

# **PRABUDDHA BHARATA** *or AWAKENED INDIA*

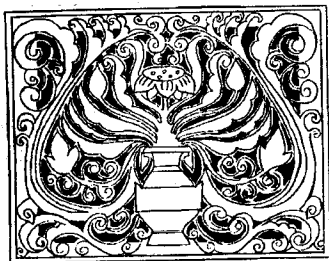


SEPTEMBER  
2003



A Monthly Journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
Started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

VOL. 108  
ISSN 0032-6178



# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

SEPTEMBER 2003

## CONTENTS

Traditional Wisdom..	433	The Kali Temple at Dakshineswar	458
This Month	434	and Sri Ramakrishna	458
<i>Editorial:</i>		<i>Swami Prabhananda</i>	
Sacrifice as a Spiritual Discipline	435	Patanjali's Yoga Sutras – An	464
<i>Prabuddha Bharata</i> –100 Years Ago	439	Exposition	464
Reflections on the <i>Bhagavadgita</i>	440	<i>Swami Premeshananda</i>	
<i>Swami Atulananda</i>		Glimpses of Holy Lives	469
Why Celibacy?–A Hindu Perspective	446	Kaṭha Rudra Upaniṣad	472
<i>Swami Tyagananda</i>		<i>Swami Atmapriyananda</i>	
<b>They Lived With God:</b>		<b>Review Article</b>	
Bhavanath Chattopadhyay	452	A Heart Poured Out: A Story of	473
<i>Swami Chetanananda</i>		Swami Ashokananda	473
		<i>William Page</i>	
		Reviews	476
		Reports	479

Visit us at: [www.advaitaonline.com](http://www.advaitaonline.com) for a free internet edition

### Editorial Office:

Prabuddha Bharata

Advaita Ashrama

P.O. Mayavati, Via. Lohaghat

Dt. Champawat 262 524, Uttaranchal

E-mail: [awakened@rediffmail.com](mailto:awakened@rediffmail.com)

### Publication Office:

Advaita Ashrama

5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014

Ph: 91•33•22440898 / 22452383 / 22164000

Fax: 22450050

E-mail: [pb@advaitaonline.com](mailto:pb@advaitaonline.com)

Cover: Temples in Dakshineswar seen from the Ganga; the divine site of the first 'awakening'!

उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत ।

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!

Vol. 108

SEPTEMBER 2003

No. 9

## ⇒ Traditional Wisdom ⇐

### DISCRIMINATION

मनो नाम महाव्याघ्रो विषयारण्यभूमिषु ।  
चरत्यत्र न गच्छन्तु साधवो ये मुमुक्षवः ॥

In the forest of sense objects prowls a large tiger called the mind. Let those good ones with a longing for liberation never visit there. (*Vivekachudamani*, 176)

Discrimination is the reasoning by which one knows that God alone is real and all else is unreal. Real means eternal, and unreal means impermanent. He who has acquired discrimination knows that God is the only Substance and all else is non-existent. With the awakening of this spirit of discrimination a man wants to know God. On the contrary, if a man loves the unreal—such things as creature comforts, name, fame and wealth—then he doesn't want to know God, who is of the very nature of Reality. Through discrimination between the Real and the unreal one seeks to know God. (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 327)

The misery that we suffer comes from ignorance, from non-discrimination between the real and the unreal. We all take the bad for the good, the dream for the reality. Soul is the only reality, and we have forgotten it. Body is an unreal dream, and we think we are all bodies. This non-discrimination is the cause of misery. It is caused by ignorance. When discrimination comes, it brings strength, and then alone can we avoid all these various ideas of body, heavens, and gods. (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1.287)

Worldly people will advise you to follow that which they have understood as good. You are to discriminate and find the path that is good for you, and that will lead you to your goal. The best path is that trodden by men of God. (Swami Premananda)

---

---

## ∞ This Month ∞

**Sacrifice as a Spiritual Discipline**, this month's editorial, discusses various aspects of sacrifice and its role as a tool for inner growth.

**Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago** features a conversation between a mother and her son.

In the fourth instalment of his **Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*** Swami Atulanandaji comments on verses 20 to 22 of the seventh chapter of the *Gita*, emphasizing that 'no matter who the devotee is or whatever god or image he worships, as long as he is sincere in his devotion, as long as he has faith in his god, the Lord will help him' by strengthening his faith.

In his illuminating article **Why Celibacy?—A Hindu Perspective** Swami Tyaganandaji discusses threadbare this important and delicate issue: what celibacy really means, its value and benefits, and aids to its practice. The article is based on the author's paper presented in Boston College on 25 March 2003 at their initiative titled 'The Church in the Twenty-first Century'. The general theme was 'Sexuality in the Christian Tradition'. This was the third event in the series and the focus was on the ideal of celibacy. Besides the author, the panellists were Fr Howard Gray, SJ (John Carroll University) and Geshe Tsetan (a Tibetan Buddhist Monk, Siddhartha School Project). A monk of the Ramakrishna Order and a former editor of *Vedanta Kesari*, an English journal of the Ramakrishna Order, the author heads the Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston.

**Bhavanath Chattopadhyay** by Swami Chetananandaji is the second new biography

to appear in the revised edition of the author's acclaimed work, *They Lived with God*. A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, the author is head of the Vedanta Society of St Louis.

**The Kali Temple at Dakshineswar and Sri Ramakrishna** by Swami Prabhanandaji is the first part of his research work on the subject. Dakshineswar in the early 1880s, how Rani Rasmani was instrumental in building the Kali temple there, details of the temple land, and Sri Ramakrishna's arrival there—these are discussed this month with the author's characteristic flair for detail. Head of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, he is a trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Ramakrishna Mission. He has to his credit a number of books and articles, both in English and Bengali.

**Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*—An Exposition** by Swami Premeshanandaji features the author's comments on sutras 1 to 20 of the first chapter, 'Samādhi Pāda'. The English translation of the original Bengali notes is by Sri Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee, a former Professor of Statistics from Calcutta University.

**Glimpses of Holy Lives** features this month some inspiring incidents from the life of Tirunilakantha Nayanar, one of the sixty-three Tamil Shaiva saints called Nayanmars.

**Kaṭha Rudra Upaniṣad** is the sixth and final instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmयोगin's commentary.

---

---

# Sacrifice as a Spiritual Discipline

## EDITORIAL

In the July 2003 editorial, 'We, God and the Universe', we saw that the macrocosm (God) and the microcosm (we) are under dynamic equilibrium at different levels: the gross, the subtle and the causal. The divinity behind the individual's body and mind is called Atman, and that behind the universe and the cosmic mind, Brahman. And ultimately, Atman and Brahman are identical according to the famous Upanishadic equation '*Ayam ātmā brahma*, This Atman is Brahman.'<sup>1</sup> Realization of this identity is the goal of life, goal of religion.

With this background we shall examine an important verse in the *Bhagavadgita*: 'The world is bound by work because work is not performed as a sacrifice. Therefore, O son of Kunti, work for the sake of sacrifice, devoid of attachment to it.'<sup>2</sup>

### Yajna: Different Interpretations

By *sacrifice*, Sri Shankaracharya and Sri Shridhara Svamin mean 'God', citing '*Yajño vai viṣṇuḥ*, Yajna is Vishnu.'<sup>3</sup> Sri Ramanuja interprets *sacrifice* as the Vedic yajna. Sant Jnaneshvar advocates looking upon one's duty itself as an obligatory sacrifice. Yajna as a fire ritual, or offering of oblations to gods through fire, has almost fallen into disuse now. Therefore, (1) looking upon *sacrifice* as Vishnu and performing actions for the Lord, and (2) considering one's duty itself as a sacrifice seem to be more relevant interpretations meriting deeper analysis. A third important point emerges from the *Gita* verse cited: Sri Krishna asks Arjuna to work for the sake of sacrifice (yajna), *devoid of attachment to work*. That underlines the fact that detachment (from work and its outcome) is the main factor in work performed in a spirit of sacrifice.

### Work for the Lord

According to the first interpretation, working for the sake of yajna implies working for God, not out of selfish interests. Such work frees us from the good and bad effects of work. Sri Krishna shows how such a work is done: 'Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation in a sacrifice, whatever gifts or service you give, whatever austerities you perform—O son of Kunti, do that all as an offering unto me.'<sup>4</sup> With a slight modification this can serve as an 'offering' verse: 'Whatever I do ... O God, I offer that all unto you.'<sup>5</sup> A person who works for the Lord remembers that God is the Prime Mover of all activities. It is God who directs our thoughts and actions from within as the *antaryāmin* (Inner Controller). Such an aspirant offers the fruits of his actions to that Prime Mover: 'I take refuge in that primal Purusha, from whom have streamed forth the eternal activity (of projection, sustenance and dissolution).'<sup>6</sup> Repeatedly offering his actions to the indwelling supreme Spirit, he undergoes self-renewal and learns to look upon himself more and more as a spark of divinity, part of the luminous ultimate Reality. The hold on him of his body-mind complex thus gradually wears thin.

For such an aspirant, even the simple act of prostration before images of God becomes a significant spiritual practice. With each prostration he offers his body, mind and buddhi—the slightly awakened Self—to the supreme Spirit pervading the holy Image. He feels spiritually renewed with such a simple but qualitatively uplifting act and gradually develops detachment from his body and mind. His focus gradually shifts to the Deity that dwells within him, as his real 'I'.

Such an aspirant does not look upon his little awakening as some non-dual realization. His little awakening does not preclude his prostration before images of God or His incarnations. He knows the difference between him and God (or an incarnation): In him the awakening or realization is so feeble that he needs to struggle to keep his mind above the pull of the body and the senses. An incarnation of God—as in the case of Sri Ramakrishna—has his mind riveted to the Infinite all the time, and with great difficulty brings his mind *down* to the normal plane, to show humanity the path to God. The spiritual aspirant's prostration before images of God is a symbolic sacrifice of his partially awakened Self (and body-mind) in the supreme Spirit behind the image or in the divine fire of realization of the incarnation.

It may be parenthetically remembered that Sri Ramakrishna never found any incongruity in prostrating before the image of Bhavatarini in the Dakshineswar temple, even after scaling heights of non-dual experiences and beyond.

Working for God also includes selfless participation in a movement furthering the mission of an incarnation of God; for according to Sri Ramakrishna, 'There is no doubt that God exists in all things; but the manifestations of his Power are different in different beings. The greatest manifestation of His Power is through an Incarnation. Again in some Incarnations there is a complete manifestation of God's Power. It is the Śakti, the Power of God, that is born as an Incarnation.'<sup>7</sup>

### Performing One's Duties as Sacrifice

The wheels of social life can revolve smoothly only if individuals discharge their responsibilities, conscious of their impact on the good of society as a whole. None can remain in a mental island and isolate himself from the welfare of others. Discharging to perfection one's duties without prompting from others—other people or rules of the state—is

another way of performing work as a sacrifice. The interrelatedness of the activities of the members of society and the resultant social harmony are brought out clearly in the following words of a former Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order:

Production and distribution of consumable commodities is done through an exchange of services by capitalists, technocrats, labour, the distributor and the consumer. All these factors functioning within the good of the whole social order in view and contributing their respective services and receiving their due rewards without any party trying to take undue advantage of the others—may be called *yajña* in the social sense. All this is based on work and a person who seeks all the benefits of society but keeps quiet and fails to contribute his share for social good can be described as an exploiter and a thief as the *Gīta* does. The difference in this interpretation is that, in place of the divine agencies, only the social environment is taken for mutual exchange of services and rewards. This explanation sublimates the ritualistic *yajña*.<sup>8</sup>

### God Himself Works

An important verse from the third chapter of the *Gīta* lends another dimension to work done in a spirit of sacrifice. Sri Krishna says: 'O Partha, I have no duty to speak of. There is nothing in the three worlds that I have not gained; nor is there anything that I have to gain. Still I continue to work.'<sup>9</sup>

God takes a human form with a special mission: to uplift humanity from animal nature to human nature to divine nature. *Avatara* means 'one who has descended'. Here the descent is from a state of pure undivided Consciousness, Brahman, to a human form, with associated pain and misery—not a mean sacrifice on God's part. God assumes a human form whenever there is decline in dharma, righteousness, and prevalence of adharma, unrighteousness. (4.7) Sri Krishna further clarifies the concept of incarnation: 'Though I am birthless, of changeless nature and the Lord of all beings, yet having my Prakriti (maya) un-

der my control I come into being by my own maya. (4.6)

A mother went for shopping along with her four-year-old daughter. They saw someone across the street, walking along with some policemen. 'Who is he?' asked the child. 'He is a thief being taken to the police station,' replied the mother. A couple of days later, the child asked her again, pointing out someone accompanied by policemen, 'Who is that thief, mom?' The mother hurriedly shut the child's mouth and said, 'No, my dear, he is not a thief. He is the Governor of our state; the police are offering him protection.'

There was police escort in both the cases. But the governor had the police under his control, while the thief was under police control. This example is cited to prove an important Vedantic point: Brahman appears as an incarnation of God, or functions as Ishvara, with maya under Its control. The individual souls—all of us—on the other hand, are under maya's control.

Whatever an incarnation of God does is for the welfare of humanity, uplift of dharma being his primary concern. He is subject to sufferings in the world; he undergoes struggles like an ordinary spiritual aspirant, practises spiritual disciplines and shows that it is possible to live a God-centred life amid the world and its lures and problems. Students of the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi, his spiritual consort, can appreciate the point.

Sri Krishna is an important character in that monumental epic, the *Mahabharata*. Even some apparently controversial actions of his have this one aim: uplift of dharma. He lived what he preached in the *Gita*: calmness amid intense activity and absolute freedom from selfishness and attachment. Citing his own case, Sri Krishna encourages Arjuna—and through him, us—to work without attachment, without anxiety for the outcome.

### God's Work: Another Viewpoint

A second way of looking at God's work is

to analyse his functions as Ishvara, Personal God. We need to recap on some points we discussed in the July 2003 editorial. In the God-Soul-Universe triangle all the three vertices of the triangle stand or fall together. As long as our individuality is real to us, God and the universe continue to be real. According to Swami Vivekananda, Personal God is the highest reading of the Absolute [Brahman] by the human mind.<sup>10</sup>

We also saw in the said editorial that Ishvara (Personal God) is the macrocosmic counterpart of the microcosmic causal body, which the individual soul dons during deep sleep. Just as we have a gross body and a subtle mind, even so Ishvara has a gross body (the entire universe) and a subtle mind (the cosmic Mind, of which all individual minds are, as it were, parts). Incidentally, according to qualified non-dualism, besides the universe, we, individual souls, also constitute Ishvara's body. And Ishvara is the Soul of our souls.

This background is to help us appreciate that the ceaseless flow of ideas in the cosmic Mind constitute Ishvara's mental activities, and the unceasing, but rhythmic, movements of galaxies, stars, planets and solar systems are His physical activities. Ishvara Himself is unattached to these activities. He has no likes or dislikes towards anyone,<sup>11</sup> nor does He take note of anyone's merits or demerits. (5.15) He is a silent witness to the happenings in His creation. (He responds to His devotees' prayers; He can bring about inexplicable transformation in their lives and can alter the course of their destiny—all this is true, but we are not discussing them here.) Ishvara is ever conscious of His divinity and a perfect embodiment of the 'inaction amid action and action amid inaction' described in the *Gita*. (4.18)

In order to be free from maya and realize his potential divinity, man needs to emulate his macrocosmic counterpart in his thoughts and activities: not giving way to lethargy, trying to practise calmness amid activity and expecting nothing in return. In other words, he

needs to hold his body, mind and spirit as a sacrifice to the supreme Spirit, and offers in It the fruits of his actions.

### Sacrifice and Detachment

Attachment to work results from selfishness, an offshoot of the feelings of 'I' and 'mine'. As a corollary, detachment from work and its results implies giving up selfishness. Swamiji equates unselfishness with God Himself<sup>12</sup> and traces the root of misery to selfishness:

This 'I and mine' causes the whole misery. With the sense of possession comes selfishness, and selfishness brings on misery. Every act of selfishness or thought of selfishness makes us attached to something, and immediately we are made slaves. Each wave in the Chitta [mind-stuff] that says 'I and mine' immediately puts a chain round us and makes us slaves; and the more we say 'I and mine', the more slavery grows, the more misery increases. Therefore Karma-Yoga tells us to enjoy the beauty of all the pictures in the world, but not to identify ourselves with any of them. Never say 'mine'. Whenever we say a thing is 'mine', misery will immediately come. Do not even say 'my child' in your mind. Possess the child, but do not say 'mine'. If you do, then will come the misery. Do not say 'my house', do not say 'my body'. The whole difficulty is there. The body is neither yours, nor mine, nor anybody's. These bodies are coming and going by the laws of nature, but we are free, standing as witness. This body is no more free than a picture or a wall. Why should we be attached so much to a body? If somebody paints a picture, he does it and passes on. Do not project that tentacle of selfishness, 'I must possess it'. As soon as that is projected, misery will begin.

So Karma-Yoga says, first destroy the tendency to project this tentacle of selfishness, and when you have the power of checking it, hold it in and do not allow the mind to get into the ways of selfishness. (1.100-1)

An unselfish attitude coupled with an attitude of worship and adoration towards the recipient of service can help us in the process of attunement with the macrocosm, in simulating the actions of God. In the words of Swamiji, 'When you are doing any work, do not think of anything beyond. Do it as worship, as the highest worship, and devote your whole life to it for the time being.' (1.71) 'And this is the gist of all worship—to be pure and to do good to others.' (3.141)

\* \* \*

In sum, sacrifice involves renunciation of selfishness and cultivation of detachment from the fruits of actions. This will pave the way for the ultimate sacrifice: renunciation of attachment to the body-mind complex, offering one's self as an oblation into the imperishable supreme Self—the supreme sacrifice that lends meaning to human life. \*

### References

1. *Mandukya Upanishad*, 2.
2. *Bhagavadgita*, 3.9.
3. *Taittiriya Samhita*, 1.7.4.
4. *Gita*, 3.27.
5. *Yatkaromi yadaṣṇāmi yajjuhomi dadāmi yat; Yattapasyaṁi govinda tatkaromi tvadarpanam*.
6. *Gita*, 15.4.
7. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 726.
8. *Srimad Bhagavadgita: The Scripture of Mankind*, trans. Swami Tapasyananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1984), 108.
9. *Gita*, 3.22.
10. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.377, 2.337.
11. *Gita*, 9.29.
12. CW, 1.87.

It is harder to conceal ignorance than to acquire knowledge.

—Arnold Glasow





# Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago



September 1903

## Mother and Son

Look at that rose, mother. How lovely it is! 'Yes, our new gardener manures and waters the plants well; that is why our roses this year are so beautiful and big,' answered the mother. 'Why, mother, if the gardener did not manure and water them, would there not be such nice flowers?' asked the little boy with a look of surprise.

'No, manure and water are their food. If you fast, how weak you feel. Similarly, if the plants do not get plenty of food, they cannot grow and bear good flowers.' 'But no flowers are there,' interrupted the child, pointing to a poor-looking plant.

'Because it is dying. It can no more take the food that is given to it. The sign of life is "giving and taking". The plants and the trees take in heat, water and many other things from the air and the soil. They bear flowers delightful to see and smell and fruits which men, animals and birds eat. We feed our cows; they give us milk.'

'Have the plants life?' 'Yes, even the stones have life. Life is everywhere. In some places, we see it; in others, we do not.'

'The bulls do not give us anything.' 'They carry our loads, draw our carts, plough our fields and render us service in many other ways.'

'Then the things that do not give *us* anything have no life.'

'They may not give anything to us. But besides human beings there are animals, birds, plants, trees and millions of other living things. To live, they must give something to one or other of these. Where there is life, there is giving and taking, though we cannot see it in many cases. That which cannot give and take, is dead.'

'Mother, I do not give others anything, yet I live.'

She took him up in her arms and implanted a kiss on his sunny brow. 'Why, dearest, you are such a good boy and love your father and me so much. You are our joy. You do not know how unhappy we were before we had you. And what happiness you are to us now!

'How can I make you more happy?'

'Why, my darling, by making all happy, the villagers, your country and everybody you have to do with. To give and take—that is the end of life, that is the way to make yourself and others happy.'

'Know that consciously or unconsciously everyone has to give and take. Will you not therefore try to carry this out in the best manner you can, so that your life may be a blessing to yourself as well as to others?'

'Surely, how shall I do so?'

'Listen. Now you are a boy. In ten or twelve years, you will be a man and begin to work and earn. Never think the things you possess are yours. Be always ready to help the poor and the needy with them. Draw to yourself with great zeal the best things of the world, enjoy them yourself and give them freely to others. Do you see that small tunnel through which the water is running from the tank to the garden? Bear in mind that you should be like it so that the best things of the world may pass through you to other people.'

—X

---

---

# Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*

SWAMI ATULANANDA

## Chapter 7 (*continued*)

**20. Others, deprived of discrimination by this and that desire, following this or that rite, devote themselves to other deities, guided by their own nature.**

Their desires for the enjoyment of worldly things during their lifetime and of heaven hereafter, deprives them of their power of discrimination about the true nature of God, and they resort to other deities called *devatas*, other than Vasudeva, who is the Self of all. They engage in rites peculiar to the worship of these gods, being led to do so by their own nature, or Prakriti, by that peculiar tendency (samskara) they acquired in the previous births.

We are all suffering from ignorance, from want of true discrimination. Whatever we are attached to, *that* we regard as the highest. Our superstitions, sentimentalities, our fears and weaknesses, we mistake for spirituality. We want to enjoy life to have a good time; but we think that we are spiritual persons. We go to church, sing hymns and pray; and we are satisfied that we are religious. We do not discriminate. We do not probe our own hearts to find out what is hidden there, what guides us in our actions. Why do we pray? To whom do we pray? We denounce idolatry, spirit worship and whatever form of religion different from our own. But do we ever stop to think what is the real motive power that brings us to church and prayer? Do we ever examine our mental gallery to find out what images and idols we carry there ourselves? Do we ever analyse the God we worship? So, we are cowards. We fear the Truth; or we would find that in many cases our worship is no better than the lowest form of idolatry or spirit worship. We go through all forms of hardship simply to pacify a fearful

being, to escape His wrath, to gain His favour and protection. Most of us have some such ghost stored away somewhere in our minds, and *that* we worship. Primitive people do so openly. They bring their images out and dance and pray and feast before them publicly. We keep our ghost hidden and worship it in the seclusion of our mind. If we could photograph the God we worship and carry in our minds, we would see a dismal collection of deities—caricatures worse than any heathen idol. But we think we are bhaktas.

The Hindus believe that everything has its presiding deity. Certain deities can fulfil certain desires. And each deity must be worshipped in a special way, by performing different rites, by fasting, by singing, by some form of worship or other. Those who have minor desires worship minor gods. And these gods fulfilling their desires—be it for success, for fame, for wealth, for victory in battle or whatever else—the devotee is happy and satisfied; he never thinks that there may be something higher. We know how different sects have their own harvest gods or goddesses, how they worship the presiding deity of some malignant disease and so on. Our desires keep us on a certain level. Unless we change and purify and refine our tastes and desires we cannot rise to a higher mental plane. Those who are satisfied with such lower forms of worship will not rise higher. Their discrimination carries them no farther. They will stay in their religion. But this is not bhakti. Praying for health or wealth or for heaven is called

karma or meritorious action. *This* we must remember. The mischief begins when our discrimination fails us, when we think that we are great devotees—that we know all about spirituality—while as a matter of fact we only perform a little ritual karma. We perform some rite or pray, and what we call ‘help’ comes; and there the matter ends. That is all there is to that kind of religious life. No one is to blame. We are guided by our own nature, which we have built up in the past. But that does not mean that we must stay where we are. We may rise. We may progress. We may adopt higher forms. This form of religion is called *pratika upāsana*, where God Himself is not worshipped, but images of saints, symbols, higher beings, departed spirits, angels, books or mahatmas. That is not bhakti. The worship of devas or other beings, *in and for themselves*, is only ritualistic karma and brings only the fruit belonging to that particular worship and *not mukti, freedom*. It may give us power or information or prosperity, or it may cure disease, or grant us whatever else we want. But *God* alone can give salvation. He alone can give mukti.

Is then the use of all forms and images to be condemned? Is it not then true that some bhaktas have attained God-vision through image worship? There is a difference. We learn of saints who have realized God in all His fullness through image worship. But their image worship was of quite a different nature. These pure souls did not beg of their images for worldly gain. They did not approach their God with low and selfish motives. They looked upon the image not as a minor deity, but as God, the Mother, Father and Teacher of the universe. When the object of worship is looked upon as *God* (says Swami Vivekananda), then the highest result comes. We may worship anything as long as we see God in it, if we can forget the idol and see God there. We

must not project any image on God. That would be limiting Him. We may fill the image with that Life, which is God. We may worship God *in* a picture or image, but not the picture *as* God. The Hindus understand this in their worship. They know that the image as image is but wood or stone. Therefore God is invoked. The Lord who dwells in the universe, who is the Self of the worshipper, is called upon to dwell in the image, so that the devotee may worship Him, who is the vastest of the vast, in a concrete form, easy to contemplate. And the image is not considered sacred before it is properly installed and the Deity invoked in it. And when no image is at hand, the devotee, when he wants to worship, will himself fashion an image out of some clay. After finishing his devotion the image is destroyed.

***We go through all forms of hardship simply to pacify a fearful being, to escape His wrath, to gain His favour and protection. Most of us have some such ghost stored away somewhere in our minds, and that we worship.***

This shows that it is not the image that is worshipped, but the Spirit dwelling in it. We often misjudge the idolater, seeing only the outward form. The Hindus speak of a twofold dhyana or meditation: *with* and *without* form. Meditation on the formless God is beyond the range of mind and speech, and without any end. Says the *Mahanirvana Tantra*: ‘It is beyond the perception of ordinary people. With many hard practices of contemplation the yogis can perceive it.’ But the other form, the gross form, is easier for dhyana. Then according to the devotee, God, who is devoid of form, is conceived as having different forms. And Sri Krishna says in the *Gita*: ‘In whatever way men worship Me even so do I reward them.’<sup>1</sup> These religious practices are very beautiful and inspiring if one understands their true spirit, if

one can see the Truth beneath the form.

And is it not wonderful that the Hindus as a nation find all their pleasures and recreations and amusements in religious matters? The festivals, the time of merry-making, are all of a religious nature. One of the greatest festivals in Bengal is Durga Puja, the festival of Durga, the great Mother. She is the Shakti, the form of Kali. She is the manifested energy in the whole universe. As such She is always propitiated before any special worship. Whatever we do is through Her energy. Brahma creates, we speak, we act, the insect crawls—all this happens through Her energy. Goddess Durga is said to live in the Himalayan mountains with her consort Shiva, the great God. There they live in seclusion, in eternal meditation. But once in a year She comes down from Her mountain retreat to visit every dwelling for three days, for She is also the daughter of every householder. That is a very happy time. Great merry-making, giving of presents, religious performances, worship—all rejoice. The children love the beautiful image prepared for the occasion, for Durga is the great Mother, the giver of all that is good. But after the third day Shiva becomes restless and He also comes down, but only to take the goddess back with him to the Himalayas. Shiva will never separate from Durga except during these three

days. Then when all is over, the image is submerged in the Ganges.

We must know that Durga stands for Prakriti, nature, and Shiva for Purusha, the Soul. The one is powerless without the other. So they are always together.

Sri Ramakrishna said that often the necessity arises of worshipping an image. It is God Himself who has provided these various forms of worship. The Lord has done this to suit different men in different stages of spiritual progress. 'The Mother,' he said, 'so prepares the food for Her children, that everyone can get what best agrees with him. She gives each child such food as agrees with its digestion.'<sup>2</sup> So God has provided different methods of worship to suit all His devotees. The Lord assists all devotees, no matter what form or god they worship. For are not all forms and gods included in Him? As long as we are sincere the Lord helps us in our worship by strengthening our faith in the god of our devotion. The worshipper may not realize then that he really worships God, the Self within; but in the course of time he will realize this. Through the minor gods the great God is worshipped, just as by honouring the minister we honour the king. Therefore Sri Krishna says in the next two verses:

**21. Whatsoever form any devotee seeks to worship with faith—that faith of his I make unwavering.**

**22. Endowed with that faith he engages himself in worship of that (deity); and from that he obtains his desired ends, those verily being dispensed by Me alone.**

**T**his is the great lesson we have to learn: everything in the universe comes from God. It is He who strengthens our faith. It is He who fulfils our desires.

Sri Krishna says here that no matter who the devotee is or whatever god or image he worships, as long as he is sincere in his devotion, as long as he has faith in his god, the Lord will help him. In what way will the Lord help him? By strengthening his faith. 'For whoso-

ever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath,' said Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

We must make use of what we have. Our faith may be weak in the beginning, but by exercising it, it will gain in strength. The Lord will increase it. But if we sit idle and say 'What good will my little faith do? It is no use trying'—we shall then lose what little faith we have.

But when our faith has become strong and we worship our own Chosen Ideal, then our prayer will be answered and our desires fulfilled. How is our prayer answered? By the God we worship as ordained by the supreme Lord. An angel or a celestial being or a god may grant us the object of our desires; but he can do so only as a messenger.

God alone is omniscient. He is the Lord of karma. He alone knows the precise relation between actions and their fruits. So in reality all prayers are answered by the Creator, whether we address Mary or Joseph or any other saint. Minor gods have no independent power. Their power is but a part of God's power.

When we realize this, there will not be so much fighting and quarrelling between different religions. There will not be so much sectarianism, for we are all fighting for our little gods: *My* god is the only true god, great and mighty, and *your* god is an idol, a false god. And the fight begins. Some Christians become quite enraged if we dare to place Buddha or Krishna alongside Jesus. And so we find men in every religion unable to see any greatness in incarnations other than the one preached by their religion. That is because their conception of their God—be it Jesus or any other—is so small, so little, so narrow.

These men use big words, but in reality they make of their Chosen Ideal a minor deity, just as some sectarian Hindus do with their gods. And from that, all kind of superstitions arise.

There is a story of a devotee who was most devoted to Shiva. He worshipped His image daily, placing before it flowers and incense. He was a good bhakta and the Lord was well pleased with him, except for his sectarian idea that Shiva was the only God to be worshipped; all other gods were unworthy of de-

votion. So the Lord wanted to teach him a lesson and to teach him that all gods are but manifestations of the one supreme Being. Therefore in the night the Lord changed the Shiva image of the devotee, leaving one half of it as Shiva and transforming the other half into Vishnu. The next morning the devotee saw to his great surprise that instead of his beloved Shiva, the image was half Shiva and half Vishnu. What could be done? He surely could not worship Vishnu. But how could he worship Shiva and avoid worshipping Vishnu at the same time? That was the question. At last he had an inspiration. He would burn the incense on only one side, on the Shiva side of the image. That would leave Vishnu out. He began his worship. Flowers and holy water were offered as usual, but placed only on the Shiva side of the image. Then the incense was lit and

***We may worship anything as long as we see God in it, if we can forget the idol and see God there. We must not project any image on God. That would be limiting Him. We may fill the image with that Life, which is God. We may worship God in a picture or image, but not the picture as God.***

placed with the flowers. Now it so happened that a slight draft of the incense smoke was blown towards Vishnu. The bhakta saw very distinctly that a little smoke entered the nostril that belonged to Vishnu. That made him angry. But at last he had the happy inspiration of putting a little cotton in Vishnu's nostril so that no incense smoke could possibly enter it. And then all went happily. Shiva alone could enjoy his offering. And are we not all doing very much the same thing?

In the words of Swamiji, 'Whomsoever you may worship with singleness of faith and devotion as the one God of the universe, in whatsoever form, as Shiva, Rama or Vishnu, you will get salvation.'<sup>4</sup> It is not the question of

which Incarnation of God we worship, but how we worship Him. Do we make of Him a little mental idol or do we worship Him as the supreme Being, our own divine Self?

Everything can be accomplished through sincerity of purpose. Sometimes our devotion to God is not of the highest order. It may even be misdirected, that is we may not be able to conceive of God in His highest and truest form. The God of our adoration may fall far short from what God really is. Still, as long as we are sincere the Lord will help us. He will strengthen our faith and in time will correct our shortcomings. Everything comes from God; even our very faith is His gift. We say that by praying to saints and higher beings our desires meet with fulfilment and that is true.

***God alone is omniscient. He is the Lord of karma. He alone knows the precise relation between actions and their fruits. So in reality all prayers are answered by the Creator, whether we address Mary or Joseph or any other saint. Minor gods have no independent power. Their power is but a part of God's power.***

But even saints and higher beings receive their power to fulfil our desires from God. He is the Giver behind all givers, the Power behind all powers. Everything comes from Him.

We have seen how far bigotry can go in the story of the bhakta who could not bear the idea that a little smoke of the incense offered to Shiva, his idol, should enter the nostril of Vishnu. I want to give you the example of another bhakta to illustrate the opposite view that one may be entirely devoted to one manifestation of God and at the same time realize that God takes many forms and that all the avatars are incarnations of God.

Hanuman, the ideal bhakta of the *Ramayana*, was the greatest devotee of Ramachan-

dra. And Hanuman is worshipped all over India as the ideal lover of God. He stands for the highest ideal of bhakti. Hanuman's faith was so strong that uttering the name of Rama he was able to clear the ocean in one jump. In the *Ramayana* we read the story of how the monkey army went in search of Sita, who had been kidnapped by Ravana, the fearful demon king of the island of (Sri) Lanka. Ravana had taken Sita from the forest, where she lived with her divine husband, the exiled King Ramachandra, and his brother. Snatching her up, the terrible Ravana mounted his celestial car and carried Sita off through the air to his capital. Ramachandra in search of her had come across and had befriended the monkey army of the forest; and he had solicited their assistance to recover Sita. Hanuman, the leader of the monkey army, became entirely devoted to Ramachandra and consented to assist him in his search for Sita. Sita was then traced to the island of Lanka, but how to take her from there? How to find out where she was? There was the ocean to cross and no means to do so. Then, Hanuman said, 'Taking the name of Ramachandra I shall leap across the

ocean and shall find Sita.' And then taking one mighty jump he landed in the capital of Ravana, where after many adventures he discovered Sita, watched over by demons and threatened with death should she not respond to Ravana's advances of love. Well, at last Sita was rescued. And it was only through Hanuman's faith that her rescue became possible. Faith is all-powerful.

Jesus said, 'If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.'<sup>5</sup> These are not vain words, but the words of avatars, the sons of God. These words are true. And everyone can experience it, as Ha-

numan and thousands of bhaktas have done. So great was the love and devotion of Hanuman for Ramachandra that when Lakshmana, Rama's brother, asked him: 'Hanuman, is what people say true that no one loves my divine brother as you do?' Hanuman replied: 'Look here!' And then he tore open his breast and laying bare his heart, told Lakshmana to read. And then to his overwhelming astonishment Lakshmana saw written on the heart of Hanuman the names of Rama and his consort Sita. So constant, so unwavering, so intense was Hanuman's love for Ramachandra that the names were indelibly imprinted on his heart. Hanuman always meditated on Rama and passed his days in ecstatic love for Him.

Once Hanuman was asked, 'Who is the greatest of all the deities?' And then he answered (and this is the point I want to bring out): 'All deities are great; they are all God incarnate, but I love my Rama.' Hanuman's love for Ramachandra did not mean hatred of all other gods. He had realized God. He knew that God incarnates in many forms; that He comes to save mankind whenever He is needed. That is true bhakti and that is jnana at the same time. It is the highest illumination.

On another occasion it was asked of Hanuman to explain his love for God. How was it possible to think of God and love Him under all conditions? For we know how changeable the mind is, how changeable our love and sentiments are. And Hanuman replied, 'I always think of God, but not always in the same relationship. When I think of myself as Hanuman, the leader of the monkey army, then I regard God as my Master, and I am His servant. And when I think of myself as a soul, then I feel that

I am part of the divine Being. But when I think of myself as the Spirit, the Atman, then all distinction vanishes, and I become one with God.' We see here how in one person the three stages of love can coexist. Personal God and God the Absolute realized by the same person. We find here the first practical hint of what was but lately worked out to such perfection by Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda: the reconciliation of the three systems of Vedanta, Dvaita, Vishishtadvaita and Advaita—the dualistic, qualified monistic and monistic systems.

But we must now return to examine the lower stages of bhakti, for in verses 21 and 22 Sri Krishna speaks of the form of worship of those who practise devotion with a selfish motive in order to gain the objects of their desire. Those desires are fulfilled by the spirit that is worshipped, but remember it is ordained by Me. I dwell in all gods, angels and spirits. They are My power, My agents. Through the instrumentality of these inferior gods, I fulfil the desires of the devotee.

But what do we find?

*(to be continued)*

## References

1. *Bhagavadgita*, 4.11.
2. See M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 81.
3. *Matthew*, 13.12.
4. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 3.450.
5. *Matthew*, 21.21.

---

The very existence of everything is God. Existence cannot be non-existence. The *Gita* says, 'The unreal never is. The Real never ceases to be.' This is a gospel truth. There is no reason why one cannot realize God. It is possible if one has intense longing, right efforts, perseverance and a true guru.

—Swami Turiyanda

---

---

# Why Celibacy?—A Hindu Perspective

SWAMI TYAGANANDA

Whenever I am invited to present a Hindu view on anything, I often find it convenient to begin by explaining what my own name means. It is an unusual name in the West, difficult to pronounce and unintelligible to most people. 'Swami' is the epithet used for Hindu monks and the word means 'master'. It points to the ideal of being a master of oneself or being in control of oneself.

The second part of my name is my actual name, given to me when I received my final vows of sannyasa, or monastic life. Tyagananda is a combination of two words, *tyāga* and *ānanda*: *tyāga* means detachment or letting go; *ānanda* means joy. Taken together, the word means 'the joy of detachment'. Again, it points to the ideal of letting go of all the non-essentials in order to focus on and hold on to the essentials.

My name thus serves me as a reminder of two ideals: self-mastery and letting go. Both these are involved in the practice of celibacy as understood in the Hindu way of life.

I am a Hindu monk and, as all monks do, I have taken a formal vow of celibacy. I should make it clear that I am a monk, not a priest. In the Hindu tradition, monastic duties and priestly duties are different and distinct. Monks are always celibate. Priests don't have to be. Indeed, most Hindu ceremonies need a married priest. An unmarried or a divorced priest or a widower priest is not eligible to perform certain religious ceremonies.

Hindu monks are exempt from most rituals and ceremonies connected with the social aspects of religion. Their primary duty is towards the spiritual aspects of religion: transforming the inner life through prayer, meditation and study, and sharing their insights with other spiritual seekers. In ancient times Hindu

monks lived outside the social structure. Their contact with society was minimal: those interested in spiritual life sought instruction from the monks, and others just left them alone. Monks lived on alms and led austere lives.

In the last hundred years or so, Hindu monasticism has undergone a change. While a significant number of monks and nuns still follow the traditional pattern, many nowadays function within the social structure. They don't go out begging for food anymore but engage themselves in activities designed to serve the needy sections of society. They look upon their work not as social service but as part of their spiritual practice, and they don't hold salaried jobs. If God is present in the hearts of all beings, then serving others should be no different from worshipping the Divine present in them.

This is the philosophy that guides the programmes of the Ramakrishna Order, to which I belong. The Order is named after the Hindu mystic Ramakrishna, who lived in India in the nineteenth century. It was his disciple Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), who came to this country exactly 110 years ago and started the Vedanta Societies. The Ramakrishna Order currently has about 1500 monks staying in many countries around the world.

## **Brahmacharya: 'Dwelling in Brahman'**

Hindu monks take the vow of poverty and celibacy. The Sanskrit word for celibacy is brahmacharya, 'dwelling in Brahman'. What do I mean by Brahman? What does 'dwelling in' mean and how is it to be practised? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to understand the Hindu world view. Let us begin with a few key concepts.

In Hinduism, the ultimate Reality is call-



ed Brahman. Brahman is not the name of a person. It is not a state to be attained. It is not a place to be reached. Literally the word simply means that which is vast. It is used to denote pure consciousness. Why 'pure' consciousness? By that is meant not the consciousness 'of' something but 'consciousness-itself'. Understood thus, Brahman—or 'consciousness-itself'—is undivided, all-pervading, birthless and deathless.

The characteristics of Brahman are best described by the word *sat-cit-ananda*, 'Being-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute'. Brahman is not merely consciousness-itself but also being-itself and bliss-itself. To be 'dwelling in Brahman' is the same as being one with being, consciousness and bliss. Oneness with being removes the threat of being reduced to non-being or 'nothingness' (which is what death looks like); oneness with consciousness removes the threat of being reduced to dust (the eventual fate of the body); and oneness with bliss removes the threat of sorrow and suffering in this life and the afterlife. *Sat-cit-ananda*, or Being-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute, is not just the 'ultimate' reality, it is also the 'present' reality of you and me.

### Atman, the 'Real Me'

Our current experience of who we are doesn't, of course, correspond to what I just said. We don't see ourselves as Being-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute. We see ourselves as just ordinary human beings—weak, imperfect, and vulnerable to forces outside of ourselves. According to Hindu teachers, this happens because something is obstructing us from getting in touch with our true reality. My true reality is my real Self, the 'real me', which is different from the ego. The Hindus see the ego as a function of the mind. They don't see the mind as the 'real me'. According to them,

the mind is still outside—or is a kind of covering over—the 'real me', which is sometimes called the true Self (to distinguish it from the ego) or the divine Self (to distinguish it from our frail human identity)—usually the 'S' is capitalized in writing.

The Sanskrit word for the true Self or divine Self is Atman. That is the only spiritual part of the human personality. By spiritual I mean non-material. Both the body and the mind are material parts. That the body is made up of material particles is perhaps easy to understand, but it may sound strange that even the mind is material. According to the Hindu tradition, the mind is not visible the way the body is because it is made of subtle matter. Our sense organs have their limitations and so we cannot see the mind the way we can see the

***Hindus say that both body and mind are material, one made of gross matter and the other of subtle, or fine, matter. Both body and mind cover—or, at least, seem to cover—the Atman, our spiritual Self, which is why our true identity remains hidden from us.***

body.

The mind is similar to the body in many ways: both undergo changes for better or worse; both are subject to illness and both have doctors; both get tired and need rest; both can produce joy and sorrow. The most obvious difference between the two is that one can be seen while the other can only be felt. Hindu thinkers attribute this not to a difference in kind but in degree: they say that both body and mind are material, one made of gross matter and the other of subtle, or fine, matter. Both body and mind cover—or, at least, seem to cover—the Atman, our spiritual Self, which is why our true identity remains hidden from us.

The Hindus say that the goal of life—or the supreme consummation of life—is reach-

ed when we have a direct experience of our true nature as divine beings, and when we dwell continually in that blessed experience. Those who attain this state are called enlightened: these are the people who are truly in the state of brahmacharya, because they are truly dwelling in Brahman.

The body and the mind limit the full manifestation of our divine nature. It's a big climbdown really: imagine being reduced to a miserable, bound, imperfect and mortal human being from our original status as the blissful, free, perfect and immortal divine being. This is the Hindu version of the biblical myth of the fall—and the consequent expulsion—of Adam and Eve from the Garden of

***The practice of brahmacharya, 'dwelling in Brahman', involves moving away from the body-mind complex, which is the false self, and going towards the Atman, our true Self.***

***What makes the 'moving away' process difficult is the strong claim the body and the mind exert over me, the constant demands they make of me.***

Eden. For Hindus, spiritual life is a conscious and voluntary effort to go back to our original state of joy and freedom, pristine purity and perfection. For this spiritual journey to be successful, every hurdle on the way needs to be overcome and transcended.

### **The Value of Celibacy**

Hurdles and obstacles there will be plenty (as every spiritual seeker can testify), but the root problem is the chronic forgetfulness of our joyful spiritual identity and the amazing attachment to our frail, sorrow-ridden human identity. What make us human are, of course, the human body and the human mind (which includes the intellect and the ego). My human identity is inseparably con-

nected with perceiving my body and mind as 'me'. Every demand of the body and mind is considered 'my' demand—and in the process, the spiritual Self within is forgotten; my body-mind complex becomes my de facto 'self'.

The practice of brahmacharya, 'dwelling in Brahman', involves moving away from the body-mind complex, which is the false self, and going towards the Atman, our true Self. What makes the 'moving away' process difficult is the strong claim the body and the mind exert over me, the constant demands they make of me. Indeed, it's difficult for most of us to even conceive of our existence apart from our body-mind experience. Our actions and thoughts throughout the day keep us preoccupied with either the body or the mind or both.

Hunger and thirst, rest and work, joy and sorrow, ambition and frustration, likes and dislikes—who has been free from the demands and pressures of these? The body and the mind make their presence felt through all these and more. But the intensity of sexual desire is often more powerful and more persistent than that of our other needs, so the meaning of brahmacharya often gets narrowed down to sexual abstinence.

Sex plays an important part in human life and it often absorbs much of our thinking, feeling and willing. In Hinduism it is customary to view most things at three levels: physical, mental and verbal. Brahmacharya, or celibacy, includes sexual abstinence at all these levels. Celibacy thus is not limited to merely physical abstinence from sex but also non-indulgence in sexual fantasy and sexual talk. Body, mind and speech are interconnected and they tend to influence one another. When these three become compartmentalized and disconnected, the result is disharmony, which

often leads to mental stress and anxiety, physical illness and unhealthy interpersonal relations.

This description of brahmacharya may be all right for monks and nuns, but what about those who are not monks and who choose to get married? Does this ideal not apply to them? The Hindu tradition believes that the ideal of brahmacharya is relevant to all, but its 'application' to monastic life is different from its application to married life.

Marriage is not a licence to do away with all restraints. Chastity and fidelity are the foundation on which a strong and happy marital relationship can be built. The *Bhagavata*, a tenth-century Hindu text, has this message for the married: 'Among the duties of a married person are the practice of brahmacharya except for the purpose of procreation, austerity, purity, contentment and friendliness toward all.' (11.18. 43)

In a world full of temptations, if a married person can fulfil these duties, he or she can get the same benefits that a monk does through a sincere practice of celibacy. Since brahmacharya is about self-restraint, it doesn't really matter to whom one feels sexually attracted or with whom one has a committed long-term relationship. Sex is sex, whether heterosexual, homosexual or unisexual. For spiritual seekers of every persuasion, the ideal is still brahmacharya. This ideal is not about sex per se. It means 'dwelling in Brahman', or dwelling in the experience of our identity as *sat-cit-ananda*, Being-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute.

The troubled times in which we live today may lead us to imagine that the brahmacharya ideal is unattainable. It seems out of reach for non-monastics and one may question whether it is attainable even for those who have chosen to be monks or nuns. The Hindu tradition addresses this legitimate doubt by

pointing out that the ideal of brahmacharya is no more difficult today than it was any time in the past. It has always been difficult and probably it will always be. But there are in every generation people who have lived up to this ideal and that gives hope to the rest of us.

Second, the ideal of brahmacharya, although relevant for all, is not mandatory for all. Not everyone feels the call to practise brahmacharya, and those who do, have options and a graded system of employing it in their own lives. For those who choose a monastic life, the rules are most stringent and uncompromising. If one finds that these are too difficult to follow—as some do sooner or later—one has the freedom to choose a different lifestyle, where the rules are somewhat relaxed. In marriage, the emphasis is on fidelity

***In marriage, the emphasis is on fidelity  
—remaining faithful to one's spouse.***

***Indeed, the glory of chastity in married life  
and the spiritual power it can generate  
have been described in great detail in  
Hindu history as well as mythology.***

—remaining faithful to one's spouse. Indeed, the glory of chastity in married life and the spiritual power it can generate have been described in great detail in Hindu history as well as mythology.

### **Benefits of Celibacy**

What are the benefits of celibacy? What exactly happens when a person practises brahmacharya? The yoga traditions of Hinduism have made a deep study of this. According to them, the sexual impulse and the human energy that fuels it, when checked and controlled, become converted into a refined, subtle power called *ojas*. A yogi tries to transform all of the sexual energy into *ojas* through the practice of celibacy. It is only celibacy—or chastity in the case of the married—that

causes the *ojas* to rise and be stored in the brain. Lack of chastity produces loss of mental vigour and moral strength.

According to the Hindu tradition, if one practises brahmacharya for twelve years, a special nerve, called *medhā nāḍī* in Sanskrit, is developed. This produces spiritual intuition, a strong memory and a remarkable capacity to grasp the subtle realities of life. It may not make a person an intellectual prodigy or a wrestler but it definitely makes him healthy, both physically and mentally.

For the sustained practice of contemplation our brain needs to be strong and calm—and this becomes possible through brahmacharya because it provides nourishment and vigour to the brain. It also nourishes our cre-

***Five factors are helpful in the practice of celibacy: motivation, spiritual longing, detachment, self-restraint and higher creativity. The rules and tradition of Hindu monastic life in particular—and spiritual life in general—have incorporated all of these factors to facilitate the practice of brahmacharya.***

ative energy and makes it flow on a higher plane. The validity of these claims is borne out by the actual experience of people who have practised brahmacharya.

### **Aids to Celibacy**

It is needless to say that like any other ideal the ideal of celibacy has its own challenges and pitfalls. These challenges have to be faced head-on and the pitfalls avoided. This has to be done by both individuals as well as institutions. Among the things important to keep the ideal of celibacy untarnished are the following:

1. *Motivation*: There is a saying in Sanskrit: '*Prayojanam anuddisya na mando'pi pra-*

*varitate*, Even a stupid person does not do anything unless there is a motive.' Practising celibacy is not simply a matter of keeping one's vow or abiding by the rules of an institution. It is not a question of what one 'should do'. The question is: Do I really *want* to do it? The impulse has to come from within. For that to happen, the practitioner has to be clear about why he is practising celibacy. In the Hindu tradition, the practice of celibacy is considered a must—even if it is practised in a graded manner—to transcend our human limitations and to regain our divine identity.

2. *Spiritual Longing*: Motivation and hunger go together. I cannot be motivated to eat unless I am hungry for food. I cannot be motivated to study unless I am hungry for knowledge. Similarly, I cannot be motivated to practise celibacy unless I am hungry for the spiritual ideal or, in theistic language, I long to commune with God. Burning love for God is the greatest aid in the practice of celibacy. With love of God in the heart, no challenge is too difficult. Without it, every step becomes potentially slippery. Armed with God's grace, we can attain any ideal. Without

his grace, we cannot be certain about anything—not even the next moment or the next breath.

3. *Detachment*: Allurements can come in many guises and from many directions. Unless we look deeply and analyse what is 'essential' and what is 'non-essential' to our lives, we won't know what we must keep and what we need to trash. Wealth and fame, power and possessions, may have their utility but a spiritual seeker learns to deal with them with detachment. Monks in the Hindu tradition take a vow—and remind themselves about it daily—to renounce the desire for wealth (*vittaiṣaṇā*), fame (*lokaiṣaṇā*) and sensual enjoyment (*cittaiṣaṇā*). This obviously does not apply to

non-monastics. What *does* apply to all is the necessity to arrange our priorities in life in order of importance depending on what we perceive as the goal and purpose of our existence.

4. *Self-restraint*: Daily reminders of one's vows would be meaningless unless these are backed up by a lifestyle that is in harmony with one's spiritual ideal. Swami Brahmananda, the first spiritual head of the Order to which I belong, gave this advice to those who wished to practise brahmacharya: 'Avoid exciting food, oversleep, over-exercise, laziness, bad company and useless conversation.'

Hindus have given much thought to the effect food has on the body and mind, even going to the extent of experimenting which food has what effect on us. Accordingly, they have classified certain foods as 'exciting food', meaning that too much of their intake stimulates passions and restlessness. They also found that overdoing of anything—be it physical exercise or sleep—is injurious to spiritual life; hence the advice to practise moderation in everything.

5. *Higher Creativity*: Every one of us is endowed with creative energy and we have the freedom to decide how to express that creativity. In most people, at least a portion of the creative energy gets expressed through sex at the physiological level. But it is possible to express it through other channels such as art, music and scholarly pursuits. One who wishes to practise brahmacharya must learn to give a higher turn to one's creative energies. This helps to keep the mind on a higher plane.

I have mentioned five factors which are helpful in the practice of celibacy: motivation,

spiritual longing, detachment, self-restraint and higher creativity. The rules and tradition of Hindu monastic life in particular—and spiritual life in general—have incorporated all of these factors to facilitate the practice of brahmacharya.

There are times when some of those who embraced monastic life, mostly novices, find it difficult to continue for one reason or another. Many of those who return to secular life start families and become responsible and respected citizens, and contribute positively to community life. This has confirmed my belief that monastic celibacy is a great ideal but it is not for all. When people are unable to maintain celibacy, it's because they're trying to fit into a situation where they cannot fit. Problems arise only when people find themselves in a wrong place or with a wrong vocation. Every problem needs to be addressed appropriately and there is no problem that doesn't have a solution.

\* \* \*

I have shared with you some of the salient points connected with the ideal of celibacy in the Hindu tradition. We have seen what that ideal means from the Hindu viewpoint, what its implications are, and how it benefits those who embrace the ideal. I also listed factors that are helpful in the practice of celibacy. It's a great ideal and it is a rewarding experience to know how this ideal is defined and practised in other faith traditions. We have much to learn from one another. The more we do that, the better our understanding will be of the ideals that we hold dear in our own lives.

\*

## The Refuge

True it is that man is a slave to worldliness. But pray, 'Lord, bless me with right understanding.' I see no evil in you. Who knows, you may become a saint tomorrow. God plays with us by putting on various masks. We act under the control of our samskaras. We are all toys in the hands of the good Lord, and He is our refuge.

—Swami Premananda

## Bhavanath Chattopadhyay

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

As both blades of a pair of scissors are needed to cut a piece of cloth, so both self-effort and grace are needed to realize God. The grace of God is always blowing, like wind over the sea. A sailor who unfurls the boat's sail catches the wind and reaches the destination smoothly. Sri Ramakrishna's grace began to flow over Bhavanath Chattopadhyay's life, but Bhavanath suddenly pulled down his sail, putting his spiritual journey in peril. His condition was like that of a man who puts his left leg in one boat and his right in another. Bhavanath ascended to a higher plane of consciousness by the grace of the Master, but mysterious Mahamaya entangled him and brought him back down to the world.

Bhavanath was born towards the end of 1863 in Atulkrishna Banerjee Lane, Baranagore, a couple of miles away from Dakshineswar, to Ramdas Chattopadhyay and Ichhamayi Devi. He had one sibling, a sister named Kshirodbala. A good-looking boy with a fair complexion, Bhavanath had a simple, mild and devout nature.

During the fourth quarter of the nineteenth century, Western influences brought about an upheaval in Indian society. Christian missionaries were trying to use Western education to convert the younger generation. In response, various indigenous religious and social movements sprang up to face the Western challenge by reforming India's religions and its ancient customs. At that time Shashipada Bandyopadhyay, a leader in the Brahma Samaj, organized some youths in southern Baranagore and inspired them to carry out philanthropic activities. On 27 October 1872, Shashipada established the Students Club, which

carried out various social programmes: popular education, women's education, education for labourers, night school, Sunday school, moral training, a public library and so on. In 1876 Shashipada established the Atmonnati Vidhayini Sabha, an association devoted to the self-improvement of its members. Bhavanath was in charge of this association's library. Narendranath Datta (later Swami Vivekananda) would sometimes take part in the discussions held by this association, along with his classmates Satkari Lahiri and Dasharathi Sanyal, who also lived in Baranagore. Thus Bhavanath became acquainted with Nendra.

Due perhaps to Shashipada's influence, Bhavanath joined the Brahma Samaj. Nendra was also a member, and Bhavanath and Nendra eventually became close friends. Shashipada had met Sri Ramakrishna at Shambhu Mallick's house and was very devoted to him. Bhavanath most probably heard about the Master either from Shashipada or from the writings of Keshab Chandra Sen, the famous Brahma leader.<sup>1</sup> According to M's account in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Bhavanath met Sri Ramakrishna either in late 1881 or early 1882. At any rate, M first saw Bhavanath and Nendra at Dakshineswar on 6 March 1882.

On 5 August 1882, the Master visited Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, accompanied by M, Bhavanath and Hazra. On different occasions, the Master made remarks about Bhavanath that bear witness to his high spiritual state:

Boys like Nendra, Bhavanath and Rakhhal are my very intimate disciples. They are not to be thought lightly of.<sup>2</sup>

Devotees like Rakhhal, Nendra and Bhavanath may be called nityasiddha. Their spiritual con-

sciousness has been awake since their very birth. They assume human bodies only to impart spiritual illumination to others. (182)  
Narendra, Bhavanath, Rakhhal and devotees like them belong to the group of the nityasiddhas; they are eternally free. Religious practice on their part is superfluous. (279)

On 11 March 1883 Bhavanath attended the Master's birthday celebration at Dakshineswar. The Master told the assembled devotees, 'One cannot be spiritual as long as one has shame, hatred, or fear. Great will be the joy today. But those fools who will not sing or dance, mad with God's name, will never attain God. How can one feel any shame or fear when the names of God are sung? Now sing, all of you.' (186)

Bhavanath and his friend Kalikrishna sang the following song:

Thrice blessed is this day of joy!  
May all of us unite, O Lord.  
... ..  
Thou dwellest in each human heart;  
Thy name, resounding everywhere,  
Fills the four corners of the sky. (186-7)

As the Master listened to the song with folded hands, his mind soared to a far-off realm. When Kalikrishna bowed down to the Master and was about to go, the Master asked where he was going.

Bhavanath replied, 'He is going away on a little business.'

'What is it about?' the Master asked.

Bhavanath replied, 'He is going to the Baranagore Workingmen's Institute.'

'It's his bad luck,' said the Master. 'A stream of bliss will flow here today. He could have enjoyed it. But how unlucky!' (187)

The celebration continued throughout the day. When the devotees were about to leave that evening, the Master told Bhavanath, 'Don't go away today. The very sight of you inspires me.' In the *Gospel*, M comments, 'Bhavanath had not yet entered into worldly life. A youth of twenty, he had a fair complexion and handsome features. He shed tears of joy on

hearing the name of God. The Master looked on him as the embodiment of Narayana.' (194)

Passion, or longing, for God is the only thing necessary in spiritual life. Just as one who is hungry will definitely search for food, so one who has a genuine hunger for God cannot sit idle. Observing Bhavanath's yearning for God, the Master said to Manilal, 'Ah, what an exalted state he is in! He has hardly begun to sing about God before his eyes fill with tears. The very sight of Harish made him ecstatic. He said that Harish was very lucky. He made the remark because Harish was spending a few days here, now and then, away from his home.'

The Master asked M, 'Well, what is the cause of bhakti? Why should the spiritual feeling of young boys like Bhavanath be awakened?' M remained silent.

Master: 'The fact is, all men may look alike from the outside, but some of them have fillings of "condensed milk". Cakes may have fillings of condensed milk or powdered black gram, but they all look alike from the outside. The desire to know God, ecstatic love for Him, and such other spiritual qualities are the "condensed milk".' (232)

Noticing Bhavanath's gentle character, the Master said to M, 'Have you noticed Bhavanath's devotion? Narendra and he seem like a man and a woman. He is devoted to Narendra. ... Bhavanath, Baburam and a few others have a feminine nature; but Narendra, Rakhhal and Niranjan have a masculine nature. Bhavanath and Narendra are a pair. Both of them belong to the realm of the formless Reality.' (238, 458-9, 535)

Swami Saradananda wrote in *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*:

Bhavanath Chattopadhyay, a handsome and devout youth, stayed with the Master in Dakshineswar for a while. During that time he became acquainted with Narendra and a close friendship developed between them. Bhavanath was very dear to the Master because of his humility, modesty, simplicity, faith and devo-

tion. Observing his soft feminine nature and his affection for Narendra, the Master sometimes teased him, saying, 'Perhaps you were Narendra's life-companion in a previous incarnation.'<sup>3</sup>

On 7 April 1883 the Master visited Balam's house in Calcutta with Narendra, Bhavanath, Rakkhal, M and others. Balam invited some of the Master's young devotees to lunch. The Master often said to him, 'Feed them now and then; that will confer on you the merit of feeding holy men.' (198)

At the Master's request, Narendra sang a few songs:

Sing, O bird that nestles  
 deep within my heart!  
 Sing God's everlasting praise.  
 ....  
 O King of Kings, reveal Thyself to me!  
 I crave Thy mercy.  
 Cast on me Thy glance! (198)

Bhavanath was also a good singer, so the Master asked him to perform as well. Bhavanath sang:

Where is another friend like Thee,  
 O Essence of Mercy?  
 Where is another friend like Thee  
 To stand by me through pain and pleasure?  
 Who, among all my friends,  
 forgives my failings,  
 Bringing me comfort for my grief,  
 Soothing my spirit in its terror?  
 Thou art the Helmsman  
 who dost steer life's craft  
 Across the world's perilous sea;  
 Thy grace it is alone, O Lord,  
 That silences my raging passions' storm.  
 Thou pourest out the waters of peace  
 Upon my burning, penitent soul;  
 And Thine is the bosom that will shelter me  
 When every other friend I own  
 Deserts me in my dying hour. (199)

Bhavanath was trying to renounce everything that might be detrimental to his spiritual progress. Narendra said to the Master with a smile, referring to Bhavanath, 'He has given up fish and betel-leaf.' Master: 'Why so? What

is the matter with fish and betel-leaf? They aren't harmful. The renunciation of "woman and gold" is the true renunciation.' (200)

Bhavanath felt intense renunciation and began to spend nights at Dakshineswar with the Master. His parents and relatives thought the Master was mad. They warned Bhavanath not to frequent Dakshineswar, but he did not listen to them. On 18 June 1883 Bhavanath and other young devotees shared a carriage with the Master to attend the festival at Panihati. On their way, the Master was in a light mood and joked with the youngsters; but as soon as he reached the festival grounds, he joined the kirtan party and danced, totally forgetting the world.

All followers of Sri Ramakrishna are eternally indebted to Bhavanath because he was responsible for the shrine photograph of the Master that devotees worship today worldwide. In October 1883, Bhavanath brought a photographer from Baranagore, Abinash Chandra Dahn, to Dakshineswar to take a picture of the Master. The most authentic account of the circumstances surrounding this photo came from Swami Nirvanananda, who published the following brief report in Bengali in the *Udbodhan* [64.12] in 1963:

At Belur one day, Swami Akhandananda asked us in the course of a conversation: 'Well, do you know anything about the photo of Sri Ramakrishna that is worshipped these days?' On being told by us that we knew nothing that is really important, he related the following:

'Bhavanath Chatterjee, the Master's devotee from Baranagore, wanted to take a photograph of the Master. One day he requested him very strongly to give his consent, and on the afternoon of the next day brought a photographer along with him from Baranagore. He could not make the Master agree. The Master just went away near the Radhakanta temple.

'In the meantime Narendra arrived on the scene and heard everything. He said, "Wait a bit. I shall put everything straight." Saying this, he went to the veranda to the north of the Radhakanta temple where Sri Ramakrishna was sitting and started a religious conversation with



him. The Master went into samadhi. Narendra went and called others and ordered them to get ready quickly to take the picture.

In the state of samadhi the Master's body was bent on one side and therefore the cameraman went to make him sit erect by gently adjusting his chin. But as soon as he touched his chin, the whole body of the Master came up like a piece of paper—so light it was!

'Swamiji then told him: "Oh, what are you doing? Be quick. Get the camera ready." The cameraman took the exposure as hurriedly as possible. The Master was completely unaware of this incident.

'After some days, when Bhavanath brought the printed copy of the photo, the Master remarked, "This represents a high yogic state. This form will be worshipped in every home as time goes on."<sup>4</sup>

Bhavanath's spiritual journey was proceeding smoothly, but suddenly his parents took advantage of his soft nature and arranged his marriage. Bhavanath consented to their wishes. Either at the end of 1883 or at the early part of 1884, he married Kiranshashi, an eleven-year-old daughter of Abhaycharan Bhattacharya of Mallikpur, 24-Parganas.<sup>5</sup> After the wedding Bhavanath took his wife to Dakshineswar for the Master's blessing, so that Kiranshashi would help him in his spiritual journey. The Master blessed them both.<sup>6</sup>

During this period Bhavanath became a teacher in Baranagore School, but the job did not last long. Soon after they were married, his wife became very ill, but by God's grace her life was saved. Although Bhavanath was involved in family life, he did not have much attachment for worldly things. Since he was then desperately looking for a job, he could not visit the Master on a regular basis.

Narendra and Bhavanath were very close friends. Sometimes Narendra would spend nights with his Baranagore friends singing devotional songs and discussing spiritual subjects. On the night of 25 February 1884 Narendra was staying at the house of Satkari Lahiri in Baranagore when he learned of his father's death. Immediately Narendra's strug-

gle began. His family was living hand to mouth, so he began searching for a job. He could not visit the Master as usual, and he started to question the existence of God. News spread that Narendra had become an atheist and was associating with bad people. One day Bhavanath tearfully said to Sri Ramakrishna, 'Sir, we never dreamed that Narendra would sink so low!' The Master cried out excitedly: 'Silence, you scoundrel! Mother has told me that he could never do such things. If you talk like this anymore, I won't allow you in my presence again!'<sup>7</sup>

In early 1884 Sri Ramakrishna fell while in ecstasy near the railing of the temple garden, dislocating his left arm. In spite of his injury he was constantly either absorbed in samadhi or engaged in instructing his devotees. On 9 March, Bhavanath came to see the Master and told him about an exhibition that was then being held near the Asiatic Museum. He said: 'Many mahārājās have sent precious articles to the exhibition—gold couches and the like. It is worth seeing.' The Master replied with a smile:

Yes, you gain much by visiting those things. You realize that those articles of gold and the other things sent by mahārājās are mere trash. That is a great gain in itself. When I used to go to Calcutta with Hriday, he would show me the Viceroy's palace and say 'Look, Uncle! There is the Viceroy's palace with the big columns.' The Mother revealed to me that they were merely clay bricks laid one on top of another.

God and His splendour. God alone is real; the splendour has but a two-days existence. The magician and his magic. All become speechless with wonder at the magic, but it is all unreal. The magician alone is real. The rich man and his garden. People see only the garden; they should look for its rich owner.<sup>8</sup>

While talking about the rules for householders and monks the Master advised devotees to give up hypocrisy and be guileless. Then he remarked: 'How guileless Bhavanath is! After his marriage ceremony he came to me and asked, "Why do I feel so much love for my

wife?" ... This is due to the world-bewitching maya of the Divine Mother of the Universe. A man feels about his wife that he has no one else in the world so near and dear, that she is his very own in life and death, here and hereafter.' (401)

Again, how much a man suffers for his wife! Still he believes that there is no other relative so near. Look at the sad plight of a husband. Perhaps he earns twenty rupees a month and is the father of three children. He hasn't the means to feed them well. His roof leaks, but he hasn't the wherewithal to repair it. He cannot afford to buy books for his son. He cannot invest his son with the sacred thread. He begs for a few pennies from different friends.

But a wife endowed with spiritual wisdom is a real partner in life. She greatly helps her husband to follow the religious path. After the birth of one or two children they live like brother and sister. Both of them are devotees of God—His servant and His handmaid. Their family is a spiritual family. They are always happy with God and His devotees. They know that God alone is their own, from everlasting to everlasting.' (401-2)

On another occasion (7 March 1885) the Master remarked: 'Bhavanath is married, but he spends the whole night in spiritual conversation with his wife. The couple pass their time talking of God alone. I said to him, "Have a little fun with your wife now and then." "What?" he retorted angrily. "Shall we too indulge in frivolity?"' (715-6)

In 1884 the Master's birthday celebration was postponed because of his illness; it was finally held on 25 May. Seeing Bhavanath dressed elegantly, Surendra remarked: 'Are you going to England?'

Master (*smiling*): 'God is our England. ...'

Surendra: 'On returning from the office, as I put away my coat and trousers, I say to the Divine Mother, "O Mother, how tightly You have bound me to the world!"'

Master: 'There are eight fetters with which man is bound: shame, hatred, fear, pride of caste, hesitation, the desire to conceal and so forth.'

Then the Master sang: 'In the world's busy market-place, O Śyāmā, Thou art flying kites;/ High up they soar on the wind of hope, held fast by māyā's string.' The Master explained: 'Māyā's string means wife and children.'

'The three gunas—sattva, rajas and tamas—have men under their control. ... The three gunas are so many robbers. Tamas kills and rajas binds. Sattva no doubt releases man from his bondage, but it cannot take him to God. It shows him the way.'

Bhavanath: 'These are wonderful words indeed.'

Master: 'Yes, this is a lofty thought.' (438)

Only a few people could support Sri Ramakrishna when he was in samadhi. If the devotee touching him was not pure enough, the Master would cry out in pain, embarrassing that person. On this particular birthday celebration, M recorded: 'The musician sang a song about the monastic life of Chaitanya. The Master stood up, as he heard about Chaitanya's renunciation, and went into samadhi. The devotees put garlands of flowers around his neck. Bhavanath and Rakhai supported his body lest he should fall on the ground.' (440)

It was probably during this period that Bhavanath asked the Master to remove maya from him. The Master told him to come to Dakshineswar on a Tuesday or a Saturday. When Bhavanath arrived, the Master tried to give him a little prasada, but he could not lift his hand. He tried several times and then said, 'Mother is not allowing me to do it.' Swami Saradananda later explained this mystery: 'The Master had two moods—human and divine. When he was in the human plane, he had infinite compassion for the suffering humanity. He was eager to remove the sufferings of those who came to him. But when he ascended to the divine plane to remove their suffering, he would see the time had not yet come and it was not the will of the Mother.'<sup>9</sup>

On 7 September 1884, the Master told a large group of devotees: 'There are many

opinions about God. Each opinion is a path. There are innumerable opinions and innumerable paths leading to God.'

Bhavanath: 'Then what should we do?'

Master: 'You must stick to one path with all your strength. A man can reach the roof of a house by stone stairs or a ladder or a rope-ladder or a rope or even by a bamboo pole. But he cannot reach the roof if he sets foot now on one and now on another. He should firmly follow one path with all his strength.

'But you must regard other views as so many paths leading to God. You should not feel that your path is the only right path and that other paths are wrong. You mustn't bear malice towards others.'<sup>10</sup>

On 14 September 1884 Bhavanath visited the Master at Dakshineswar. Narendra, M and other devotees were present. A scholar from Konnagar came to see the Master with some friends and he asked many different questions. When he and his friends later saw the Master in samadhi they were about to leave, but Bhavanath asked them to stay. When they finally left, the devotees talked about the scholar.

Bhavanath (*smiling*): 'What kind of man is he?'

Master: 'He is a tāmasic devotee.'

Bhavanath: 'He can certainly recite Sanskrit verses.'

Master: 'Once I said to a man about a sādhu: "He is a rājasic sādhu. Why should one give him food and other presents?" At this another sādhu taught me a lesson by saying to me: "Don't say that. There are three classes of holy men: sāt̄tvic, rājasic, and tāmasic." Since that day I have respected holy men of all classes.' ...

Bhavanath: 'The devotees from Konnagar did not understand your samadhi and were about to leave the room.'

Master: 'Who was it that asked them to remain?'

Bhavanath (*smiling*): 'It was I.'

Master: 'My child, you are equally good in bringing people here and in driving them away.' ...

The conversation turned to the glory of God's name.

Bhavanath: 'I feel such relief while chanting the name of Hari.'

Master: 'He who relieves us of sin is Hari. He relieves us of our three afflictions in the world. Chaitanya preached the glory of Hari's name; so it must be good. ... (*Smiling*) Once some peasants were invited to a feast. They were asked if they would eat a preparation of hog plum. They answered: "You may give it to us if the gentlemen have eaten it. If *they* enjoyed it, then it must be good."<sup>11</sup>

(to be concluded)

## References

1. *Udbodhan*, 87.623.
2. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 127.
3. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*, trans. Swami Chetanananda (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 2003), V.8.2.6.
4. Swami Chetanananda, *Ramakrishna as We Saw Him* (St Louis: Vedanta Society of St Louis, 1990), 468.
5. *Udbodhan*, 68.321.
6. Vaikunthanath Sanyal, *Sri Ramakrishna Lilamrita* (Calcutta, 1936), 335.
7. *Divine Play*, V.8.2.14.
8. *Gospel*, 400.
9. Akshayachaitanya, *Swami Saradananda Jivani*, (Calcutta: Model Publishing House, 1955), 348-9.
10. *Gospel*, 514.
11. *ibid.*, 528.

With the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, a new age has dawned. Let all find the way to peace. Whoever walks his path will be immersed in bliss. We must make all the people on earth as our very own. If there must be an outsider, it should be this 'I', 'me' and 'mine'.

—Swami Premananda

---

---

# The Kali Temple at Dakshineswar and Sri Ramakrishna

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

One day Sri Ramakrishna was talking to some devotees when he said, "The feeling of "I" and "mine" is ignorance. People say that Rani Rasmani built the Kali temple; but nobody says it was the work of God. ... After attaining Knowledge a man says: "O God, nothing belongs to me—neither this house of worship nor this Kali temple. ... These are all Thine. Wife, son, and family do not belong to me. They are all Thine."<sup>1</sup>

## Two Significant Events

One event after another, like surging waves of a mountain stream, sweeps through the valley of time. But very few leave any imprint deep enough to be noticed for even a short period, while those of most are quickly washed away. The imprints of a few, however, are what bear witness to the great movements that shape the course of history. During the nineteenth century two important streams, flowing around two extraordinary personalities, had their source in Bengal: one in the elite urban centre of Calcutta, the capital of British India, and the other in the quiet village of Kamarpukur, then untouched by British culture. Ultimately these streams merged, forming a mighty confluence, at a small village called Dakshineswar, just north of Calcutta. It was here that an exquisite temple to the Divine Mother Kali was built, and a profound spiritual milieu was created by one of the greatest men to walk this earth. And here a new history was created that drew people from all walks of life, including some who were destined to help in a movement that would bring new hope to the world.

Of these two personalities, one was the

incomparable spiritual genius, Sri Ramakrishna (1836-86), who is now worshipped as the embodiment of five thousand years of the spiritual life of India. The second was the powerful and influential mistress of a very wealthy and aristocratic family of Calcutta, Rani Rasmani (1793-1861). Rani Rasmani is still adored in Bengal as a paragon of intelligence, piety, compassion and character.

## Dakshineswar in the Early 1980s and Before

In the early decades of the 1800s, there were only a few huts in Dakshineswar and the adjacent villages on the eastern bank of the Ganges. We can get an idea of the condition of this area about a decade before the temple was built in a description given by J C Marshman in the January 1845 issue of *Calcutta Review*. There he wrote: 'A little higher up we have the village of Dukhinsore, remarkable chiefly for the country seat, mapped down in the map of Hastie's Garden, but which has repeatedly changed hands during the last thirty years. To the north of it lies the Powder Magazine. During the last four years which have elapsed since Joshep's map was published, four elegant houses have sprung up to the south of the garden.'<sup>2</sup> The houses mentioned here include the garden houses of Jadulal Mullick and Shambhucharan Mullick.

According to an old legend, the illustrious King Vana had his palace at Deulpota, which is now the heart of the urban area of Dakshineswar. The original name of the village was Sonitpur, though some say it was called Sambhalpur. As the family deity of King Vana was known as Dakshineswar Shi-

va, eventually the village came to be known by the name Dakshineswar. Some say that Dakshineswar Shiva can no longer be traced, while others say that the present Buro Shiva of Shivtala, near the bank of the Ganges, is indeed this same Dakshineswar Shiva.

About three hundred years ago the entire area of what is now Dakshineswar, including Deulpota, was a dense forest. Only a handful of families of fishermen and boatmen were settled here and there in the area. Then Durgaprasad Roy Choudhury and Bhavaniprasad Roy Choudhury, of the well-known Savarna Choudhury family, came from Barisha and settled there. They brought with them a number of people, cleared the forest, and developed the village in their own way. An illustrious descendant of this family was Yogindranath, who became a monastic disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and was known as Swami Yogananda.<sup>3</sup> From such an obscure origin, Dakshineswar has risen to become an internationally renowned spiritual centre. Today the life of Dakshineswar centres around the Kali temple that was constructed by Rani Rasmani and sanctified by the life and spiritual practices of Sri Ramakrishna.

### **Sri Ramakrishna's Arrival at Dakshineswar**

Sri Ramakrishna was the youngest son of the saintly Kshudiram Chattopadhyaya and his wife, the kind-hearted Chandramani Devi. His childhood and adolescence were spent in the environment of rural Bengal, which in those days was almost untouched by British culture. His extraordinary memory, sharp intellect and pure character, along with his sweet and guileless behaviour and his wonderful talents in art, music and acting made him the darling of the whole village. The death of his father when he was only seven years old as well as a divine vision of the Goddess Vishalakshi determined the future course of his life. He turned his back on what he considered mere bread-winning education and instead became drawn towards the knowledge that

would help him realize God. In 1853, when he was seventeen years old, he came to Calcutta with his elder brother Ramkumar to assist him in his duties as priest for some families living in Jhamapukur. By then the construction work on the Kali temple in Dakshineswar was almost complete, but its consecration and formal opening had been postponed for various reasons. Perhaps this was divinely ordained so that the young spiritual seeker Sri Ramakrishna could be brought there. Why? Because it was meant for him to awaken the all-powerful Divine Mother in the stone image of the temple and release the energy of the universal kundalini for the welfare of humanity.

### **Rani Rasmani and Her Philanthropic Activities**

Rani Rasmani<sup>4</sup> was the daughter of a poor couple who lived in the village of Kona, in 24-Parganas. Her father, Harekrishna Das, built huts as a profession and was also a farmer. Her mother, Rampriya, died when Rasmani was just seven years old. In the year 1804, when Rani Rasmani was eleven, she was married to Rajchandra Das,<sup>5</sup> the zamindar of Janbari. He had married twice before but both wives had died young, so Rani Rasmani was his third wife. Soon after the marriage the income of her husband's family increased, so her arrival in the family was considered propitious. Rajchandra himself was given the title 'Rai Bahadur' and was appointed an honorary magistrate. He had to his credit many philanthropic activities such as the construction of Babu Ghat, Hatkhola Ghat and Babu Road (now called Rani Rasmani Road), the donation of the land for the excavation of the Beliaghata canal, the construction of a shelter for the dying and their relatives at the Nimtola crematorium, the digging of the Talpukur pond at Barrackpore, the building of Metcalfe Hall for a library, and also donations to the Famine Relief Fund. The couple had four daughters, named Padmamani, Kumari, Karunamayi and Jagadamba. In 1836, at the age of fifty-one,

Rajchandra died from an attack of thrombosis.

Mathurmohan Biswas was the husband of Rani Rasmani's third daughter, Karunamayi. He was cultured, well-mannered, quite intelligent and had an English education. When his wife died, he married her younger sister Jagadamba. With the assistance of Mathurmohan, Rani Rasmani was able to administer her estate very well. She increased her property holdings considerably, and also earned a substantial amount through trade and business. This success, together with her numerous charitable activities, spread her name throughout Bengal. Among her many philanthropic activities, especially remarkable were the excavation of the Sonai and Beliaghata canals, the setting up of the bazaar at Bhowanipur, the construction of a bathing ghat as well as a shelter for the dying and their relatives at Kalighat, the construction of a ghat on the bank of the Ganges at Halisahar, and also the construction of a substantial part of the road from the Suvarnarekha River to Puri in Orissa. Moreover, she earned the profound gratitude of her tenants for her protection of them from oppression by the indigo planters. Again, she also paid for the excavation of the connecting canal between the Madhumati and Navagan-ga Rivers, which alone cost her lakhs of rupees. Her generosity and concern for the welfare of others became proverbial in the homes of Bengal.

### Her Memorable Achievement

However, her most memorable achievement was the establishment of a temple to Mother Kali at Dakshineswar, and along with it, providing Sri Ramakrishna with all the necessary facilities to carry on his long and intense spiritual quest. While it was Rani Rasmani's devotion, hard work and perseverance that made the construction of the temple possible, it was the thirty years of Sri Ramakrishna's God-intoxicated life that elevated the temple complex into one of the greatest pilgrimage places of the world.

The account of how the pious yet resolute Rani Rasmani came to build the temple at Dakshineswar is truly a combination of the extraordinary and the popular. It is said that in the year 1847 (1254 BS)<sup>6</sup> Rani Rasmani was making arrangements to visit the holy city of Kashi. For many years she had cherished a desire to make this pilgrimage and worship to her heart's content Lord Vishvanath and the Divine Mother Annapurna. She had also set aside a large sum of money to meet the expenses for the trip. Earlier she had bought some land at Kashi in order to build a temple there.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps she intended to go there and make the final arrangements herself for establishing the temple. It was decided that the Rani would be accompanied by her three daughters and their husbands, plus other relatives, and a host of servants, maidservants, watchmen and armed guards. Twenty-five large barges had been commissioned.<sup>8</sup> The elaborate arrangements were almost complete.

At that time a famine had cast its dark shadow over the entire country, and people were in a state of panic. The agonizing cries of thousands of starving people and the news of hundreds of deaths from starvation made the Rani restless. While going for her daily bath in the Ganges she also personally observed the unspeakable miseries of the starving people. The night before the Rani was to leave on her journey she had a dream of the Goddess. According to another version, however, the Rani had already set out on the pilgrimage and had reached the village of Dakshineswar. There on the boat she received a divine command in a dream. The Goddess told her that there was no need to go to Kashi. Instead, a beautiful temple should be built on the bank of the Ganges where the Goddess would be installed and regular worship and services offered. The Goddess assured her, 'I will manifest myself in the stone image and will regularly accept your daily worship and offering of food.' The next morning the Rani recounted her dream to Mathurmohan and told him to call off the pil-

grimage. The food and other supplies stored on the barges were then distributed to the famine-stricken people. In addition, the Rani donated some more money for their relief.

From Sri Ramakrishna's account we learn that after the Rani received this divine command she gave up the idea of going to Kashi and resolved to build a temple for the Goddess on the bank of the Ganges. However, the statement she gave in a legal document for the endowment executed by her in the year 1860 (1267 BS) mentions a different reason for building the temple. There she said: 'During his lifetime my husband had a desire to build a temple and offer service to the Lord. But as he suddenly died and could not fulfil this desire, I have purchased by bill of sale, for carrying out his wishes, revenue-generating land measuring 54½ (fifty-four and a half) bighas, bearing an annual revenue of ...'. In another part of the same document, the Rani's reason for establishing the temple was more clearly stated. It was 'for the fulfilment of the desire of my deceased husband and for his spiritual welfare'. Of course, there is no difficulty in admitting that both the aforesaid divine command and the unfulfilled desire of her husband were behind the establishment of the temple.

There is a saying, 'The western bank of the Ganges is as holy as Varanasi.' The Rani had great faith in this and searched extensively for land at Bally, Uttarpara and other places along the western bank of the Ganges, but she failed to find a plot anywhere. The well-known Das Ani and Chay Ani group of zamindars declared that it would be beneath their dignity to step in the Ganges from a ghat built by someone else on their land. According to another account, the Rani had tried to build the temple within the precincts of the Siddheshwari Kali temple at Balidaghat in Halisahar on the bank of the river. But even with the promise of huge sums of money the Rani could not secure any foothold there due to the stubborn opposition of the influential brah-

min and kayastha communities.<sup>9</sup> Thus she was compelled to search for land on the eastern bank of the Ganges, and she finally selected the land where the present temple complex stands.

### The Temple Land

The major portion of this land had been owned by an Englishman named John Hastie<sup>10</sup> and was popularly known as Saheban Bagicha ('Saheb's garden'). Another portion was a Muslim cemetery and was the burial place of a Gazi (a Muslim saint). This land was shaped like the back of a tortoise, and according to the Tantras, such a graveyard is ideal for establishing a temple to Shakti, the Divine Mother, and for practising sadhana of this path. Sri Ramakrishna observed, 'Therefore, as if guided by Providence, the Rani chose this piece of land.'

Swami Saradananda wrote in the *Lilaprasanga*: 'It is recorded in the Endowment document that the land of the Kali temple complex is 60 bighas.' In the document itself, however, we find that the land measured 54½ bighas, and it was described as being bounded by the Ganges on the west, by the land of Kashinath Roy Choudhury and others on the east, by the government's powder magazine on the north,<sup>11</sup> and by the buildings previously owned by John Hastie on the south, where Jadulal Mullick's garden house was built. Rani Rasmani purchased the land at a cost of Rs 42,500 from John Hastie's executor, James Hastie, the attorney of the Supreme Court. The day was Monday, 6 September 1847 (22 Bhadra 1254 BS). In order to expand the area, the Rani acquired additional land from some boatmen on the north, and part of the Muslim cemetery on the east.<sup>12</sup> Thus the total area of the land came to 60 bighas, and altogether it cost the Rani Rs 55,000.<sup>13</sup> Later a portion of the land on the south had to be given up for a railway line and for the construction of Vivekananda Bridge. Thus the present amount of land held by the temple authorities is approximately 58 bi-

ghas.<sup>14</sup>

### The Northern Part of the Temple

To the north of what is now the temple courtyard there is a building called the Kuthi Bari, which was the house of the previous owner, John Hastie. Possibly it had originally been built by some indigo planters, as the Bengali *Kathamrita* indicates that indigo planters used to live there. The ancient banyan tree and the platform around it, which was used by Sri Ramakrishna, had also been there earlier.<sup>15</sup> And the holy shrine of Gazi Saheb in the Muslim cemetery was quite ancient.

In *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, Swami Saradananda gives us a vivid picture of the northern part of the compound:

In those days the land surrounding the Panchavati was not as even as it is now. It was full of pits, ditches, lowlands, jungles, etc. There grew an Amalaki tree among the wild trees and plants. It was a burial ground besides being a jungle. Therefore people hardly went there even in the day time. ... We have heard from Hriday that the [*amalaki*] tree grew on a low piece of land. So, anyone sitting under that tree could not be seen from the high land outside the jungle.<sup>16</sup>

Swami Saradananda also informs us that when the small pond called the goose pond (Hanspukur) was re-excavated, the ground around the old Panchavati was filled with mud from the pond, and in the process, the *amalaki* tree was destroyed. Sri Ramakrishna then set up a new Panchavati. He planted a holy fig tree to the west of the small hut, and Hriday planted saplings of a banyan tree, an *ashoka* tree, a *vilva* tree, and an *amalaki* tree. Around this Sri Ramakrishna added saplings of the holy basil and the *aparajita* creeper and then had the whole place fenced in with the help of a temple gardener named Bhartrihari. The basil plants and *aparajita* creepers grew quickly, so in a short time the place was quiet and secluded and suitable for meditation.

Shortly after the whole plot was ac-

quired, boundary walls were put up with two gates—the main gate for people coming from Calcutta, and a second gate meant to facilitate access to the Ganges for bathers from the Vachaspatipara, Mukherjipara, Bhattacharyapara and Choudhurypara areas. A brick embankment, retaining wall and a cement bathing ghat on the Ganges were also constructed then. But the strong current from the flood-tides in the river which come from the southwest—from the bend in the river at Ghusuri—struck the property with such force that the embankment and retaining wall were soon washed away. Rani Rasmani then assigned the project of constructing a new embankment, retaining wall and ghat to M/s MacIntosh & Burn Co. The work was completed at a cost of 1,60,000 rupees. After the embankment and retaining wall were built, the construction of the temple complex as well as the digging of the pond, planting of trees and saplings, and laying out of flower gardens could begin.

### The Temple Architecture

The name of the architect of the temple and other such details are not known for certain, but it is not difficult to identify the principal traditions that influenced its design. Regarding temple architecture of Bengal, generally four traditions have been followed: Rekha or Shikhar Deul, Bhadra or Pida Deul, Stupa-shirsha Bhadra or Pida Deul, and Shikharashirsha Bhadra or Pida Deul. Well into the Muslim period, however, temple architecture in Bengal developed a truly indigenous character, as the temples were built in a style modelled on the thatched huts of the villages. These temples can be broadly classified into three categories—Bangla Mandir, Chala Mandir and Ratna or Chura Mandir, which are differentiated by the design of the roofs.<sup>17</sup> The design of the Ratna Mandir, with its graceful turrets on the roofs, was truly an indication of the genius of Bengali architects. And one of the finest examples of the Ratna Mandir design is the Navaratna temple (a temple with



nine turrets) of Kali at Dakshineswar. The roof has two tiers. On the first tier there are four turrets—one at each of the four corners. Then four more turrets grace the corners of the smaller second tier, and a large ninth turret crowns the centre. The Navaratna style is truly majestic and was a special innovation in temple architecture. The total height of the temple at Dakshineswar is 100 feet, and the area at the base is 46½ square feet.<sup>18</sup> Besides the Navaratna temple to the Divine Mother, there are also within the complex a row of twelve Atchala temples (that is each temple has a two-tiered roof, each tier having four sides) to Shiva, plus a temple to Radha-Govinda. The whole complex is arranged in a beautiful and harmonious manner.

(to be continued)

### Notes and References

1. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 456.
2. *Counterpoint*, ed. Alok Roy (Calcutta: Riddhi-India, 1977), 1.201.
3. Subodh Kumar Roy, *Itivritta—Ariadaha o Dakshineswar* (1971), 80-90; and Sashi Bhushan Samanta, *Dakshineswar Mahatirthe Sri Sri Ramakrishnadever Lilatattva* (1345 BS), 1-2.
4. Her mother called her Rani, but her given name was Rasmani.
5. Rajchandra's father, Pritiram, in association with a moneylender from East Bengal, opened a depot for selling bamboo at Belegkata. A large quantity of bamboo could be tied up and despatched from there by floating it down the river to another point. A large bundle of bamboo was called *banser madh*, and from this, Pritiram got the title 'Madh'. In 1813, Pritiram started building 'Satmahala' (a house with seven sections) in Janbazar, but he died before it was finished. Eventually, in 1821, his son Rajchandra completed it. The total cost was Rs 5,00,000.
6. From the deed and other documents it is known that the land for the temple at Dakshineswar was bought on 6 September 1847 (22 Bhadra 1254 BS), so the arrangements for the Rani's pilgrimage must have been made either earlier that same year or in the preceding year.
7. Some years later, Mathurmohan's son Trailokya built temples on that land in Kashi dedicated to Trailokyeshwar Shiva and to Lakshmi-Narayana.
8. According to the *Lilaprasanga*, about one hundred boats, big and small and laden with various supplies, were berthed on the river.
9. *Kumarhatta Halisahar High School Centenary Volume (1854-1954)*, 49.
10. John Hastie lived on this property in the Kuthi. An industrious man, he became involved in setting up a jute mill there. After finalizing part of the plans, he left for London to purchase the machinery, but died during the journey, and the jute mill was not built.
11. A powder magazine had been established there in the 1840s. Wimco Match Factory is located there now. (*Itivritta*, 101.)
12. *Dakshineswar Mahatirthe Sri Sri Ramakrishnadever Lilatattva*, 7.
13. Swami Jagadisvarananda, *Dakshinesware Sri Ramakrishna* (Imambazar, Hooghly: Sri Ramakrishna Dharmachakra, 1359 BS), 26.
14. Information courtesy of Sri Kushal Choudhury, Secretary, Dakshineswar Kali Mandir and Endowment Estate.
15. Swami Nityatmananda, *Sri Ma Darshan*, (Calcutta: General Printers and Publishers, 2nd edn), 3.216.
16. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1991), 1.157.
17. Asim Mukhopadhyaya, *Chabbis Parganar Mandir* (Calcutta: Ananda Bazar Prakashan, 1377 BS), 2-5.
18. David J McCutcheon, *Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal: Origins and Classification* (Calcutta: The Asiatic Society, 1972), 52.

---

---

# Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*—An Exposition

SWAMI PREMESHANANDA

Translated by Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee

## Chapter 1: The Section on *Samādhi* (*Samādhi-pādaḥ*)

### 1. *Atha yogānuśāsanam.*

Now concentration [yoga] is explained.

**C**omment: Only he who is well trained, that is has his body and the mind under control, and who is eager to enter the inner world, is eligible for practising the yoga of meditation. Such a person qualifies for the practice of yoga only if he is able to understand that Brahman is the goal of a seeker of freedom and that spiritual practice consists in

tearing the mind away from the world to engage it in the pursuit of that goal.

Maharshi Patanjali's instructions are meant for those who have acquired such awareness about the goal and the means. This is the significance of the word *atha* ('now') in the first aphorism.

### 2. *Yogaścitta-vṛtti-nirodhah.*

Yoga is restraining the mind-stuff (*citta*) [which is like a lake] from taking various forms (*vṛttis*) [or modifications, which are like waves and ripples rising in it when external causes impinge on it].

### 3. *Tadā draṣṭuḥ svarūpe'vasthānam.*

At that time (the time of concentration) the seer (Purusha) rests in his own (unmodified) state.

### 4. *Vṛtti-sārūpyam-itaratra.*

At other times (other than that of concentration) the seer is identified with the modifications.

**C**omment: Our mind has been busy with external things life after life. Now if we are to attain Self-knowledge we have to stop all activities of the mind. Even when the mind

ceases to think, we have the consciousness 'I exist'. We need to sit still for long hours, holding only to that 'I-consciousness'. This is the first instruction in the practice of yoga.

### 5. *Vṛttayaḥ pañcatayyaḥ kliṣṭākliṣṭāḥ.*

There are five classes of modifications, (some) painful and (others) not painful.

### 6. *Pramāṇa-viparyaya-vikalpa-nidrā-smṛtayaḥ.*

(These are) right knowledge, indiscrimination, verbal delusion, sleep and memory.

7. *Pratyakṣānumānāgamāḥ pramāṇāni.*

Direct perception, inference and competent evidence [the words of an *āpta* or 'attained person'] are proofs.

8. *Viparyayo mithyā-jñānam-atadrūpa-pratiṣṭhitam.*

Indiscrimination is false knowledge not established in real nature [like mistaking a piece of mother-of-pearl for a piece of silver].

9. *Śabda-jñānānupātī vastu-śūnyo vikalpaḥ.*

Verbal delusion follows from words having no (corresponding) reality.

10. *Abhāva-pratyayālambanā vṛttirnidrā.*

Sleep is a *vṛtti* that embraces the feeling of voidness.

11. *Anubhūta-viśayāsampramoṣaḥ smṛtiḥ.*

Memory is when the (*vṛttis* of) perceived subjects do not slip away (and through impressions come back to consciousness).

*Comment:* Usually we do not observe the movements of the mind. But if we want to make the mind inactive, it is extremely important that we keep a watch on its movements. The thoughts we entertain throughout the day are broadly of five types. Every thought results sometimes in pleasure, sometimes in pain. Generally, whatever circumstances we are in, we think about our associated daily ac-

tivities. Due to bad upbringing or lack of upbringing, sometimes various strange ideas too crop up in the mind. We always think about the happiness and misery of our past life. And when we get tired, the mind, as it were, winds itself up and lies down like an inert mass. What else is our life but such variegated plays of the mind?

12. *Abhyāsa-vairāgyābhyām tannirodhaḥ.*

Their control is by practice and non-attachment.

13. *Tatra sthitaḥ yatno'bhyāsaḥ.*

Continuous struggle to keep them (the *vṛttis*) perfectly restrained is practice.

14. *Sā tu dirgha-kāla-nairantarya-satkārāsevīto dṛḍha-bhūmiḥ.*

It becomes firmly grounded by long constant efforts with great love (for the end to be attained).

15. *Dṛṣṭānuśravika-viśayavitṛṣṇasya vaśikāra-samjñā vairāgyam.*

That effect which comes to those who have given up their thirst after objects, either seen or heard, and which wills to control the objects [that is to control the twofold motive powers (for our actions) arising from our own experience and from the experience of others, and thus prevent the *citta* being governed by them], is non-attachment.

*Comment:* Life means the activities of the gross and subtle bodies. Both these are consti-

tuted by *avidyā* (nescience). These are insentient matter like pieces of brick. The first step

towards stopping their activities is to realize that such play is absolutely useless for us. Then we have to follow it up with efforts to check the mind's propensity towards them. The second task is to forcibly stop these activities.

We find it difficult to get rid of lesser addictions like chewing betel leaves and tobacco. But if we really want to be free from them, we have first to reason out that these do not benefit us in any way but involve only pointless waste of energy and depletion of wealth. Above all, these mean slavery to a habit. Then we need to abstain from them now and then and see for ourselves whether the abstentions really harm us in any way.

Similarly, to free ourselves from the addiction to worldly enjoyments, we have to de-

***True non-attachment comes only to those who realize through subtle perception or discrimination that none of the objects of enjoyment they have known or heard about from others is beneficial to them, and that total renunciation of all desires for enjoyment does not harm them in the least.***

velop the following awareness: Through endless time we have catered so much enjoyment to the five senses and the mind, but that has not given us the least bit of satisfaction; rather, the addiction has only grown. Therefore we should not proceed farther in that direction. When the issue becomes clear through such reasoning, we have now and then to stop the activities of our mind and intellect and look inside and beyond them. We will then be convinced that when there is so much joy inside us, we shall only court disaster if we keep playing with things outside.

Through such practice, when non-attachment becomes well established, the bondage of maya formed of the three gunas will fully snap and the conception of one's true Self will

become clear.

Above the enjoyments of this world there exist infinite life, infinite knowledge and infinite bliss. One has to hear of this fact from a man of illumination or read it from scriptures and then ruminate over it again and again. How happily illumined souls live is evident from their play-like activities. As one thinks about their forms, and the facts of their lives, a longing to rise above worldly lures arises in one's mind. This is something to be specially comprehended before embarking on the practice of yoga.

To control the extreme restlessness of the mind one has to discriminate and understand that one has been intoxicated with this kind of play of the mind through so many births, without being benefited in the least. Therefore, this restlessness of the mind has to be stopped if one is to attain peace. As a sequel to this, one will develop disgust for the habit of thinking about various things. One will then have to adopt the above-mentioned methods to restrain the mind.

But this habit is not something that goes away in one or two days. To conquer this habit acquired through innumerable births, one has to ceaselessly keep the thought-stream of the mind stopped for many days. If I quell the thoughts of the mind, I will find out my true Self. It will not do me the least bit of harm; rather, through it, I will be able to free myself from the clutches of misery. This fact needs to be firmly imprinted in the mind.

Sometimes we find that non-attachment arises in the mind because of some particular distress. But such non-attachment does not produce any lasting effect. True non-attachment comes only to those who realize through subtle perception or discrimination that none of the objects of enjoyment they have known or heard about from others is beneficial to

them, and that total renunciation of all desires for enjoyment does not harm them in the least. The term *vaśīkāra-samjñā* (*samjñā* = jñana, or awareness) means firmly imprinting the idea

in our mind that the objects of enjoyment are out and out vile, and a clear awareness (and conviction) that they can never lure us.

### 16. *Tatparam puruṣa-khyāter-guṇa-vaitrṣṇyam.*

That is extreme non-attachment which gives up [under which one ceases to feel attraction for] even the qualities [the three guṇas, which constitute the whole of nature], and [which] comes from the knowledge of (the real nature of) the Puruṣa.

*Comment:* When the mind is thus kept restrained for many days, one experiences a wonderful peace, and the mind becomes serene. Then one knows for certain that all peace and happiness is within oneself. One needs to

apprehend nothing apart from one's true Self. This state is called *para-vairāgya* (supreme non-attachment). When this state is attained, the mind becomes absolutely free from attraction for anything in this creation.

### 17. *Vitarka-vicārānandāsmītānugamāt samprajñātaḥ.*

The concentration called right knowledge [*samprajñāta samādhi*] is that which is [upon a single object and is] followed [in stages] by reasoning, discrimination, bliss [and] unqualified egoism [depending on the object chosen].

### 18. *Virāma-pratyayābhyāsa-pūrvaḥ saṃskāra-śeṣo'nyaḥ.*

There is another samadhi [*asamprajñāta samādhi*] which is attained by the constant practice of cessation of all mental activity, [and] in which the *citta* [mind] retains only the unmanifest impressions.

*Comment:* Concentration of the mind is the first discipline for spiritual progress. That is why a Hindu's religious practice started with Gāyatrī worship. In that worship boys were taught to concentrate on [an inner] light. Those who want to follow the path of meditation have to first practise making the mind inactive. Established in that state, they have to comprehend the idea 'I am'. For those who succeed in this, certain other practices are prescribed. First, one has to think about some gross object. When the mind becomes totally fixed on that, one can understand that the power of concentration of the mind has developed. Then in the second stage, the mind

needs to be fixed on some subtle (or abstract) idea. Thus when the mind becomes completely still and steady, a stage called samadhi is reached. In that tranquil state of the mind, sometimes one gets a faint glimpse of one's true Self. That is called *sānanda samādhi*. There is another state in which one remains in a sort of unswerving awareness of that very 'I'. That is known as *sāsmītā samādhi*. When the mind comes out from such samadhis, one finds that one's previous impressions (saṃskāras) continue to remain as earlier. But unlike the worldly-minded, who move about with a restless mind swayed by their impressions, yogis can keep the impressions fully under control.

### 19. *Bhava-pratyayo videha-prakṛti-layānām.*

(This samadhi when not followed by extreme non-attachment) becomes the cause of the re-manifestation of the gods [the offices of gods are filled successively by various souls, none of whom is perfect] and of those that become merged in nature.

*Comment:* One has to undergo various | disciplines to become eligible for the practice

of meditation. Those who do not do that but practise remaining inactive by the sheer exercise of will power do not attain freedom. Possibly, due to the propagation of the Buddhist doctrine of nirvana, many people followed various spiritual disciplines based on erroneous beliefs. They did not know about Brahman, either with or without attributes; what is more, they did not admit of any entity called Brahman. Many among them were atheists and nihilists. Their idea was that there is nothing called jīvātman. Therefore they thought that the ultimate goal of life was to hold the breath (practise *kumbhaka*) and hibernate

through worship, become tempted by various occult powers when they accrue to them. This spells their downfall. And if they die in a state of samadhi with their mind void and inactive, their mind-stuff continues to be covered by *avidyā* (nescience). Thus they are reborn at the end of the kalpa.

Some people may be able to merge their mind in nature, that is in *avidyā*, through meditation. If they die while *not* in a state of Samadhi, they may have in their mind even thoughts other than that of the primal *avidyā*. Their next birth will of course be determined by their thought at the time of death. And if their consciousness remains merged in nature even while they give up the gross body, they will remain in that state until the end of the kalpa.

Two kinds of liberation have been spoken of in Vedānta: *videha-mukti* (liberation when bereft of the body) and *jīvan-mukti* (liberation when still living). *Videha-mukti* means

liberation after death. Likewise we can also interpret *videha-laya* as the state in which one remains merged in nature (Prakriti) when bereft of the body. And it is a universal truth that one is reborn exactly in accordance with one's state of mind just before death.

Commentators have understood the word *videha* to mean *devatā* (god). Swami Vivekananda too accepted the same meaning.

***Those who embark on yoga without purifying the mind through the practice of karma yoga and attaining concentration of the mind through worship, become tempted by various occult powers when they accrue to them. This spells their downfall.***

smugly like a frog or a snake. During deep sleep we become as if dead. But on waking up we find ourselves exactly as we were before sleep. If such atheists and nihilists die while in a state of samadhi, they remain merged in nature, as if in deep sleep, until the end of the kalpa (until the dissolution of the universe at the end of the cycle). When a new cycle of creation begins they are reborn as they were before, with the sum total of their earlier impressions intact.

Those who embark on yoga without purifying the mind through the practice of karma yoga and attaining concentration of the mind

20. *Śraddhā-vīrya-smṛti-samādhi-prajñā-pūrvaka itareṣām.*

To others [those who do not want the position of gods or even that of rulers of cycles] (this samadhi) comes through faith, energy, memory, concentration and discrimination of the real. [They attain to liberation.]

(to be continued)

---

---

## ↔ Glimpses of Holy Lives ↔

### Every Saint Has a Past ...

**L**ord Shiva assumed the form of an ascetic and with a luminous smile on his lips descended on the streets of Chidambaram. Sacred ash smeared all over his body, clad in just a loin cloth and with just a begging bowl in hand, the ascetic stood before the potter's house and called out: 'Tirunilakantham, Tirunilakantham!'

A seventy-something old man emerged from the house and, finding an ascetic at the threshold, fell prostrate at his feet. With folded hands Tirunilakantha welcomed the ascetic to his house.

The potter offered the ascetic a low stool to sit on. His wife soon came with a plate and a water pot. The couple washed the ascetic's hands and feet and offered him a glass of water to drink. 'Will you kindly have your food at our house? Can we be of any other service to you?' enquired Tirunilakantha.

Ascetic: 'No, my dear, I have already had my food. I have come here for some help. I would like you to preserve this begging bowl with you for some time. This is no ordinary earthen bowl. No gold can ever replace it—so precious it is to me. Keep it carefully and return it to me when I come back asking for it.'

With folded hands Tirunilakantha nodded assent and touched the bowl to his head. The ascetic left. Tirunilakantha accompanied him some distance and returned home.

Tirunilakantha went about his job, fixing the rod on to the potter's wheel and rotating it. When it gained speed, he began fashioning pots after pots—the deftness of his hands and decades of experience showing on their geometric similarity. His wife went past him towards the kiln, straw in hand. Her face was expressionless. His was equally stony. Neither appeared to recognize the other's presence.

Was there anything wrong with them?

\* \* \*

It was a forty-year feud, resulting from a costly mistake of his.

Pongal is an important festival in Tamil Nadu and is of special relevance to farmers. The festival derives its name from a sweet prepared on this day by cooking part of the recent produce of rice with jaggery. The rice is usually boiled in a new earthen pot. The sweet is offered to the sun god and the prasad partaken of with friends and relatives.

#### **Potter with a Difference**

When Pongal was round the corner, more pot-sellers flocked to Tirunilakantha's place—a veritable factory of pots, thousands of them literally rolling out every day. Tirunilakantha was a potter with a difference. The pot-sellers exclaimed: 'Dear sir, your pots have a unique value in the market. When held near the ear, they emit a conch sound; on tapping, they give out a musical note; when held near the nose, they emit the sweet aroma of sacred ash. What additive do you use in your pots?'

Tirunilakantha replied, 'Why, I know of no additives. But yes, while making pots I try to chant Shiva's holy name.' The pot-sellers said, 'Well, that explains it.' More spiritual conversation ensued, Tirunilakantha clarifying their doubts. The retailers prostrated at his feet before they left, pots in their carts. Tirunilakantha's wife's eyes would become moist with tears of joy at the reverence people had for her husband.

#### **The Mistake**

Our thoughts and actions are guided by

our samskaras. A person on the path to perfection needs to be careful about weak links in his character and avoid times and places that stimulate and manifest his latent bad impressions. Tirunilakantha's weak moment had come.

On return from the market one day with sale proceeds of pots in hand, he succumbed to the lures of a prostitute. Grapevine always works overtime. The news reached home before he did. With his cash fully depleted, Tirunilakantha reached home guilty and hesitant.

### The Rebuke

Tirunilakantha washed his feet and entered the house. Sparks flew from his wife: 'Where had you been?' Tirunilakantha asked, 'When?' Irritated at the counter-question, she burst out: 'To that harlot's house?' Tirunilakantha's throat choked. He squirmed.

His wife let off steam: 'Aren't you ashamed? The entire town has held you in great esteem for your pots of divine fragrance, for your life of devotion and sterling character. And today you visit a public woman! What will you say if people now complain of the stench of sweat emanating from your pots?'

'My dear,' Tirunilakantha began. 'Dear? Who—me or her? Who is your dear?' she cut in.

'Please don't say that, *sakhi*, my friend. I am sorry for my mistake.'

'True friendship is something valuable between two people. Does that exist between us?'

'Yes, my dear,' Tirunilakantha drew near her.

'Stop! Stop where you are,' words came from a betrayed wife. 'Don't touch me with your stained hands!'

'Don't say that, my dear,' he tried to pacify her, and in sincere repentance wanted to hold her shoulders.

'If you touch me ... Tirunilakantham!' she burst out.

*Nilakantha* is an epithet of Shiva meaning

'blue-throated', referring to the poison He is believed to have swallowed to save the world from annihilation, and which His consort Uma prevented from descending down His throat. The lethal poison is said to have remained in Shivas' throat, leaving a permanent blue tinge on it. *Tiru* is a Tamil prefix meaning *Sri* in Sanskrit, a term of respect before a man's name.

What did she mean by 'If you touch me ... Tirunilakantham!?' Certainly not his name—a wife calling her husband by name was unthinkable those days. Such was the wife's reverence for the husband. Then what did she mean? That she would swallow poison if he touched her? or would she emit poison at him? or did she swear in the name of Shiva, the blue-throated one? It was not clear. But one thing was certain: she could not bear his touch.

### The Penance

They parted that day. The atmosphere cooled down a little the next day. Tirunilakantha realized his grave mistake. He resolved: 'From this day I shall never touch any other woman even mentally. And won't touch you too, my wife, without your consent. I promise in the name of my Lord Shiva.'

She did not want to be touched. Nor did he press her. Though he strayed, it was here that he rose again. He proved that he was different from ordinary husbands—having a tiff with their wives one day and making up the next day, quarrelling one day and getting closer the day after. Nor did he exhibit male superiority to cow her. Both in the prime of youth, Tirunilakantha willingly made the pledge, as self-punishment. She too cooled down in a couple of days and went about her duties, assisting him in making pots. He calmly went about his job, the Lord's name on his lips. She cooked for him and looked after his comforts, but there was no touch, no unnecessary words. People found nothing odd in them. The couple visited temples, entertained guests, interacted with relatives; but



neither of them discussed with anyone the un-savoury event or the pledge. Forty long years rolled by. They were now old and waiting for the final call from the Lord.

### The Test

The call did come, not for their release from the world, but in the form of the ascetic who left his begging bowl with the potter for safekeeping till his return.

The ascetic was back now, asking for the bowl. After Tirunilakantha and his wife worshipped him, the ascetic reminded him about the bowl. Tirunilakantha said, 'Yes, holy one, I shall fetch it right now.' The divine play began. Tirunilakantha scoured his house for the bowl, in vain. It had disappeared.

'O holy one ...'

'What happened?'

'That which shouldn't have has happened.'

'Have you broken the bowl?'

'No, it's lost.'

The ascetic was incensed: 'I had told you that the bowl was invaluable!'

'I shall replace it with a new one,' Tirunilakantha pleaded with tears in eyes.

'I said it was irreplaceable, didn't I?'

'Yes, but I have lost it.'

'It's a lie!'

'No! I promise, my lord. It is true.'

'You promise? Where is your son? Repeat your promise with your hand on his head.'

'We have no children, revered sir.'

'Why?'

Tirunilakantha stood silently, head bowed down.

'All right, that's your misfortune. Hold your wife's hand, both of you take a dip in the temple tank and repeat your promise.'

Tirunilakantha looked at his wife. She was silent. He brought the rod used to turn the potter's wheel.

'Why this now?'

'To follow your instructions, holy one.'

'Explain.'

'I have promised not to touch my wife. We shall hold either end of this rod, dip in the temple tank and make the promise.'

'Stop! Is this a second lie to cover the first?'

'No, I promise.'

'What?'

'That I lost the bowl, that I don't touch my wife.' The ascetic exclaimed: 'Funny couple! Repeat your story in front of the elders of the town.'

Thousands of local brahmins assembled before the temple and heard the ascetic's complaint. 'Tirunilakantha, this is not fair. We know of no dispute between you and your wife. You should certainly hold her hand, dip into the temple tank and make your promise,' the prominent ones declared.

Unwilling to discuss his personal life before so many, he walked silently to the temple tank with his wife. The ascetic and the assembly followed. Before dipping into the water he held the rod and offered the other end to his wife. The ascetic fumed at this and insisted on his holding her hand. Tirunilakantha said, 'It's impossible, O holy one. We have pledged not to touch each other.' And he unfolded before the assembly the unpleasant episode—his fall, her rebuke, his pledge and all. They froze in awe and amazement at the frightening pledge and their austere life. Rod in hand, the couple dipped into the tank and rose, only to find that they had become young again!

The ascetic too was gone. Instead, there was the luminous form of Lord Shiva with His consort Uma. Shiva said, 'O holy ones who have mastered your senses! You will always remain with us, ever young.' The couple left with their Lord for His heavenly abode, the entire assembly mutely witnessing with folded hands.

For his devotion, purity and strict adherence to truth in thought, word and deed, Tirunilakantha is adored as one of the sixty-three Nayanmars, Shaiva saints of Tamil Nadu. \*

---

---

# Kaṭha Rudra Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

**Sevenfold division of one attributeless Brahman (continued)**

मायोपाधिविनिर्मुक्तं शुद्धमित्यभिधीयते ।  
मायासम्बन्धतश्चेषो जीवोऽविद्यावशस्तथा ॥४३॥  
अन्तःकरणसम्बन्धात् प्रमातेत्यभिधीयते ।  
तथा तद्वृत्तिसम्बन्धात् प्रमाणमिति कथ्यते ॥४४॥

43-4. [The Consciousness] unconditioned by the limiting adjunct (*upādhi*) of *māyā* (cosmic nescience) is termed 'pure' [Brahman]; and when associated with *māyā*, It (Brahman) is God (*īśvara*); under the influence of *avidyā* (individual nescience) It is individual self (*jīva*). When associated with the internal organ, It is called the knower (*pramātā*). Likewise, in association with the modifications [of the internal organ], It is called the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*).

अज्ञानमपि चैतन्यं प्रमेयमिति कथ्यते ।  
तथा ज्ञातं च चैतन्यं फलमित्यभिधीयते ॥४५॥  
सर्वोपाधिविनिर्मुक्तं स्वात्मानं भावयेत्सुधीः ।

45-6. The Consciousness that is unknown is called 'object' [consciousness] (*prameya*); and the consciousness which is known is termed 'result' or 'fruit' (*phala*). The wise person should contemplate his own Self as devoid of (unconditioned by) all limiting adjuncts.

**The fruits of [Brahman] Knowledge**

विद्याफलम्  
एवं यो वेद तत्त्वेन ब्रह्मभूयाय कल्पते ॥४६॥

46. He who knows thus in reality becomes fit for inhering in [the pure Being, which is] Brahman.

सर्ववेदान्तसिद्धान्तसारं वच्मि यथार्थतः  
स्वयं मृत्वा स्वयं भूत्वा स्वयमेवावशिष्यते ॥४७॥ इत्युपनिषत् ॥

47. [Now] I speak of the essence of the [decisive, settled] conclusion of all Vedānta, in its true significance: dying oneself, being oneself, one remains oneself alone. Thus [ends] the Upaniṣad. \*

---

**Y**ou are that ever-free Atman; your expression of self-pity does not befit you. No doubt it is difficult to look directly into the sun, but it is easy to look at the reflected sun. Likewise, it may be difficult to realize the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute as 'I am Brahman', but one can definitely identify oneself with Him as 'I am His child or part.'

—Swami Turiyananda

## A Heart Poured Out: A Story of Swami Ashokananda

*Sister Gargi (Marie Louise Burke)*. Kalpa Tree Press, 65 East 96th Street, Suite 12D, New York, NY 10128. 2003. 472 pp. \$ 26. Copies available at Advaita Ashrama, 5 Dehi Entally Road, Kolkata 700 014. Rs 500.

Sister Gargi has earned the gratitude of Vedantists all over the world by writing the monumental six-volume *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries* as well as the definitive biography of Swami Trigunatita and several other works. Now she has outdone herself with this magnificent tribute to her guru, Swami Ashokananda.

The title is taken from a remark the swami once made: 'The heart must be poured out—poured out!' It is clear from Sister Gargi's account that he himself poured his heart out in abundance in building up the Vedanta Society of Northern California and training his disciples.

The photos alone are worth the price of the book. They will have special appeal for devotees who, like myself, knew some of the swamis of the second generation (the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna's direct disciples) only when they were old. It comes as a revelation to see their photos when they were young—vibrant, laughing, and dashing in their three-piece suits.

Swami Ashokananda was born as Yogesh Chandra Datta in 1893 in a village in East Bengal (now Bangladesh). He was a devout, introspective boy with a passion for reading. It didn't take him long to discover Vedantic literature, and when he was still in his teens he had an extraordinary experience that was to determine the course of his life.

He was meditating on Kali, when 'suddenly I felt that the presence of the Mother was replaced by the vivid presence of Swamiji. ...

Immediately I began to feel that Swamiji was pouring his power and spirit into me. ... Just as you would put the mouth of a full jar against the mouth of an empty one ... and just as the contents of the first would pour into the second ... so his power poured into me. Swamiji's mind and mine became as though merged.' Subsequently he had a dream in which Swamiji visited his house and talked to him, and on another occasion a mantra came to him spontaneously while he was walking along a road.

Yogesh had doubts about the validity of these experiences, but when, with some trepidation, he confided them at different times to some of the direct disciples—first Swami Premananda, then Swami Turiyananda, then Swami Brahmananda and finally Swami Shivananda—they all assured him that his experiences were real and that Swami Vivekananda had actually initiated him.

So it is no wonder that devotees who read the published lectures of Swami Ashokananda often have the eerie feeling that they're hearing the echo of a tone and style of speaking they've heard before.

Eventually Yogesh received brahmacharya from Swami Brahmananda and sannayasa from Swami Shivananda. He served at the Madras Math before being assigned to Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati. He had always had a reputation as a formidable intellectual, but at Mayavati he cemented it, because in his editorials for *Prabuddha Bharata* he dared to criticize Mahatma Gandhi.

Swami Ashokananda had the highest reverence for Gandhi, and in fact when the latter was assassinated he wept for a week. But he disagreed with Gandhi's policies on two counts. First, he did not believe it was possible to spiritualize Indian politics until the population as a whole had been spiritualized. Second, he disagreed with Gandhi's emphasis on cottage industries. He believed that India could be industrialized without losing her spirituality.

Gandhi himself replied to these points. Mainly he thought it was sacrilegious for Swami Ashokananda to invoke Swami Vivekananda in defence of his position. But in fact Swami Ashokananda's arguments followed logically from Swami Vivekananda's belief that religion is the centrepiece of Indian life, and that all other activities ought to be subordinate.

In defence of Gandhi's position, though, it must be said that if he had waited for the whole of India to become spiritualized before embarking on his struggle, he never would have accomplished anything. In trying to do two things at once—win political freedom and spiritualize the Indian people at the same time—Gandhi may have failed, but he failed magnificently; and who can tell how many people were uplifted in the process?

The episode highlights a characteristic of Swami Ashokananda that he retained to the end of his life. He would never compromise or settle for second best. He was a perfectionist with high ideals and he expected people to stretch themselves and attain those ideals. The thought of watering down the ideals as a concession to human frailty was anathema to him.

So it is not surprising to learn that he was an uncompromising Advaitin. No dallying (to quote the author's memorable phrase) in 'the warm, sun-dappled waters of dualism' for him. Even those devotees who, like myself, shy away from the fathomless depths of Advaita and prefer the gentler waters of Vishishtadvaita have to admire Swami Ashokananda

for his adamant insistence on the highest—and also admire those heroic souls who followed him.

This is not to say that the swami was always intimidating. There is a matchless series of three passport photos that capture his moods. In the first, he is frowning sternly. In the second, he is beginning to smile, and the sternness is struggling with the smile. In the third, he is smiling as radiantly as a child.

Tough he was, but he had a sensitive side that often burst through. Once he had to kill a fish, and the memory bothered him all his life. On another occasion, during the Great Depression, he turned away a beggar, and that bothered him for the rest of his life too.

His real life's work began when he left India to take up a new assignment in San Francisco. At that time, the renowned philosopher Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan remarked, 'There goes the best brain in India.'

In San Francisco, Swami Ashokananda wanted to build for the ages. He embarked on ambitious projects aimed at lasting for centuries. But he was soon to find how cruel the sharp shoals of Maya could be.

The establishment of branch temples in Berkeley and Sacramento was fraught with setbacks and hardships; so was the building of the New Temple and the retreat at Olema. Legal battles were a constant problem; for when Mahamaya really wants to stick it to you, she brings in the lawyers. The neighbours did not want a Hindu temple in Berkeley, and Swami Ashokananda was shocked by the crude display of racial and religious prejudice that ensued. For some time the US government wanted to absorb the Olema retreat into a national park, and this necessitated a long legal battle. When the swami wanted to revise the Society's bylaws to bring them more in line with American legal requirements, some devotees rebelled and appealed to the trustees at Belur Math. Swami Ashokananda found himself having to justify his actions to his own brother monks. But he excused them on the

grounds that they were 'a rather innocent sort of people' unfamiliar with the worldly sophistries of a litigious society.

Possibly the worst blow he had to endure was the trustees' decision in early 1959 'to have no more convents in the USA' after the Santa Barbara convent. Swami Ashokananda had been building up a convent, which now had six members, and the prospect of having to disband it shocked and dismayed him. He wrote a thirteen-page letter to the general secretary in which he analysed the pros and cons of the issue and presented a strong case for a convent not only in San Francisco, but in every American centre. It must have been quite a letter, because ten weeks later he received a letter authorizing him to continue with the convent.

In every case, Swami Ashokananda persisted with true Advaitic resolution through all obstacles and setbacks, and eventually he prevailed. But he had always had problems with his health, and these were exacerbated by overwork. As he got older, the problems multiplied and wore him down. He had wanted to

hand over the Vedanta Society of Northern California 'in perfect order' to his successor; and when he finally gave up the body, in December of 1969, the Society's membership paid him a tribute that showed that he had indeed left it in perfect order.

As the author notes, Vedanta Societies in the United States tend to suffer a loss of membership whenever the head swami dies and another succeeds him. But in San Francisco, there was 'no exodus of members. No one budged.' This was the highest tribute the members could have paid their guru, who himself was the very embodiment of steadfastness.

If one were in a nitpicking mood and wanted to hunt down a flaw in this book, it would have to be the subtitle, 'A Story of Swami Ashokananda'. It shouldn't be 'a' story. It should be 'the' story, because nobody will ever tell it better than Sister Gargi.

*William Page*  
Bangkok, Thailand

---

### Carry a Few Candles

It is not that a person works all the time. My motto is: when I open my eyes may I see God everywhere; when I close my eyes may I see God within me. If you are not doing anything, close your eyes, let your mind at once go unto God. If you are talking to someone, let your words be addressed to God and not to man. Why do you think when Swami Vivekananda spoke to anyone, even a casual word, he just changed that person's life? Once he was staying as the guest of someone in Bihar. One morning he had gone out for a walk and he met a boy who was also out for a walk. He looked at the boy's feet, and he found that he had not tied his shoelaces properly. And Swami Vivekananda knelt down and tied the laces for him, and he said, 'My boy, you must not be sloppy', and he went on. The boy *never* forgot that incident; it changed his life. Just this meeting, just this one. It is a universal testimony that anyone who approached Swami Vivekananda felt the very best within himself rising to the surface of his consciousness. He felt that he was also someone, that he had a mission in life, he could be great. ... Why do you think it was so? Because Swami Vivekananda saw the very highest in everyone. He saw Brahman in everyone.

If only in a very small measure, we have to do the same. If he carried many suns in his hand, we should be able to carry at least a few candles, but light we must carry.

—Swami Ashokananda, *Meditation Ecstasy and Illumination*, 129.



## Reviews



*For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA  
publishers need to send two copies of their latest publications.*

**TB Control in India: Ramakrishna Mission's Contribution.** *Comp. and ed. Swami Deshikatmananda.* Ramakrishna Mission, Ramakrishna Ashram Marg, New Delhi 110 055. 2002. xix + 253 pp. Hardback Rs 300, paperback Rs 250.

Tuberculosis is known to man since the beginning of history. Even after decades of introduction and use of effective chemo-therapeutic drugs, TB not only remains but, in vicious combination with AIDS, has emerged as the major adult killer and is responsible for two million deaths every year in the world. India registers two million new cases and 4,50,000 deaths due to TB every year.

The Ramakrishna Mission first started a TB clinic in Delhi in 1933 when anti-TB drugs were not available. Since then, the Mission has continued to fight against TB through a network of its hospitals and dispensaries in various parts of the country. In this context the publication of this book is most welcome and should inspire many more NGOs to take up TB eradication programmes.

The book is divided into five sections. Section One contains transcripts of speeches on various topics. Although this section contains some technical articles, a lay reader too can certainly benefit by them. He will get a good idea of what TB control is all about. Section Two has papers presented by eminent scholars in a seminar organized by the Mission in 1998. Section Three deals with research studies carried out by the Ramakrishna Mission TB Clinic. Section Four contains information about the Ramakrishna Mission centres working in TB control. Lastly, Section Five gives heart-rending stories about some selected TB patients.

The book has five appendices, containing some general information about the present status of TB in India and some technical guidelines for its diagnosis and treatment, and the national programmes for TB control.

Eminent personalities responsible for TB con-

trol in India in the past and the present—like Dr S P Pamra, former Director, New Delhi TB Centre; Dr D R Nagpaul, President, Tuberculosis Association of India; Sri K K Bakshi, former Union Health Secretary; and Sri J V R Prasad Rao, present Union Secretary for Family Welfare—have enriched the publication with their contributions.

Under the Ramakrishna Mission, there are fourteen hospitals and more than one hundred dispensaries functioning in different places in the country. These are widely spread and include tribal areas like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Abujmaharh (Madhya Pradesh), and remote tribal areas in Rajahmundry (Andhra Pradesh). Though in most of these centres TB patients are treated along with others, two centres—one at New Delhi and the other at Ranchi—are exclusively dedicated to TB eradication programmes. Though this programme has been going on since 1933, detailed documentation of the work done was not done properly. The present book is an attempt to show broadly the efforts for TB control in India, particularly highlighting the Ramakrishna Mission's contribution. This effort may be modest when compared with the magnitude of the problem, yet it is very significant when we consider the dedicated service and scientific approach adopted by the Mission. This compilation shows the involvement of the Ramakrishna Mission in this great effort right from the inception of the TB control programme seven decades ago, till this day. It also shows the gradual evolution of the methods adopted to cure TB patients, commencing from the time when no anti-TB drugs were available (between 1933 and 1948) to now, when such drugs are available. However, the aim of bringing out this compilation, it seems, is not only to highlight the efforts and contributions of the Ramakrishna Mission to TB control programme, but also to include in it valuable and illustrative technical and general information on the disease.

Although this book has information about the treatment of TB by many of the Ramakrishna Mis-

sion centres, some useful information has been left out. For example, the Varanasi Sevashrama has been treating TB patients systematically for many years. Dr N L Bordia, a former advisor to the Government of India for TB control, was of the opinion that the Ramakrishna Mission Tuberculosis Sanatorium, Ranchi, was one of the best in India. His actual comments are worth incorporating in the next edition of the book.

To what extent will this book prove useful to a layman? Since it deals with only TB control, it can have only a very limited utility for him. However, it is an excellent guide for all those who are engaged in TB control.

*Swami Brahmeshananda*  
Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama  
Chandigarh

**Sri Sarada Vijnanagita.** *Babaji Bob Kindler.* SRV Association of Oregon, PO Box 14012, Portland, Oregon 97293, USA. 133 pp. Price not mentioned.

**H**oly Mother Sri Sarada Devi was the spiritual consort of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, an incarnation of God for this age. When we go through the Ramakrishna-Sarada-Vivekananda literature it becomes amply clear that just a few direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were aware of Holy Mother's unobtrusive and veiled presence, not to speak of understanding her towering spirituality. As her life unfolded in Sri Ramakrishna's divine play, she slowly came out of her mysterious sphere to free people from the bonds of samsara. Sri Sarada Devi is seen to give intermittent glimpses, sometimes in her unguarded moments, of who she really was: the Divine Mother of the universe. This corroborated with what Sri Ramakrishna said of her. This knowledge coupled with her photographs and priceless words of instructions given amidst her conventional life gives us a tangible idea of the Godhead represented by the her.

The book has highlighted these three dimensions admirably. Sri Sarada Devi's choicest words are compiled, selected and edited according to relevant topics and further graced by all her thirty-two known photographs in black and white. Here Holy Mother's immortal sayings issue unimpeded by historical and cultural settings in twenty-two small chapters, and enter deep into our consciousness.

The topics so selected deal with man's spiritual and temporal problems in a language that is simple, direct, yet sublime. That is why Holy Mother's words have such a tremendous appeal that cut across national and racial boundaries. Yet, yet it is so hard for our unenlightened minds to grasp this implication, although it is unquestionably attracted to her pictures and her words. Maybe this is due to the invisible umbilical cord still connecting us to her. A few sincere souls who struggle in the spiritual path have an intuitive grasp, however microscopic, of her immensity, boundless grace and unconditional compassion, even now working in the subtle universal realms and inspiring her children everywhere.

Babaji Bob Kindler, a sincere devotee, introduces the book saying that his meditation on Holy Mother and absorption in her thoughts for over thirty years after being initiated by a direct disciple of Sri Sarada Devi, resulted in a rare divine mood that lasted for ten days and later crystallized in the form of this book. The book contains nothing new, its source being the Ramakrishna Movement's literature on Sri Sarada Devi. The difference is this: the teachings are presented in verse form that is both delightful and sweet.

This book is a must-read for all devotees of Sri Sarada Devi. The quality of paper and printing is superb and, what's more, the cover has the imprint of Holy Mother's footprints, which undoubtedly add value to the book.

*Swami Satyamayananda*  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

**Hindu Scriptures.** *Dominic Goodall.* Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. 2000. li + 410 pp. Rs 395.

**H**indu Scriptures by Dominic Goodall is the third in the series of anthologies with the same title. Two of them, published earlier in 1938 and 1966, were that of Nicol MacNicol and Prof Zaehner. The present book is an English translation of verses from a few of the important books of the sacred Hindu lore. Of the Vedas there are a few hymns from the *Rig* and the *Atharva* Samhitas; from the principal Upanishads, the two prose-Upanishads (in part)—Brihadaranyaka and *Chandogya*—and four verse-Upanishads—*Isha*, *Katha*, *Mandukya* and

*Shvetashvatara*. Further, the *Gīta*, the *Yajñavalkya Smṛiti* (in part), the *Bhagavata* (in part) and the *Kīraṇa Tantra* (in part)—a scripture of the Shaiva Siddhanta—complete the list in this anthology. Most of this selection attempts to trace the emergence and development of doctrines of theology and cosmogony.

Although a good attempt has been made here to make this collection fairly representative of the Hindu thought, it would be incorrect to say that this is what Hindu scriptures are all about. It is a fair prologue affording a cursory view of the Hindu scriptures. Orthodox Hindu scriptures refer to that vast body of literature of innumerable different groups of people across India, each of which reads the ultimate Reality from different standpoints. They display a widely colourful array of approaches, practices and knowledge of God and Reality—from the very base, pluralistic, to the most sublime, non-dualistic, view, transcending human thought and speech. They are not mere speculative groping, but experiential wisdom. Hence, understanding Hindu scriptures requires a comprehensive view that reconciles all divergent and mutually conflicting views.

Seen in this light, though the author's introduction is highly informative, it displays lack of proper understanding. Some of his misconstrued conclusions prove the point. These present a distorted view of the Hindu scriptures. A few samples of them include his contention that the religion of the Veda was polytheistic (xi, xii); that the Upanishads were motivated by power in their quest for knowledge (Edgerton's quotation); followed by several of his misquotations (xiii-xvi); that the *Gīta* merely talks of *some sort of bhakti* (xxvi). But the most curious of all is his attempt to prove the inferiority and the idiotic character of the race that produced the 'profane and contemptible Puranas', the Indian mythology (xxxviii-xxxix). An attempt to set right the author's perspective is beyond the scope of this review.

The author's tone reminds you of the attitudinal legacy of those early Indological scholars whose aim in studying the Eastern lore was to help the British gain political hegemony over a subject race by mastering their language, and to establish the superiority of the Greco-Roman-Christian religion and literature to that of the Orient. Born in the womb of European Romanticism, Indology had set

off with such a vicious intention, no doubt; but it has come a long way in its march over a period of the last two centuries shedding much of its religious prejudices. Some of the impartial European connoisseurs of Eastern literature have today ended up acknowledging the greatness of the Vedic lore, not merely for its antiquity, but for its sheer genuineness and visionary sweep unseen in the history of world literature and philosophy. But the fact remains that the credibility of Hindu scriptures does not depend on any such exotic recognition. They stand on eternal and experimentally verifiable spiritual principles. In such a positive intellectual draft, some of the author's views in this book—first published in 1996 in the UK—display that distorted occidental vision for the Eastern lore.

Different scholars have translated different portions in this book, leaving their distinctive marks. But, here and there, translations reveal lack of proper comprehension of the original texts. Knowing a foreign language is one thing; proper grasp of a living spiritual tradition is quite another. In the absence of the latter, the former results in interpretational flaws: *bhūtas* (elements) become 'disembodied spirits' (141), and *rajavidya rajaguhya* (Sovereign science, Sovereign mystery) becomes 'science of kings and mystery of kings' (247). Whether the *Gīta* was ever on a king-making spree, or whether the *Chandogya* was ever tormented by disembodied spirits, are for right-thinking people to guess. All glory to etymological loyalty! These are just a few samples from a host of them. This is more evident in the Upanishadic portion. Philologically or etymologically, kudos to such translations.

Mere perusal of the pithy and cryptic verses without proper interpretation will be of little help to readers in fathoming their true depth and significance. In that sense the book leaves much to be desired. Nevertheless, with all its black-and-white features, the book introduces the readers to an experiential thought system of a race for whom Spirit mattered more than matter. For that the author deserves our gratitude, and especially for offering the *Kīraṇa Tantra* for the first time to English readers. This book has a valuable glossary and a bibliography, and the printing is good.

Swami Shuddhidananda  
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata



---

---

## ☞ Reports ☞

**Trained.** 18 girls and 3 boys as nursing assistants and two-wheeler mechanics, respectively, at 3½-month-long training courses; by Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; from February to June. The courses came as a follow-up to the Math's relief operations in Tiruvarur district.

**Conducted.** A month-long summer camp for children between 8 and 15 years of age; by Ramakrishna Math, Chennai; in May. About 400 children took part in the camp, which offered among other things courses in yogasanas, Vedic chanting and bhajans.

**Celebrated.** The golden jubilee of Vivekananda Balaka Sangha, a cultural and recreational centre for boys; by Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore; from 30 May to 1 June. More than 3000 devotees and 20 monastics who were members of the association attended the 3-day function.

**Inaugurated.** A permanent exhibition consisting of 40 oil-paintings measuring 30" x 22" depicting the life of Sri Ramakrishna; by Sri Kailashpati Mishra, Governor of Gujarat; at Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot; on 3 June. The inauguration concluded with a speech on Swami Vivekananda by the Governor .

**Inaugurated.** A new medical laboratory; by Srimat Swami Gitanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at Ramakrishna Math, Barasat; on 9 June.

**Organized.** A 3-day medical camp during the Bali-Harachandi mela; by Ramakrishna Math, Puri; in Brahmagiri; from 15 to 17 June. 350 patients were treated at the camp.

**Visited.** Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi; by Sri Ved Prakash Marwah, Governor of Jharkhand; on 18 June.

**Visited.** Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai; by Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, President of India; on 19 June. The President interacted with the students for about an hour.

**Visited.** Centres of the Ramakrishna Math



*The Governor of Gujarat with the head of Rajkot Ashrama at the exhibition*

and Ramakrishna Mission in Moscow, Gretz (France), Amstelveen (the Netherlands) and Geneva; by Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary; in June. In all these places he spoke before congregations.

**Completed.** The following relief projects: digging of a watershed channel connected to a reservoir to increase rain-water conservation in Ramrajpur; sinking of a



*De-silting and dredging of ponds by Limbdi centre*

620-foot-deep tube well and installation of a 30,000-litre overhead water tank in Nani Katechi; and de-silting and dredging of ponds in seven other villages; by Ramakrishna Mission, Limbdi; in remote areas of Surendranagar district, Gujarat; in June. The district happens to be one of the country's worst-affected drought-stricken places.

**Installed.** A hand-pump to draw drinking water; by Ramakrishna Mission TB Sanatorium, Ranchi; in Murungtoli village; in June. The centre also gave away saris to 100 poor women belonging to the village.

**Renovated.** A water tank in BR Hills; by Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore, jointly with Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra, BR Hills, Chamarajanagar district; in June. For the past two years BR Hills has been facing acute water scarcity.

**Provided.** Fodder for 200 head of cattle; by Vivekananda Ashrama, Ulsoor; at drought-struck Huvinayakana-halli of Bangalore North taluk; in June.

**Distributed.** 108 kg rice, 54 kg potatoes, 372 dhotis, saris and chadars, 36 mats and 36 sets of utensils; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri; among 36 families of Gouda

Nua Gaon in Khurda district whose houses had been destroyed by a devastating fire; in June.

**Distributed.** 103 quintals of fodder (sufficient to feed about 223 cows for a month); by Ramakrishna Mission, Jaipur; among poor families of drought-affected Jakhan village in Jodhpur district; in June.

## Nobility

There is nothing noble in being superior to others. True nobility consists in being superior to our former self.

—A Hindu proverb