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Kanchenjanga from Sandakphu

Photo: Bimal Dey

*Information for subscribers,
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overleaf.*



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No. 2

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

SRI RAMAKRISHNA REMINISCES

[Doctor Sarkar asked Sri Ramakrishna about his having been kicked by a wicked man while lying in samadhi.] 'You must have heard about it from M. The man was Chandra Haldar, a priest of the Kali temple at Kalighat; he often came to Mathur Babu's house. One day I was lying on the ground [in Mathur's Janbazar house] in an ecstatic mood. The room was dark. Chandra Haldar thought I was feigning that state in order to win Mathur's favour. He entered the room and kicked me several times with his boots. It left black marks on my body. Everybody wanted to tell Mathur Babu about it, but I forbade them.'

*

'Once the idea came to me to put on a very expensive robe embroidered with gold¹ and to smoke a silver hubble-bubble. Mathur Babu sent me the new robe and the hubble-bubble. I put on the robe. I also smoked the hubble-bubble in various fashions. Sometimes I smoked it reclining this way, and sometimes that way, sometimes with head up, and sometimes with head down. Then I said to myself, "O mind, this is what they call smoking a silver hubble-bubble." Immediately I renounced it. I kept the robe on my body a few minutes longer and then took it off. I began to trample it underfoot and spit on it, saying: "So this is an expensive robe! But it only increases man's rajas."'

*

'Once I ate some onion.² While eating it I discriminated, "O mind, this is onion." Then I moved it to different places in my mouth and at last spat it out.'

*

'There is Someone within me who does all these things through me. At

¹ On another occasion (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Aug. 24, 1882) he described the same incident, beginning, 'Sometimes I used to assume a rajasic mood in order to practise renunciation.'

² The onion is considered a rajasic food and not conducive to spiritual life.

times I used to remain in a mood of Godhood and would enjoy no peace of mind unless I were being worshipped.'

*

'Though Padmalochan was so great a scholar, he had so much faith in and devotion to "here" [me]! He said, "When I shall come round, I'll convene a meeting of all the scholars and tell them all that you are an incarnation of God. I'll see who can refute my word." Mathur, at one time, for another reason, was going to convene a meeting at Dakshineswar of all the scholars. Padmalochan, an unavaricious Brahmin, who was of a virtuous orthodox disposition, would never accept a gift from a Sudra. Thinking that he would not come to the meeting, Mathur asked me to request him to be present there. At the request of Mathur, I asked the Pundit affectionately, "Will you not come to Dakshineswar?" He said, "I may go to a sweeper's house with you and take my food there. Is it too much that I should go to a meeting in the house of a person of the caste of fishermen?"'³

*

'Padmalochan was a man of deep wisdom. He had great respect for me, though at that time I constantly repeated the name of the Divine Mother. He was the court pundit of the Maharaja of Burdwan. Once he came to Calcutta and went to live in a garden house near Kamarhati. I felt a desire to see him and sent Hriday there to learn if the Pundit had any vanity. I was told that he had none. Then I met him. Though a man of great knowledge and scholarship, he began to weep on hearing me sing Ramprasad's devotional songs. We talked together a long while; conversation with nobody else gave me such satisfaction. He said to me, "Give up the desire for the company of devotees; otherwise people of all sorts will come to you and make you deviate from your spiritual ideal." Once he entered into a controversy, by correspondence, with Utsavananda, Vaishnavcharan's guru... About the renunciation of "woman and gold", he said to me one day: "Why have you given up those things? Such distinctions as 'This is money and that is clay' are the outcome of ignorance." What could I say to that? I replied: "I don't know all these things, my dear sir. But for my part, I cannot relish such things as money and the like."'

*

'Once Hriday brought a bull-calf here. I saw, one day, that he had tied it with a rope in the garden, so that it might graze there. I asked him, "Hriday, why do you tie the calf there every day?" "Uncle," he said, "I am going to send this calf to our village. When it grows strong I shall yoke it to the plough." As soon as I heard these words I was stunned to think: "How inscrutable is the play of the divine maya! Kamarpukur and Sihore [Hriday's birth-place] are so far away from Calcutta! This poor calf must go all that way. Then it will grow, and at length it will be yoked to the plough. This is indeed the world! This is indeed maya!" I fell down unconscious. Only after a long time did I regain consciousness.'

³ Mathur Babu belonged to the fisherman caste.

MIRACLES AND SPIRITUALITY

EDITORIAL

I

Once we heard a spiritual aspirant of many years, remark in a not quite joking way that his life was fruitless because he had not acquired even one occult power, to enable him to work miracles. We asked him why he thought so, inasmuch as there seemed to us hardly any relation between spiritual life and miraculous powers. 'Well,' he rejoined, 'if I were to possess any such powers, these people here who don't think much of me now, would have come to me in throngs!'

Let us assume that the person concerned was really joking. But still, this seemingly innocuous remark is indicative of a serious pitfall in spiritual life, to which a large percentage of aspirants may become victims—many of them unknowingly so. Certainly such a desire springs from an inner frustration and an unsubdued ego. Any aspirant who craves occult powers is walking into the mine-field of subtle desires. It is relatively easier to refrain from gross, sensual cravings and enjoyments than to resist or conquer subtle desires and indulgences. Hankering for people's admiration, for name or fame, and for keeping others under one's control, shows that the spiritual aspirant is stagnating and his inner life is warping. It in fact indicates that his own ego has largely taken the place of his Chosen Ideal, and much of his contemplation, meditation and other spiritual exercises has now been turned into his own ego-adoration. If he does not somehow recover his spirit of dispassion and discrimination, and shake off this ego-charm, it will not be long before those mines of subtle desires will start bursting and reduce his inner life to shambles.

II

Miracles, as many of us are aware, are extraordinary and astonishing happenings

ONWARD FOR EVER!

Many become wholly pre-occupied with the outward forms and observances merely, and fail to direct their mind to thoughts of the Atman! If you remain day and night within the narrow groove of ordinances and prohibitions, how will there be any expression of the soul? The more one has advanced in the realization of the Atman, the less is he dependent on the observances of forms. Shankaracharya also has said, 'Where is there any ordinance or prohibition for him whose mind is always above the play of the Gunas?' Therefore the essential truth is realization. Know that to be the goal. Each distinct creed is but a way to the Truth. The test of progress is the amount of renunciation that one has attained. Where you find one in whom the attraction for lust and wealth has considerably diminished, to whatever creed he may belong, know that his inner spirit is awakening. The door of Self-realization has surely opened for him. On the contrary if you observe a thousand outward rules, and quote a thousand scriptural texts, still, if it has not brought the spirit of renunciation in you, know that your life is in vain. Be earnest over this realization and set your heart on it. ...Attain the supreme knowledge and go beyond Vidya and Avidya, relative knowledge and ignorance.



in the physical world, that surpass all known human and natural powers and are ascribed to the presence and action of an ultimate or divine power. Etymologically, the word 'miracle' comes from the Latin *miraculum*, meaning that which causes wonder and astonishment, and has its Greek parallel in *thaumasion*, from which thaumaturgy—'the working of wonders or miracles', 'magic'—is derived. It is also to be noted that the significance of a miraculous event is frequently held to reside not in the event as such, but in the reality to which it points—for instance, the presence or activity of a divine power. Thus a miracle is also called a sign—from the Greek *semeion*—signifying and indicating something beyond itself. Some of the miraculous powers recognized in Western religious lore, of which a complete list would be bewilderingly lengthy, are: materializations, doublings, dissociations and functional disintegrations, communications, animal magnetisms, vibrations, thought-forces, mind-waves and radiations, clairvoyances and clairaudiences, telepathic dreams, premonitions, death-lights, and trance writings. In the Hindu books dealing with yoga and other branches, miraculous powers are called *siddhis* or *ṛddhis*, and they seem to be even more varied, incredible, almost innumerable. Patañjali's *Yoga-sūtras* devotes a whole chapter to these powers and the methods of their acquisition, and in the 'Uddhava-gītā'—forming a part of the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*—Śrī Kṛṣṇa expatiates on these powers and how they can be acquired through certain kinds of meditations on Him. However in both these texts there are clear warnings that these powers are obstacles on the way to perfection, and cause, at the least, distractions and much waste of time.

That humanity has an inveterate interest in miracles and occult powers, is proved by the fact that belief in miraculous happen-

ings is a feature of practically all religions. Belief in and reports regarding miracles are well-nigh universal, though the nature, functions, purpose, and explanations of the miracles vary according to the social, cultural, religious and philosophical contexts in which they occur. Moses, the earliest and possibly greatest prophet in Judaism, is credited with the performance of many miracles, one of the most astonishing of which was his safe conduct of the children of Israel through the Red Sea. In Christianity, miracles and belief in their occurrence have a prominent place. As the Gospel accounts of Christ's life show, his advent, conception, birth, ministry, death and Resurrection are all associated with miracles. He is reported to have performed miracles of diverse kinds: healing the sick, restoring to life the dead, casting out evil spirits; and causing nature miracles such as multiplication of loaves and fishes, and turning of water into wine at a wedding-feast in the town of Cana. Unlike Jesus, Mohammed, according to the Qur'ān, explicitly rejected the idea of proving his prophetic mission by signs and miracles: the Qur'ān itself was the greatest miracle, and he but a human bearer and preacher of its holy message. Nevertheless, Muslim popular religion has become riddled with miracles, pilgrimages to the tombs of wonder-working saints, and the like. In both Christianity and Islam, miracles have come to occupy such an important place that 'the occurrence of miracles is part of the requirements for official recognition of sainthood and is interpreted as a special intervention by God, who thereby manifests his esteem for the saint or, more essentially, his salvific presence as realized concretely in the life and virtues of the saint'.¹ Although the Buddha deprecated miraculous

¹ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Macropaedia) (15th Edition), Vol. 12, p. 271

powers and their exercise, his adoring biographers have greatly embellished his life with miracles, and in the Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism miraculous and magical elements are especially prominent.

III

In studying these world faiths which had their beginnings many centuries ago, some dating back long centuries before Christ, we should keep in mind their social settings. To pluck them out of these contexts and to study them against our own dominant contemporary thought-patterns and social norms, would be doing these religions a great injustice. The founders of these faiths were all undoubtedly spiritual giants. But they had to speak in the language of their contemporaries. These teachers had to take note of the rudimentary levels of most of their hearers and followers, and give them a push forward from where they stood. If such minds as these believed in supernatural phenomena of a worldly kind, their teachers could not ignore such belief and simply teach higher ideas. Thus it is but natural that miraculous elements and doings have been usually reported in the lives of these great teachers. As Swami Vivekananda rightly observed regarding the miracles performed by Jesus, 'They were low vulgar things that He could not help doing because He was among vulgar beings.'² Nevertheless we do note that these great ones deprecated this craving for signs and miracles among their contemporaries. Jesus did bitterly reprimand the Scribes and Pharisees, when they asked for a sign about his being a prophet, saying, 'an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign...' Yet even he had then to promise—and later show—them the miracle of Resurrection.

Not that miracles do not occur or that occult powers cannot be acquired. These occur, and do act, and can be acquired, according to higher mental laws which are not accessible to common and untrained minds. All the same, they are in the domain of matter, of sensuality and worldliness. True spirituality and saintliness will never stoop to worldliness, either on the gross or subtle level. As Evelyn Underhill insightfully observes :

*'Mysticism is an entirely Spiritual Activity. This rule provides us with a further limitation, which of course excludes all the practisers of magic and magical religion: even in their most exalted and least materialistic forms. As we shall see when we come to consider these persons, their object—not necessarily an illegitimate one—is to improve and elucidate the visible by the help of the invisible: to use the supernormal powers of the self for the increase of power, virtue, happiness or knowledge. The mystic never turns back on himself in this way, or tries to combine the advantages of two worlds. At the term of his development he knows God by communion, and this direct intuition of the Absolute kills all lesser cravings. He possesses God, and needs nothing more.'*³

Referring to a biography of Sri Ramakrishna filled with all kinds of miraculous incidents and hardly revealing of his spiritual greatness, Swami Vivekananda wrote in two of his letters to a Madras disciple, to keep clear of all such 'jugglery'. He said:

'What nonsense about the miracle[s] of Ramakrishna! ... Miracles I do not know nor understand. Had Ramakrishna nothing to do in the world but turning wine into the Gupta's medicine? Lord save me from such Calcutta people! What materials to work with! If they can write a real life of Sri Ramakrishna with the idea of what he came to do

² *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P.), Vol. IV (1962), p. 32

³ *Mysticism* (Meridian Books, The World Publishing Company, Cleveland and New York, June, 1967), p. 84

and teach, let them do it; otherwise let them not distort his life and sayings. These people want to know God who see in Sri Ramakrishna nothing but jugglery!⁴

'... As to the wonderful stories published about Sri Ramakrishna, I advise you to keep clear of them and the fools who write them. They are true, but the fools will make a mess of the whole thing, I am sure. He had a whole world of knowledge to teach; why insist on unnecessary things, as miracles really are? They do not prove anything. *Matter does not prove Spirit. What connection is there between the existence of God, Soul, or immortality, and the working of miracles? ...*'⁵
(italics ours)

In its essential characteristics, humanity today seems hardly to have changed from that of two or more millenniums ago. A strange puerilism plagues vast masses of humanity—scarcely different from that which compelled Jesus and other great ones to come down to the miracle-making level—even today when we boast so much about our progress, rationality, and cultural advancement. The achievements of modern science and technology are rivalling and often outdoing many of the miraculous powers and feats which are reported in the old books and still are available to contemporary yogis. Since it has thus been made amply clear that such feats are entirely in the field of *matter*, is it not a matter of shame to the 'rational' minds of moderns, to confuse display of miraculous powers with spirituality or saintliness?

Spirituality, let us remind ourselves, is always characterized by a spirit of utter dispassion towards worldly attainments and powers, and a profound humility born of submitting the little personal will to the cosmic Divine will. It is a transformation of character marked by purity, unselfish-

ness, and divine love. For one who has attained spirituality, the world and its admiration are as straw and dust. This world and its glories fascinate a person only so long as egoistic attachment persists. Ego is thus the central sun of the unregenerate man, round which the planetary system of his earthly motives, ambitions and relationships hurtle as they spin. But in the case of a saint's personality, the central position has been taken by God and God alone. For him, only God is real from beginning to end. His ego has either disappeared in the immensity of Divine consciousness, or is transfigured in such a manner that nothing worldly remains in it.

IV

The real 'miracle' that saints and spiritual luminaries like Christ and the Buddha perform, is the transformation of us earth-bound creatures into sense- and ego-transcending spiritual heroes. If there is no inner transformation, what avails it for a man to acquire occult powers or exercise them? Neither do they elevate the user nor those who witness the effect of these powers. 'One ounce of sanctifying grace', St. Francois de Sales used to say, 'is worth more than a hundredweight of those graces which theologians call "gratuitous", among which is the gift of miracles. It is possible to receive such gifts and yet be in mortal sin; nor are they necessary for salvation.' When it was reported to the Buddha that a certain disciple of his had performed a prodigious feat of levitation, he gravely commented, 'This will not conduce to the conversion of the unconverted, nor the advantage of the converted.' Swami Vivekananda, in his own powerful and revealing manner, has explained that the true significance of Christ's life and message did not at all lie in the miracles he performed:

'The great strength of Christ is not in his miracles or his healing. Any fool

⁴ *The Works*, Vol. V (1959), p. 53

⁵ *ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 54

could do that; fools can heal others, devils can heal others... These are powers truly, but often demoniacal powers. The other is the spiritual power of Christ, which will live, and always has lived—an almighty, gigantic love, and the words of truth which He preached... These are the powers Jesus taught, and the powers He had. The power of purity; it is a definite power. So, in worshipping Christ, in praying to Him, we must always remember what we are seeking. Not those foolish things of miraculous display, but the wonderful powers of the Spirit, which makes man free, gives him control over the whole of nature, takes from him the badge of slavery, and shows God unto him.⁶

Thus the acquisition or display of miraculous powers is not a sign of spiritual progress, what to speak of attained saintliness! The real test is the inner transformation of character which invariably expresses itself as selflessness, absence of egotism, one-pointed devotion to the divine truth, a bliss not dependent on worldly circumstances, and a cloudless serenity. Such a man of palpable spirituality attains a fulfilment which is the despair of worldly-minded aspirants who hanker after occult powers. For the spiritual health of aspirants and of society, what are needed are not miraculous powers but a spirit of supreme dispassion and a one-pointed devotion to the infinite ideal of divine truth. Let us therefore

cherish and cultivate the intense dispassion and divine love instinct in the following prayers of two great mystics.

Rabi'a, a Sufi mystic of the eighth century in Iraq, once prayed to the Lord thus:

'Whatever share of this world Thou dost bestow on me, bestow it on Thine enemies, and whatever share of the next world Thou dost give me, give it to Thy friends. Thou art enough for me.'⁷

Sri Ramakrishna, the prophet and incarnation of nineteenth century India, used to pray to the Divine Mother thus:

'O Mother, I throw myself on Thy mercy; I take shelter at Thy Hallowed Feet. I do not want bodily comforts; I do not crave name and fame; I do not seek the eight occult powers. Be gracious and grant that I may have pure love for Thee, a love unsmitten by desire, untainted by any selfish ends—a love craved by the devotee for the sake of love alone. And grant me the favour, O Mother, that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching maya, that I may never be attached to the world, to "woman and gold", conjured up by Thy inscrutable maya! O Mother, there is no one but Thee whom I may call my own. Mother, I do not know how to worship; I am without austerity; I have neither devotion nor knowledge. Be gracious, Mother, and out of Thy infinite mercy grant me love for Thy Lotus Feet.'⁸

⁷ *Mysticism*, p. 85

⁸ 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1947), p. 707

⁶ *ibid.*, Vol. IV, pp. 32-3

LETTERS OF A SAINT

Calcutta
19th September, '17

Sriman P—,

I am glad to receive yours dated 17/9/17...

There is no need to raise independently, at the meeting, the topic of the welfare work among the Sonthals. A good work advertises itself; when people see that, their doubts will be cleared up. Therefore go on working; there is no need for unnecessary talk. If the topic is raised by yourself, it will be only the displaying of your vanity. Any work done with vanity becomes an evil.

Accept the blessings of Baburam Maharaj [Swami Premananda] and mine. Nowadays I get most of the letters written by others. All well here. Write once in a while about your welfare.

Ever your well-wisher,
SRI SARADANANDA

Calcutta
9/4/'21

Sriman A—,

I am in receipt of your letters.

I can tell you this much only: Sri Sri Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] has come as the Guru of the world; therefore for him who, keeping firm faith in him, will repeat his name, his welfare here and hereafter is a certainty—there is nothing to worry about his salvation. His name is the *mahāmantra*;¹ daily make *japa* of it as much as you can... If you feel a desire to take some other form of initiation and if you cannot have faith in what I have said now, then without writing to me any more, write to Sri Maharaj [Swami Brahmananda]—care of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Bhuvanewar/Puri—and do as he says.

Ever your well-wisher,
SRI SARADANANDA

SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA THE REFUGE

Calcutta
31st *Śrāvan*, '30 [Bengali Era]

My dear—,

I was glad to get the news of your safe arrival there, in your letter of the 12 August. It made me sad to learn that almost all of you were ill while you were at Dacca. Hope by the grace of Sri Sri Thakur you are all now well in every way.

¹ lit., 'a great sacred formula', by devotedly repeating which an aspirant attains salvation.

I am gratified to know that eight or ten devotees daily assemble at your house and do holy readings, discussion, and devotional singing. This is a very good practice. To sing the name and glories of the Lord in the company of devotees is helpful to the increase of love and devotion. Therefore, turning a deaf ear to whatever the opponents say, don't refrain from that practice, as you are now doing. When they see that this has helped you in your improvement, then they will of themselves understand its helpfulness. It is not proper to enter unnecessarily into disputation or argument with anyone in respect of these matters. This will only bring about undesirable results.

Accept my blessings and convey the same to your wife also. Convey my good wishes also to the assembled devotees.

Ever your well-wisher,
SRI SARADANANDA

AT THE FEET OF SWAMI AKHANDANANDA—XI

BY 'A DEVOTEE'

November 1936:

By this time, a bearded American, Mr. Philips by name, had come over to Sar-gachi from Belur Math. Originally he was an Austrian, an adventurous pilot during the First World War. After the War he decided to stay on in America. Through his wife, ten years older, he came in touch with the Vedānta movement in California. When a dam broke there in the early thirties, his wife was washed away. Next day he found her dead, with a little book *Light on Life* held firmly in her hand. Mr. Philips carefully took the book out of her grip, and that book became an abiding inspiration to him.

When he was telling his story to Bābā¹ in the dim light of the veranda, he was weeping, and repeatedly said it was for peace that he had come to India.

Bābā, pointing out an inmate of the Ashrama, said to Philips:

'He is your brother, he will look after you, serve you. This is the "privilege of

service". When I serve others I serve my own Self, my Ātman. Everyone is my Ātman.'

Bābā now felt the back part of his head with his palm and showing his own ochre robes, asked him: 'Do you like this? This *gerua* is the garment of renunciation. You like it? You are a born *tyāgi* (renouncer). You are the Self—the Ātman.'

Philips took out the little book with the marks of flood water on it from his breast pocket and said to Bābā: 'I have read more than ten thousand books, and much of Christian literature also; but in vain; this little book has shown me more light. Now I want peace, I want to build up a new life in the peaceful light of Vedānta.' Bābā interrupted him:

The Imitation of Christ is a great book; it helps much towards a spiritual life of renunciation. We had that book in our first monastery. It is a very wonderful book and can give you peace.

Then he took Philips to his own room and looked closely at his face with a lighted candle and asked him some questions, and came out satisfied. One of the questions,

¹ The name by which Swami Akhandananda was called by most of his disciples and devotees.

as Philips told the 'Devotee' later on, was whether he had ever seen Bābā in his dreams, to which he had answered in the affirmative.

After this unusual first meeting, the two met mornings and evenings only for a few seconds. Philips paid his respects and Bābā blessed him in silence.

A few days later, on the Jagaddhātrī-pūjā day,² when the day-long worship was being performed in the shrine room, Bābā initiated Philips into the vows of *brahmacharya* (life of a celibate) with special *homa* (fire ceremony in which oblations are offered) and named him Paramacaitanya.

Shorn of his beard and hair, and with the white robes of a Brahmachārin, Philips looked quite a new man with a childlike face full of joy. He would walk around the Ashrama and would repeatedly say, 'I am Bābā's youngest child!'

The whole of the afternoons he would spend in the shrine with folded hands; sometimes he would sit down under a tree and meditate. On being asked he would say, 'O, I must realize the Self while in India. This is a great country. How you love so much, I wonder! I never found such love anywhere else.'

Philips had no bedding. He would lie down on a blanket resting his head on his palm. During winter nights he would spread just his warm coat over his body, but would not ask anything of anyone. One morning he was in deep meditation on his cot with only a cotton shirt on his body. Bābā came in and covered him with his (Bābā's) own new white woollen wrapper, smiling as he did so with fatherly affection, with his long grey hair flowing down over his face.

² Jagaddhātrī is an aspect of the Divine Mother in which She is considered as the sole supporter of the whole universe. Her worship usually comes a month after the Durgā-pūjā (in October-November).—*Ed.*

That afternoon Philips confided to the devotee: 'Do you know who Bābā is? Bābā is Śiva!' In silent joy and wonder, the Devotee fully agreed with him.

After evening *ārati* (vesper service with waving of lights, etc.), Bābā was speaking on dispassion and renunciation:

Whenever you feel the spirit of dispassion, leave the worldly life. This is enjoined in the *Jābāla-upaniṣad*. There is no particular age or time prescribed for final renunciation of worldly life. Ācārya Śaṅkara also declares, 'He gets out of the meshes of this world, just as a lion rushes out of a cage.' When a man becomes imbued with the spirit of real renunciation, he gets out of worldly life and follows whatever road lies before him. He begs his food from houses when their fires are extinguished and people have taken their meals; he is satisfied with what little he gets.

*

One evening Bābā was talking to the devotees about Booker T. Washington, an uplifter of the Negroes in America:

Have you read the book, *Up From Slavery*—the great story of service, of educating the people? It tells of how they made their own bricks with which they built their school. In the beginning they were unable to do so; but after repeated failures they succeeded. He that is born with a mission does not stop at obstacles. He is never depressed; he will finish his work and then only rest.

Sarat Maharaj [Swami Saradānanda] gave that book to me, with this introduction, 'Brother, just like your school at Sargachi.' See how a great work of service started from scratch! The President of the United States of America once dined with Booker T. Washington, but many people did not like it and some threatened violence.

Here a (European) magistrate tells me,

'You (in India) hate man.' I used to retort, 'Don't you do the same?' and would cite to him the above instance. Then he would be silenced. But he commented a little later, 'Christianity is not yet ripe in America.' But from that time he became a great friend of mine, because I spoke the truth. Not so with our own people. Tell one of them the truth and he becomes your lifelong enemy.

*

From some time back, Bābā had been expressing his desire to send a group of Ashrama members and workers to the villages with a magic lantern and slides to teach the villagers many things they ought to know.

Eroani would be the first village they would visit, where a Moslem devotee was waiting for someone to come from Bābā to console him in his bereavement. The new American Brahmācārīn was a good mechanic and repaired the discarded magic lantern and made it fit for use. One evening a screen was put up and the first slide projected was of Swamiji [Vivekananda]. Bābā was sitting on a reclining chair with others just to see how the machine worked. As soon as the slide captioned 'Hindoo Monk of India' was clearly projected, Bābā was delighted and said, 'See, what a form, what a figure!' Bābā also sat up straight like that figure of Swamiji and wanted others to be filled with the same spirit. A little later he spoke:

It is easier to have a glimpse of Swamiji; he is ready to appear before us, but not so the Master. At present the people will understand the Master through Swamiji. Don't you see more and more young people are accepting Swamiji first? Swamiji's ideas of service and patriotism, and selfless work out of love will prepare the field; then will be sown the seeds of spirituality.

Next, on the screen was focused the great and inspiring message of Swamiji, 'Oh India, forget not...'. Someone was reading that out and the whole hall was silent and sombre. After a few minutes Bābā broke the silence:

Swamiji's 'love' for the country is not so easy to understand. It is not 'patriotism', it is identification of the Self with the country (*deśātma-bodha*). Ordinary people identify the Self with the body (*dehātma-bodha*), so they are always mad after the happiness and comfort of the body; but in the case of Swamiji, he was absorbed in the thought of the country and his countrymen—their past, present, and future. This is not all. In the stage beyond this, the identification is with all (*viśvātma-bodha*), thinking of the good of all.

After a long silence, someone asked, 'After so much work for so many years, have the masses of India been elevated at all?'

Bābā replied frankly:

What little has been done compared with what ought to have been done! Is it easy to awaken this vast mass of humanity—the sleeping leviathan, as Swamiji called it? Can it be achieved by the so-called popular movements? Slowly you have to rouse the masses in a spirit of sympathy and service. Sudden, spasmodic actions which the politicians call 'mass response' have no enduring value. Mass awakening will be slow and sure as it has been in Japan, Russia, Turkey, and China. The principal aim of Swamiji was 'mass education'. He has laid the foundations for work. It will come about slowly. Is it easy to awaken dead corpses—the slaves of a thousand years!

But then, we were among the first who went from village to village and visited the cottages of the farmers and talked to them not of religion but of general knowledge, about cultivation of new crops, of

health and hygiene, and how to be careful in times of epidemics. Here I have tried to improve the economic condition of the individual, and thus solve the problem of food and clothing, and then taught them how to provide for a rainy day by saving something out of their daily income. The neighbouring farmers learnt from the

Ashrama how to grow cabbages and cauliflower. We started sericulture—the raising of silk worms for production of raw silk—in this area, and many deposited their meagre savings with me, to be withdrawn on the day they could not go to work. Even now I am something of a Savings Bank to some.

ESSAY ON APPLIED RELIGION

RESIGNATION TO GOD

SWAMI BUDHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

III

Resignation to God, for the devotee, means self-surrender to the Personal God. Self-surrender means surrender of the ego, submerging one's own will completely in God's will.

In the case of the aspirant who wishes to realize the impersonal Brahman, there is clearly no way open except through the annihilation of the ego. The identification of the seer with the seen, producing the delusion called 'ego', will have to be sundered. In the Upaniṣads this is emphasized in the parable of the two birds of similar appearance on the self-same tree. The chief difference between them is that one eats sweet and bitter fruits, while the other merely looks on unconcerned. The bird that eats, enjoys and suffers by turns, represents the seer identified with the seen. The other is the true spirit, which is our true nature. We will realize this essential and true nature when our false identification vanishes, on the dawning of knowledge.

But the devotee, the worshipper of the personal God, approaches this issue in a

different way. No such violent tearing or shearing is needed. We must, however, remember that resignation to God does not come easily. As has been hinted before, when a sincere seeker of God tries his very best to move toward God, he discovers certain contrary forces from within and without. Almost none of them does he understand fully or clearly, much less control or conquer them. He does not, first of all, understand his own mind! Even such a simple thing as how to prevent a wrong thought from arising in the mind, he does not know. And then there are ever so many other distractions and impediments inherent in circumstances which are not apparently of his own making! On thus examining his entire situation, he comes to the inevitable conclusion that *he* really does not know anything and is incapable of taking spiritual care of himself.

Then at last he again hears the voice of the scriptures, and the guru who is the friend of the soul:

'Surrender everything at the feet of God. What else can you do? Give

Him the power of attorney. Let Him do whatever He thinks best. If you rely on a great man, he will never injure you.'¹

This at last offers the devotee a ray of hope. Everyone would like to throw his burden on somebody else. But it is not easy to get anyone to carry even a part of our burden. However, God is—the mystics say He is always ready to carry our entire burden. And now, buffeted from inside and outside, we readily feel this is the best and easiest way. We make vows of resignation to the Lord in beautiful phrases. In boastful humility we say: 'I have surrendered myself and my all to God. I do as I am led to do.'

But soon the inevitable test comes, and our self-surrender is found to be creaking. For any good done by us, we claim the credit. And when adversity or troubles overtake us, we blame the Lord. If some one hits us we hit him right back.

Of such a devotee the Lord does not take charge. Sri Ramakrishna warns us again and again that if there is theft in 'the chamber of attitude', if there is hypocrisy in us, we shall get nowhere in spiritual life.

It is not sin that is the worst enemy of spiritual life. Sin has proved in many lives to be grace of God in disguise. But hypocrisy is the real enemy—the unmitigated evil. So we must always beware of hypocrisy. Sri Ramakrishna shows in a parable how the Lord is disappointed by His devotee's half-hearted self-surrender:

'Once Lakshmi and Narayana were seated in Vaikuntha, when Narayana suddenly stood up. Lakshmi had been stroking His feet. She said, "Lord, where are You going?" Narayana answered: "One of My devotees is in great danger. I must save him." With

these words He went out. But He came back immediately. Lakshmi said, "Lord, why have You returned so soon?" Narayana smiled and said: "The devotee was going along the road overwhelmed with love for Me. Some washermen were drying clothes on the grass and the devotee walked over the clothes. At this the washermen chased him and were going to beat him with their sticks. So I ran out to protect him." "But why have You come back?" asked Lakshmi. Narayana laughed and said: "I saw the devotee himself picking up a brick to throw at them. So I came back."'²

IV

Perfect resignation is called *prapatti* in Hinduism.³ The quintessence of *prapatti* is unflinching faith in the saving grace of God. Scriptures⁴ say that there are these five characteristics of such resignation:

- (a) to conceive (comprehend) what is in conformity with the will of God.
- (b) to reject what is disagreeable to God.
- (c) to have firm faith that He will save.
- (d) to seek Him alone as the protector.
- (e) to surrender oneself to Him in all meekness.

These five will require some explanation.

(a) To conceive what is in conformity with the will of the Lord, we have first to learn about it from the scriptures under the guidance of a competent teacher. According to Sri Ramakrishna, God's will can be perceived only when the mind has been thoroughly purified. Whatever the pure mind resolves is the will of the Lord. This is really another way of saying that God's will can be perceived only after God is realized, for when perfect purity is attained one cannot but realize God.

² *ibid.*, p. 772

³ Śrīnivāsadāsa: *Yatīndramatadīpikā* (Tr. by Swami Adidevananda, Pub. by Madras Math, 1967), p. xxii

⁴ *vide loc. cit.*

¹ 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1947), p. 315

Now the question is: we who have not yet attained purity of mind, how do we know the will of God? In fact, we have no way of knowing it. If we think we know the will of God, we will be fooling ourselves.

Then what should we do? We should follow the commandments of the scriptures under the guidance of our respective teachers towards purifying our minds. We require this guidance by teachers also, because scriptures are very many, and often bewilderingly contradictory to one another, on the surface.

But there is also another way of abiding by the will of God without having to ascertain theoretically what it is. It may not be easy to practise, but it can surely lead to self-surrender to God. The idea is that of *aprātikūlya*, which Swami Vivekananda explains in his *Bhakti-yoga* as 'the conviction that nothing that happens is against us'.⁵ When the devotee gains this conviction he is able to say, if pain comes, 'Welcome pain.' If misery comes, he is wholeheartedly able to say, 'Welcome misery, you are also from the Beloved.' If happiness comes, he welcomes it. If a snake bites, that is also welcome. Even if death comes, he welcomes that.⁶

For the secret of perfect resignation, to the *bhakta*, is perfect love of God and trust in Him. Thus whatever comes from the Beloved must be welcome, for it is certain that it is all the will of Him who is all love, in various forms. Therefore such a devotee must forget how to complain against pain or misery. So far as they affect him, he need not know how to distinguish between them.⁶

This uncomplaining acceptance of what-

ever comes, is the practical demonstration of submission to the will of God. The devotee comes to take it for granted—and that rightly—that whatever happens is according to the Lord's will. For nothing contrary to His will can happen in the universe.

(b) In the second place, true resignation will require us *to reject what is disagreeable to God*. But how to ascertain what is disagreeable to God?

Certain generalizations at least can be made. '*Satyam, Jñānam, Anantam Brahma*' ('Brahman is truth, knowledge, infinitude')—is a statement regarding the nature of the formless Brahman. The Personal God, who is none but Brahman seen through *Māyā*, is also of the same nature. This means that God likewise is of the nature of truth, knowledge, and infinitude.

Thus we may say with certainty that what is negation of truth, knowledge and infinitude, will be disagreeable to God. We cannot of course change the nature of God by our actions. But if we act in a way which will prevent us from manifesting His qualities in ourselves, that will clearly be disagreeable to God.

(c) Thirdly, true resignation will require us *to have firm faith that He will save*.

When the aspirant has this firm faith, he entirely becomes free of all worries and anxieties, which commonly eat into the vitals of most human beings who have no real anchorage in genuine faith. Sri Ramanuja, the great teacher of the path of *Bhakti*, taught his disciples in his last message:

'He who has truly surrendered himself at the feet of God should not bestow any thought on his future, which is entirely at His disposal; for the least anxiety felt in that connection betrays the hypocrisy in his self-surrender. His present life is entirely determined by his past karmas; so it is not proper

⁵ *The Complete Works* (Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Dt. Pithoragarh, U.P.), Vol. III (1960), p. 82

⁶ *ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 82-3

to grieve over it. Let not the performance of your duties be regarded as a means for achieving worldly ends, but consider it as service rendered to the Supreme Being.’⁷

This firm faith that God will save, we can have only when we are convinced for ourselves about two facts in regard to God: that God is all-powerful and God is all-love. By being all-powerful, God has the capacity to save us. By being all-love, He has the willingness to save us, even in spite of ourselves. Now, there is no least room for doubt that God is all-powerful—the dispenser of the destiny of the universe, its creator, sustainer, and destroyer. Again, there is ample testimony to God’s infinite, unreasoned compassion and love, in the personalities and deeds of the Incarnations of God. When a devotee is thus convinced of God’s love and power, resignation to Him comes about most spontaneously.

By dying on the cross, Christ showed that he was all-love. Through resurrection, he demonstrated his power even over death. When his apostles were convinced of these two great facts, they developed tremendous faith in his saving power. And through the force of that faith they themselves became invincible pioneers of Christianity.

But strange to say, God has His own—sometimes incomprehensible—ways of saving devotees. In Socrates’ case, the hemlock worked all too well. The Heavenly Father gave no help when his beloved Son was being nailed to the cross. Did Christ, again, do anything to save St. Paul, who had done so much for Him, when he was killed? Sri Ramakrishna’s Divine Mother did apparently nothing to cure his most painful throat cancer. Further, in the *Bhāgavatam*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who

was God incarnate, makes it very specific:

‘I gradually deprive that man of his wealth to whom I choose to extend My grace. Thereupon his relatives abandon him finding him penniless and deep in misery.’⁸

Then, most poignantly of all, Bhīṣma, the great warrior-sage and devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa, while painfully dying on a ‘bed’ of arrows and being asked why he was at last weeping, replied that it was not at all because of his own suffering, but simply that he saw he had not understood a bit of God’s ways. For ‘God Himself is the constant companion of the Pandavas, and still they have no end of trouble’.⁹

Still, in regard to God’s ways of saving, this much can be said: God has not shown any anxiety to save our skins, our property, our attachments and things originating therefrom—or any other of the things the world values. If anyone “resigns” himself to God hoping thus to have a security officer to guard his body and his things, he is surely deluded. He is only out to use God for the things *he* loves. He has not yet loved God, what to speak of resigning himself to Him!

How then does God save, if he will not save *anything* for us? This is the great paradox. This is the great fun. God saves the devotee by saving nothing *for* the devotee except only one single simple thing. When the devotee completely resigns himself to God, God saves the devotee’s love for Himself. He saves and ever strengthens his *bhakti* or devotion or love of God. And through that love, God gives Himself entirely to the devotee. When He thus entirely gives Himself, is not that ample compensation for all He had taken away? When the devotee gets God, he at last comes to realize that every single blow of destiny was a blow of grace

⁷ Swami Ramakrishnananda: *Life of Sri Ramanuja*, (Madras Math, 1965), p. 256

⁸ *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam*, X. 88. 8

⁹ *The Gospel*, p. 347

—God's unique manner of self-giving.

Therefore, trusting and loving God—loving God without reason, without count, without stopping, without satiation, with all one's powers, with one's entire being—is the only safe and rational thing to do in life. What does not lead to this love is futile.

(d) Fourthly, true resignation will require us to seek Him alone as the protector.

The protection we seek in anything else but God is a hole, as it were, in the jar of our devotion. Through that hole, all our devotion may well trickle out. Why do I seek protection in anything else? Because I have not complete faith in God. Why do I not have faith in God? Because I have not loved Him. The meaning of my not loving God, can only be that I have again and again rejected His love.

Devotion to God is nothing but received love, returned only very fractionally. It is not that God loves us in return for our puny puddle of muddy love. God has always kept us immersed in His love and protection. Read the *Life* and the *Gospel* of Sri Ramakrishna, and the Holy Mother's *Life* and teachings—just try a little to forget yourself, and you will know in what infinite love you are held. When one awakens to this reality, in every pulsation of the heart, in every nerve, every fibre—that is devotion. Then what will you give to God? From where will you give? How will you give? Can you stand anywhere outside God, to give Him something? Can you get from somewhere else, a particle of anything which is not God's, to give Him?

The true devotee comes to know this spontaneously—that all comes from God and can come from nowhere else. Therefore he takes refuge in Him alone. Seeking protection under any other 'umbrella' than God is only inviting more bombs.

When the protection of the Lord destroys 'you', you are saved. When the protection of anything else but God saves you, you will be destroyed. The true devotee therefore spurns all worldly protectors and protections.

To what awe-inspiring limits a completely resigned devotee can go, in abandoning all protection except God's, is repeatedly illustrated in Swami Vivekananda's life. We shall here recall only one such example:

During his wanderings in India, the Swami would keep no possession, no money with him. He did not know whence his next meal would come. Many a time he had no food for days on end. But nothing shook his lion heart. The more he suffered, the higher rose the leaping flames of his divine faith and devotion.

Once during those days an intense ascetic mood took possession of Vivekananda.

'He thought: "Let me beg no longer! What benefit is it to the poor to feed me? If they can save a handful of rice they can feed their own children with it. Anyway, what is the use of sustaining this body if I cannot realize God?" A...terrible spiritual dissatisfaction overwhelmed him... Thereupon he entered into a thick forest which stretched for miles and miles before him, and walked the whole day without a morsel of food. The evening approached. He was faint from fatigue and sank to the ground beneath a tree, fixing his mind upon the Lord, his eyes looking vacantly in the distance.

'After some time he saw a tiger approaching. Nearer and nearer it came. Then it sat down at some distance from him. The Swami thought: "Ah! This is right, both of us are hungry. After all, this body has not been a vehicle of absolute realization, and as by it no good to the world will possibly be done, it is well and desirable that it should be of service at least

to this hungry beast." He was lying there all the while calm and motionless, waiting every moment for the tiger to pounce upon him, but for some reason or other the animal ran off in another direction. The Swami, however, thought that it might yet return, and waited; but the tiger did not come. The Swami spent the night beneath the shelter of the tree, holding communion with his own soul. And with the approach of dawn, pondering in the silence of that forest on the guiding Providence of the Most High, a great sense of power came upon him.¹⁰

Another inspiring example of resorting to God alone for protection, we find in Mahatma Gandhi. As many are aware, Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated on 30 January 1948. Prior to this, on 20 January, there was a bomb explosion fifty yards away from where Gandhi was seated at his prayer meeting. But he remained completely unruffled, though he later learned that the bomb had been intended for him. He neither asked for nor accepted any police protection which the Government of India was anxious to provide. His view was that God would keep him alive as long as it pleased Him. He would not like to be saved or protected if God did not protect him.

Two days before his assassination a friend had asked him, 'Was there any noise in your prayer meeting today, Bapu?' Gandhi had replied, 'No. But does that question mean that you are worrying about me? If I am to die by the bullet of a madman, I must do so smiling. There must be no anger within me. God must be in my heart and on my lips. And you promise me one thing. Should such a thing happen, you are not to shed one tear.'¹¹

Just two days later, he did fall to a fanatic's bullet. And all know how he kept his promise. He died with God's name on his lips, uttering 'Hê Râm'. Wonderful was the life of this man; wonderful his death. And his great secret was that he sought God alone as his protector.

Consider: what will your security bonds, your insurance policies, your heap of money, your little love, little flesh, do for you? What will save you when the deluge of calamity comes, when dear ones are torn away, when disease eats into your vitals, when your heart is wrung by love insulted? Nothing whatsoever will save you, soothe you, console you, inspire you except one thing: resignation to God. When you have this one thing, everything else will have 'value' as being really superfluous! Moreover, when you have resigned yourself to the Lord, to the extent that your resignation is firm, you will become the consoler, inspirer of others.

Ācārya Śaṅkara says in one of his popular hymns: 'O Fool, take refuge in the Lord, take refuge in the Lord, take refuge in the Lord. Rules of grammar will be of no avail when death draws near!'

In other words, in the ultimate reckoning what will save is resignation to God, and not any worldly attainment.

(e) Fifthly, in order to attain perfect resignation, the devotee is required to *surrender himself to Him in all meekness*.

Surrender of oneself without meekness is not only no self-resignation at all, it may well be foolish hypocrisy.

As pointed out by Swami Ramakrishnananda, a great disciple of Sri Ramakrishna:

'God is more intelligent than any of us. He knows what is necessary for you and where to keep you. If you resent

 veri & Tendulkar, Bombay, 1954), Vol. VIII, p. 345; *vide* also pp. 330 ff.

¹⁰ His Eastern and Western Disciples: *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* (Advaita Ashrama, 1949), pp. 264-5

¹¹ D. G. Tendulkar: *Mahatma* (Pub. by Jha-

his dispensation, you really resent his infinite love and grace. Obedience is divine; disobedience is satanic.'¹²

If you are seeking God, do not envy anybody's position, situation or elevation anywhere in the world. You do not know from what troubles God has saved you by keeping you where you are. And what you feel as pricks or blows, where you are at present—may they not be seen as calls to awakening, symbols of His compassion, when you understand Him, when you love Him?

Swami Ramakrishnananda also says:

'Man is too often afraid to surrender. He thinks he will lose something; but he is never a loser when he gives himself absolutely to the Lord. Only when he is guided by God does he cease to blunder, because then God works through his hands, sees through his eyes, speaks with his tongue; and he becomes a perfect instrument in the hands of God. He is directed by God in everything.'¹³

In these words there is no trace of exaggeration. They are literally true.

Something of this idea is expressed also in a beautiful Christian hymn of the sixteenth century:

'God be in my head
and in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes
and in my looking;
God be in my mouth
and in my speaking;
God be in my heart
and in my thinking;
God be at mine end
and at my departing.'¹⁴

When the devotee's resignation to God is complete and perfect, this actually happens. Then God radiates out through

the body and mind of the devotee—to use Śaṅkarācārya's words—'like the glow of a powerful lamp placed in a pot with many holes'.

V

Perfect resignation to God is the highest worship. Through it all other spiritual practices become fruitful. In daily devotions, even in a religion such as Buddhism which does not stress God or worship, the aspirant is expected to take these refuges:

I take refuge in the Buddha.

I take refuge in the Dharma.

I take refuge in the Sangha.

These are the famous *tri-śaraṇas*, triple refuges, of Buddhism.

But the worshippers of the personal God have to take only one refuge. In any case, true resignation is the ultimate fruit of all self-effort. Though the self-effort of the unillumined is merely ego-effort to start with, still as it is directed Godward, after long and strenuous effort may come attenuation of the 'unripe ego'. What is self-surrender? It is ego-surrender. And as Sri Ramakrishna says, 'All troubles come to an end when the ego dies.'¹⁵

Self-surrender is not only the end of troubles: it is a source of tremendous power. When the devotee empties himself completely of his ego, God takes possession of him. He then becomes strong in God's strength. The power of resignation is therefore the power of God. A perfectly resigned devotee thus becomes invincible. That is the secret of his fearlessness. That is why Swami Vivekananda says, true religion is infinite strength.

Actually, real self-surrender is the most heroic form of worship. In the Hindu epic the *Rāmāyaṇa*, we have the character of Hanumān. In modern times we have the character of Vivekananda. The secret

¹² Sabina Thorne: *Precepts for Perfection* (Ganesh & Co., Madras, 17, 1961), p. 170

¹³ Swami Tapasyananda: *Swami Ramakrishnananda, The Apostle of Sri Ramakrishna to The South* (Madras Math, 1972), pp. 199-200

¹⁴ Sarvan Primer (1558), as quoted in the Pilgrim Hymnal (Congregationalist Church)

¹⁵ *The Gospel*, p. 100

of these two spiritual heroes was in nothing but absolute resignation to their Masters. Scratch Hanumān, it is all Rāma within. Scratch Vivekananda, it is all Ramakrishna inside. In one of his songs, Vivekananda says, invoking Sri Ramakrishna, 'I am your slave life after life.'

VI

In perfect self-surrender one merges one's will completely in the will of the Lord and stays unruffled in all situations of life: happiness and misery, gain and loss.

But who can do that?

Swami Turiyananda, one of the great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, and a knower of Brahman, points out:

'...one can rightly take refuge in Him [God] only when one becomes free. Before that it is *abhyāsa-yoga* or yoga of practice. Perfect resignation of self to God is liberation.'¹⁶

Thus, there are two types of self-resignation: that of the *sādhaka*, the aspirant; and that of the *siddha*, the illumined. Self-resignation for the aspirant is a relentless struggle; for most people self-effort is much easier than self-surrender. Swami Brahmananda, one of the foremost disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, says:

'Resign yourself utterly to the Lord. He is everything. There is nothing besides... Never be calculating. Is self-surrender possible in a day? When that is achieved everything is achieved. One must struggle hard for it.'¹⁷

One has to struggle hard for self-surrender, for as we may now glimpse, it is the profoundest of all approaches to the Godhead. Therefore, in the *Gītā* we find Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaching self-surrender at the end of His entire discourse to Arjuna, after

instructing him in all the various yogas. And He speaks these words on self-surrender with a particular concentrated emphasis. To Arjuna He says with a great personal appeal, though Kṛṣṇa was God incarnate on earth:

'Again, listen to My supreme word, the profoundest of all. You are well beloved of Me; therefore I will tell you what is for your good.

'Fix your heart on Me, give your love to Me, worship Me, bow down before Me; so shall you come to Me. This is my pledge to you, for you are dear to Me.'

Then comes the supreme verse:

'Abandon all *dharma*s (external forms of righteousness) and come to Me alone for shelter. I will deliver you from all sins; do not grieve.'¹⁸

Such is the grand pledge of the Lord to Arjuna, and through him to all sincere seekers.

VII

But after all, what *use*—let me employ this worldly word, use—do we propose to make of this saving pledge of the Lord?

We could have ended this discussion without asking this. But the theme of self-surrender has this other aspect which should be emphasized. Let none ever think that self-resignation is only sighing and weeping, cringing and crouching to a mighty God because we are powerless. No, that is not the truth. God's power can become truly our power! Sri Ramakrishna goes still further, to say that the devotee is greater than God. For the devotee carries God in his heart!

Self-surrender is not tears alone, prostrations alone; it has its thunder too. Consider this song of Rāmprasād, a great mystic of India, a worshipper of the Divine Mother:

'I have surrendered my soul at the fearless feet of the Mother;

¹⁶ Thorne, op. cit., p. 170

¹⁷ Swami Prabhavananda: *The Eternal Companion—Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda* (Madras Math, 1945), p. 155

¹⁸ *Bhagavad-gītā*, XVIII. 64-6

Am I afraid of Death any more?
 Unto the tuft of hair on my head
 Is tied the almighty mantra, Mother
 Kali's name.
 My body I have sold in the market-
 place of the world
 And with it have bought Sri Durga's
 name.

Deep within my heart I have planted
 the name of Kali,
 The Wish-fulfilling Tree of heaven;
 When Yama, King of Death, appears,
 To him I shall open my heart and
 show it growing there.
 I have cast out from me my six un-
 flagging foes;¹⁹
 Ready am I to sail life's sea,
 Crying, "To Durga, victory!"²⁰

Further, self-surrender has not only its
 thunder, but its humour too. And this
 paradox makes it particularly attractive
 For instance, Yāmunācārya, another great
 mystic of India, says to the Lord, 'straight
 from the shoulder':

'Harken to this only entreaty of mine
 before Thee; this is not a falsehood
 but absolute truth. If Thou shalt not
 take pity on me, then, O Lord, it will
 be hard for Thee to find one worthy of
 Thy compassion. [For who has ever
 committed so many sins?]
 'Therefore, without Thee I have not my
 Lord, and without me Thou hast not a
 worthy recipient of Thy compassion;

preserve this relation, O Lord, ordained
 by Fate, and spurn me not.'²¹

What power has God to forsake such a
 devotee, who thus boldly jokes while tear-
 fully imploring?

Indeed, God cannot help surrendering
 Himself to such a devotee.

There is even one thing more, in self-
 resignation to God. It is said in
Śrī Durgā-saptasatī, a scripture on the
 Divine Mother:

'When satisfied, You destroy all ill-
 nesses; but when wrathful You frustrate
 all the cherished desires. No calamity
 befalls men who have sought refuge in
 You. Those who have found their
 shelter in You become verily a refuge
 of others.'²²

When the seeker's resignation becomes
 total, by virtue of becoming illumined and
 a purveyor of God's grace he becomes the
 refuge of others, solace and inspiration to
 others.

Sri Ramakrishna resigned himself com-
 pletely to Kālī, the Divine Mother. So
 now, in fulfilment of the scripture, he has
 in his turn become the refuge of uncounted
 earnest spiritual seekers of the world.

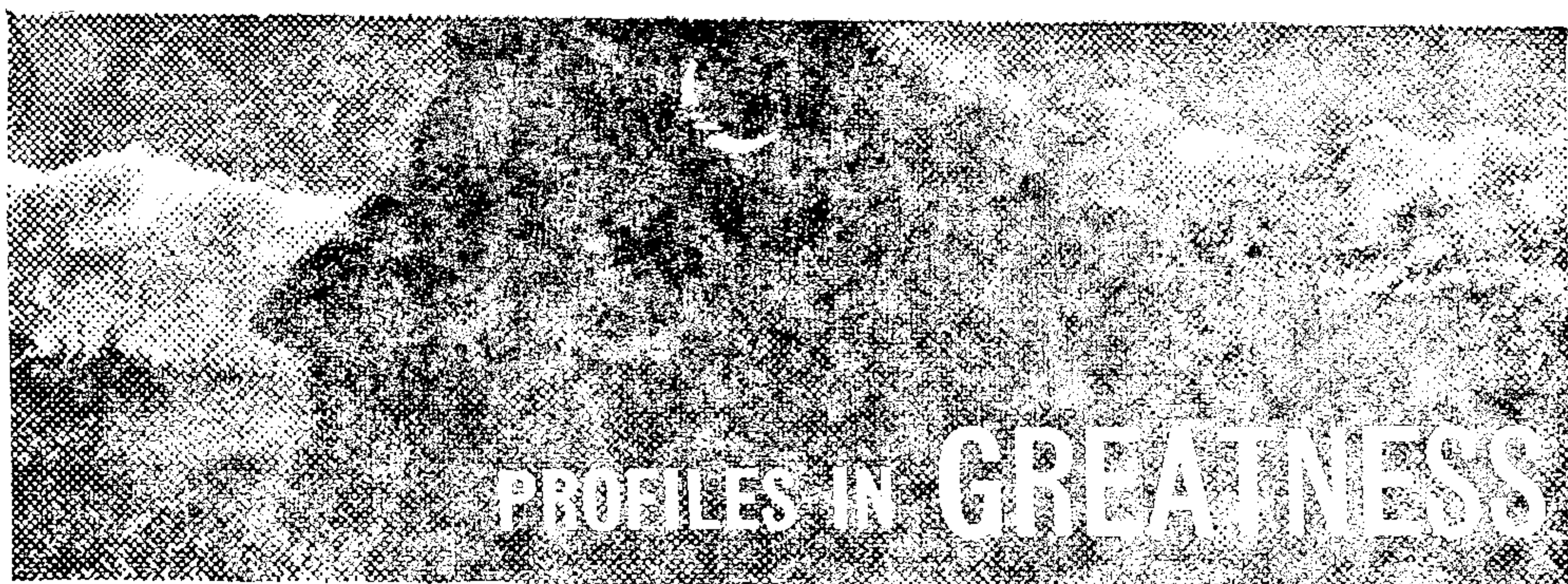
(Concluded)

¹⁹ The six passions.

²⁰ *The Gospel*, p. 245

²¹ Yāmunācārya: *Stotraratna (Hymn-Jewel)*
 (Tr. by Swami Adidevananda, Pub. by Madras
 Math, 1967), p. 61

²² XI. 29



PROFILES IN GREATNESS

'MY GOD THE POOR'

My first personal encounter with him stands out vividly before my mind's eye, though four decades have rolled by since. He was of medium height, thinly-built, even emaciated. His dress consisted of a tattered pair of shorts, a sleeveless under-shirt, and a piece of cloth tied round the head to serve as a turban. The 'turban' was not so much for sartorial elegance as to help in carrying heavy head-loads. He was then working in a factory among the lowest-paid class of labourers, carrying on his dreary and heavy work—that of loading and unloading dusty materials. His job was a very dusty affair, and when I saw him he was heavily covered with cement dust. He had a charcoal-dark complexion, and the contrasting whitish dust which had settled on his face, specially on the eyelids, lent him an eerie appearance. Add to it his reddish eyes rendered so by the dust, and it would be no surprise if anyone who came upon him suddenly mistook him for an apparition.

But there was more to his personality than this factory-made appearance; more to it than the dusty body and red eyes of an industrial coolie. His gait, even while working, was unhurried and measured. When he spoke, his speech had a rare quality of gentleness. And still later, after he had washed himself, there was such

a calm dignity and even sweetness in his dark face and reddish eyes that I became quickly attracted to him. In and through his emaciated features there would emerge now and then a gentle smile too, though pensive and sad, the result perhaps of a hard life of crushing poverty. Strangely his name was 'Kariya', meaning 'Blackie' or 'Darkie'.

It was some mundane needs of life, some mutual self-interest, that brought us together. The employees of the factory were issued charcoal from the factory store for their domestic use, at a concessional price. Of course this involved time-consuming procedures—presentation and registration of a requisition, approval by the appropriate authority, checking it through the accounts section, taking the registered requisition to the stores on particular days when stocks would be available, and finally transporting it home. For most people all this rigmarole would be most disagreeable, and they would be happy to pass on the job to some other person for a price; and there would be quite a few poor workers needing money and ever ready to take up such jobs to augment their own slender incomes. Kariya happened to be one such. But there was something which distinguished him from his compeers—his gentleness and

courtesy, his honesty and dependability. One could just hand over the requisition-slip to him and forget about it. He would do all that was needed carefully and deliver the charcoal bags to the home promptly, and all that for a fee of four annas (currently twentyfive paise) per bag, the cost of the charcoal itself being about three or four rupees.

In this cruel world, and specially in countries where sloppiness and unreliability are the rule, to have such persons to help, and on such inexpensive terms, is naturally a rare and heart-warming experience, something which induces faith in human nature. It means that honesty and goodness do exist in this world after all, and that too not dependent on wealth or affluence. Here was one who was quietly proving that poverty need not make one a criminal, and that even a poor labourer, in spite of all his hardships, could yet manifest the virtues and graces of an honest and worthy life. It was no wonder that I soon started depending on Kariya for various odd jobs and also recommended him to others, and felt happy in giving him bonuses in cash and kind whenever I could. More than the economic benefit, he became to me a symbol of integrity, one who vindicated the basic goodness of the 'poor Indian'. I was reminded that such are 'God's own', even as Śrī Kṛṣṇa declares in the *Śrī Bhāgavatam*, 'We are poor and the poor are *Our beloved*', and which Swami Vivekananda echoed, '...I am poor, I love the poor'.

But all was not to be smooth sailing for long; billows arrived in due course. As if to teach a lesson that nothing in the world can be taken for granted, as if to prove that after all men are basically selfish and one should not place too much trust in any mortal man, much less an indigent labourer, a new situation developed. Once I gave the usual monthly requisition

for charcoal to Kariya and expected it to arrive within three or four days. But something happened this time and the days went on rolling. A week elapsed, two weeks and then three, and still there was neither charcoal nor Kariya. At this point I grew uneasy and became anxious to know whether he was out of station or had even taken ill. But soon I got reliable reports that he was very much in station and healthy enough to carry charcoal bags to other parties! And when I went to the accounts office and enquired about my requisition I was told that it had been registered and the amount had already been debited to my account. This information went through me like a stab. Then, had Kariya misused my indent, had he taken the charcoal to some other party and perhaps even misappropriated the money? The very thought hurt me tremendously, not so much for its monetary aspect but as a breach of faith. Somehow on Kariya's integrity had rested my fragile trust in humanity in general. I suddenly felt awfully let down. So, after all, mistrust and cynicism would have their mocking triumph? It was a very bitter pill to swallow.

After a good deal of cogitation and heart-burning I decided to contact him and have it out. Going out in search of him, by chance I met him right on the road. He was carrying a charcoal bag. Trying to remain as calm and composed as I could, I put an apparently casual question to him, 'What is this you are taking?' 'A bag of charcoal, sir, to Mr. So-and-so', was his calm reply. 'When are you going to bring *my* charcoal? It is already two months!' 'Sir, I shall bring yours tomorrow.' This unperturbed reply put me out. I thought he was feigning innocence and unless I took him to task he wouldn't admit his mistake. Yet, I decided to reserve the final dressing down till after he

had brought my bag of charcoal.

I expected he would evade me and force me to raise a row, but to my surprise the very next day he did come and with the charcoal too. And now, like a determined yet cool inquisitor, all set to wring out a confession from a heretic, I put him the loaded question, 'So it took you eight weeks to bring charcoal this time?' 'Yes, sir.' 'Why? It would ordinarily take only three or four days. Even allowing some extra margin it should not take more than a week. Now, tell me what *really* happened.' 'Sir, I lost your requisition.' This at last elicited a caustic remark. 'But you could have told me so! However, I learn that you have already got it registered in the accounts department.' 'Yes, sir, it is true... It was after its registration that I lost the slip.' At this stage the issue began to get rather complicated for me. Still I kept on: 'But even so you could have informed me of the same and taken another indent. I would not have hauled you up to a court of law and got you sentenced just for three or four rupees!' 'But, sir, how could I come to you and with what face? You had entrusted me with the work and your account had already been debited. So I felt that I could not meet you till the amount of the lost indent was made up by *me!*' 'And may I know how you proposed to do it?' There was still quite a bit of irony in my words. But his calm reply struck me dumb: 'Sir, I felt responsible for the three and a half rupees which the lost indent was worth; but I had no ready money with me to make it up straight away. So I had no option but to wait, and collect money by carrying charcoal bags for others, once or twice a week. The four annas I got for each of these bags I saved to square up the loss I had put you

to, through my negligence. In seven weeks I was able to save the three and a half rupees, then got a charcoal bag on my own and brought it to you. It was yesterday, when I was all set to bring your bag, that you also met me on the road... Here it is, sir!'

As I heard his explanation, uttered in measured words and in his gentle, somewhat sad tone, my mind and heart were taken by storm, as it were. Feelings of remorse and shame overwhelmed me that I had wrongly and harshly judged such a good man. A plain, humble, totally honest man, an unbelievably honourable man, whom neither poverty nor hardships could corrupt—he was truly a saintly soul. It was for such true sons of Mother India that Swami Vivekananda's heart bled. It was to get material help for such that he went and toiled in the West. It was referring to such that he declared 'poverty here (in India) is no crime... Our masses are gods as compared with those of other countries... Ours are angels.' It was such he called '*Daridra-nārāyaṇas*' or 'My God the Poor'.

My own faith in humanity was restored. Suddenly Kariya stood before me transfigured. I saw in him not an uncouth labourer but a god. What if his skin was dark and his eyes were reddish? To me he appeared handsome. Did not our hymns describe Śrī Rāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa as of dark hue (*syāmala*) and of roseate eyes (*aruṇākṣa*)? Did not the word *kṛṣṇa* itself mean 'dark'? His calmness and courtesy, his honesty and uprightness, his gentleness and dignity, invested Kariya with a divine quality, a quality which has left an indelible impress on my mind, never to be forgotten in this life.

—EXPLORER

Source: An actual life-story as personally related.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND HIRANAND SHAIKIRAM ADVANI

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

The young man had come all the way from Sindh, 2,200 miles away in North-western India, to Calcutta to see for himself the mortally ill Sri Ramakrishna who was so dear to his heart. The question as to why a man steeped in God-consciousness should suffer at all—much less from the excruciating pain of cancer as did Sri Ramakrishna—haunted the young man. However hard he had sought the answer, it remained a mystery to him. So he asked Sri Ramakrishna directly, 'Please tell us why a devotee of God suffers.'

A sweet smile spread over Sri Ramakrishna's face. But he could speak only in a hoarse voice, 'It is the body that suffers.' He seemed about to say something more. After waiting some time, Hiranand heard Sri Ramakrishna say, 'Do you understand?'

Mahendranath Gupta ('M'), who later became the author of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*,¹ guessing what the Master wanted to say, explained: 'The body suffers for the purpose of teaching men. His life is like a book of reference. In spite of so much physical suffering, his mind is one hundred per cent united with God.' The learned young man, finding a parallel from history, replied: 'Yes, it is like Christ's crucifixion. But still the mystery remains—why should he, of all people, suffer like this?'

And no explanation could then satisfy him—even Sri Ramakrishna's elaboration of his own deep perception, 'Now I perceive only this: the Indivisible Satchida-

nanda is covered with skin, and this sore in the throat is on one side of it.' He had heard earlier that the Divine Mother was sporting through Sri Ramakrishna's body and all his suffering was in accord with Her will. But even this explanation could hardly help him reconcile himself with the hard reality. The young man bore deep love and reverence towards Sri Ramakrishna, and love often does not harmonize well with logic. His affectionate concern was so profound that he could hardly accept the fact that the Master, like all others, was subject to natural phenomena like bodily illnesses.

The young man, whom Sri Ramakrishna had introduced to 'M' as 'a very fine boy', was none other than Hiranand Shaukiram Advani, then editor of two papers—the *Sindh Times* in English, and the *Sind Sudhār* in Sindhi. Born in Hyderabad, in Sindh, 23 March 1863, Hiranand was scion of a noble family which had for generations provided ministers to the rulers of Sindh. His grandfather, Dewan Shaukiram Nandiram, long a Taluka Revenue Officer and Magistrate, as well as his elder brother, Dewan Navalrai, exerted considerable influence in shaping the life of young Hiranand. The latter in particular, being 'a man of extraordinary strength of character, austere, devout, silent...' ² was nevertheless a staunch nationalist and widely known for his generosity and charities; and it is clear that Hiranand, who is said to have had marked resemblance to him even in appearance, derived great benefit from his loving guidance.

¹ 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 600004, 1947), p. 962. *Vide* also pp. 958-64. This visit occurred on April 22, 1886.

² Nagendra Nath Gupta, 'Sind in the Eighties', *The Modern Review* (Calcutta), Aug., 1926, p. 155.

About this time, friendly relations were beginning to form between Sindhis and some prominent Bengalis, including those of the Branmo Samaj—enhanced by the appointment of Satyendranath Tagore, an active Brahmo, as the first Indian civilian District Judge of Sindh.³ Soon Dewan Navalrai, often called a pioneer of the modern renaissance in Sindh, became attracted by the charming personality of Keshab Chandra Sen and joined his Branmo Samaj. In September of 1870 he founded a Brahmo Mandir (Worship-hall for Brahmos) in Hyderabad (Sindh). His second brother Tarachand became the head of a training college at Hyderabad, and the youngest, Motiram, who grew up under the direct supervision of Hiranand, became a successful barrister. Brought up in an orthodox family practising Guru Nanak's religion, the young Hiranand's first ideological conflict came with the introduction of English education and subsequent onslaught of the Brahmo faith into the family. Although his early days were virtually guided by his enlightened elder brother, Hiranand had to marry when he was only twelve years old, in accordance with the family tradition.

Soon after the demise of his grandfather, Hiranand came to Calcutta on 17 January 1879 to have a sound education under the general guidance of Keshab Chandra Sen, who was Navalrai's mentor and guide. In one room rented at Rs. 10/- per month in the Bharat Ashrama at 6, College Square, Hiranand grew up among the Brahmo missionaries and their families. Kanti Chandra, the Manager of the Brahmo Mission's boarding house, was virtually the local guardian of the boy. Securing a second division in the University Entrance examination in December, 1879, Hiranand joined the Presidency

College. Next month his younger brother Motiram came to Calcutta and joined the Albert School in the fourth Class. The news of their father's death on 27 July 1881 unsettled their minds but they were forbidden to travel back home lest they should miss their studies. In December, 1881, Hiranand passed his F.A. examination in the first division, and won a scholarship of Rs. 20/- per month. In the meantime the Albert School was raised to the status of a College with Keshab Chandra's brother, Krishna Behari Sen, as its Rector. The boarding house was closed down, and Hiranand lived for about a year, from February, 1882 with the family of Krishna Behari Sen at Colootolah and then with Keshab's sister. Moti lived with Nabin Chandra Sen, Keshab's elder brother. The two boys had almost identified themselves as members of the Sen family—so much so that the boys used to address Keshab and his brother as 'uncles' and their older sister as 'aunt'.

Under the care of Keshab Hiranand's religious propensities deepened and in the summer of 1881 he began wearing ochre-coloured cloth and walking barefoot under a vow of humility. Nurtured in Brahmo traditions, particularly those upheld by Keshab Sen, Hiranand read with interest Keshab's statement in his *Journal the New Dispensation*:

'Sadhu Sanga, or the companionship of saints and devotees, is justly regarded as one of the essential means of sanctification; and we are gratified to find, among our brethren, a desire to avail themselves of such means, whenever an opportunity presents itself. Dayanand Saraswati, the great Vedic reformer, the Paramhansa of Dakshineswar, the Sikh Nagaji of Doomraon and the Pavhari Baba of Ghazipur are, so far as we know, the four distinguished ascetic saints whom our friends have, from time to time, duly honoured, and, in whose company, they have sought the

³ loc. cit.

sanctifying influence of character and example.'

Of them Sri Ramakrishna was not only living nearest to them but was perhaps the only person who had fascinated the hearts of the Brahma leaders. The Brahmos were then divided into three factions. The Adi Brahma Samaj, the original institution, having moved closer to orthodox Hinduism had begun to be restricted more and more to the activities of the Tagore family circle. The Sadharan Brahma Samaj, busy with development of rules, policies and guidelines, appeared to be too coldly rationalistic for many. Keshav's Nava Vidhan, (New Dispensation), borrowing from various religious traditions and committing itself to none, seemed like a bouquet prepared by Keshub Chunder's ingenuity. And among these divergent groups Sri Ramakrishna was perhaps the only personality who was loved and adored by all. As a member of Keshav's 'Band of Hope', the reading of the *New Dispensation* was a must to Hiranand. As in the past the *New Dispensation* had announced on 8 January 1882 the growing popularity of the Paramahansa,

'The proceedings of these meetings generally embrace hymns and discourses by the Paramahansa, questions and answers, and *Kirtan* of a most enthusiastic character ... Learned *Pandits*, educated youths, orthodox *Vaishnabs* and *Yogis* gather in numbers, some from curiosity, some for the sake of Sadhu Sanga or good company, others for acquiring wisdom and joining the *Kirtan*. We have invariably found on such occasions an outburst of living devotional enthusiasm—a mighty wave of rapturous excitement sweeping over the whole audience. The effect is wonderful.'

Again, the *Indian Mirror* dated 21 April 1882 announced that 'the most Venerable Arya Rishi Ramkristo [Ramakrishna] Paramahansa will grace the fourth anni-

versary meeting of the Calcutta Hari Bhakti Pradayini Sabha to be held on 22nd and 23rd April, 1882 at 132, Baranossy Ghose's Street'. Though living close to that venue, Hiranand seems not to have taken the occasion to meet Sri Ramakrishna.

During the summer vacation of 1882, however, probably in May,⁴ Hiranand saw Sri Ramakrishna for the first time. It is very likely that he had gone to Dakshineswar in the company of Nandalal Sen ('Bhulu'), son of Keshav's eldest brother and a devoted friend of Hiranand. It is unfortunate that there is little on record as to what transpired at that first meeting. We know little of the talks between Hiranand and the Master, and outer events, if any. But we can well glimpse the forces that were acting beneath the surface then. Had not such forces been more important than events, it would never have been possible for the little-known Paramahansa to exert such tremendous and lasting influence on a 'progressive' young man like Hiranand. It can be safely assumed that Sri Ramakrishna, adept as he was in reading human character, took little time to assess the spiritual potentialities of the new arrival. His first impression must have been favourable; he was later heard to remark:

'While listening to the kirtan [devotional music], I had a vision of Rakhali in the midst of Sri Krishna's companions in Vrindavan. Narendra belongs to a very high level. Hirananda too; how childlike his nature is! What a sweet disposition he has! I want to see him too.'⁵

Sri Ramakrishna soon came to consider Hiranand as his very own. In fact, on one

⁴ Dayaram Gidumal: *The History of a Humble Soul—Life and Letters of Hiranand Shaukiram* (Sind Gazette and Commercial Press, Karachi, 1903), p. 51

⁵ *Gospel*, p. 275

occasion he had said to Hiranand: 'You all seem to be my kinsmen. I do not look on any of you as a stranger.'⁶

Still, Hiranand was not to be like Narendra and the other future monastic disciples, in as much as Hiranand was already married. Yet, what did it matter, if one had one's mind fixed at the lotus feet of the Lord? Sri Ramakrishna had remarked: 'If married people develop love for God, they will not be attached to the world. Hiranand is married. What if he is? He will not be much attached to the world.'⁷ Sri Ramakrishna loved specially those who were born with good tendencies—pure souls, with longing for God, who did not pay attention to money, creature comforts, or other such things. That Hiranand showed such qualities from early youth is clear from numerous testimonies, one being his colleague, journalist Nagen-dranath Gupta:

'Hiranand was not highly intellectual, but as a man of character I have met very few who can be compared with him. Although married and the father of three children, he was in spirit essentially a sannyasin, with marvellous self-discipline and self-control. He spent long hours in silent communion, while in conversation his simplicity was that of a child.'⁸

For further glimpses of his mental make-up we may quote from Hiranand's letter of 7th September 1883: 'Complaints of and in life I have very few. I only wish I could fight with my difficulties as manfully as I wish to do.'⁹ And on 15/9/83, he wrote to another friend:

'Destiny is always on our side, never really against us, though, apparently at times, things seem to be in deadly opposition to us... Hold on to your God, hold on to truth, hold on to the

dictates of conscience, hold on to the best yearnings of the heart...'¹⁰

About Hiranand, the noted Brahmo leader Pratap Chandra Mazumdar wrote:

'I came across very few young men who showed the same simplicity, sincerity and affectionateness. Underneath his mildness, however, there was a stern framework of moral purity, which everyone who knew him intimately could not fail to recognize. I never knew him to do or say a dishonourable or impure thing... The absence of conceit and brag... gave a singular charm to all his actions: he was the most unpretentious of our young men.'¹¹

For his part, Hiranand, though still in his teens at their first meeting, had been charmed by Sri Ramakrishna, who appeared to him a joyous, winsome and loving person. He noticed like other Brahmos, but with deeper insight than most, that the Master's whole nature burned day and night with the fire and fervour of a strong faith and feeling—that he moved between rapturous ecstasy and outward awareness, many times during the day, especially during conversation when he spoke of his spiritual experiences, or heard of any striking response to them. The Master had exerted a lasting influence on him—however faint its voice in the beginning—which made him love and revere this guileless child of God. He felt deeply attracted to Sri Ramakrishna, and the attachment grew deeper as days went by, so that his biographer notes that 'in 1883, Hiranand spent almost every Sunday'¹² at Dakshineswar. One of Hiranand's friends, Bhai Baldev Narain, reminisces:

'I commenced to visit the Paramhansa in 1881... Thenceforward, Hiranand and I used to see him very often, and,

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 962

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 551

⁸ Gupta, *op. cit.*, p. 156

⁹ Gidumal *op. cit.*, p. 84

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 85

¹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 1-2

¹² *ibid.*, p. 52

sometimes, even passed nights at Dakhineswar. We used to shampoo him and fan him, and take him to the river and anoint his body there and bathe him. He was very fond of Hiranand.¹³

From July, 1883, several young men—almost all members of Keshab's 'Band of Hope'—had begun meeting together daily for study, mutual high-thinking and discourse, and an austere programme of living. Before long the group numbered seven, of whom one was a Moslem; Hiranand was a moving spirit from the first. Keshab was to them a vital force, and they tried to imitate his virtues in many ways. They used to visit either Keshab or Sri Ramakrishna frequently, and also certain other spiritual leaders.¹⁴ But with Hiranand, his visits to Dakshineswar were prominent as well as frequent. One of his closest friends, Nalu (Pramathalal Sen) wrote:

'It was through Keshab Chandra Sen that Hiranand, like most of us, came to know the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar. I think I am not wide of the truth when I say that, of all the young men in our circle whom the Paramahansa knew, Hiranand was the one whom he loved most deeply. Hiranand used to spend days and nights at the Paramahansa's place, listening to his words of deep wisdom, arguing with him, joking with him, and trying to serve him personally if possible.'¹⁵

But, upon graduating from college with his B.A. degree, family responsibilities drew Hiranand back to Sindh, though after a sad delay for attending his beloved Keshab in the latter's last illness. Both he and his brother Tarachand were by Keshab's bedside till the end; and Navalrai too had

come from far, and stayed as long as he could. Arriving in his native city on 1 February 1884, Hiranand at once was offered encouraging job-possibilities, but soon chose the task of editor of two newspapers, *The Sind Sudhār*, in vernacular, and the *Sindh Times*, in English—both sponsored by the progressive 'Sind Sabha' at Karachi. As if this double responsibility—plus that of his family—were not enough, he soon had organized another small devotional group of friends, for prayer, worship, study, moral development, which met almost daily; and the next year, he began extensive work for a charitable doctor, acting as his compounder, assistant and nurse, purely as a service of love for the needy. Yet it is clear from letters to his Calcutta friends, that Hiranand still pined for Sri Ramakrishna. Before Christmas of 1885, he wrote in such a letter comparing the message contained in Kabir's *sakhis* (devotional songs), with that of Sri Ramakrishna, and concluded: 'Truly we live not to benefit ourselves, but to benefit others. In this alone consists true salvation.'¹⁶ Soon after this, the gloomy news of the protracted illness of Sri Ramakrishna reached him. He wrote one of his Calcutta friends on 14/2/86:

'The news of Paramhansa Ram Krishna's serious illness and threatened dissolution has unsettled me very much. I pray that he may be spared yet. I pray that he may live to do more good among young men. I pray that that unique and wonderful light may not be extinguished so soon... I would run up to Calcutta if I could, in the hope of kissing those holy feet, but I am chained down here.'¹⁷

Hiranand's letters in the next few weeks expressed his mounting concern; and finally he did make that long trip from Karachi. On his last visit recorded in *The*

¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 324-5

¹⁴ *Sadhu Hiranand*, Compiled by C. T. Valecha (1963), p. 26. Cf. also, *Gidumal*, op. cit., pp. 87-91

¹⁵ 'Phoenix of 5th May, 1894'—quoted by *Gidumal*, op. cit., p. 52

¹⁶ *Gidumal*, op. cit., p. 192

¹⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 194-5

Gospel,¹⁸ while stroking the Master's feet, Hiranand sweetly 'consoled' him about his illness and—though the Master urged him to stay longer with him—regretfully told that he had to leave for Sindh two days later, and would come that morning to say farewell. After his departure, the Master told 'M' of Hiranand's earnest desire to take him (Sri Ramakrishna) to Sindh with him!

Just a few months after his return to Karachi, came the sad news of Sri Ramakrishna's death. After this, Hiranand himself lived less than seven years—till July of 1893; but he left a glorious work behind him. His long-cherished interest in medical service bore increasing fruit: he continued spare-time studies until, despite his aversion to 'reputation' (and the expense of formal medical degrees, for one whose charities kept him poor) he became

highly regarded in this field. Yet as late as 1892, in a terrible outburst of cholera in Hyderabad, he worked day and night, as attendant, nurse and doctor as long as his strength held out. He had given up his Editorships in 1887; but his heart was drawn to all who suffered, and hence he was soon engaged in educational work for women (classes at a newly-founded Hospital, plus much help to his brother Navalrai and other Brahmans in this work) and he soon became head of a boys' School, which grew rapidly under his leadership. Though he had no special interest in politics, his sterling character and personal magnetism naturally brought him into many 'Reform' movements, with notable results therefrom. Yet in this whirlwind of activity, he found time to be a good husband and father for his family. Thus his life stands as a testament to the indelible influence of Sri Ramakrishna, whose teachings and personal memories he cherished always.

¹⁸ pp. 962-4 (date was April 23, 1886)

THE ABSOLUTE IN SRI AUROBINDO

S. P. SANDANASWAMY, S. J.

India is proud to have had in the recent past, Sri Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950) as one of the glorious sons of the soil, and the memory of this seer is fresh in many veteran hearts. As a zealous nationalist, Sri Aurobindo played an active role in politics for four years in pre-independence India. Having been suspected of a bombing plot (1908-09), he was imprisoned, and during this retreat through a remarkable inner experience, he changed dramatically into a spiritual seeker. Thereafter, his sole aim was to realize, and also spread, the universal truths of Hinduism. Like many early

Vedāntins, he experienced and interpreted the Vedas in his own way. Here we shall attempt to study Sri Aurobindo primarily as regards his concept of the Absolute.

PHILOSOPHY THE BASIS

Spiritual ascent generally has philosophy as its background. The quest after truth and reality has led the Indian seers as well as mystics everywhere, to break the bonds and transcend the boundaries of the physical existence. Some thinkers, however, remain rigidly confined to sensory evidence—in the Indian scene these are the materia-

lists or Cārvākas. But the search for reality—that is, ontology—cannot be complete unless one comes to consider the Reality of realities; and thus religion is dependent on, and at least tacitly presupposes, metaphysics. On the one hand, sense-evidence—often complacently termed ‘self-evidence’—has been taken as the sole authority on reality: consequently consciousness and God are considered unknowable and unreal. On the other hand, the cycles of birth, death and change have led some to affirm the unreality of appearances, and conclude that pure spirit is the sole reality behind. These are but two extremes. If our physical existence is an illusion (or *māyā*), and if what matters is spirit alone, then our mind and consciousness which have their basis in the body, can never comprehend the meaning of that spirit. On the contrary, if everything is explained by matter, our life loses its moral and religious significance. Sri Aurobindo aims at the role of a modern philosopher of reconciliation, bringing together matter and spirit, the realities of one and many.

POSITING THE ABSOLUTE

To quote a basic statement of Sri Aurobindo's, ‘...the need of positing an Infinite ... is imperatively demanded by our mind...’¹ It is not only that the mind, he insists, *can* know the existence of an Absolute or Brahman, but that it *must* know it. Man, as he is, is not sufficient unto himself. He is keenly conscious of his relativity and infinitesimality: conscious that he is not ‘the Eternal and the All’. He cannot help seeing that ‘by himself he cannot be the explanation of the cosmos’.² In

short, man is an insufficient explanation of himself or of the world. From such an awareness, Aurobindo concludes that ‘something greater than ourselves, greater than the cosmos which we live in, the supreme reality of that transcendent Being which we call God, something without which all that we see or are conscious of as existing, could not have been, could not for a moment remain in existence’ exists.³ This is similar to St. Thomas Aquinas's reasoning in proof of the existence of God through contingency of the world.

This rational argument of Sri Aurobindo's for the existence of Brahman, follows from the nature of the human mind. According to him, ‘Mind is not a faculty of knowledge... It is a faculty for the seeking of knowledge ... it is that which does not know, which tries to know and never knows except as in a glass darkly’.⁴ This incapacity results from the dependent nature of human knowledge through the medium of the senses and circumstances, and from the mind's essential limitations and imperfections, being encased within the body. Analysis and questioning, division and separation, are its innate faculties. Our mind never succeeds in getting ‘the inner or intimate touch of the thing itself’,⁵ thus there remains no certainty whatsoever about the mind's grasp of the Absolute.

Though the starting-point of mind is thus a sort of ignorance, Aurobindo hastens to add, one nevertheless cannot deny to it the minimum that is its natural due. ‘Mind has a power also for truth ... its goal is always knowledge: there is in it an impulse for truth-seeking, a power ... of truth-finding and truth-creation.’⁶

¹ Sri Aurobindo: *The Life Divine* (Arya Publishing House, Calcutta), Vol. II (1940), Part I, p. 4

² *ibid.*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 600

³ *ibid.*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 124

⁴ *The Life Divine*, Vol. I (1939), Part I, p. 178

⁵ *ibid.*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 355

⁶ *ibid.*, Vol. II, Part I, 307

WAYS OF KNOWING

Mind comes to know, says Aurobindo, 'by analysis and division ... and assemblage'; and our mental knowledge is separative, objective and superficial, and is 'incomplete and relative'—or as St. Thomas earlier put it, '*per modum compositionis et divisionis*'. But Aurobindo further adds that our mental knowledge, being partial, is very largely 'a falsifying one'.⁷ By this he seems to mean that man cannot, by the light of reason alone, know the Absolute or Brahman in its true reality. But to know the Absolute is the transcendent need of man's reason and the very urge of his nature. He is not satisfied with knowing the relative realities; he wants to arrive at the knowledge of the Absolute. But he just succeeds in catching 'some reflected impression of the Truth',⁸ some 'bright or shadowy photographs or films of a distant Reality'. The more he tries to grasp the Absolute the more he realizes that it 'escapes the grasp of our thought and speech'. The Christian idea voiced in the council of Florence (A.D. 1414) was basically the same, 'What we do not know of God is infinitely more than what we do know concerning Him.'

The mind, however, does not stop with the process of analysis in trying to know the Absolute. Over and above this, it begins to follow the Upaniṣadic method of '*neti neti*' ('not this, not this'). Accordingly it takes up an apparently unending series of concepts or experiences, tries to empty them almost completely of their limited contents, and excludes from the conception of the eternal Reality 'all that offers itself as limitable by the senses, the heart and the understanding'.⁹ This way of 'supreme

negation' may perhaps succeed a little in constructing a mental concept of the Absolute. But the intrinsic character (*svarūpa*) of the Absolute, being beyond thought, falls outside the mind's reach. All that the mind realizes about the Absolute is that it is an 'unimaginable being' wholly incomprehensible to all logical thinking, 'indefinable and ineffable by mental thought and language';¹⁰ it is simply 'inconceivable by finite and defining mind', 'the unknowable reality' (Kant). It is interesting to observe that Aurobindo hesitates even to call Brahman the One. Long back, Plotinus seems to have used the word 'one' with reservations. This was for two reasons: (a) the Greeks had no symbol for zero, and (b) the word 'one' denied any plurality. In any case, Aurobindo still uses 'one', not as opposed to plurality, but rather as uniquely super-transcendent, and essentially exceeding all beings.¹¹

Aurobindo's insistence on the limited capacity of the mind and the unknowability of Brahman, does not mean that he joins hands with the traditional agnostics. He clarifies his stand by distinguishing the Vedāntic agnosticism, with which he agrees, from the Victorian agnosticism:

'...the only difference is that the Vedantin says It (the Absolute) is unknowable by the mind and inexpressible by speech, but still attainable by something deeper or higher than the mental perception... The Victorian agnostic would cancel this qualification; he would pronounce for the doubtful existence and, if existent, for the absolute unknowableness of this unknowable'.¹²

⁷ *ibid.*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 662

⁸ *ibid.*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 955

⁹ Sri Aurobindo: *Essays on the Gita* (Sri Aurobindo Ashrama Press, Pondicherry, 1959), Series II: Part I, p. 455

¹⁰ *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 555

¹¹ *vide ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 193

¹² Sri Aurobindo: *The Riddle of This World* (Sri Aurobindo Ashrama, Pondicherry, 1933), p. 23—as quoted by Paul S. Colaco, S. J., in his *The Absolute in the Philosophy of Aurobindo Ghose* (Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1947), p. 100

Aurobindo's unknowable is really the Unknown and not the absolutely unknowable. He adds: '... if not knowable by thought It is attainable by a supreme effort of consciousness'.¹³ Our consciousness can rise to a state which he calls 'intuition', above the ordinary mental state.

INTUITION

Explaining intuition, he takes up the issue of grades of consciousness, and asserts, 'If we refuse to recognize a series of ascending terms between spirit and matter, the two must appear as irreconcilable opponents bound together, in an unhappy wedlock, and their divorce the one reasonable solution'.¹⁴ He distinguishes between inorganic matter and organic things. The human organism, with its unique attribute of self-consciousness, stands highest. The stages from matter to life and animal consciousness are sub-conscious and the stage of human life is conscious. Humanity, however, is not the apex of natural evolution. Aurobindo further speculates and concludes that consciousness will in the course of time evolve into an immutable stage of superconscious or 'Supermind'.

Coming to his ideas on intuition as a means of knowing Brahman, Aurobindo says that 'intuition' does not refer to any sudden flash of the intellect about the inner reality of being, as usually thought. Rather it is a consciousness that comes to find a relation to the world of realities, becomes aware of an immediate contact of one's existence with Existence, experiences an inner meeting of itself (subject) with the consciousness of the Absolute. It is the realization (of Brahman) which is the climax of the intuitive experience of the

mind—or the Supermind-Consciousness. It is attained by means of the knowledge of a higher identity, an identity with the very essence of Brahman. This 'knowledge-by-identity', which is very much different from empirical mental knowledge, Aurobindo considers the summit of intuition and insists that it is the only means that gives us a real and infallible 'knowledge' about Brahman.

THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

The knowledge of Brahman obtained thus through intuition is, according to Sri Aurobindo, not a formless blank nor a vacant infinite, *not even a pure self-existence*,¹⁵ but 'It is a zero which is All', a zero 'packed with Force, teeming with power of existence, full of actual or potential contents'. It is both *nirguṇa* (without attributes) and *saguṇa* (with attributes).¹⁶ In explaining the *saguṇa* aspect of Brahman, Aurobindo enters into the metaphysical problem of the one and the many. The *saguṇa* aspect implies that all things, possibles included, 'have their fundamental truth in the supreme Existence'.¹⁷ While the simplicity or oneness of Brahman is upheld, the multiplicity in Brahman is also accepted. Śāṅkara has the division of empirical and transcendental planes, but implying the ultimate unreality of the many. But Aurobindo cannot accept this stand. He affirms that evolutionary progress in consciousness leading to the Supermind is a reality.

According to Aurobindo the intuitive knowledge of Brahman necessarily includes the aspects of both the one and the many—the two sides of the same coin. Just as the One is real in God, so too the many are real in God. The reality of the many

¹³ *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, p. 18

¹⁴ *Arya*: 1914, p. 6—as quoted by Adhar Chandra Das in his *Sri Aurobindo and the Future of Mankind* (University of Calcutta, 1934), p. 30

¹⁵ *vide The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 99; Part II, p. 522

¹⁶ *vide ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 127

¹⁷ *ibid.*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 37

is subservient to that of the one, for 'the One is the fundamental truth of existence, the many exist by the One'.¹⁸ This part of the intuition is however only the first phase, which reveals 'a pluralistic unity' only, and not the ultimate unity as postulated by the Vedas. But when the intuitive mind touches the luminous transcendence of the divine, there disappear all distinctions, with the result that the aspects of *saguna* and *nirguna*, many and one, are fused completely. 'Somewhere behind them (one-many realities) there must be a still greater Transcendence which originates them or upholds them in its supreme Eternity'.¹⁹ This transcendental Brahman is in no way 'plural nor a sum of things', but 'one that is many'. It is the realization that Brahman is immanent in the many, 'all in God and God in all'.²⁰

This fusion of one-and-many aspects is held to be the transcendental nature of Brahman, and its realization has been reached through intuition or knowledge-by-identity. It is a spiritual knowledge of the highest order, or *parāvidyā*, attainable only by *ṛṣis* (seers). They have indicated their experience of Brahman in the one supreme expression *saccidānanda*, comprising the three terms existence (*sat*) consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*). This is the universally accepted affirmation of the Vedānta, though the terms have been interpreted differently by different Vedāntins. Aurobindo says of it: 'Reality in its nature is an eternal Existence, Consciousness, Delight of Existence'.²¹ The human mind may perhaps come to 'understand' the *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda* of Brahman in a

shadowy manner through speculation. But it is in an intuitive experience alone, that they are to be realized and experienced as real aspects of Brahman. This knowledge-by-identity *ipso facto* includes realization of the identity of these three aspects, and the affirmation that the triune principle of *saccidānanda* does not imply any division in Brahman—that 'These are three terms, but they are really one'.

CREATION

Further reflection on *saccidānanda* as a pure unity takes Sri Aurobindo to the issue of creation—and to the denial of it. First he rules out the material 'explanations': creation by chance and creation by mechanical force. The world is of fixed order and law, and chance has no place in creation. 'The emergence of consciousness out of the unconscious' is an impossibility, and so mechanical necessity cannot explain creation. What about direct creation by the Absolute, or 'fiat of the creator'? This is denied on account of 'the arbitrary nature of the creation, the incomprehensibility of its purpose, the crude meaninglessness of its law of unnecessary ignorance, strife and suffering...' The creator could well have had better thoughts than this unhappy and unintelligible universe. Neither can Aurobindo accept the non-monistic Vedāntins (Rāmānuja and Vallabha) position that *saccidānanda* could itself be the principle of creation. It is a pure unit without any trace of differentiation. The transcendental Brahman cannot become divided consciousness or originate division and differentiation as it exists in the world today. He however tries to explain creation by saying that it is the One which has really *become* the many in timeless, spaceless eternity and that what we understand by the created world is 'only an outward form of the becoming of the spirit'.

The Absolute in its triune status (*sacci-*

¹⁸ *ibid.*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 97

¹⁹ *ibid.*, Vol. II, Part I, p. 25

²⁰ Roque Ferriols, S. J.: *The Psychic Entity in Aurobindo's The Life Divine* (Ateneo De Manila University—U. S. T. Press, the Philippines, 1966), p. 111 ff.

²¹ *The Life Divine*, Vol. II, Part II, p. 592; cf. Vol. II, Part I, p. 416

dānanda), 'preceding' manifestation, remains the infinite unity, its fundamental character being supreme equality, or *samam brahma* which is a state of perfect equilibrium. 'It is a stilled sea of self-identity, a vast limitless or pure consciousness brooding in trance and immobility.' But buried within this equilibrium there lies an innate urge for activity or manifestation. This inherent force, according to Aurobindo, brings out nuclei of dynamism resulting in a pattern, at least discernible by seers, of harmonious multiplicity.²² Thus in Brahman, there is not only the aspect of indivisible *saccidānanda* but also a character which acts (becomes) to produce the many. This latter is not, of course, of the nature of human mind. Human mind, to Aurobindo, is essentially ignorant; but it has evolved out of Supermind which is 'an original consciousness which contains and views both [finite and infinite] at the same time and is intimately conscious of all the relations of the one with the other'.²³ In this aspect of Supermind, Brahman or *Īśvara* becomes the creator of the universe, the One becoming visible in time and space with form and substance.

It seems that Aurobindo considered the 'Supermind' as a development over Śaṅkara's view on creation. Śaṅkara in undertaking to explain the world posited a lower Brahman, or *Īśvara*—the controller of *māyā*—as creating the empirical and illusory universe. He holds however that the higher Brahman is the only Reality underlying the creatures and objects. Accepting the same dual aspect, Aurobindo goes on

to identify both the aspects of unity and diversity in the same Brahman, on the same plane. In his use of the terms, *saccidānanda* emphasizes the quiescent aspect of Brahman, and the Supermind, the dynamic aspect—both referring to the same reality. 'To say that all things proceed from divine consciousness, is to say that the Absolute does not contain them in their physical reality. The original truth of things alone—and not the derivations—exists in the Absolute. One can say that in the supreme Light, darkness exists as a possibility. Matter exists in the absolute consciousness not as matter but in its fundamental substratum. Hence manifestation means a kind of shift in the absolute consciousness to a particular mode of existence or action. 'God has made himself the world and its creatures, the transcendental has become the material cosmos true.' In becoming many, however, the One remains the same supreme unity.

MAN IN RELATION TO GOD

The supreme reality, Sri Aurobindo affirms, is the Lord, in and through whom the universe lives, moves, and has its being. Man's home is in God, or rather *is* God. The ascent to union in mind, soul and body with the Lord of action is effected through Yoga by a transformation and change of the human nature. In Yoga one has completely to surrender his intellect, will and aspirations. Simultaneously one has to 'reject the lower nature, deliver his consciousness from it by self-rising to freedom in the higher nature'. This double movement enables the yogin consciously to rise and unite himself with the Higher Reality. Sri Aurobindo calls this process *Pūrṇa Yoga* (integral yoga).

EVALUATION

Aurobindo's whole concept of the Absolute finds strength in the 'becoming'

²² *vide* A. C. Das, *op. cit.*, p. 34 ff. Despite the 'incomprehensibility' and apparent 'meaninglessness' noted in the preceding paragraph of the text, the creation is an eternal manifestation of the Absolute and has an inherent tendency towards the Absolute, as seen explicitly in man.

²³ *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, p. 249

aspect which he would integrate with the aspect of being. It is in the movement or dynamic aspect that he reconciles the realities of the one and the many. He emphasizes that the Absolute has *become* the beings of the world. Such an insistence on the *becoming* aspect would seem to make the Absolute composed and imperfect. Again, for Aurobindo the fact of being and the fact of becoming are both real. God and creatures have one common suppositum. But this is simply a form of pantheism. If the many already exist in some way in Brahman, then creation loses its meaning and explanation. In reconciling Being and Becoming in the Absolute, perhaps he should have used the aspect of potency²⁴ which has been very well brought out by Aristotle and St. Thomas. The latter describes creation as a donation of being to nothingness by the free will of God. This is what is meant by *ex nihilo sui et subjecti*. This reconciles reasonably the transcendence of God with the contingency of the world.

Aurobindo maintains that the ordinary human mind cannot attain knowledge of an absolute truth and therefore is not a faculty of true knowledge. He concludes that we cannot know the nature of God. But if the nature of the mind, as he himself accepts elsewhere, is to know, it would seem it should be able to know without error, and should be able to reach objective truth in some way. The Absolute,

which is the highest truth or being, should come into the scope of this knowledge. Of course, the Absolute cannot be 'mastered' by human minds, cannot be completely 'accounted for', conceptualized and brought to expression in human categories. But the analogical method of knowledge is certainly available for the mind, to approach the Absolute. Indeed, Aurobindo's affirmations of the intuitive knowledge of Brahman as pure being, perfect being, and first cause, can—we believe—be known without any mystical experience. We can go a long way with him, even in the ordinary capacity of our minds.

One finds in the thinking of Aurobindo a deep search for and insight into the Reality of the Absolute. But he does not say all that could be said about the Absolute, nor is it all to be accepted unquestioningly. One friendly critic of Aurobindo has this to say: 'Aurobindo is a powerful and original thinker and at times even an inspired seer. But his explanation of God and the world does not answer to the bleak reality of life and cannot satisfy the human craving for real truth.'²⁵ Aurobindo has deeply queried the concept of Reality and has tried to explain the same. But the positing of the intuitive experience leads one to conclude that his religious thinking is an intellectualized spirituality, although personally he was also a practical mystic. His search does remain a standing witness to man's thirst for what is beyond.

'The animal is satisfied with a modicum of necessity; the gods are content with their splendours. But man cannot rest permanently until he reaches some highest good. He is the greatest of living beings because he is the most

²⁴ 'Potency' means capacity of a thing or being to become or to receive some other new perfection. Aristotle used it as a technical term to explain 'change' in a being from one mode to another, with some common basic element that exists in both the modes, thus explaining continuity amidst change. St. Thomas Aquinas uses this term further in its intrinsic meaning, viz., that all beings in potency are finite beings, as against God, who alone has no potency. Even today, the concept of potency remains indispensable in explaining the evolving universe.

²⁵ Quoted by Colaco (op. cit., p. 111), from a 'Mr. Shahani', writing in the *Indian Art and Letters* (Royal India Society, London, 1944), p. 35. The passage was also reprinted in *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annuals*.

discontented, because he feels most the pressure of limitations. He alone, perhaps, is capable of being seized by the

divine frenzy for a remote ideal.²⁶

²⁶ *The Life Divine*, Vol. I, pp. 70-1

SERMONETTES AT ST. MORITZ—IX

SWAMI YATISWARANANDA

This is an important law in spiritual life: what we regard as reality draws our whole being. If we take the world to be the only reality, then it will have powerful effects on us. It will draw our senses and mind outward. But if we take the inner world to be more real, we will find it easier to turn our minds within.

It is therefore most essential for us to have a clear conception of what Reality is. Our soul must be properly oriented to Reality. We must be clear about our relationship to Reality. For, all our actions and thoughts are controlled by that conception and relationship.

*

Reasoning is necessary in the early stages. Logic is essential to bring order into our confused minds. But we should learn to go beyond reasoning. This is achieved through concentration and meditation. We should at first practise meditation at regular intervals. The higher mood generated during meditation should be maintained at other times. At least a small light should be kept burning in the sanctuary of the heart always.

*

March on, ever higher. You do not know where the journey will end. Remember the parable of Sri Ramakrishna about the wood-cutter. A holy man asked a wood-cutter to go forward. Leaving the ordinary forests behind, the wood-cutter went forward and came across a sandalwood forest. Proceeding still further he

came across mines of silver, gold, and finally of diamonds.

Never stop! Stop not till the goal is reached. The goal is to realize the Infinite.

*

The three primary disciplines are: moral culture, prayer, and meditation.

Moral culture is most important. It is the very foundation of spiritual life. Always take proper precautions before you embark on spiritual life. See that you are not touched by evil. We should know how strong we are. We may temporarily run away but, sooner or later, we should be able to come back and face all forms of evil. At first this may create some complexes in us. But some of these complexes help us to overcome other worse complexes. Sometimes we may have to make use of a lesser evil to overcome greater evils.

Then comes prayer. Pray intensely to the Divine for guidance. It will come. Our prayers are finally answered—though maybe not in the way we want them. But prayer is a great help in removing our inner obstacles. It breaks down the resistance of the ego. We get a new power from the Divine.

Then comes meditation. Meditate with a calm and free mind. Meditation can be done by the *bhakta* (devotee) as well as by the *jñānī* (aspirant of the path of wisdom). There are several types of meditation. In fact meditation is a common and essential step in all forms of spiritual

discipline. Meditation acts like an altimeter. It tells us whether we are going up or down.

Spiritual practice is somewhat like skating. The proud fall. Never think you are too great or too safe.

*

Let us think we are sparks of the Divine. We may also liken ourselves to a combination of cloud and light. If we are egoistic, we are the clouds. If we are in touch with the Divine, we are the light.

*

Don't lose yourself completely in material objects. If you are not able to detach yourselves wholly from them see that at least your soul, your inner being, is un-

affected by them.

There is a way of associating with people. When you have to deal with bad people, create a strong inner mental barrier as a shield to protect your soul. Never give yourselves away to others. Guard your soul as a sacred treasure.

Try to establish contact with others through the Divine. This is the safest method. But then, you must have a clear conception of the transcendental Reality and should have got at least some glimpses of it through intense practice.

*

Just as we have a duty to the world we have a duty towards the Divine. And that is to keep the inner shrine pure and serene.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

IN THIS NUMBER

IN THIS NUMBER

Reminiscences are taken from: 'M': *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (Tr. by Swami Nikhilananda, Pub. by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 1947); and Swami Saradananda: *Sri Ramakrishna The Great Master* (Madras, 1970). References: *Gospel*: No. 1, p. 873; No. 2, pp. 494-5; No. 3, p. 631; No. 4, p. 108; No. 6, pp. 206-7; No. 7, p. 210. *Great Master*: No. 5, pp. 550-1.

The words quoted in 'Onward For Ever!' are from *The Complete Works*, Vol. VII (1958), p. 211.

A religious revival invariably seems to generate alongside of itself a morbid interest in miraculous and occult phenomena. This fact is greatly in evidence at the present time, both in and outside India. Undoubtedly, a religious revival is always a

welcome development, but not so the stimulation of interest in the miraculous. Though vast sections of common humanity are always mad after miracles and the worldly gains to be made by them—acquisition of health, wealth, progeny, success, influence, etc.—it is surprising that even our modern educated, cultured and rational elite—and more especially the spiritual aspirant—should go after these so-called supernatural phenomena, and, what is still more surprising, mistake them for spirituality or godliness. The Editorial this month is a discussion on this theme, endeavouring to disentangle spirituality from the grip of miracles and occult phenomena.

'Resignation to God', the Essay on Applied Religion by Swami Budhananda, is concluded from our last issue. Resignation to God is not losing everything to gain nothing. In fact it is the opposite of

this. Our worldly individuality is a cocoon of nothingness. By determinedly and persistently giving it up, for God, we gain the real individuality, the Infinity of God—by attaining which nothing else remains to be attained. Those who so attain, not only reach the highest fulfilment of their own lives, but also become harbours of security and tranquillity for others tossed about by the tempests of worldly misery. The Swami very effectively brings out this aspect of resignation to God, along with many other illuminating facets.

‘Watch a man do his most common actions;’ says Swami Vivekananda in his *Karma-Yoga*, ‘those are indeed the things which will tell you the real character of a great man.’ This is equally true of the character of a ‘common’ man. And it is character—that wonderful blend of honesty, steadfastness, courage, and other-regard—which is the hall-mark of greatness. When such greatness manifests in a so-called common person, poor and humble, he becomes a particularly inspiring example for his fellowmen to emulate. ‘My God the Poor’, by Explorer, brings to our column the profile of a great ‘common’ man.

For readers of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Hirananda is a familiar name. The *Gospel* portrays a touching scene in Sri Ramakrishna’s sick-room at Cossipore Garden-house, where Hirananda is seen by the Master’s bedside, among Narendra and other devotees. A lively dialogue between Hirananda and Narendra ensues, which the Master enjoys immensely, and in which occasionally he participates. It was the deep spiritual rapport between Sri Rama-

krishna and Hirananda that had drawn the latter from Sindh, over 2,000 miles away, to the Master’s bedside. Excepting the few other details that M’s *Gospel* gives, the students of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature perhaps know very little about Hirananda. This lacuna is being greatly remedied by Swami Prabhananda in ‘Sri Ramakrishna and Hiranand Shaukiram Advani’, which is a very informative and interesting article.

Sri Aurobindo’s contribution to contemporary Indian philosophic thought is immense. A practical mystic, he not only went deep into the inner realm of the spirit but also propounded a new school of thought and set in motion a powerful spiritual movement. Rooted firmly in the Vedic ideas and ideals, he yet assimilated into his system later developments in Hindu philosophic thought as well as scientific ideas from the West. Though his philosophic terminology has familiar Hindu and Western terms, still he uses these terms with amplified and often altered connotations. His concept of the Absolute, for instance, differs as much from that of the Upanishadic seers’ as from that of the Western philosophers’. ‘The Absolute in Sri Aurobindo’, by S. P. Sandanaswamy, S.J., is a scholarly writing on this rather abstruse theme. Writing with perception and erudition, the author has presented his valuable study in a relatively brief compass.

S. P. Sandanaswamy of the Society of Jesus, is an Economics graduate of Madras University, and took his B. Ph. in Kodaikanal, South India. It was at Kodaikanal that he became especially interested in the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo.

REVIEWS AND NOTICES

TIBETAN AND HIMALAYAN WOOD-BLOCK PRINTS: INTRODUCTION AND CAPTIONS BY DOUGLAS WEINER, Published by Dover Publications, Inc., 180 Varick St., New York, N.Y., 10014, U.S.A., 1974, pp. 75, Price not stated.

The editor of this rather spectacular book has shown praiseworthy endeavour to give publicity to the Tibetan artistic mind in the field of graphic art. The way in which the linear representations of gods and goddesses, as well as important human beings with their respective moods and expressions, have emerged in this book, is very impressive from the artistic standpoint. In fact, one may well find it difficult to ascertain whether these are brush-works or the woodblock prints, which can rarely approach this wealth of detail and lifelikeness. These mythical deities, with their typical poses and postures, will no doubt appeal to the artistic sense of most readers, if not all.

Though the compiler has tried to give interpretative notes on each of the figures, somewhat more elaboration would have helped to heighten the attraction as the readers' conception of these theological representations.

One should further note that the cover-design—which is highlighted again on the back cover—although doubtless a colourful specimen with fine layout, would much better have been replaced by another, in keeping with the high tone of the rest of the work. Since the book deals mainly with the adorable deities of the Tibetan people, it is to say the least misleading to find the covers suggesting it to be a book on erotic art.

VISHWARANJAN CHAKRAVARTY

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA—THE MILITANT HINDU MONK: BY G. M. JAGTIANI, Published by The Shooting Star, D/22 Self-Help Housing Soc., St. Francis Rd., Vile Parle (West) Bombay, 400056, (? 1974), pp. 101, Price Rs. 4/-

This booklet is the result of some sincere devotion and enthusiasm on the part of a student of Vivekananda. In spite of its high-flown language, and the author's personal reflections here and there, this booklet is indeed suitable for the common man, the common readers—providing as it does a good acquaintance with the powerful and inspiring message of Swami Vivekananda.

Nevertheless, we have to note that the price of this booklet seems to be a little high, and that there are many printing mistakes as well as

omissions, in the production, which we trust will be corrected in the next edition.

SWAMI BHAVAHARANANDA

REFLECTIONS ON THE TEACHINGS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA: BY R. C. ROY, Published by the Author, from 'Sarat-Tara', 59 Prafulla Chandra Ave., Calcutta-30, pp. vi+253, Price Rs. 10/-

A concise study of the teachings of the saint of Dakshineswar. After giving in the introduction a survey of the background of the conditions—social and religious—that called forth the effluence of spiritual Light that was Sri Ramakrishna, the author analyses his teachings under the heads of: God, Faith, Love, Knowledge, Work, God and His World, The World and the Worldly, Guru, Incarnation, Spiritual Practice, As Many Faiths, So Many Paths, and (Conclusion) Religion in the Age of Reason. He cites significant parables and similes adopted by the Master to drive home his message: the unity of religions, the world as the workshop of the Divine Sakti, need of surrender of the human will to the Divine Will, movements of life as means for elevating oneself Godward. Sri Ramakrishna's life was a shining model for all to follow. In Tagore's words, addressed to Sri Ramakrishna, 'Countless streams of sadhana flowing from countless God-seekers of the past, have found their confluence in thy meditation.' And more. Ramakrishna opened new horizons of hope and faith for humanity, and today there is hardly any spiritual movement in the world that is not influenced, directly or indirectly, by the spirit of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

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*Sri Aurobindo Ashrama
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BOOKS RECEIVED

YOGA FOR BEGINNERS: BY SWAMI GNANESWARANANDA, Published by Vivekananda Vedanta Society, 5423 So. Hyde Park Blvd., Chicago, Illinois 60615, 1975, pp. 200+ix, Price \$ 4.95.

TEXTBOOK OF YOGA: BY GEORG FEUERSTEIN, Published by Rider & Co., 3 Fitzroy Sq., London, W-1, 1975, pp. xiv+178, Price £ 4.25.

SANSKRIT

MULAVIDYA-BHASHYA-VARTIKA-VIRUDDHA: BY S. VITTHALA-SASTRI, Published by Adhyatma Prakasha Karyalaya, Holenarsipur, S.R., 1975, pp. xxviii+106, Price Rs. 4/-.

NEWS AND REPORTS

CENTRE VEDANTIQUE RAMAKRICHNA— GRETZ, FRANCE

RAMAKRISHNA'S NAME CHANTED IN FRENCH CATHEDRAL

The city of Laon, north of Paris, is noted for its Notre Dame Cathedral, one of the earliest gothic sanctuaries built in France, dating from the twelfth century. During the early autumn of 1975 the city of Laon organized a cultural festival called Medieval Hours, consisting of exhibitions, musical and ballet programmes, lectures, and even a horse riding show, centring in or around the old cathedral.

The month-long series culminated on Sunday afternoon, October 12, with an 'Ecumenical Poem' in the cathedral. This drew a capacity audience of more than a thousand, and was presided over by the Roman Catholic bishop of the region and priests of the church. As the printed programme explained, the idea behind the 'Poem' was to express love for and thankfulness to God, in a fashion 'open to all those who wish to do so, and according to their traditional ways'.

The programme began with a thrilling fanfare of trumpets announcing the presence of Catholic dignitaries, a Moslem priest, the director of the Paris mosque, a Tibetan Buddhist, a Jewish theologian, representatives of Orthodox, Protestant, and Mormon churches, and Swami Ritajananda, leader of the Centre Védantique Ramakrishna at Gretz. The leaders were accompanied by musical groups that were to participate in the programme—that of Gretz being made up of five brahmacharins dressed in white dhoti and chadar, and supplied with harmonium, *tanpura*, and cymbals.

The programme was entirely musical—there were no exhortations—and was indeed a musical poem or cantata accompanied by organ and symphony orchestra. Soloists and musical

groups expressed their worship according to their traditions and in their sacred languages. The Gretz group sang the Sanskrit 'Homage to the Supreme Guru' (*Viswasara Tantra*) and the lively *bhajan* 'Hari Om, Ramakrishna' followed later in the programme by Devendranath Majumdar's 'Hymn to Sri Ramakrishna' in Bengali.

Whereas the atmosphere in the cathedral was cordial and even enthusiastic, the event was not without adverse opinion. A group calling itself the Anti-Reform Catholics handed out leaflets at the door protesting that the idea of ecumenism referred to the reconciliation of all Christians, but should not be extended to welcome into the church on an equal footing 'a rabbi, a Greek Orthodox "pope", Tibetan lamas, Buddhists, and Hinduists'. This protestation was answered by another leaflet, signed by the curé, explaining that no ritual was being performed; the church existed for the purpose of welcoming all who wished to praise God and express man's fundamental brotherhood, and that was what the 'Ecumenical Poem' invited the participants to do.

The two-and-a-half-hour programme ended with all the leaders, groups, and the congregation rising and singing in unison the 'Hymn of Brotherhood' especially composed for the occasion:

In God we are brothers.
May love guide our steps
towards a sublime fraternity
in joy.

Let us go toward the Light;
Let us go together toward the Light.
Hallelujah!

The fervent tones of this song, rising in the lofty nave, recalled the enthusiasm of congregations assembled there long before in the Age of Faith; and perhaps heralded a new age of faith.

The day ended with a spectacular night-time illumination of the cathedral inside and out, and a display of fireworks.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S BIRTHDAY

The birthday of Sri Ramakrishna falls on Wednesday, 3 March 1976.