. If you say you have no control over the kind of children you give birth to, that you cannot be held responsible—ah, I shall hold you responsible. The Hindus believe, you see, that if the minds of the parents are in a pure and high state when the mother conceives, then a good soul is drawn to her womb.

Of course, at that time a person cannot command the right state of mind unless he has purified himself through long years of training. It has been the tradition in India from ancient times until the present day for girls approaching the marriageable age to practise austerity and to worship the gods. Why do they worship? Not because they are eager for a man, as one of your American writers has imagined, but because they feel that to enter the state of wifehood is a tremendous responsibility. Everybody knows that young girls have not much sense in choosing a husband. Even parents are not always governed by the best motives, and sometimes they are hemmed in by circumstances and are not able to get the right bridegroom for their daughters; there are so many difficulties about it. But when men can do nothing, there is One whom they can approach, and that is God. There is a wisdom that is never asleep—*atandritam*, 'the ever-wakeful One'. And He is our very own; He is not a ruler sitting on



a throne with a big stick in His hand; He is our inmost Friend; He is our Father and Mother. Why should our prayers not reach Him? So Hindu girls pray for a good husband. Then after marriage, when the husband and wife want children, they also become prayerful. They practise austerity, they fast, and they perform worship. There is nothing primitive about it; it is a process of purification. And when a child is conceived by parents whose minds have been purified, a good soul will be drawn to them, one who likes the spirit of austerity, of prayer and meditation. That is where a parent's responsibility lies: if he does not train himself, if he does not develop the power to attract good souls, he has failed in paying his debt to his ancestors. So you see, the payment of this debt is not a simple matter. Similarly, one's debt to the *ṛṣis*—the sages and prophets—is not paid by merely reading the scriptures every day after dinner. That is just a matter of form. If you want to pay your debt to the *ṛṣis* truly, it has to be something else altogether.

And one's debt to the gods? In the time of the Vedas the sacrifice to the gods—*deva-yajña* it is called—was performed by making oblations into a sacred fire. Behind this sacrifice was the idea that all nature is governed by celestial forces, or gods. We may ignore these forces, but that does not mean they ignore us. If we ignore the weather, for instance, the weather does not ignore us: if we had no weather reports, still snow would come, storms would come. There are these forces—celestial forces—that govern this material nature, and it was found that if these forces are worshipped, then man is paying the gods for what he derived from them. You know how American Indians in Arizona dance, and at once rain will come? Similarly, the ancient Vedic Aryans believed that when they performed certain sacrifices rain would fall as a result. You make offerings to Indra, the

god of the rains, and at once you hear his thunderbolt rumbling in the sky; the sky becomes filled with black clouds, as though demons were covering it, and he pelts the earth with his bullets of rain. That is Indra: if you worship him he does that kind of thing.

These, then, were three of the debts the Hindus thought men were born with. Actually, they speak of five debts. If you reduce them to modern terms, you might say that every individual is born with certain responsibilities: he has responsibilities to his family; responsibilities to his fellow beings; responsibilities to the gods—if he believes in the gods; responsibilities to culture, that is, to education and to religion (which last he fulfils by supporting his church and by being himself a religious person); and responsibilities to subhuman creatures.

By subhuman creatures the ancient Hindus meant not only animals but mysterious beings such as demons and the like. In this universe there are these evil, unclean creatures; they are not gods, they are just the opposite; yet they exist, and the Hindus thought that a soul owes something to them just as a community feels that it has some responsibility to its slum dwellers and tramps. Even today, before a Hindu will eat dinner he will take a bit of food and offer it to these *bhūtas*, or evil spirits, and it is said that they are somewhat satisfied. You might think that it is just being childish to believe that putting out a little piece of bread will satisfy these spirits. But why not? Suppose a father of a poor family has gone away to make money and bring it home. Year after year he writes hopeful letters to his family: 'Now prosperity is just around the corner'; 'Things are looking up'; 'It will not be long before I shall come back and we shall live a better life.' It is all just talk, but you must admit that these letters have sustained the family



through the years. We do not know how much even a thought can sustain people. Take all idle thoughts away from people, and their lives will become as barren as a desert, dry as anything. True, there is little substance in all this sentiment and talk, and yet these things are the sustaining powers in human life at this stage. You cannot deny it. So even the thought that goes to the spirits along with the offering of food—'With this food you will be sustained, O Spirits'—that thought, it is said, sustains them.

Well, however that may be, you might say that the meaning behind this whole concept of being born with certain debts is that we have duties to all our fellow beings. And if there are angels and spirits and such things in our universe, then we owe something to them too; if we can help them, we should be willing to help them. In other words, as long as you feel that the world is outside you, that it means something to you, and that you have to know it, then you must take it seriously. You cannot just say, 'Oh, I don't care. I don't care for having children or for helping others; why should I bother?' So you go on; you earn money, you live your life, you have your fun. Death! Death for you! You will never thus be able to get away from the snare of this transmigratory existence. Why? Because, you see, you have taken it to be real, but you do not know how to treat it in such a way that you can get out of its clutches. Only when you take it seriously and meet its demands with the highest sense of duty and evaluation will this existence let you go. As I told you, when the soul in the instinctive stage no longer reacts with enthusiasm to the phenomena that nature is bringing to it, nature itself forces that soul into a higher form. In this deliberative stage, also, nature will do that. But you will hasten the process when you take this phase of reality with seriousness.

When you respond with sincerity and with the best intentions to what it asks of you, then nature will say, 'Well, I have got what I wanted. I don't want anything more out of him in this phase; I shall appear to him now in another guise.' Nature will let you go.

In our scriptures it is said that when a man becomes a monk he is allowed to give up everything—family, responsibility, everything; society does not expect anything more of him; entirely free he is. But you see, it is only when he has finished all his duties in this phase of existence and wants nothing more from it, only when he has performed the five great sacrifices that were his duty by the very fact of his birth, is he free to renounce the world and become a monastic—not until then. Renouncing is not escaping, as many people think. You cannot escape; you just cannot! A man may put on the garb of a wandering monk and beg his food, but that does not make him free. If he is bound internally, nature itself will make him work.

There is a joke about this among the people who live in the Himalayas. Although a great part of the Himalayas is uninhabited, here and there you will find small villages. The people are never prosperous, but they are very hospitable. For ages and ages, monks and spiritual aspirants have gone to the Himalayas to dwell there in poverty and meditation, and the poor villagers have always thought it their duty to supply them with their basic needs. Every day after cooking—and they cook with a great sense of ceremonial purity and reverence—they will set aside some of the food, a piece of bread, a small portion of vegetables or lentils, expecting a wandering monk to come by. When a monk comes he will stand at the door and repeat the name of the Lord. Thus, at the very least, he makes the householder hear the name of God. Sometimes he will discourse on a spiritual subject or sing a devotional song.



Then he will go to the next house. Well, however devoted they are, the villagers have common sense; they know that some of these monks are not genuine, that they are just lazy people. But they think it is not their responsibility to administer justice; that is the responsibility of the monks among themselves. So they say: 'Let him have a piece of bread or a little vegetable. In his next life he will be born as our ox and till the fields that have produced this food!'

Yes, life will make you work if you have not become free of this phase of existence. And how do you become free? When you have treated a thing at its best with your best, then you become free of it. That is the secret. You in America say you are born with rights; Hindus say just the opposite. Our attitude is that our existence here is not to get things but to give. So we say everyone is born not with rights but with indebtedness to this community of beings, of which some are visible, others invisible, some are human, some superhuman, others subhuman. In this country you, too, speak of your obligations, but at the same time you talk of your rights, and then, of course, there is conflict. Boys and girls grow up and say, 'I want to seek happiness; it is my legal right.' Parents cannot say anything; it is unconstitutional to say anything. So the children go out seeking happiness. Of course, they do not know what happiness is, or which kind of 'happiness' will bring what result. They have not had enough experience, nor enough self-discipline; therefore conflict comes.

I think the idea that we are born with obligations is better. I admit that you can make too much of it and crush the soul. Like every idea, it has to be judged in conjunction with associated ideas. The associated idea in this case is that parents teach their children, even when they are very small, the art of gaining happiness from

within. How to keep the spirit soaring even when things get very dark outside is an art that can be cultivated. It is the art of meditation, the art by which you brush aside mental conditions, and erase impressions received from the outside, so that your natural enthusiasm will emerge. The soul, they say, is not buried too deep. If you remove one or two layers from the surface you find it is there. In every person there is that source of peace and joy and strength. It is not dependent upon physical vigour; it is not dependent upon mental enthusiasm, or upon any stimulus from the outside; it is just there; it is like an eternal spring, continually rising from within. The bounden duty of devoted Hindus is to teach their children this art of meditation. In olden times, if higher-caste Hindus failed to do so, the family was made outcaste. Other members of the community would not dine with them, would not invite them to any social gathering, would just ostracize them. So you see, these two ideas went together—indebtedness and meditation—and thereby the sense of obligation did not become a crushing burden; it became, rather, a stimulus to higher, nobler endeavour.

You might say that life would become awfully stodgy with the sense of all this obligation. How do you know that? Go into the monasteries and convents of any religion and you will find the most cheerful group of people you could ever come across, playful and merry. Don't be fooled by their big hats or by clothes that make them look dowdy; they are a cheerful bunch. You see, when these two things, meditation and obligation, go together, then there is no sense of burden.

Yes, that is the way. And when a person has fulfilled his obligations, has paid off the debts with which he was born, then this state of nature will no longer have a hold on him.



If you study the whole thing psychologically, you will see how true this is. Whenever you enjoy your senses but do not assume the consequences of your enjoyment as a noble obligation, it degrades you. It is as if you had gone to a shop and helped yourself to something without paying for it. It actually has been said by Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhagavad-gītā* that you become a thief if you enjoy the fruits of nature and do not make offerings to the gods, who have made nature give you these fruits. Enjoyment must be coupled with responsibility; otherwise it becomes degrading, it becomes binding; it will cause you to sink lower and lower until you lose your human status. On the other hand, if you repay your indebtedness to this existence, gradually your desire for enjoyment becomes converted to another sense of things; you see more in this phase of reality than you had seen before.

Suppose, for example, a man with this sense of obligation marries a beautiful girl. In the beginning, it is true, he may have been attracted by her beauty, the sense of enjoyment may have been predominant in his mind, but if he has this noble sense of responsibility, he will see a great deal more in their life together than enjoyment. Then it will not matter in the slightest to him if his wife becomes ugly or old or diseased; on the contrary, a better understanding of his wife will grow in him, and he will lose the external attraction with which he first married. He will find it very superficial.

Or a person might say, 'Oh, how wonderful it would be to be rich!' All right, suppose he becomes rich. Then at once he assumes the responsibilities of wealth: he has to support his relatives, he has to give to the poor, contribute to hospitals, schools, and churches. If he does all this in a noble spirit, very soon he will find that possessing wealth is not the important thing; giving away wealth is the important thing. Posses-

siveness is replaced by the sense of sacrifice and renunciation.

In short, to treat any phase of reality in the highest sense is the means of our liberation from that phase of reality. If I am caught in this view of existence and have been forced to come to this world, I must find where the compulsion lies, then I must face it. I must say, 'I shall do my best by it.' When I do my best, at once I feel a release. But release expresses only a part of what comes: I become aware of a higher life. If I discharge all my obligations in the deliberative stage of existence, I find that my mind and my power of perception have undergone a change: I have become superconscious; I have become intuitive.

In this lower form of life, where knowledge depends on the body and the senses, and the mind traffics only with what the senses give it and cannot produce anything of its own, truth seems to be far off, and even our best efforts often end in error. But when I have become free of the senses and my perception has become more internal, then the mind becomes free from its bondage to the body. The mind says, 'Now, O man, I can do a better job of finding truth for you.' 'Oh, you can? Then why haven't you done it all this time?' 'You didn't give me a chance. You forced me into slavery to the senses and the body; you compelled me to go outside to bring truth to you; you ordered me to rearrange the impressions the senses brought, to sort them out, and to put them away in the unconscious ready to be used again. But now I don't have to go outside to get the truth for you. I can produce it at once, like a lightning flash.' 'But,' the mind goes on, 'let me tell you one thing. I don't think you have given me complete freedom yet. You still want to look outward through the eyes, and you still want me to make a record of all the things that you see so that you can hobnob a little with this and a little with that. No! That



won't do. You have to give me complete freedom.'

It is here that spiritual practice comes in. Religion, when it is taken seriously, is for those who have become aware that what they are seeking is not in the sense world. The truth of even what we see by means of the senses lies beneath what the senses reveal. If the senses reveal a man to me, I see his face, but the greater truth of the man lies behind his face. And as regards this greater truth, it is within me; I don't have to look outside. Through me is the door to the heart of the universe. When I enter here, through this door, then I enter into the very heart of the whole of reality, not merely the reality that is circumscribed by my physical form. But first I must become free from the remnants of bondage to the sense world.

That freedom comes when we deliberately undertake religious practices. You see, when you clear a forest, you first cut down the big trees, then after they have dried a little, you burn them. Still you find burnt stumps are standing here and there, making things ugly; so you have to remove them. When you have removed stumps, roots, and everything, the ground becomes clear, and a beautiful harvest can be grown there. In the same way, the mind must be freed from all the remnants of sense desires, desires for external things. Then gradually the mind becomes calm: and that is the mind that becomes intuitive.

To put it briefly, a scattered mind, an objectified mind, is the deliberative mind, and it cannot give you the truth. When the same mind is no longer forced to be scattered, it at once becomes intuitive. Just as in intense darkness a lightning flash illumines everything without the slightest shadow anywhere, making things clearer than in daylight, so the flash of intuition brings everything to you with the utmost clarity, without a shadow of doubt or speck

of ignorance anywhere. That is intuition. Will it tell you your future or who is speaking where and what about you? No, that is not intuition, that is madness. If you have the power of intuition, do you think you will care to know what is going to happen to you in the future, or who is doing what now or did what in the past? That is a degradation of the very idea of intuition. Yes, there are certain psychic powers which can be attained, but the intuition I am speaking of is the light by which truth is made known to us.

Intuition brings you the knowledge that you are not this body, you are not this mind. And when this knowledge comes, it will not be just intellectual knowledge; it will be actual perception. You will feel separate from the body; even if someone were to cut your body to pieces, it would not matter to you. When this intuition comes you will already have reached the point where you are no longer tied up with that form of existence called *samsāra*, in which you are made to whirl from life to death and death to life. You have come out of it; you are approaching the life that has been called Absolute, the life of freedom, the life of your own true Self, of your own true nature.

In this process of becoming free from transmigratory existence and reaching the Absolute, there are many stages. I shall mention only one here. As I said, before the mind really reveals its power of intuition, it will demand that we make it free, completely free from taking account of all our sensations and perceptions in this world of appearances. That is a long process, but a time comes when the mind is free and stands still. Patañjali has called that stillness of the mind in which the truth is revealed the state of yoga. How do you make the mind stand still? He says through *abhyāsa* and *vairāgya*. *Abhyāsa*, which literally means practice, is making the mind



continually come back to the contemplation of truth, not allowing it to dwell on anything else. What is truth? Truth is the Spirit. Make your mind feel that changeless, unmoving, subtle Being which is the support of the whole universe and without which in one moment it would go into nothingness. Think on that Being which is the essence of everything that is. By imagination remove all these variations and make your mind dwell on this homogeneous Being, the one essence of all these variegated forms.

This is spiritual practice, my friends. All the time, as it were, you have been looking towards the north or the west. Look towards the east and you will see the rising sun. That is, take your mind away from differentiation, from the many, and make it dwell in imagination upon the infinite, homogeneous Unity, the one Being. At first it will just be some vague abstraction. That also is good; your mind has never thought like this before. It has always thought of little things, changing things. In fact, it has not really thought at all; it has just danced the dance of a monkey, that is all. We cannot call that thinking. Let the mind turn the other way, if only for one minute. Sit still, close your senses, and in imagination and consciousness feel this one, unchanging, infinitely peaceful Being—just one Being unto the ends and endless ends of the universe. Feel yourself one with that Being. That is thinking. Learn to do that more and more, more and more. A time comes when that Being no longer appears so abstract, and as you progress in thinking of It you become aware of It in such a way that the richest being in the phenomenal world pales into nothingness compared with It. That is *abhyāsa*.

But *abhyāsa* does not become complete unless you are established in *vairāgya* or dispassion. *Vairāgya* literally means 'un-colouring'. All these things in the world look colourful; that is why they attract you.

But if they lose their colour, you no longer want to look at them. Suppose there is a canvas full of beautiful colours; you would say, 'What a wonderful painting!' But if some water or acid falls on it and the colours are washed away, would you look at it? No. This world of appearance is like a canvas painted by the greatest of all artists—God. Or by you yourself, by the real you—*kavi*, the poet. This is the beautiful poem you have composed—this universe. You do not know it now, but a time will come when you know that it is your own composition. But then, you will no longer like it. Its colour will have gone and you will no longer be attracted by it. That is called *vairāgya*, nonattraction. A time comes when you are no longer caught by this world; you are free from it. You have seen through it, and it has become pale; there is nothing there. Even an illusion, however, has a tendency of coming back; so if a remnant still remains, you just remind yourself that it is an illusion to think that this world is a colourful, substantial thing. By this effort you kill the remnants of illusion and the whole mind becomes free. True intuition comes; the mind becomes unified and exceedingly subtle. You become aware of the one divine Being.

I wish very much that you would have a glimpse of this most wonderful, beautiful Being that is hidden by the forms of this universe. It is He who is contributing the substance, the colour, the attraction of everything that is. His the value, His the power, His the love, His the sweetness and the beauty. He is the living one. And He is not a stranger to us; we have not to be afraid of Him. He is not far off; he is the nearest of the near. He is in our very breath, He is the life of our life. He is the eye of our eye. He is the very Soul of our soul, our very own—always has been, always will be. It is not a relationship which we have built up; there can be no fear it

will dissolve. It has been always there; it is, in fact, not a relationship at all: He is one with us.

If we would just think of Him, we could catch a glimpse of Him. From time to time the mind would stand still: as in the midst of a storm suddenly there is a lull in the air, an utter silence, so from time to time the mind quiets down, and in that quietude reality flashes, and you see His beautiful face. I wish you could catch a glimpse of Him. You should try, because that is the answer to all your seeking. Once you have fallen in love with Him, you will never forget Him; even if you forget Him for a time, you will again remember Him, and you will come away from what has bound you down for the time being. You will never rest until you have been united with Him forever. The heart will just cry for God—until God comes. It is said that God Himself also feels that longing. When the soul cries for Him, He rushes toward the soul. And that is the culmination of the soul's

journey. That is its destiny, not merely its destination: no soul will find peace until it has reached that state.

Every one of you is bound to reach that state. You are *now* God; you are not going to become God, but you will remember yourself as God again. That memory will come back, and you will smile at the childish games you have been playing, thinking you are a small being, fearing this, loving that, hating one thing, desiring another. You will laugh at all those things, just as we laugh at the fears of our childhood. Yes, we shall all have to become great; we shall all have to know ourselves as divine. Until we have done that, there will be no rest for us; continually we shall have to move from moment to moment, from life to life, from stage to stage, until the highest has been reached. That highest is at-one-ment with God. If God is excellent, in that at-one-ment we also are excellent. Nothing more need be said about it.

(Concluded)

## EXCURSIONS INTO UDDHAVA-GITA

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

### WHY NOT LOOK UPON YOURSELF AS DIVINE?

The manifested world always reminds us of the unmanifested cause behind it—the infinite spirit out of which it has come. Ordinarily we see everywhere only discontinuity, but we should at least think about the Unity behind all this diversity.

Whenever you find cosmological processes discussed in our scriptures, you should know that it is always to show the unity behind all the diverse phenomena. Vedānta accepts the theory of evolution of the world, not out of self-existing atoms but out of Brahman which is the material as well as

the efficient cause of all.

Dualism exists on the phenomenal plane. The worldly man, even if he is a great scientist, takes this world as the ultimate Reality. The spiritual man too sees the diversity of phenomena. But he does not stop with that. He knows that behind this apparent world there is the ultimate principle, the supreme Spirit. He sees the world as a manifestation of this infinite spirit.

Why not meditate on our own form as divine? This thought strikes me very often. As long as we do not look upon ourselves as divine, we can never really see the Divine in others. When we cannot see the



Divine anywhere, we see only men and women, animals and objects, everywhere. Everything depends upon our attitude towards ourselves. If we can look upon ourselves as divine, then a tremendous transformation will take place within us. This is an important point to note: If we want to see the Divine everywhere we should not leave ourselves out of account. We are not able to give up our egos, our false identification with our bodies, and yet we want to see the Spirit everywhere! How is that possible? So before trying to see the Divine in others first see Him in yourself. Look upon yourself as divine. Repeat, 'I am the Spirit', 'I am the Spirit', until your nature changes and you really begin to feel the Spirit.

#### THE CLOUD OF GUNAS

The eighth chapter begins with a description of the *guṇas*. *Guṇas* are like clouds which hide the sun of knowledge. The Self is absolute consciousness and bliss; it is self-luminous. The *guṇas* act as a sort of screen or cloud obscuring this light. According to Sāṅkhya philosophy the ultimate cause of the world is *prakṛti*. *Prakṛti* is nothing but the three *guṇas* existing in a state of dynamic equilibrium. When this equilibrium is disturbed evolution takes place. All the evolutes of *prakṛti* are also composed of the three *guṇas*, but in some *sattva* (balance and serenity) predominates, in some *rajas* (activity) predominates, and in some *tamas* (inertia) predominates. Human nature, temperament, and mood depend on the predominance of one or the other of these *guṇas*.

'The *guṇas*—*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*—belong to the intellect and not to the Self. Through *sattva* one should subdue the other two, and subdue *sattva* also by means of *sattva* itself.'<sup>1</sup>

It is very important to understand that with the help of *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* can be controlled. Our restlessness and dullness are to be got rid of by stimulating *sattva* in us. The general classification of men into good and bad is not enough. The ancient teachers developed another classification which looks upon every man as a mixture of the three *guṇas*. Our actions are not purely *sāttvic* or purely *rājasic*, or purely *tāmasic*. They are a mixture of all the three with one or other of them predominating. The spiritual aspirant should watch his actions, his thoughts, his impulses and see that he allows only *sattva* to dominate his personality. With an effort of the will he should keep his restless tendencies in check and rouse himself when the mind tends to slip into a torpid state. Every aspirant must always be watchful about his mind. He should not allow moods to overpower him. He should try to maintain one mood at all times, namely, the *sāttvika*. Otherwise continuity in spiritual life is impossible. If we constantly swing between the restlessness of a monkey and the torpidity of a reptile, where is the hope of a steady spiritual life? We should always try to be calm, cheerful and alert—signs of a *sāttvika* temperament. Then we shall always be in a spiritual mood and maintain an unbroken current of spiritual thoughts. Without this continuity in spiritual endeavour, progress will be deadly slow. If we do our spiritual practice by fits and starts it will take a long time for us to get even glimpses of higher life. Not only that, we will not be able to retain for long the effects of the spiritual experience that we have already gained.

So every spiritual aspirant must take great care to see which *guṇa* dominates him. Once restlessness and dullness are allowed alternately to have their sway over us, they become habitual. Then our life becomes just a series of changes from recklessness to inertia and *vice versa*. Cosmic energy is

<sup>1</sup> *The Last Message of Śrī Kṛṣṇa* (Tr. by Swami Madhavananda, Pub. by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U. P., 1956), VIII. 1.



flowing through us. The way we handle it determines the nature of our life. We should transmute the currents of *rajas* and *tamas* and redirect them into new channels of *sattva*. This means the opening of higher faculties in us.

Some people are pure by nature, others attain purity through effort. But if we earnestly try to become pure through effort we finally become pure by nature. Without previous struggle and effort that higher state can never be reached.

### HOW TO ATTAIN THE SATTVIKA NATURE

'For the increase of *sattva* a man should concern himself with *sāttvika* things<sup>2</sup> alone. Thence comes spirituality and from this again knowledge which leads to the freedom of the self and from its false identification with the *gunas*.'<sup>3</sup>

As long as we live on this phenomenal plane we have to be very careful about how the world influences us. We should associate closely only with those who are pure

by nature. More important, we should cease to associate with the unholy images that we create in our own minds. The Upaniṣad says:

'By taking pure food one's mind becomes pure; purity of mind leads to steadiness of memory (of the Self) which breaks down all the bonds of transmigratory existence.'<sup>4</sup>

And this contains a great truth. But here the word 'food' should be taken in its larger meaning, as 'sense-experiences'. Whenever there is some impurity, our mind gets clouded. Clear thinking becomes impossible. Anger, greed, lust: these obstruct clear, steady memory. With a confounded mind spiritual life may even be dangerous. We should always be watchful about what is going on within us and act with great care. Only when the mind becomes pure and the memory steady, Truth flashes.

### DESTRUCTION OF BODY-CONSCIOUSNESS

'The fire that springs from the friction of bamboos in a forest burns that forest and is itself quenched. Similarly, the body which is the outcome of an intermixture of the *gunas*, is destroyed in the manner of the fire.'<sup>5</sup>

It is only when the body is burnt down that the Self, which had till then been eclipsed by the body, shines forth. By destruction of body is here meant destruction of body-consciousness, that is, identification of the Self with the body. This must go. Everybody must bring about the destruction of his own inordinate body-consciousness. It is the fire of knowledge that brings this about. One should be dead to the body, dead to all things of the senses, and fully alive to the Spirit.

<sup>4</sup> आहारशुद्धी सत्त्वशुद्धिः सत्त्वशुद्धी ध्रुवास्मृतिः  
स्मृतिलम्भेः सर्वग्रन्थीनां विप्रमोक्षः ।

*Chāndogya-upaniṣad*, VII. 26. 2.

<sup>5</sup> L. M., VIII. 7.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., only those scriptures are to be followed which teach *nivṛtti* or the march back to the oneness of Brahman, not those (*rājasika*) that teach *pravṛtti* or continuing the multiplicity, or those (*tāmasika*) that teach downright injurious tenets; similarly—holy water only is to be used, not scented water or wine etc.; one should mix only with spiritual people, not with worldly-minded or wicked people; a solitary place is to be preferred, not a public thoroughfare or a gaming house or places like slaughter-houses; early morning or some such time is to be selected for meditation in preference to hours likely to cause distraction or dullness; the obligatory and unselfish works alone should be done, not selfish or dreadful ones; initiation into pure and non-injurious forms of religion is needed, not those harmful; meditation should be on the Lord, not on sense-objects or on enemies with a view to revenge; *mantras* such as 'Om' are to be preferred, not those bringing worldly prosperity or causing injury to others; purification of the mind is what we should care for, not trimming of the body merely. (Notes added by the translator, Swami Madhavananda, to the above passage.)

<sup>3</sup> L. M., VIII. 6.



The body is like a forest, and in it we lose our way. Just as two dry stems of bamboo produce fire through friction, so through meditation, the aspirant is able to bring out a fire, the fire of knowledge. Superconscious knowledge is revealed in *samādhi*. This finally will destroy all the latent impressions or tendencies accumulated through countless births. In yogic literature this is called *prajñā*, illumination. This is what happens during *savikalpa-samādhi* (superconsciousness with one mental modification only).

By the constant practice of *savikalpa-samādhi* the yogi destroys all his latent impressions. Not only attachment to the physical body but even attachment to the subtle body is thus destroyed. This is followed by *nirvikalpa-samādhi* in which the knowledge gained through *savikalpa* too is destroyed. It is an absolute state. What happens then cannot be described. This is what Sri Ramakrishna meant when he said that using the thorn of knowledge one should remove the thorn of ignorance and then, the thorn of knowledge too should be discarded. But this is a very high state which very few people can aspire to attain.

Our immediate task is to kindle the fire of knowledge and destroy our body-consciousness and the latent impressions. The question of transcending even this superior knowledge comes only after we have succeeded in bringing about a thorough destruction of our *samskāras* (mental impressions).

When you sit for meditation imagine that your body is a temple and is filled with the light of the Spirit. This light exists outside the body also. Merge your body in that light. Throw into it all the thoughts and pictures that arise in you. Practise in this way for some time with unbroken regularity. You will find that even though this is only a form of higher imagination, it will bring about a great transformation in you in due course.

### LEARN TO RELAX

During the period of our spiritual growth some of the centres in us often act madly for a time. We should not make matters worse through our restlessness. Sometimes the lower centres become over-active and give us a lot of trouble. Trying to keep them under control often creates much tension and anxiety. These are phases that are unavoidable in the early stages of our spiritual growth.

We have got bodies no doubt, but unfortunately many of us do not know how to live in them. In spiritual life we try to pacify the physical body as well as the mental body. We should, along with that, see that both these work in harmony. An unhealthy body is a great nuisance. So the aspirant must take proper care of it and see that it functions smoothly. But an unhealthy mind is the greatest problem. The aspirant should see that the mind works harmoniously with the body. It is not an easy thing to dwell in this body. One should learn the art of harmonious living.

*Japa* (repetition of *mantras* or holy names) and meditation help us in bringing about this needed harmony within us. But we should learn to relax first. If you want to have good meditation you must know how to relax yourself, without falling asleep. We keep ourselves constantly in tremendous tension, as if the heavens were going to fall upon us. Know for certain that the world will not come to a standstill if we are not there to save it. Learn to see things in a cosmic perspective.

Learn to relax your body and your mind. We must learn to remain perfectly quiet, still. I sometimes think it is better for many aspirants first to learn to have a relaxed sleep and a good rest than to have a good meditation. Most people do not know how to fall asleep and get a deep restful repose. After a good relaxation, you come to have a deep meditation. You see.



meditation in the early stages always means a sort of higher tension. But to this if you add all your physical and mental tensions, what do you really get out of all that struggle? If we get over our superfluous tensions of the body and mind, we come to have a good meditation. Meditation too involves a certain kind of tension; but then, this will gradually give way to the super-conscious state called *samādhi* where one enjoys the highest form of relaxation, perfect rest. The spontaneity of spiritual experience brings to us supreme peace.

All the three states—those of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep—are interconnected. If your waking state is a terribly restless one, the dreaming and deep sleep states too are affected. You never get full relaxation even after sleeping for ten hours. A spiritual aspirant must learn how to keep awake and how to fall asleep. He can then get greater relaxation of body and mind and this will enable him to practise better meditation. Furthermore, there should not be any attempt at concentration with an impure and restless mind.

#### ORIGIN OF DESIRE

Uddhava asks Kṛṣṇa:

‘O Kṛṣṇa, even though mortals generally know sense-objects to be sources of danger, how is it that they still run after them like a dog, an ass, or a goat?’<sup>6</sup>

This is an age-old question. You find it in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (III. 36). The opening verse of the *Kena-upaniṣad* contains the same theme. Brahman, the ultimate Reality, is infinite, immutable, Existence-consciousness-bliss. In it somehow arises the primordial I-consciousness. This limits the Spirit and confines it within subtle bodies. The subtle body gets identified with the

gross physical bodies. This is the situation we are in. The problem is further complicated by the presence of latent impressions (*samskāras*) acquired through repeated births. These *samskāras* are stored in the subtle body. The subtle body is in touch with the Cosmic mind. Cosmic energy (called *rajas* in this book) is flowing into the subtle body. This energy strikes the *samskāras* and awakens them. These sprout into desires. Desires produce multiplicity of thoughts and actions. This is what is happening in all of us.

‘In the heart of an indiscriminating man, the wrong idea of “I (and mine)” naturally arises; then, dire *rajas* overtakes the mind which is (originally) *sāttvika*.

A mind under the influence of *rajas* cherishes desires with all sorts of cogitation. Then, from dwelling on the tempting aspects of objects, the foolish man gets inordinate hankering for them. Under the sway of hankering, the man devoid of self-control wilfully commits deeds fraught with further misery, being infatuated with violent *rajas*.’<sup>7</sup>

#### OVERCOMING DESIRES THROUGH SELF-CONTROL

Desires can be controlled by an effort of the will. We have seen that the desires are caused by latent impressions of past experiences. By keeping a constant watch over the movements of the mind one can check the desires before they pass from the subtle to the gross state. A yogi who is alert detects every subtle movement of his mind and controls it then and there. This method of self-control is easier for those who had previously led a pure life. After living a careless life of indulgence for a long time most people find it difficult to control their mind.

<sup>6</sup> L. M., VIII. 8.

<sup>7</sup> L. M., VIII. 9-11.



Self-indulgence need not be with regard to bad things. From the spritual aspirant's point of view good desires are as much an obstacle to concentration as bad desires. A man who cannot control his good thoughts will find it difficult to control his bad thoughts. The so-called good and pleasant life by itself does not guarantee concentration of mind. One should exercise control over one's good thoughts also.

### THE POWER OF SOUND VIBRATIONS OVER DESIRES

Desires become troublesome only when they become manifested as thoughts. Thoughts are invariably associated with vibrations of sound—subtle and gross. The external sound we hear through the ears is only the gross sound vibration. This is called *vaikhari*. When these are comprehended in the mind they are changed into subtle vibrations called the 'middle' (*madhyamā*) vibrations. These are transformed deeper down as still more subtle vibrations called the *paśyantī*. Beyond that lies the pure consciousness of the Self. Desires, subtle and gross, are connected to these 'sound' vibrations at all levels. Hence, by controlling the sound vibrations we can exercise a certain amount of control on desires. Here comes the importance of *japa*.

*Japa* means the repetition of a *mantra*, consisting of mystic syllables or divine names. By means of *japa* with the help of gross sound vibrations we are able to rouse holy, subtle sound vibrations. These powerful vibrations subdue the wrong vibrations of thoughts and desires automatically going on in our mind. This is an important point to note. Ordinarily we do not realize the great good that *japa* does to us. It is one of our most important practices and should be always performed with great attention and regularity. *Japa* is one of the best means of controlling the desires. The result

may not be immediately known by the average aspirant, who does not have the capacity to tap the subtle vibrations of his mind. But if he persists in his practice of *japa* he will soon realize some of its great beneficial effect on his mind.

*Japa* in due course leads to awakening of consciousness. When we are in the gross plane we can hear only gross sounds. But as we progress in spiritual life we enter into subtler planes and then we are able to hear subtle sound. We are able to perceive subtle vibrations of thoughts going on within us. The vibrations of *japa* penetrate into these deeper planes. We have the sound aspect, the thought aspect, and the consciousness aspect. The gross sound is associated with the gross thought and gross consciousness, the subtler sound with subtler thought and subtler consciousness, the subtlest sound with the subtlest thought and subtlest consciousness.

You can judge the condition of your mind by your perception of sound. When you are in deep concentration, when the mind is calm and peaceful, you can hear the subtle sound going on within you. This is called the *anāhata-dhvani*, the 'unstruck sound'. It is not in any way created by you. It goes on eternally like a continuous fountain. The vibrations are always there. You do not create them. When you are gross-minded you do not hear this sound. Also, when you attain to still higher states of consciousness you do not hear it, because you have risen above the sound-plane. Until you have come in direct touch with higher consciousness you have to take the help of sound symbols and continue your *japa* with great perseverance. Through regular practice of *japa* you must create in yourself higher vibrations. This will guard you at other times also, e.g., when you are engaged in work.

Self-control there must be in all the paths. Without it *japa* loses much of its effect even



though *japa* has got its own intrinsic power to control the mind. Both must go hand in hand. This is the best method for the majority of aspirants.

#### CONTROL OF DESIRES THROUGH DETACHMENT OF THE SELF

'Even though distracted by *rajas* and *tamas*, the man of discrimination, conscious of their evils, again concentrates his mind, without giving way to inadvertence and is not attached to them.'<sup>8</sup>

There is a third method of controlling desires. Stand as a witness of your personality, your feelings, your thoughts, without identifying yourself with them. Sometimes when we have good thoughts we feel highly elated and self-confident. But when bad thoughts assail us we are crestfallen. This will not do. There must be no identification either with good thoughts or bad thoughts. This is the correct witness-attitude.

But this is by no means an easy affair. One has to begin with certain preliminary disciplines before one develops the witness attitude. One may begin with imagining that one's body is only an empty case, as it were, floating in the mind (rather than vice versa). Systematically reduce your body-consciousness until it occupies only just a fraction of your mind. There is another method. Look at your face in the mirror and then think very intensely that it is somebody else you are seeing, not yourself. This is no doubt a crude form of imagination, but one has to begin with some such simple imaginations. Those who are very earnest about cultivating the real witness attitude must begin with them. Otherwise if one attempts to remain as a witness simply after reading some books one may not succeed at all.

However, the problem can be made easier if one learns to identify oneself with the Infinite. If we think of ourselves as parts

of the Infinite Divine, we naturally come to look upon finite objects as something different from us. Intense love and attachment for God make it easy for us to get rid of our body-consciousness. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, if you travel towards the west you automatically move away from the east.

#### KEEP A LITTLE LAMP BURNING WITHIN YOU

We have discussed various methods of controlling our desires. As I said earlier, desires cannot be snuffed out all at a time as you put out fire with a fire-extinguisher. It takes time, usually a long time. In the meantime, all aspirants have to pass through a period when there is neither complete defeat nor complete victory. But you should not give up the struggle even if it means intense suffering. Keep up the struggle until you die. That should be your motto.

The most important thing during these struggles is not the extent you imagine you are progressing. What is important is to keep up an undying flame of aspiration in your heart. Light the lamp of wisdom and/or devotion to God, and keep guard over it. See that it does not get quenched either through lukewarmness or through carelessness. Do not allow the day-to-day affairs of your life to snuff out the little lamp within. A little of the higher consciousness should always be kept awake in your heart. This is the essential part of spiritual life.

#### THE STATE BEYOND SATTVA: PARABLE OF THE THREE ROBBERS

Unless we attain to transcendental consciousness, beyond *sattva*, we will not have reached the goal of our life. A man may be perfectly pure and calm, perfectly serene, but this does not mean that he has reached the goal. If we want to reach the terrace it is not enough if we stop at the highest step of the stair-case. Regarding this Sri Rama-

<sup>8</sup> L. M., VIII. 12.



krishna used to narrate the following parable:

‘Once a man was going through a forest, when three robbers fell upon him and robbed him of all his possessions. One of the robbers said, “What’s the use of keeping this man alive?” So saying, he was about to kill him with his sword, when the second robber interrupted him, saying: “Oh, no! What is the use of killing him? Tie him hand and foot and leave him here.” The robbers bound his hands and feet and went away. After a while the third robber returned and said to the man: “Ah, I am sorry. Are you hurt? I will release you from your bonds.” After setting the man free, the thief said: “Come with me. I will take you to the public highway.” After a long time they reached the road. Then the robber said: “Follow this road. Over there is your house.” At this the man said: “Sir, you have been very good to me. Come with me to my house.” “Oh, no!” the robber replied. “I can’t go there. The police will know it.”’

This world is the wilderness. The three robbers are the three *gunas* of *prakṛti*: *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. The *jīva* or the individual soul is the traveller. Self-knowledge is his treasure. The quality of *tamas*, like one of the robbers, is about to kill the

soul through ignorance, but *rajas* binds it to the world by the fetters of attachment. Then *sattva* protects it from *rajas* and *tamas*. With the help of *sattva* the individual soul becomes free from attachment to the world. But *sattva* itself is also a robber. It cannot reveal the Reality though it takes one near to it. When a man has transcended *sattva*, Brahman reveals Itself to him.

So, purity, peacefulness, serenity, non-attachment—all these are only stepping-stones to the supreme realization. Practice of morals and ethics is not spiritual experience. Moral and ethical life is necessary but it does not mean illumination, though without it illumination cannot come. A fully illumined man goes beyond morals. He transcends them. But he does not act in an immoral way; he just cannot. As the *Vedānta-sāra* says, virtues remain like ornaments with the illumined soul.<sup>9</sup> Hindu ethics has this transcendental basis. Ethics in India has never been considered an end in itself. It is only a means for spiritual illumination.

(Concluded)

<sup>9</sup> Sadananda: *Vedānta-sāra* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, via Lohaghat, Dt. Pithoragarh, U. P., 1968), p. 130.

## AT THE FEET OF SWAMI AKHANDANANDA—VI

BY ‘A DEVOTEE’

One afternoon when nobody was near by and Bābā<sup>1</sup> called for someone to pour water on his hands, the Devotee had to attend on him. Washing over, Bābā took the pot and taught the devotee how to pour water, saying, ‘Do it like this. Hold the pot with

your fingers outside and never put them within.’ He came back, tired, sat in his room and continued in a very tender tone:

‘You have to do even small things in a perfect way. Doing the inside work very carefully and the outside haphazardly, is not the way. You have to do every work with due care. Whenever you do any work, put your whole mind to it. And you have

<sup>1</sup> The name by which Swami Akhandananda was called by most of his devotees.



to think thus : "This very work is my *sādhanā* (spiritual practice); this will help me to realize God." Dr. Ganguli (a nurse in Dacca) tends a garden in her spare time, and thinks : "This is the garden of my Beloved God. I am watering it so that when the plants blossom, I shall decorate my Beloved with those flowers." The trend of thought should be like that. This is meditation along with work—this is *sādhanā*.'

In the evening on a camp-cot in the open veranda overlooking the small garden of 'Binod Kutir', Bābā was singing in a very low tone a song in Hindi (perhaps an adaptation from the Persian poet Hafiz):

Beloved, thy smiling face has charmed me,  
And has kindled the fire of love within!

The attendant was slowly fanning him; hence Bābā explained the song to him :

"The word for "love" is *isk* in Persian. Two kinds of love are spoken of in these songs—*Isk Hakiki* and *Isk Majaji* : the first is spiritual or true love, and the other is human or temporal love. I heard this song in a city somewhere in western India ; of course a lover was singing this with his beloved girl in mind, but when it reached my ears I was reminded of my Beloved, the Master. Who else has a smiling face ? I have seen only one truly smiling face and it was his ! It has kindled the flame of love within me !"

\*

One evening the gathering was quite a large one and the discussion centred round Tibet. Someone asked : 'What attracted you to Tibet ? What did you actually find there ?' Bābā began to speak :

'Why did I go to Tibet ? After the Master passed away I felt no attraction for anything. Only one thought reigned—where shall I find him again ? Sometimes I felt, certainly in the Himalayas I shall find him. The Himalayas are the abode of the gods. The Himalayas are the abode of the gods.

Even as a boy, whenever I heard of Kedar-nath and Badarinath, of Kailas and Manas Sarovar from wandering monks, I had thought of going away to those places. When I grew older I heard there were in Tibet still large Buddhist monasteries. I thought of visiting them.

'O the Himalayas ! Tier after tier of towering mountains, some under everlasting snow—immaculately white, silent and serene ! How many days and nights I spent in those snowy regions ! It seemed that the places were all familiar to me, perhaps from some time long ago....

'The lamas picked me up from the snow and took me into Thuling math (a Buddhist monastery in western Tibet). My half-clad body was almost frozen. They found in my body certain signs and exclaimed "Ge-lang", which meant, I learnt later on, "a man of continence". Such people are very much honoured by them. So they asked me to stay on in their monastery.

'One day they took the Master's (Sri Ramakrishna's) photo from me, placed it on the altar near the Buddha and performed *ārati* by waving a light. They eagerly enquired : "Where did you get it ? Who is he ? These eyes are not of a man. They are of a God. This is the Buddha !" After some days they gave the photo back to me.

'There are so many monasteries—the strength of inmates in some being 4,000, in some even 7,000. In the middle of the hall a big kettle of water is kept over a fire. Not tea leaves but tea-tablets are put into the water and raw tea is taken from time to time. Monks are seated meditating on stone chairs constructed along the walls.

'I learnt the Tibetan language in a fortnight. Sometimes the women would talk to me. "Have you no mother and sister ?" they would ask. "Why have you left your home ? Why not marry and settle down here ?" I would reply, "You are all my mothers, whom shall I marry ?"



'I felt sympathy for the miseries of the common man in Tibet and indirectly criticized the luxurious life of the monks. This was reported to the Head Lama, I was called and warned. My friends asked me to leave Tibet. On my way back via Ladakh (Kashmir) in Tibetan costume, I was arrested and kept under observation till the British Regent was satisfied as to my identity and bona fides, and that I had no connection with politics. I was set free but the police shadowed me up to Baranagar Math.'

\*

Bābā was talking, with a style of pronunciation peculiar to East Bengal, to a Brahmacārin (novice in the monastery). "Mysterious are the ways of work"<sup>2</sup>—understand? Karma-yoga is a very difficult path. The path of meditation is a much easier one. What you meditate upon is not unknown to me. Your meditation is only to avoid work. Work, work, till you are tired. Work is something positive, the result of which you can perceive. It does good to you as well as to others. Work, but then work as worship. That is Yoga. He who meditates well attains power to work more efficiently. He is never tired, because his energy is not mis-spent in any way; he is never annoyed nor worried, he is not attached to anything. Always calm, he goes on working without any fatigue. This is the test: whether the mind is working properly or not, can be understood from this.'

\*

One day Bābā narrated many incidents of his life including those concerning his spiritual life and *sādhana*:

'In my boyhood I used to worship Śiva every day. I would mould an image of Śiva in clay and worship this symbol with water, flowers and *bilva* leaves. Lastly I would

recite some prayers. At the time of ablutions in the Gaṅgā, I would practise *kumbhaka* (retention of breath: the middle part of the *prāṇāyāma*) while under water. When I met the Master, he told me: "You need not do so many things. Devotion and faith are enough."

'At Baranagar after the passing away of the Master, everyone was burning with the fire of renunciation; everyone was anxious for a vision of the Master. The evenings were spent by the Gaṅgā and the nights at the cremation ground, in meditation and *japa* (repetition of the Lord's name). With the chirping of the birds at dawn, we would come back to the Math after a bath in the river. Some days while discussing the life and teachings of the Master at the Math, we would sit down just as we were, and would become absorbed in deep meditation.

'At Rishikesh the bells would ring at the *chatra* (alms-house for monks), calling the *sādhus* (monks and holy men) for their alms. I would not like to leave my seat. Then sometime in the afternoon I would stand at the door of a householder. A mother would come out and ask, "Why, my child, so late? Did you not hear the bell?" I would say, "Mother, I was in meditation and did not like to get up." The mother would say: "Very well, I am preparing something for you. Wait a little and I'll send it to you." Later she would make a habit of keeping two *capātis* (unleavened bread) for me.

'As a boy I worshipped Śiva made out of clay. In the Himalayas I have seen the living Śiva. Our Master is living and moving in all as Nārāyaṇa. The seed of this Religion of Service was in him. Therefore you now see the tree and its branches. At Deoghar he said to Mathur Babu, "Feed these poor people, give them clothing and Varanasi (for pilgrimage). That is how the oil [for rubbing their heads in the scorching heat], or else I will not proceed to

<sup>2</sup> गहना कर्मणो गतिः । *Bhagavad-gita*, IV. 17



wheel of this "Religion of Service" for this age, started rolling.

"That is why I always repeat: Work, work; serve others. It is something positive, something palpable. We know what you meditate on, and how much you can meditate. I was travelling with Swamiji [Vivekananda] in the Himalayas. We found a *sādhū* seemingly meditating with his whole body covered. But Swamiji cried out: "O, he is sleeping and snoring. Put him to the yoke; then perhaps, he may attain spirituality some day."

"Observing these things, Swamiji concluded. "With the highest ideals of *sattva* (tranquillity) on the lips, the country is sinking into the abyss of *tamas* (darkness)." That is why he said, "To recover from this the whole body from head to foot must be electrified by *rajas* (activity)." Therefore he laid so much stress upon work. Go on working, come what may. Some good will surely come of it. There is no courage in you, no faith, no strength. Fear has overcome you, so you shirk work. You think, "If I fail, people will blame me." Let them blame you. Go on working in the name of the Master with faith and courage, and depend upon Him.

"I travelled in the Himalayas, leaping, as it were, from peak to peak. When I reached the top of one peak, I would find another peak obstructing the view. After a rest I would think of scaling it; so I would start off again.

"When I say that most of you have to work if you want to live a spiritual life, I am telling you the truth. Keep working till you are tired. Only keep one point clear, that is, you are doing it for God, for the Master. This idea must be maintained always; otherwise trouble is in store.

"Satyen (Swami Atmabodhananda) of Udbodhan Math used to sell books from a small book-shop in College Street, Calcutta, when he was a worker of the Advaita

Ashrama. He would take a simple meal at 10-00 a.m. and spend the whole day in the book-shop. I knew how he felt and what he was thinking. One day I chanced to visit him there, and standing just in front of the shop I gave him a good lecturing which Satyen remembers even now. He told me, "Maharaj, that inspiration is still driving me!" I told him: "It is not an easy task you have taken up. How much of renunciation and service and *tapasyā* (austerity) is involved in this work. This is real *sādhana*. In the morning you come here after a bare meal. Others enjoy a full meal at noon—this is renunciation. Then you have to stay seated in this small room—this is *tapasyā*. Then again from the books sold here, people are getting the ideas of our Master and Swamiji. It is through your hands that they are reaching the people. This is a great service to the Master. Do you think that only the service done in the shrine is service to him?"

"To you also I say: bring in this idea—"Whatever I am doing is *sādhana*". Give up at once any work that you cannot think of as *sādhana*. You are eating—think of this as an offering to Him within you. You are walking or going around the city—think that you are circumambulating His temple. Even when lying down or sleeping, look upon that also as *sādhana*. When lying down you are prostrating before Him and when sleeping you are meditating. Every moment will then be filled up with the thought of Him. This grand idea is well expressed in a song of Rāmprasād (the saint of Kālī):

When I lie down, O Mother, I salute  
You in prostration;

While I sleep, I meditate on You.

When I eat, I offer oblations to You  
within;

When I go round the city, I think I am  
going round Your temple.

O my mind, worship the Mother in  
every work you do;



Worship the Mother in any way you like!

Every way is a way to Her.'

One evening in the outer veranda, with one or two devotees present, Bābā was speaking:

'Do not sleep too long. Yogīs sleep for four hours. *Bhogīs* (those seeking enjoyment) sleep for six hours, and *rogīs* (patients) still more.<sup>3</sup> The other day I was delighted to read in the *Udbodhan* these words of Mararaj (Swami Brahmananda), "Sleep for more than four hours is a kind of disease which requires treatment." You say, less sleep makes the body weak? Just the opposite—too much sleep is what makes one weak, specially sleep in the day-time. During the midday take a little rest with a book or two beside you for reading.

'You should pray to the Master saying, "O Lord, remove my desires for enjoyment." Sleeping is also an enjoyment that must be renounced if you really aspire after the vision of God. How can one sleep who really aspires after God? Day and night one thought will be burning within him: when and where and how shall I have His vision? "O, this day is spent in vain, I have not yet realized God; I have not yet shed a single tear for Him!" How can a spiritual aspirant sleep away his life? He cannot. He must keep waking—who knows when God will come!

'The Master would teach us how to pray. Sitting on his cot with legs outstretched like a child he would cry: "O Mother, come to me, do come. I cannot bear the separation. How can You be at

peace, away from Your little son? How can You, forgetful of me, busy Yourself with other things? Come, O Mother, come, and take me up in Your arms!" At such times he was crying, like an utterly forlorn child just to show us how a child in distress pines for its mother. The idea awakened his feelings to such a degree that he was actually crying like a child restless to see its mother.

'After some time Sri Ramakrishna became still and then began saying with tears, in a trembling voice: "O Mother, I am without any *sādhana*, without *bhajan* (devotional singing and worship). O Mother, give me knowledge, give me devotion. O Mother, may I have a mind fixed at Your feet!"

'Another day, taking me to a solitary place he taught me how to meditate. "Just see, in the beginning of meditation when the mind goes this way or that, apply yourself to repeat the holy *mantra* with the greatest concentration. If you are not able to do so, leave it and meditate according to the tendency of the mind. In this way, repetition of the divine name or *mantra* will go on along with the meditation.

"Just imagine that your Chosen Deity (*Iṣṭa-devatā*) is seated in the temple of your heart, with a serene and smiling look, and that you are performing *ārati* by waving lights, burning camphor, a flower, and then a *cāmara* (fan of yak's tail). Continue this *ārati* as long as you can. When it is finished, think that you start making garlands with flowers of various kinds, large and very beautiful, and of sweetest fragrance. When this is over, suddenly fresh new flowers will come in, and you will begin to offer them at the feet of your Beloved—handfuls of lotuses of white, red and other colours. When they have been exhausted you will find a heap of *jabā*

<sup>3</sup> The Swami was here speaking to one or two devotees who presumably needed this teaching on limiting their sleep. It will be good for the generality of aspirants to reduce hours of sleep to an optimal minimum without impairing their efficiency and health. It is always safe to go by the instructions of one's own guru in such matters.—Ed.





### WHO HAS 'UNDervalUED' WOMEN?

From the 'population tribunal', a forum held in conjunction with the United Nations World Population Conference in Bucharest, was beamed on August 23 (AP) this dismal piece of news :

'Women are perhaps the most undervalued resource of the third world—so say several prominent woman social scientists and leaders of developing nations. These women leaders stressed this point yesterday saying that restricting women to the "cradle and ladle" deprived countries of invaluable talent and sheer economic output.'

Hoping that there is no man-inspired distortion in this news item, this makes, to say the least, incredible reading. For one thing, no one perhaps precisely knows what the term 'third world' means. If it is used in apposition with 'developing nations', in the same sentence, then these vehement self-depreciators should have remembered that in the third world two eminent woman-prime-ministers are ruling their countries today, not less ably than other Prime Ministers in other countries. If women were being forcibly restricted to cradle and ladle, how would these women rise to their positions of power, and what is more, retain them with distinction for such lengths of time ?

Then, it is a matter of constitutional his-

tory that in some enlightened countries of the 'third world', women had all their socio-political rights established—mainly through the efforts of men—well before even some countries of the 'First World', whatever that may be. If the Indian scene, for instance, has been singularly free from all suffragette-activity, it was because the latter was simply unnecessary, for men of themselves had seen to it that women got all their constitutional rights established, not as a gift from men, but as a logical outcome of universal principles of justice. Nothing bars a woman in these countries from rising to top positions even in the tough political sphere, provided she has the inner mettle. In one 'third-world' country a woman has virtually become a king-maker, taking the word 'king' in the contemporary sense. When a war came to that country, the world received proof enough that this daughter of a so-called 'developing' country was a match for any astute politician. And yet she was no despiser of cradle and ladle.

But then, if every woman does not become a prime minister, what do the women lose ? Or what does a country lose ? 'Sheer economic output ?' Well, there are some strange laws of economics according to which good mothers, who pray, suckle and cook, who are completely 'lib'-unindoc-



trinated, are yet among the richest treasures of a country, and are adored as such.

How pathetic is this cry from women that they are 'the most undervalued resource'! Let these learned women ask themselves, who has devalued them? If they analyse the issue without allowing any sentimental nonsense to affect their thinking process, they will discover that women themselves are treating themselves as economic commodities whenever they make such absurd statements as 'most undervalued resource'. No one ever undervalued women as passionately as these women have done.

Alas, times have indeed so changed that even women do not any more seem to believe that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. To be sure, the 'cradle-ladle' obsession is a dubious gift of so-called modernism. And the anguish it causes would appear to be confined mostly to those women of the 'third world' who have only tenuous connections with the roots of the world's common ancient spiritual culture. There are millions and millions of intelligent, educated, cultured women in this part of the world who will never give up their hold on cradle or ladle, for anything else in the world. They do not consider themselves undervalued because they have to bring up their own children or to cook for the family.

In the oriental culture, particularly in the Indian, right from the Vedic times of Vāk-Ambhrī to Śrī Sarada Devi in the twentieth century, women have risen to the highest peaks of human excellence and have even become spiritual teachers of millions of men and women.

Immaculate virgin that she was, Sarada Devi had no children of her own in the usual sense, but uncounted numbers throughout the world have become children of the cradle of her spirit and derived inspiration and nourishment from her. And for more than half a century she had con-

stant use for the ladle and she respected it. She was nearly unlettered. But the great Swami Vivekananda was before her a robust child. Her mere wish was law with him. From a distance she imperceptibly but unmistakably moulded and guided the Ramakrishna Order for thirty-four years after the passing of Sri Ramakrishna. All this happened within the memory of living men and women.

Then, seeking the sources of this kind of phenomenon, if you care to go into the scriptures, you have such inspiring teachings about the Eternal Woman—the Mother of creation :

'You are the sole substratum of the world, because You subsist in the form of the earth. By You who exist in the shape of water, all this universe is gratified, O Devi of inviolable valour !

'You are the power of Viṣṇu, the endless valour, You are the Primeval Māyā, which is the source of the universe ; by You all this universe is thrown into illusion, O Devi. If You become gracious, You become the cause of final emancipation in this world.

'All lores are Your aspects, O Devi ; so are all women in the world, endowed with various attributes. By You alone, the Mother, this world is filled. What praise can there be for You who are of the nature of the primary and secondary expression regarding (objects) worthy of praise ?

'When You have been lauded as the embodiment of all beings, the Devi, and bestower of enjoyment and liberation, what words, however excellent can praise you ?' *Śrī-Durgā-saptasatī*, XI. 4-7.

All these may be incomprehensible to those 'women of the third world' who sounded off at Bucharest. But they would do well to understand that if 'cradle and ladle' is already a bondage, they hardly gain anything by importing from the first world all the psychological bondages of modern woman's especial creation.



No sane man born of a mother can undervalue women. But women can, as they did in Bucharest. These women would do well to learn, if not from the scriptures, from their own hearts, that there is more to Woman than women know of, particularly in these distraught times of ours. Women seem to need being saved from the women-upholders.

If the roles of women and men, either at home or in society, cannot be wholly interchanged, there need be no regret on that account, for, woman or man—each is great in her or his own place by birthright. The secret of that essential inalienable greatness is the Ātman, the spiritual self, which is birthless, deathless, homogeneous, indestructible, and sexless. No one, not even woman herself, can disvalue the Ātman which is uncreated. Obviously women were not speaking of this aspect of themselves in

Bucharest.

Even in spheres of secular or worldly greatness the secret is the same for both men and women. The more you succeed in lifting your mind from your psychophysical self and seeking fulfilment of higher purposes conducive to the welfare of others, the greater or more important you are likely to become in the eyes of society—and, more importantly, in your own eyes. If you are waiting for society to tag a value card on you, while you keep looking upon your personality in the mirror of your 'unripe' ego, frustration cannot help being your lot. Those women who never did well with cradle and ladle are not likely to do better even if catapulted to high positions of power. And yet greatness never really leaves them in spite of themselves—for the Ātman always abides in woman as in man.

(Continued from p. 73)

(hibiscus) by your side. You will go on offering them all, while flowers keep on coming to you, one kind after another—there's no end to it.

“Do not allow this trend of thought to come to an end. After flowers come fruits and sweets in all their varieties, and you are offering them to your Beloved. In this way let your mind cling to your Chosen Deity. The natural tendency of the mind is towards enjoyment of the objects of the senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste). Enjoy these with your Chosen Deity; then the enjoyment will lose its evil effect and become divinized.”

‘Constant remembrance of God’, continued Bābā, ‘and ultimate reliance upon Him under all circumstances is *sādhana*. This is the last word in one’s *sādhana*.’

‘We have seen the Master, have learnt

from him, and have built our lives accordingly as far as we could. If you do not build your lives thus, after seeing his sons and hearing about his life and *sādhana*, what is the use of all this? How fortunate you are, compared to those that will come after you!

‘Pray always—day in, day out: “O Lord, come to me, appear before me: so many people of distant lands—of Europe and America, Australia and South Africa—have been blessed by You. To many You are appearing in dreams. Why not come to me at least once? Why do You not come to me who are so near to You [i.e. here in Your own country]? Give me faith, devotion, and longing for You.” As days pass on, one after another, let this thought prick your heart like a thorn, “O, I have not seen You even today.”’



## NOTES AND COMMENTS

### IN THIS NUMBER

Reminiscences are taken from: 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 600004, 1947; Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master*, Madras, 1956; and the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P., 1964. References: *Gospel*: No. 1, p. 45; No. 3, pp. 504-6; No. 5, p. 291. *Great Master*: No. 2, p. 374. *Life*: No. 4, p. 82.

The words quoted in 'Onward For Ever!' are from *The Complete Works*, Volume II (1963), pp. 298-9.

The Upaniṣads are philosophically and mystically very profound. While presenting the boldest of metaphysical conclusions they lay out clear-cut paths for inwardly realizing them. The *Mundaka-upaniṣad* among others teaches the art of contemplation and meditation, and through these union with the ultimate Reality, in bold martial language by employing the simile of bow and arrow. The *Editorial* this month attempts to analyse and present some of its deep implications, in a way which may prove spiritually beneficial.

'Swami Vivekananda: A Birthday Homage', by Honourable H. R. Gokhale, Union Minister of Law, is a slightly edited text of his speech delivered at the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, last February, when he presided over the public meeting during Swami Vivekananda's birth anniversary. We are thankful to the Secretary of the New

Delhi Mission for making this thought-provoking speech available to us for publication in the *Prabuddha Bharata*. We hope that our readers will appreciate this all the more as it comes to them this month when Swami Vivekananda's birthday will be celebrated by hundreds of thousands in and outside India.

'Man's Journey to His Destiny', by Swami Ashokananda, is the second and concluding part of an article of which the first part appeared in our January issue. The Swami's elucidation here, of the need for acceptance of one's obligations and their conscientious discharge, as a necessary growth stage in a man's journey to his spiritual destiny, will be found particularly illuminating.

This entire article was originally delivered as the fourth in a series of lectures by Swami Ashokananda at the New Temple in San Francisco, on the Origin and Destiny of Man. We are indebted to the Vedanta Society of Northern California for making this lecture available to us for publication in the *Prabuddha Bharata*.

In this last instalment of the 'Excursions into *Uddhava-gītā*,' Swami Yatiswarananda discusses a number of topics which are important from the viewpoint of spiritual life—such as control of desires, conquest and transcendence of the *gunas*, concentration, the role of *japa* in destroying the fund of *saṁskāras*. Started two years ago, this illuminating serial comes to an end here.



## REVIEWS AND NOTICES

**THE LITERARY CRITICISM OF SRI AUROBINDO:** BY DR. S. K. PRASAD, Published by Bharati Bhawan, Patna-800004, 1974, Pages 487, price Rs. 65/-.

This monumental treatise on Sri Aurobindo's literary criticism is conceived in love, devotion, and religious affiliation. 'Religions' is not used to detract from the author's literary scholarship, of which the book is a rich storehouse. A religious approach seems almost indispensable in any discussion of Aurobindo's poetry and poetics, deeply rooted as they are in his faith. The book opens with an epigraph that reveals the roots of poetry as Aurobindo conceived it: 'The voice of poetry comes from a region above us, a plane of our being above and beyond our personal intelligence, a supermind which sees things in their innermost and largest truth by a spiritual identity and with a lustrous effulgency and rapture and its native language is a revelatory, inspired, intuitive word limpid or subtly vibrant or densely packed with the glory of this ecstasy and lustre'. This view of poetry as a spiritual genesis raises literary creativity from being merely art, or social or cultural communication and invests it with the divine affinities of mankind as *Amritasya Putrah* (Sons of the Immortal).

The conception of poetry as man's divine creativity in which he resembles his Maker was latent in Aristotle's vindication of poetry from Plato's attack, and developed by humanist apologists for poetry in the sixteenth century. It is with this elevated conception that the humanists defended poetry against orthodox religious attacks, making of poetry almost an alternative to religion. But even aside from the breadth imparted to poetry or imaginative literature by the humanists, poetry has been specifically used to convey religious faith (Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, Milton) and philosophy near allied to religion (Blake, Shelley, Wordsworth). The works of these poets show that poetry and faith can find an artistic fusion—a goal fervently aimed at by T. S. Eliot, whose critical opinions have often been referred to by the author. Of the fusion of poetry and spirituality, Tagore is doubtlessly a very remarkable example in modern India. However, Aurobindo's opinions on spiritual poetry and his own practice of it can be best understood in their own terms and would probably require an initiation into his theology. Concepts like the 'supermind', and the adjectival intensity as shown in the epigraph: 'lustrous', 'revelatory', 'inspired', 'intuitive', 'limpid', and 'vibrant' may seem a confusing verbal exuberance to one without initiation into

his Yogic philosophy. Professor Prasad's book, originally his D. Litt. thesis, is a help in clarification of such problems.

Aurobindo's poetics can be profitably approached in the context of 'the soul-aspect or soul-stress in the inspiration and creation of poetry and art' (p. 13). Though this context is not peculiar to Aurobindo, it is the solemn but somewhat elusive verbalization of his Yogic philosophy ('integral yoga') that heightens his poetry and criticism to the magnificence of limitless space and time. In the seeming incomprehensibility of his philosophical quest and the abstractions he chose to express his spiritual realization, he may resemble a Shelley, who was described by Arnold as a beautiful and ineffectual angel beating his wings in the void—in vain.

Strictures like this have been the lot of most poets who dealt with abstract notions. Milton's poetry too has been criticized for its un-English idiom and lack of concrete imageries (Eliot). It is noteworthy that Aurobindo was deeply appreciative of both Milton and Shelley, and of the latter he said, as Professor Prasad quotes, that he (Shelley) was 'very nearly fitted to be a sovereign voice of the new spiritual force that was at the moment attempting to break into poetry and possess there its kingdom' (p. 22). In that appreciative remark on Shelley's poetry may be recognized Aurobindo's self-awareness in his poetic vocation and Prof. Prasad's attempt to view Aurobindo's poetry in the context of metaphysical and philosophical poetry—for example, of Milton, Blake, and Shelley—is certainly apropos. However, the generic criticism that is implied in that approach has not been carried out to any systematic length.

Prof. Prasad's approach, and I say this without any prejudice, has been primarily motivated by the love and respect of a devotee for his master and transcends the boundaries of strictly literary criticism. 'My feeling is', says he, 'that it is a critic with some spiritual experience and attainment of his own, a critic who, instead of depending exclusively or chiefly upon the intellectual modes and tools of enquiry, learns to turn more and more inward and surrender himself to the intuitive vision and psychic and spiritual guidance within him and call these faculties more than his conscious intellect, to his aid for the purpose of critical valuation—it is a critic of this kind who is best fitted today to show us the right direction', etc., etc. This requirement of a particular kind of temperament and discipline might result in restricting literary criticism as an open forum and in the alliance



of literature with dogma. (The excerpt quoted just above also underscores the need for a tight-knit style, something to be desired in a book of this giant size). In this connection, I would also like to mention a tendency in this book to resort to unresolvable value-judgments. For example: Aurobindo is 'hailed, at least in the circle of his admirers, as an even greater philosophic figure than Shankaracharya himself'. (p. 6); 'in a manner surpassing even the most painstaking of poets, Goethe, he had started ... his *magnum opus* ...' (p. 7); '*The Future Poetry* ... in our times ... is the most outstanding and original of ... all works on aesthetics (pp. 80-81); and so on *ad lib*. These should have been no more than implied rather than unnecessarily announced to the detriment of catholicity of judgment (also perhaps revealing an anxious defensiveness).

The problem however is appreciable: Can a disciple adhere to impartiality and to the sovereignty of literary standards in judging his master's works? Could St. Paul be legitimately expected to judge the literary value of Christ's teachings impartially? The question is disturbing. If he is to be confined to literary standards only, a disciple of Aurobindo is obliged to disregard the faith that must to him be of greater importance than the poetry in which it is expressed. However, a desirable mean could possibly be obtained by the utmost pursuit of objectivity and reserve.

Still, leaving aside these questions of literary judgments and dogma, Prof. Prasad's book can well be viewed in the light of its original intentions. It is a monumental tribute to his master's works and a work of erudition. Though discursive in style and pattern, and therefore of forbidding length, the book is an impressive proof of the author's wide reading. It is a comprehensive, almost encyclopedic, treatise on Aurobindo's literary criticism, and as such a valuable work of scholarship.

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CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT AND RESEARCH: Dayalbagh Women's Training College Silver Jubilee Number, Edited By MRS. S. P. SUKHIA *et al.*, 1972, pp. vii + 177. No price mentioned.

The Editorial of this volume makes a charming claim: 'Women, to whom motherhood and up-bringing of the young are divinely ordained

privileges, are more suitable for taking to education than men whom the Creator has essentially designed for the harder functions of life. This thesis is not exclusive but certainly indicates the odds in favour of women educators.' The claim is somewhat belied by the list of contributors: only six out of a total of twenty-one are recognized to be women. But that is a minor issue. The nineteen articles, which form the bulk of this special number, range over educational psychology, pedagogy, educational sociology, and some related topics. The articles, mostly of specialist interest, are generally well-written and are bound to be of good use for teacher trainees and practising teachers as well. Anthologies like this are a welcome addition to the rising educational debate in this country.

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SOUL, KARMA, AND REBIRTH: By P. PARAMESWARA, published by the Author, 2, Haudin Road, Bangalore-42, 1973, pp. 212, Price Rs. 5/-.

The belief in rebirth is as old as mankind. Philosophers and theologians have sought rational arguments to support such a faith. Malachi (4:5) and St. Matthew (11:13, 14; 17:12, 13) among other Biblical texts seem to accept the doctrine of rebirth. The pre-Zoroastrian Persians accepted the doctrine. The sufis and other mystics followed it. In India many systems of philosophy accepted it. Only in later times people came to ignore it, in spite of Pythagoras and Plato. The idea of rebirth is the most potent answer to the ethical problem of good and evil.

The author of the present text is to be congratulated for the great pains he has taken in collecting the data to show that the idea was prevalent in almost all religions. Even Adam was divine at the beginning. In the book's eight chapters the case for the doctrines of karma and rebirth has been well established. The second chapter in particular is a brilliant survey of the views concerning the soul and rebirth. Somehow the author has failed to note Sankara's statement that the Lord alone transmigrates. He has however offered in the third chapter a good refutation of materialism. The solution he offers is the Vedantic one.

This book may well be read by everyone interested in the problem of rebirth.

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**GEMS FROM THE GITA:** By M. P. PANDIT, published by Ganesh & Co., Madras-17, 1974, pp. viii + 174, Price Rs. 6/-.

This book is a collection of 128 key sentences from the original text of the *Bhagavad-gita*. The author has translated these as briefly as possible and given suggestive notes to each. The selection of the 'gems' and the notes throw light on the abundant store of ideas and ideals spread through the *Gita*. The author's attempt to rediscover the immense worth of the text and to interpret it in a lucid manner will attract most readers.

Even though the selected passages are in general pregnant with meaning and suggestiveness, we find a kind of incompleteness in the elucidation of certain passages, especially because of a tendency to disregard the great Vedantic commentators. In some cases, also, it would have been more advantageous to have quoted entire verses or at least a greater portion of each. (E.g., pp. 47, 54, 68). These defects are not of course very grave and we cannot on their account belittle the merit of the book. A versatile writer and scholar, Sri Pandit has done a remarkable job in presenting the 'Gems' of the *Gita* in a simple and elegant manner. The get-up is good; the price is reasonable.

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**THE UPANISHADIC APPROACH TO REALITY:** By SWAMI SATCHIDANANDENDRA SARASWATI, Published by Adhyatma Prakash Karyalaya, Holenarsipur, Hassan District, Karnataka State, pp. 94, Price not mentioned.

In this book the author describes in seven short chapters the wisdom of the Upanishads, quoting extensively from the principal Upanishads and the *bhashyas* (commentaries) of Sankara, whom he follows closely in his interpretations. In the last chapter the author refers briefly to post-Sankara Vedantins and their divergences on certain points—such as the locus of *avidya* (ignorance), the nature of *moksha* (liberation) etc.—from the teachings of Sankara. The book is written in a lucid style and is easily understandable.

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## BOOKS RECEIVED

**A THEORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS:** By ARNOLD SCHULTZ, published by Philosophical Library, 15 E. 40th St. N.Y., N.Y. 10016 (U.S.A.), 1973, pp. 177, Price \$ 12.50.

**GOD IN AFRICA:** By MALCOLM J. Mc VEIGH, published by Claude Stark Inc., Cape Cod, Mass., 02670, (U.S.A.) 1974, pp. 235, Price not stated.

**THE CUB OF JAMSHID:** By MUHAMMAD DAUD RAHBAR, published by Claude Stark Inc., 1974, pp. 199, Price \$ 7.00.

**EVOLUTION TOWARDS DIVINITY—TEILHARD DE CHARDIN AND THE HINDU TRADITIONS:** By BEATRICE BRUTEAU, published by Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Illinois, U.S.A. 1974, pp. 270, Price \$ 10.00.

**GUIDANCE FROM SRI AUROBINDO—LETTERS TO A YOUNG DISCIPLE:** By NAGIN DOSHI, published by Sri Aurobindo Society, Pondicherry 605002, 1974, pp. 285, Price not stated.

**EPICTETUS—A DIALOGUE IN COMMON SENSE:** By JOHN BONFORTE, published by Philosophical Library, 1974, pp. 178, Price \$ 6.00.

**GITA SARA—ESSENCE OF THE GITA:** By M. S. DESHPANDE, published by Gramseva Prasthithan, Manipal, 1974, pp. lxxii + 49, Price not stated.

(1) TULSIDAS; (2) SUKANYA; (3) DURGADAS; (4) ANIRUDDHA; (5) ZARATHUSHTRA; (6) LORD OF LANKA; (7) TUKARAM; (8) AGASTYA; (9) VASANTASENA—published by India Book House, 12 Hassa Mahal, Dalamal Park, 223 Cuffe Parade, Bombay-5, 1974, pp. 32 each, Price not stated.

**STUDIES IN EAST-WEST PHILOSOPHY:** By G. SRINIVASAN, published by Arnold Heinemann Publishers, India, (P) Ltd., AB-9 First Floor, Safdarjang Enclave, New Delhi-110016, 1974, pp. 111, Price Rs. 25/-.

**SRI RAMAKRISHNA, SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, O DHARMAPRASANGA:** By SWAMI OMKARANANDA, published by Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Ashram, 4 Naskarapara Lane, Howrah-1, W. Bengal, 1974, pp. 272, Price Rs. 8/-.

**SAHASYA VIVEKANANDA:** By SANKARI PRASAD BASU, published by Navabharat Publishers, 12 Mahatma Gandhi Rd., Calcutta 9, 1974, pp. 336, Price Rs. 15/-.

## SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S BIRTHDAY

The birthday of Sri Ramakrishna falls on Saturday, 15 March 1975.