

PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or AWAKENED INDIA*

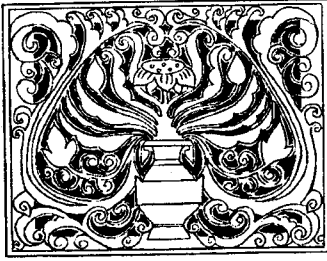


OCTOBER
2003



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

VOL. 108
ISSN 0032-6178



Monthly Journal of Ramakrishna Order
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PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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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

OCTOBER 2003

No. 10

Traditional Wisdom

DETACHMENT

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।
अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥

Undoubtedly, O mighty Arjuna, the mind is restless and hard to control; but by practice and detachment, O son of Kunti, it can be restrained. (*Bhagavadgita*, 6.35)

The mind steeped in affection for 'woman and gold' is like the green betel-nut. So long as the betel-nut is green, its kernel remains adhering to its shell, but when it dries up, shell and nut are separated, and the nut moves within, if shaken. So when the affection for 'woman and gold' dries up, the soul is perceived as quite different from the body. (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 46)

Many think of God only after receiving blows from the world. But blessed indeed is he who can offer his mind, like a fresh flower, at the feet of the Lord from his very childhood. One should practise renunciation in youth. In old age the body deteriorates and loses strength. The mind does not possess vigour. Is it possible to do anything then? ... Today the human body is, tomorrow it is not; even the shortest span of life is beset with pain and misery. He who is able to renounce all for God's sake is a living God. (Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi)

Nobody attains freedom without shaking off the coils of worldly worries. The very fact that somebody lives the worldly life proves that he is tied down to it as the bondslave of some craving or other. Why otherwise will he cling to that life at all? He is the slave either of lust or of gold, of position or of fame, of learning or of scholarship. It is only after freeing oneself from all this thralldom that one can get on along the way of freedom. ... No freedom without renunciation. The highest love for God can never be achieved without renunciation. (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 6.505)

∞ This Month ∞

This month's editorial, **The Need for God**, discusses the relationship between the individual and the universe, the individual and God and between individuals, and underlines the importance of proper attitude towards God, universe and others.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features some interesting clippings from 'News and Notes'.

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita* by Swami Atulanandaji is the author's commentary on verses 25 to 30 of the seventh chapter and verses 1 to 5 of the eighth chapter of the *Gita*. Worship of gods, delusion of the world by yoga-maya, worship of God with a firm resolve by the virtuous, the concepts of *adhyātma*, *adhibhūta* and *adhidaiva*, and, above all, the all-important necessity to remember God at the time of death—are the topics discussed in these verses.

In the second instalment of his research article **The Kali Temple at Dakshineswar and Sri Ramakrishna**, Swami Prabhanandaji describes the temple complex housing the twelve Shiva temples, the Kali temple and the Radha-Kanta temple. The problems before consecration of the Kali temple, their solution and the unprecedented consecration—the author portrays these too, collating information from various sources. 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, in English and Bengali.

Bhavanath Chattopadhyay by Swami

Chetananandaji is the second and concluding instalment of the second new biography to appear in the revised edition of the author's well-known work, *They Lived with God*. A senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, the author is head of the Vedanta Society of St Louis.

Swami Yatiswaranandaji, former Vice President of the Ramakrishna Order, founded a unique character-development institution called Vivekananda Balaka Sangha at the Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore. The Balaka Sangha celebrates its golden jubilee this year. **Half a Century of Experiment in Character-building** is a report of the inaugural function held at the Bangalore Math from 30 May to 1 June 2003.

Patanjali's Yoga Sutras—An Exposition by Swami Premeshanandaji features the author's comments on sutras 21 to 51 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.

Kuṇḍika Upaniṣad is the first instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur. This month we feature a synopsis of the Upanishad and the shanti mantra with copious notes based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

Glimpses of Holy Lives features incidents from the the life of Chandeshvara Nayanar, who loved God above everything else and who considered no sacrifice too great for his Beloved.

The Need for God

EDITORIAL

According to Vedanta, nothing exists other than Brahman, the ultimate Reality. What we see around is only an 'as-if' reality. But this as-if or dreamlike reality continues to be real to us, most of the times painfully, until the dream breaks.

In the July 2003 editorial, 'We, God and the Universe', we discussed a triangle with (Personal) God, soul (individual) and the universe as its vertices. The three vertices stand or fall together. As long as our individualities are real to us, a Personal God and the universe are inevitable realities. In other words, Personal God can be negated only if we can negate our own body-mind personality, or free ourselves from body-consciousness.

Of the three vertices the individual is the most important. That is because God and the universe assume realities depending upon our attitude towards ourselves. According to Swami Vivekananda, 'Your godhead is the proof of God Himself. ... If you are not God, there never was any God, and never will be.'¹ In other words, the divinity behind the universe becomes real to us only when we become aware of the divinity behind our own body and mind. Even a strong intellectual conviction of the divinity behind the body and mind and ordering our life accordingly can help us appreciate the divinity behind the universe. So, considering the centrality of the individual, we examine the relationship between the individual and the world (universe), the individual and God, and between individuals.

The Search for Lasting Happiness

The world is really too much with us. Most lives are fashioned by unseen forces, pulling the mind and senses towards the

world and its lures. The average man seeks lasting happiness and fulfilment from the world. It is not surprising when we know how human personality is constituted. According to the *Katha Upanishad*, 'God inflicted an injury on the sense organs in creating them with outgoing tendencies; therefore a man perceives only the outer objects with them, not the inner Self.'² But the search for lasting happiness and fulfilment in external things inevitably proves futile, for real happiness is possible only in the Infinite; there is no (lasting) happiness in finite things.³

The Centrifugal Path

What is the way out then? Give up the world? Vedanta does not advocate renunciation of everything for everyone. It shows a twofold way of life: *pravritti* dharma and *nivritti* dharma.⁴ *Pravritti* dharma is characterized by the pursuit of the three important values of life: dharma (righteousness), artha (prosperity) and kama (desire). Such a life involves responsibilities and dharma-regulated enjoyments in the world. The outward focus makes *pravritti* dharma a centrifugal path, making man move away from the central, divine core of our personality. Sri Krishna considers desires perfectly legitimate as long as they are in accordance with dharma.⁵ Life in the world is not one of unbridled enjoyment, but a graded schooling to wean man away from the sensory system and turn him within.

A Hindu's life was divided into four stages, called ashramas: brahmacharya (life of self-control and studies), garhasthya (householder's life of responsibilities and enjoyment in resonance with dharma), vanaprastha (retirement into forest, leading a life of studies and meditation) and sannyasa (total renuncia-

tion of one's family, and embarking on the quest for Knowledge). There is a significant point to be noted here: the self-control practised in the first stage served as a sheet anchor for the remaining stages of life. The householder has many sets of dos and don'ts regarding sensory life. The self-control he learnt during his student life helps him here. He practises his morning and evening devotions and serves others to the best of his ability. In the modern age, however, only the second and fourth stages of life are in vogue, the all-important first stage of self-control having almost vanished.

The Centripetal Path

Even a man given to unregulated sense enjoyment gradually learns that enjoyment is not all; that desires cannot be quenched by satisfying them—they only flame up all the more like fire fed with ghee. He begins to understand that what gave him happiness once is only a source of misery now. He learns painfully that he did not enjoy sense objects, but it was they who enjoyed him,⁶ robbing him of his consciousness of his real nature.⁷ When things go awry, when the world does not function according to his pet plans, when his possessions and kith and kin slip away from him by turn of events—man begins to think about the purpose of human life. Convinced that the world is not only impermanent but also an abode of misery, (9.33) he begins his search for something lasting amid the fleeting panorama of life. His reflection on the ultimate Reality, discrimination between the real and the unreal, and consequent giving up of attachment to ephemeral things and practising spiritual disciplines—these mark the beginning of the centripetal path, *nivritti* dharma, which leads man to the realization of the indwelling God.

Attitudes towards Others

As long as body and mind hold sway over us, the world continues to be real and others appear as distinct individuals. Likes

and dislikes of others is an inevitable sequel to this perception. Man's interaction with others is mostly driven by selfish considerations. His relationship with others being body-centred, defects in others appear more real to him. Such a self-centred life unfailingly ends up in frustration. Is there a way out? There is none as long as our vision does not extend beyond the external world. That brings us to the subject of God and our relationship with Him.

Individual and God

God does not dwell somewhere up *there*, but within our own hearts *here*. (18.61) According to the three schools of Vedanta there are three relationships between God and the individual. The dualistic school looks upon man as a soul, and God as the supreme Person, eternally different from man. According to the qualified monistic school, God is the supreme Person and the repository of all auspicious qualities. Individual souls are parts of God, even as sparks of fire are parts of fire. God is the Soul of souls. According to the non-dualistic school, the individual and God are identical in their divine essence; nothing exists other than Brahman. Everything else is illusory like a mirage on the desert, vanishing on the dawn of Knowledge.

For a spiritual aspirant these distinctions help him only to the extent that they offer him a frame of reference. Of the three relationships, the one according to the qualified non-dualistic school is most helpful for a spiritual aspirant: that is, a spark of divinity, part of the divine Fire. When someone asked about the relative merits of the conceptions of God according to the three schools of Vedanta, Sri Ramana Maharshi, the twentieth-century sage of Arunachala who lived and taught the path of self-enquiry, replied: 'First know yourself. Then there will be time enough to know God and your relationship with Him.' Sri Ramakrishna teaches that God is our own, like Uncle Moon, to whom everyone can pray. God is like our own Father and Mother and we can force

our demands on Him. Says Sri Ramakrishna:

God is our very own. We should say to Him: O God, what is Thy nature? Reveal Thyself to me. Thou must show Thyself to me; for why else hast Thou created me? Some Sikh devotees once said to me, 'God is full of compassion.' I said: 'But why should we call Him compassionate? He is our Creator. What is there to be wondered at if He is kind to us? Parents bring up their children. Do you call that an act of kindness? They must act that way. Therefore we should force our demands on God. He is our Father and Mother, isn't He?'⁸

Sri Ramakrishna advocates cultivation of another important quality: a strong faith in oneself—based on the fact that one is a child of God—and a strong resolve not to follow the old, unwholesome ways of life. Swamiji considers faith in one's higher nature a prerequisite to a meaningful faith in God.

Why Does God Seem So Unreal?

All this discussion is all right, but why do they hardly make a dent on us? Why does any talk on the subject appears so dry, or if inspiring, the effect so momentary? In short, why is God just a three-letter word to most people? Some devotees used to visit Sri Ramakrishna, accompanied by some of their friends who were worldly and had no taste for spiritual talk. Since the devotees kept on talking for a long time with the Master about God, the others would become restless. Finding it impossible to sit there any longer, they would whisper to their devotee friends, 'When shall we be going? How long will you stay here?' The devotees would say, 'Wait a bit. We shall go after a while.' Then the worldly people would say in a disgusted tone: 'Well then, you can talk. We shall wait for you in the boat.' (145-6) Sri Ramakrishna makes it clear that 'one does not feel the longing to know or see God as long as one wants to enjoy worldly objects.' (272) And none can teach anyone this hunger for God; it has to come by itself. Continues Sri Ramakrishna:

But you must remember that nothing can be achieved except in its proper time. Some persons must pass through many experiences and perform many worldly duties before they can turn their attention to God; so they have to wait a long time. ... Once a child said to its mother: 'Mother, I am going to sleep now. Please wake me up when I feel the call of nature.' 'My child,' said the mother, 'when it is time for that, you will wake up yourself. I shan't have to wake you.' (162)

We do not feel the need for God as long as we are happy with the world. The child does not seek its mother as long as it is happy with its toys. Over to Swamiji: 'We want everything but God, because our ordinary desires are fulfilled by the external world. So long as our needs are confined within the limits of the physical universe, we do not feel any need for God; it is only when we have had hard blows in our lives and are disappointed with everything here that we feel the need for something higher; then we seek God.'⁹

Attitudes towards God

Man's attitude towards God depends on his attitude towards himself and towards the world. According to the *Gita*, four kinds of people worship God: (1) the afflicted who pray for a cure; (2) those after worldly prosperity: wealth, power, position, name, fame and so on; (3) *jijñāsus*, seekers of spiritual Knowledge; and (4) the jnani, the man of spiritual Knowledge.¹⁰ While Sri Krishna considers all of them noble, he reserves the pride of place to the jnani and considers him His very Self. A spiritual aspirant needs to be clear that the first two kinds of worshippers are still worldly, using God for their worldly ends; only their worldliness has a spiritual veneer. He needs to consciously belong to the third group. To such a seeker of knowledge every problem, every experience, is grist to his mill: he understands the evanescence of the world and uses his experiences to turn to God all the more. He does not give up his devotion be-

cause his prayers remain unanswered, or if some calamity befalls him. He is persistent like the hereditary farmer in Sri Ramakrishna's parable who does not give up farming because he does not get any crop in a year of drought.¹¹ He continues with his spiritual sadhana, irrespective of returns from God. He does not go back to worldly enjoyments because he has not gained in spiritual life.

The Need to Begin Now

Once an aspirant is clear about the goal of life—knowing his real divine nature, or knowing God—he does not wait for his desires to subside, so that he could think of God with a clean mind. He knows that waiting for all worldly cares to subside before calling on God is as foolish as waiting for the waves to subside before plunging into the sea for a bath. Sri Ramakrishna advocates holding fast to God with one hand and doing one's duties with the other. When the aspirant gets a respite from his duties, he can cling to God with both hands.¹²

Change of Attitude towards the World

A spiritual aspirant learns to look upon the world not as a place of enjoyment and misery, but as 'a grand moral gymnasium wherein we have all to take exercise so as to become stronger and stronger spiritually'.¹³ Sri Ramakrishna teaches us to live in the world like a maidservant in a rich man's house. Though she looks after her employer's children as her own, she knows deep within that her home is elsewhere and that the children do not belong to her at all.¹⁴ Even so one needs to look upon one's wife, husband and children as God's children under one's care and serve them accordingly. Such a spiritual aspirant does not look for defects in others but learns to look upon others as children of God and serves them in a spirit of worship of the God that dwells in them. Both Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji teach that God's manifestation is the

most potent in a human being, and serving him in this spirit is a potent spiritual discipline. Says Swamiji, 'Think day and night, this universe is zero, only God is. Have intense desire to get free.'¹⁵ Swami Ramakrishnanandaji, the embodiment of devotion to Sri Ramakrishna, sums up religion in these few words: 'Religion is giving God His due. "God alone is the proprietor of this universe, God alone is the proprietor of myself"—recognizing this and then giving up all to Him, that is religion.'¹⁶

* * *

In sum, life becomes meaningful only if it is oriented towards its all-important goal: realization of our real, divine nature. A proper attitude towards ourselves, God and the universe (including other beings) is fundamental to a meaningful search for Truth. *

References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.308.
2. *Katha Upanishad*, 2.1.1.
3. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 7.23.1.
4. See Sri Shankaracharya's introduction to his commentary on the *Bhagavadgita*.
5. *Gita* 7.11.
6. *Bhogā na bhuktā vāyameva bhuktāḥ*. —Bhartrihari, *Vairagya Shatakam*, 7.
7. *Gita*, 2.67.
8. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 96-7.
9. CW, 7.83.
10. *Gita*, 7.16.
11. *Gospel*, 238.
12. *Ibid.*, 627.
13. CW, 1.80.
14. *Gospel*, 81.
15. CW, 7.92.
16. Swami Chetanananda, *God Lived with Them* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2001), 302.



Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago



October 1903

Swami Shivananda of Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Benares, acknowledges with thanks the receipt of Rs 20 from Lala Badri Sah, Almora, and Rs 10 from Dr Basudeo Sahai, Bisalpur, as contributions towards the maintenance of the Ashrama.

All things come to him who works with confidence while he waits. The man who believes that happiness and success are for him and goes to work to prove his belief with a heart full of hope and with a determination that nothing can discourage, is the one who will know by experience that there is no such word as fail. —*Light*

Beware, my son, of self-incense. It is the most dangerous on account of its agreeable intoxication. Profit by thine own wisdom, but learn to respect the wisdom of thine fathers also; learn, O my beloved, that the light of Allah's truth will often penetrate an empty head more easily than one too crammed with learning. —*Barrachus Hassan Aglu, an Arab sage*

After nearly thirty years of constant effort and the expenditure of nearly £100,000, scientists have succeeded in accurately measuring the earth. They have learned that its diameter through the equator is 7926 miles; its height from Pole to Pole 7899 miles. The earth, therefore, is flattened at the Poles; and while this fact has long been asserted, the actual measurement has removed the question from the domain of doubt.

The story of an unprecedented heart operation is telegraphed by the St Louis correspondent of the *New York Herald*. A thirteen-year-old girl in that city had been stabbed, and Dr Boyle, of the city hospital, fearing that the knife had penetrated the heart, removed the organ with a pair of forceps, elevated it into view, and examined it for two minutes. No injury could be found, and the heart was put back in its place with no apparent injury to the patient. The actual removal was effected by cutting through two ribs and pushing the lung aside.

It is reported that a new type-setting machine for composing by telegraph has recently been invented and is on exhibition in Paris. If all that is claimed concerning it is true, it certainly accomplishes wonderful results. It consists in reality of four separate machines. The first resembles an ordinary typewriter, by means of which the characters are inscribed on a band of paper by a peculiar system of perforations. This can be telegraphed anywhere and distributed in thousands of copies without necessitating any transcription. The band of paper, when it arrives in a printing office, is simply passed through apparatus number four, and the composition is done. In this way news may be distributed among hundreds of newspapers and printed in a few minutes by means of a copy of the perforated matrix. The inventor of the machine is M Rozar, a Hungarian, of Budapest, who has been working on his invention for a number of years.

—from 'News and Notes'

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*

SWAMI ATULANANDA

Chapter 7 (continued)

23. But the fruit acquired by these men of little understanding is limited. The worshippers of the devas ('bright ones') go to the devas, but my devotees come unto Me.

Those who worship special deities will get what they want, but they are deluded people. They do not know how to desire the highest. They are satisfied with small things when they could as well have the best. They are like the child that prefers five shining pennies to one gold piece. They have not understood yet that gods are limited beings and can grant only limited desires, perishable things. They may give us wealth or name or success, but not freedom. Had they directed the same devotion towards Me, they would have attained the highest, eternal and universal Bliss. But they are satisfied with the little, perishable things. And when they pass out of this world, they will not be free, but will go to the god they worshipped during their lifetime. They will go to his heaven, the heaven of their *ishta*. There they will enjoy for some time. But then they have to come to earth again. The devas are themselves not free. How can they give mukti to their votaries? Therefore it is said, 'Worship the Lord, the Universal, which is thy own divine Self. Then the result will be everlasting, infinite, supreme Bliss.' God alone is Real. He is free, eternal and infinite, and worshipping Him alone will make us free

forever. 'Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship.' Said Jesus, 'God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth.'¹ But we repeat the process time and again, being born and dying, and enjoying for a while in heaven, and then beginning all over again. 'My devotees come unto Me,' says Krishna. 'I am eternal; I am universal; I am Bliss itself. And those who come to Me will partake of My nature.' Jesus said, 'Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life.' (4.14) That is the teaching of all great avatars: freedom, life eternal—not sense enjoyment.

Why do so few choose the higher path? Why is it that we are satisfied with the lesser? It is because we are ignorant. Our minds are not pure. We have too many desires clamouring for satisfaction. Therefore, our discrimination is clouded. We do not recognize divinity even when we meet it. We look down upon spiritual men; we cannot appreciate holiness. When God Himself incarnates, we pass Him by unrecognized. Says Sri Krishna:

24. The ignorant, not knowing My supreme, immutable, transcendental nature, regard Me as the unmanifest come into manifestation.

The ignorant regard Me as an ordinary mortal. Man is born; that is he becomes manifested, then he dies; he becomes unmanifest. Then out of that unmanifest state he is born again, being impelled by the force of

past karma. So it is with Me, they think. The ignorant think that just like ordinary men I am born according to my karma. They do not know that I am above the law of karma, that I assume at will glorious and holy forms made

of pure sattva, to protect the world. They do not know My real nature; hence they do not worship Me, the One-without-a-second. They know the Christ only in the manner of the flesh. They do not realize that though born as man I have undergone no change; that I am the same Lord, the Consciousness of all beings, independent of nature, aware of My own divinity. 'And the Light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.' (1.5) 'He was in the World, and the World was made by

him, and the World knew him not.' (1.10) That is the mystery of divine incarnation. Who can grasp it? The unbeliever sees only My maya. He cannot pierce maya because he has not the eye of faith. Only My devotees know Me in Truth. I cannot hide Myself from them. But for others I remain hidden. Seeing, they do not see; hearing, they do not hear. I am hidden from them by the veil of maya, My divine mysterious power consisting of the three gunas, as the next verse explains:

25. I am not manifest to all, veiled (as I am) by yoga-maya. This deluded world knows Me not, the Unborn, the Immutable.

I am not manifest to all. I am veiled by yoga-maya, the maya born of the yoga or union of the three gunas. Nature covers Me. It hides Me like a mask. Therefore people are deluded and know Me not as the Unborn

and Imperishable. This maya belongs to Me. I am its wielder. It deludes others, but it can never obstruct My knowledge or vision. Therefore,

26. I know the past, the present and the future of all beings, O Arjuna, but no one knows Me.

No one knows Me except my devotees, who take refuge in Me. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'The dog knows his master under any disguise. The dog belongs to the master, he loves his master and is his own.' So the devotee belongs to God. *He* only knows Him.

As the magician is never deluded by his own tricks, neither are those who belong to

him. Just so, the Lord and his devotees are not deluded by His maya. They know the Lord is omniscient. He knows the past, present and future of every being. But very few know Him, and for want of knowledge of His real nature very few worship Him.

It may be asked, what is the obstacle to their knowing God? Sri Krishna says:

27. O descendant of Bharata, chastiser of thy foes, all beings at birth fall into delusion caused by the pairs of opposites, arising from desire and aversion.

At the time of birth the soul forgets the past and falls into utter darkness. Then new conditions confront the soul, conditions pleasant and painful. To obtain the pleasant and to avoid the painful becomes its all-absorbing object. That is the great delusion, the life of the senses. We become slaves of conditions and remain ignorant in regard to the true object of life. Blinded by passion, egotism and desires, the intellect cannot see conditions in their true light. So it is with the things of the external world. How then shall it grasp tran-

scendental Knowledge of the immortal Self?

When we meet with pleasure and pain we immediately identify ourselves with them. We undergo a change. We think, 'I am happy' or 'I am unhappy.' Thus the tranquillity of the mind, so necessary for the realization of Truth, is constantly disturbed. The ego becomes stronger and this prevents the realization of our true divine nature, the Atman.

But it is not so with all. There are those who speedily wake up from their dream. These are the sinless, mentioned in the next

verse:

28. But those men of virtuous deeds, whose sins have come to an end—freed from the delusion of the pairs of opposites, they worship Me with firm resolve.

These men are no longer deluded by opposite conditions, pleasurable and painful. They know that these conditions come in turn to every being. As long as there is a body, they must come. No one can escape them. Such virtuous men penetrate deeper and, piercing through the surface, through the manifestation, see the reality of things. Then life takes a different aspect. They have discovered the source of *all* happiness and bliss. No longer do they run after sense objects. They reverse their march; they beat a retreat. They enter within themselves and there, enthroned in their own hearts, witness Him, the Lord, as their own higher Self. Then they resolutely abandon all else to worship Him. That is possible only for the virtuous, men of pure deeds, whose sins have come to an end. Their virtuous acts have annihilated their bad deeds. They have only good karma left in them. And through that good karma they are able to renounce everything for the Lord.

29. Those who strive for freedom from old age and death, taking refuge in Me—they know Brahman, all about the individual self and the entire realm of karma.

Knowledge makes us free. How can we get that knowledge? Through practice. Sri Krishna promises in this verse that those who strive for liberation, those who attempt to go beyond old age (that is change) and death, will get full knowledge and realization by taking refuge in Him. Realization of what? Brahman. And they will also realize in full the Reality underlying the innermost individual self, and they will know everything concerning karma, all its secrets leading to spiritual Knowledge. The Lord grants full realization to those who come to Him, to those who are so fortunate that they can take total refuge in Him.

To reach that exalted state, three things are necessary: 'Human birth, desire for moksha and the company of great souls—verily these three are hard to obtain, and come only through the grace of God,' says Sri Shankaracharya.²

Then, when all these conditions are fulfilled, one thing more is required and that is *abhyāsa*. The next chapter explains what is meant by *abhyāsa*. It means practice, earnest repeated attempts at practical application of the teaching by prescribed means of constant meditation upon God.

True devotees do not care for worldly happiness. Nay, they even renounce heavenly joy. They have tasted the higher bliss, and they want only moksha, freedom. They worship God with firm resolve, free from doubt, persevering in faith. 'He who endureth to the end shall be saved.'

Now Sri Krishna declares the result of such devotion:

Sri Ramakrishna said, 'My Divine Mother says, "It is I who have caused all differentiation. Good works and bad works all obey Me. There is, true enough, the law of karma, but I am the Lawgiver. It lies with Me to make and unmake laws. I order all karma good and bad. Therefore come unto Me through love, devotion, prayer, self-surrender or through philosophy if you like, or with good works leading Godward, and I will give you knowledge of Brahman, the Absolute, also if you like.'"

But we must do something. We must practise a little with faith in the Lord, praying that He may show us the way out of maya.

Then He will show us all these conditions mentioned in this verse and the next (the last verse of this chapter), where Sri Krishna states

the condition of His devotees at the time of their death.

30. Those who know Me in the physical realm, in the divine realm and in the realm of sacrifice, steadfast in mind—they know Me even at the time of death.

Those devotees who know Me fully as manifest on different planes, and who steadfast in mind never swerve from that Knowledge, always remembering Me as their goal and happiness—they forget Me not even in their last moment. Their consciousness of Me continues as ever, unaffected by the change of approaching death. That is the great test. When we are strong and healthy we can guide and force the mind to a greater or lesser extent. But when we are sick and weak, when death approaches, then the mind is beyond our control. Often semi-conscious, the mind roams at will free and unchecked. Where does the mind go then? It follows naturally the path of least resistance. It goes as it has been trained to go. It follows the paths that are most familiar, where it is best acquainted, paths it has learned to like.

The horse going over the same route every day will follow that route when it goes out unguided. So it is with the mind. If our whole life has been taken up with worldly affairs, then worldly thoughts will be ours during sickness and approaching death. But if the mind has been trained to think of divine subjects, if it has mounted to sublime heights all the days of our lives, then it will follow as its

natural course the path leading Godward. And where the mind goes at the moment of death, *there* we go. We always follow the mind. If our mind persists, even the gross, physical, body has to follow. How much more certainly we will follow the mind in our subtle body when we depart from here! Therefore Sri

If our whole life has been taken up with worldly affairs, then worldly thoughts will be ours during sickness and approaching death. But if the mind has been trained to think of divine subjects, if it has mounted to sublime heights all the days of our lives, then it will follow as its natural course the path leading Godward.

Krishna says, those who steadily think of Him as the indwelling Spirit of all will continue in that sublime consciousness even at the close of their earthly career. That is a great encouragement, a great consolation, that whatever we acquire now in spiritual life will be ours for all eternity. If we find God here and now, then we will never lose Him again. With this assurance the seventh chapter closes. The last two verses are an introduction to the next chapter, where they will be explained.

Chapter 8: The Path of the Imperishable Brahman

The eighth chapter, 'Akshara Brahma Yoga', opens with a question by Arjuna relating to the subject mentioned in the last two verses of the preceding chapter. Sri

Krishna told Arjuna that those who sincerely long for freedom and who depending on Him strive for liberation, reach that state in which the relation between karma, the individual

soul and Brahman is realized.

Sri Krishna further said that those who see God everywhere and in everything, in all actions, in the material world and in the spiritual world, will not lose sight of Him even at

Arjuna said:

1. O Best of beings, what is that Brahman, what is *adhyātma* (the embodied soul), and what is karma? What is called *adhibhūta* (the physical realm), and what *adhidaiva* (the divine realm)?

2. Who dwells in this body, and in what way, as *adhiyajña* (the deity of sacrifice), O Destroyer of Madhu? How are You known at the time of death by the self-controlled?

Sri Krishna mentioned these seven subjects as constituting the highest Knowledge. It is therefore that Arjuna wants to understand their full meaning. He wants to make this knowledge his own so that he also may attain that eternal consciousness of God, which does not desert one even in that most critical of all times, the moment of death.

The mind is always questioning, always anxious to know. How many millions of times have these questions troubled the human mind: What is matter? What is Spirit? What is God? What is our relation to Him? More than five thousand years ago these questions were asked and answered. But still we cannot accept the Lord's word. We want to find out for ourselves and we cannot be satisfied until we have found the answer for ourselves. Only *then* will all doubt vanish forever. All other beliefs, all other acceptance of Truth, all other faith, is weak and uncertain. Today we believe, tomorrow we doubt again. Our reasoning always fluctuates. Therefore Sri Krishna does not answer Arjuna's questions simply, but shows the method to find out for ourselves, to settle these questions once and for all to our own satisfaction, bringing unshakable conviction.

The same search is going on through all ages. And the search takes two different directions. One class of investigators looks for the answer in nature. They analyse the external, the phenomena. This is the path followed by

the time of death. This statement of Sri Krishna is so very important that Arjuna wants to know more about it. Hoping to receive an explanation he approaches the Lord with the following questions:

scientists. They question nature. They want to demonstrate. They try to wring the answer from matter until they find that matter is an illusory quantity. And as their searching glance pierces deeper and deeper, matter becomes finer and finer, always more subtle until it eludes their grasp, and it melts away as snow before the sun. And the scientist stands baffled. The physical steps aside, and he is launched on the metaphysical. There alone his investigations can be pursued further.

The other class of investigators turns away from the external and seeks the answer inside. Where science ends, their search begins. They question the subtle world, the mind. All external instruments are rejected, and the mind becomes the only instrument. Mind questions and investigates itself, till at last the mind is also found to be material, though very subtle. And then the mind is also rejected, and the spirit remains. These are the Eastern philosophers. Not from the universe can we expect the answer, but from beyond it. The dream cannot explain the dream. The universe is ephemeral, a changing quantity. We must approach the Unchangeable for an explanation. What is that Unchangeable? What is that which alone can give us the answer? Who is the Knower? That was their quest. The outcome of this line of investigation is what we have today and what is known as Eastern philosophy, at the head of which stands Vedanta.

Now, let us see how Sri Krishna answers these questions. His language is strange to our ears. The technical terms are foreign to us, but the substance is the same through all the ages. It is the one answer, so far as answers can go,

The Blessed Lord said:

3. Brahman is the imperishable supreme Being; its manifestation as the embodied soul is called *adhyātma*. The prescribed sacrifice that causes the creation and support of beings is called karma.

First there is Brahman, the imperishable supreme Being, the attributeless, the absolute God, called *sat-cit-ānanda*, who transcends all and who is the basis, the source, of all that *is*. This same Brahman that is beyond human conception appears by its own mysterious power as the individual soul, the innermost Self in man, the ego, the I-ness in man. Then it is called *adhyātma*. The idea is to show that Brahman and the individual soul are one and the same. The one is the outcome of the other. They are not two separate entities, not different in their nature. The one is a phase, manifestation, of the other.

Perfect knowledge includes the knowledge of both the manifest and the unmanifest. He who knows the visible and the invisible, matter and Spirit, activity and what is beyond activity, to be but different phases of the one Being, he overcomes death. The *Isha Upanishad* expresses this idea of oneness very beautifully in its peace chant. 'Om! That Invisible, the Absolute, is Whole. Whole also is this visible, the phenomenal. From the Invisible comes forth the visible. If the Whole be taken from the Whole, still the Whole remains.'

He is called wise who sees no difference between the soul of man and Brahman, the absolute Spirit. His state is best described by Sri Shankaracharya:

One that is present always as Consciousness, the Bliss Absolute, beyond all bonds, beyond all compare, beyond all qualities, ever-free, without any activity, limitless as the sky, indivisible and the Absolute—such Brahman, O sage, O learned one, shines in the heart of the

regarding the nature of God, the Absolute, regarding the soul or life and regarding the physical universe, matter and force. Sri Krishna explains the different conditions one by one.

jnani, in samadhi.

Where all the changes of nature cease forever; where thoughts cease; who is equal to all yet having no equal, immeasurable; whom the Vedas declare; who is the essence of what we call our existence; the Perfect—such Brahman, O sage, O learned one, shines in the heart of the jnani, in samadhi.

The undecaying; the immortal, the positive Entity that precludes all negation; that which is like the placid, rippleless ocean; that without a name; in which there are no merits and demerits; eternal, pacified and the one Reality—such Brahman O sage, O learned one, shines in the heart of the jnani in samadhi.³

Now about sacrifice: sacrifice is called karma. Through karma creation takes place; through karma everything is kept going. The prescribed sacrifice here includes all virtuous works and is called karma.

The whole process of life is one great sacrifice, one great offering to the gods. In India these offerings to the gods are made on all occasions. Even before conception parents make offerings while they pray for a healthy child. Again at the time of birth and at different intervals through the entire life these offerings are made, even till after the person's death. It is something like saying Mass in Western countries. This is called karma. It is believed that pleased with the offerings, the devas fulfil the desires of the devotee. It is said that through sacrifice all beings come into existence. Yajna causes rain; rain produces food; and the food taken by men is the vehicle by which the life germ is carried. The Lord continues to answer Arjuna's questions.

4. Perishable existence is called *adhibhūta* (the material); the supreme Self is the *adhidaiwata* (universal Spirit). I am the *adhiyajña* (the presiding Deity of sacrifice) in the body, O best of the embodied.

Sri Krishna has spoken of the physical, of the divine and of sacrifice. What is meant by these different states of existence, which it is so important to know? The physical is the material universe. Though apparently different from Brahman, who is the self-conscious Principle, perishable and changeable, existence depends for its existence on the Spirit. That is the physical world. And the divine is the Purusha, the universal Spirit, the Self of all beings, the Centre from which all living beings have their consciousness. Literally, Purusha means that by which everything is filled or that which lies in the body. It is the Spirit, the mainspring of our life, and the noumenon behind the phenomenon.

In the Upanishads we find sometimes rishis addressing the supreme Spirit as residing in the sun. The Spirit, as it were, permeates

[In India] even before conception parents make offerings while they pray for a healthy child. Again at the time of birth and at different intervals through the entire life these offerings are made, even till after the person's death.

through the sun and upholds everything. All of nature depends on the sun, and the sun depends on the Purusha, the universal Soul. The sun is, therefore, sometimes regarded as the fittest symbol of God. And the brahmins in India look up to the sun when they perform their oblations and while repeating their prayers and mantras. The Gayatri, the most holy mantra in all the Vedas, is directed to the sun: 'We meditate on the adorable and self-effulgent Light, on Him who has produced this universe. May He enlighten our minds.'

Then, there is the presiding Deity of sacrifice, dwelling in everyone. It is the Lord who

presides over the life of every being. He hears our prayers and grants our supplications. He is also called the Divine Mother of the universe. We must remember that our whole life is a sacrifice, an offering to God. Every act, every word, every thought is offered to God. We may not consciously make an offering, but it all reaches Him. It is the Lord who presides over all our actions. He knows our inner thoughts. He knows our heart. And therefore He knows how to guide our life and how to distribute karma. Nothing remains hidden for Him. He knows what we deserve and what is best for us. We can safely trust Him.

We see then that everything is Brahman. There is naught besides Him. 'Brahman alone is Real. Everything else is unreal. The human soul is that Brahman, not separate from It.' That is the teaching of Vedanta, so the Vedas declare. The Absolute, the Unmanifest, appears as the manifest and is then known as the material world and the individual soul, according to its manifestations. He who realizes this, says Sri Krishna, is a free soul. 'He does not lose Me for a moment. I am at his side always even in the hour of death.' 'For

seeing the Lord equally existing everywhere, he does not destroy the Self by the self, and thus he reaches the highest goal.'⁴ Seeing God everywhere, he also sees God at all times.

Once a brahmacharin asked his guru, 'Sir, the shastras tell us that we should think of God at all times. But this seems to me quite impossible. The mind can think of only one thing at a time and with the many occupations of life we are forced to give our attention to worldly things. How then can Sri Krishna teach that we should think of Him always?' The guru said, 'You are mistaken. It is quite possible after some training to perform our daily duties and

still not forget God.' The disciple could not be convinced. Then the guru invited him to his house for a grand feast the next day.

The brahmacharin appeared at the appointed hour. The guru received him very kindly and assigned him to a room where a rich dinner awaited the hungry boy. The boy was asked to sit down and partake of the food. On entering the room, he saw a large sword, held only by a thin thread, suspended from the ceiling just above his seat. If the thread snapped, the sword would pierce and kill him if he sat below it. But what could be done? The brahmacharin sat down and began to eat. He quickly ate his dinner and when he had finished, the guru called him and asked him how he had enjoyed the meal. 'The food was excellent,' the boy replied, 'but there was the sword. I could not for a moment forget the threatening sword while taking my food.' 'Then,' said the guru, 'your mind must have been divided between your meal and the

sword. Make God the sword. Think of Him always, when eating, playing or working, just as you thought of the sword while eating.' Then the brahmacharin understood and began to practise earnestly.

We remember how at the beginning of the eighth chapter Arjuna asked seven questions. These questions Sri Krishna has answered one by one, except the last one. That one question remains to be answered and it is the most important of all the questions. *How* can we come to Thee, O Lord, when we depart from this life? That is an important question indeed. How can we be united with God, when we lay down the body? Death is a great mystery that fills us with awe and fear. We have no certainty about it. Where shall we go, what will we meet? We do not know, and the uncertainty brings fear. But in this chapter Sri Krishna throws light on the subject. And in the next verse Arjuna's question is answered.

5. He who, at the time of death, meditating on Me alone, goes forth leaving the body—he attains unto My Being. There is no doubt about it.

Passing out of this life, if anyone can think of God in His true highest aspect he will surely attain Him. There is no doubt about it, says Sri Krishna. It is the law. Not that the Lord makes any exception in the case of such. No, they *must* go to Him. Nothing can bar them. It is the eternal law of being, the law of attraction, the law of love, the law of wisdom. For what we think we become, nay, what we think we are. There is a saying among the Hindus that the beetle becomes a wasp. Terrified by the wasp hovering over it, the beetle thinks so intently on it that it is transformed into a wasp. Such is the power of thought. Thought makes us what we are.

This chapter deals with *abhyāsa* yoga, with meditation, how to fix the thought on one particular object, how through practice we can make the mind strong and steady. The acme of meditation is to lose limited, personal consciousness in the object of meditation, and

thus to *become* that object. We already *are* the supreme Spirit. But not knowing It, we do not enjoy our real state. When we realize It, become conscious of It—that very instant we become God, become Brahman. Becoming God means knowing that we *are* and always have been one with Him. That knowledge is mukti or nirvana or Freedom. That is true salvation, deliverance from all false ideas and recognition of the Truth. The influence of the last thought on the future of the soul is a general truth and not confined to those who think of the Deity. Sri Krishna explains that in the next verse.

(To be continued)

References

1. *John*, 4.22-4.
2. *Vivekachudamani*, 3.
3. *Ibid.*, 408-10.
4. *Bhagavadgita*, 13.28.

The Kali Temple at Dakshineswar and Sri Ramakrishna

SWAMI PRABHANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

It is clear that two other temples in the area influenced the plan of the Dakshineswar temple. In structural design the temple to the Divine Mother at Dakshineswar is strikingly similar to the Navaratna temple to Radha-Kanta in Tollygunge, which is the tallest temple in Calcutta.¹ It was built by Ramanath Mandal of Bowali² and took thirteen years to complete. It was consecrated in 1809 (1731 Saka). On the two Navaratna temples at Dakshineswar and Tollygunge, D J McCutcheon comments, 'Their appearance and design are more or less the same.'³

The Temple Design

As far as the design of the whole complex is concerned, the temple complex at Dakshineswar is similar to that of the Brahmayi temple at Mulajor-Shyamnagar, not far north of Calcutta. In 1808 Gopimohan, the son of Darpanarayan Thakur, who was one of the richest landlords of Pathuriaghata, installed the image of Dakshina Kali in a temple there. Even now, from the dilapidated remains of this temple complex, one can get an idea of the grandeur of the Kali temple, the twelve Shiva temples and the Radha-Krishna temple which illuminated the complex. A comparison of the layout of the two compounds shows that at Dakshineswar considerable improvements were made on the design and the coordination of the plan and its execution.

It is interesting to note that the architecture and structural designs of the temples constructed by the enlightened Hindu rajas and maharajas during the British rule were very

much influenced by the designs of their own houses and palaces. On this the social scientist Binoy Ghosh commented: 'In their devotion, the devotees' lifestyles are reflected in their worship of their adored gods and goddesses.'⁴ Thus the architecture and art work of the Dakshineswar temple complex, the arrangements for the worship and food offerings, and the overall administration unmistakably reflect the lifestyle of Rani Rasmani, who desired to serve the deities in her own manner. This is especially noticeable in the case of the Radha-Govinda temple.

If one comes to the main bathing ghat of the temple by boat, one would alight at the spacious stairway leading to the chandni (the open portico at the entrance to the temple courtyard). On each side of the chandni are six Shiva temples, making a total of twelve. On the southern side, Shiva is worshipped under the following names, from south to north: Yajnesvar,⁵ Jalesvar, Jagadishvar, Nadeshvar, Nandishvar and Nareshvar. On the northern side, the names are Yogeshvar, Ratneshvar, Jatilesvar, Nakulesvar, Nageshvar and Nirjareshvar. Each of the Shiva lingas is made of basalt and is three and a half feet high. East of the chandni and the Shiva temples is a spacious courtyard, 440 feet long and 220 feet wide, paved with terracotta tiles. The temple to Mother Kali stands in the centre of the courtyard, with the temple to Radha-Govinda to the north and the natmandir (music pavilion) to the south. According to the recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, one of the beautiful turrets of the Kali temple was once struck

by lightning and was broken.⁶ Fortunately the image of the Goddess was not damaged, though some of the marble tiles in the temple came loose. After this, a lightning rod was attached to the northeast corner of the building. The spacious natmandir, or music hall, to the south is also beautifully designed, with twenty-four elegant archways (five each on the north and south sides and seven each on the east and west sides) allowing entrance from the verandah, plus sixteen stately columns around the inside of the hall. Just south of the natmandir is the sacrificial altar.⁷

In the structural design of both the natmandir and the Radha-Govinda temple European influence is evident. The floor of the Radha-Govinda temple is paved with marble tiles, and the adjacent porch is decorated with a valuable chandelier. On the north, east and south sides of the courtyard are rows of one-storeyed rooms. The kitchen for cooking food offerings to the Goddess is on the east side, along with rooms for storing food and also some guest rooms, while the rooms on the south side house the general office and the treasurer's office. Sri Ramakrishna lived in the room on the northwest corner of the courtyard for fourteen years. Before that he lived for sixteen years in the room on the west side of the ground floor of the kuthi, the owner's bungalow, just to the north of the temple courtyard. His mother, Chandramani Devi, also lived in that room for eight years. West of the kuthi is a two-storeyed nahabat, a small tower where musicians used to play. Both Chandramani Devi and Sri Sarada Devi lived there for many years. A second bathing ghat, called the Bakultala Ghat, is just north of the nahabat, and the Panchavati is north of that.

The Kali Temple

The floor of the inner shrine of the main temple is made of black and white marble tiles, and a two-tiered black marble pedestal in the middle supports the Divine Mother. On the lower tier of the pedestal, in a small silver

throne, there is a Narayana shila (a round black stone representing Vishnu) named Lakshmi-Narayana. Beside it there used to be an image of Rama as a child, called Ramlala, made of an alloy of eight metals. It had been worshipped by Sri Ramakrishna. It was stolen, however, in 1933. At the four corners of the pedestal are four silver columns which support an exquisite canopy over the Goddess. On the upper tier of the pedestal is a large silver lotus on which lies the prostrate body of Mahakala (Shiva, a symbol of the Absolute), made of white marble. The three-eyed Dakshina Kali, dressed in gorgeous gold brocade and wearing gold ornaments, stands on top of Shiva.

The name of the Divine Mother here is Bhavatarini. Perhaps this name was given to Her by Sri Ramakrishna. However, in the Deed of Endowment, executed six years after the temple was consecrated, the name of the Goddess was recorded as Sri Sri Jagadishvari Kali Thakurani or Sri Sri Jagadishvari Maha Kali. When the recorder of the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* came in 1882, he was informed that Her name was Bhavatarini.

It is said that this exquisitely beautiful image of the Mother was made by a sculptor named Navin, who lived in the village of Dainhata in the district of Howrah. Carved out of black basalt, the image is three and a half feet tall. In *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, Swami Saradananda presents an interesting fact he got from Sri Ramakrishna. He says:

The Rani practised severe austerities according to the scriptures from the day on which the making of the image began; she bathed three times a day, took simple food, lay on the floor and practised Japa, worship, etc., according to her capacity. After the temple was built and the image made, there was delay in fixing an auspicious day for the installation owing to the leisurely ways of people. In the meantime the image was kept packed in a box lest it should be damaged.

The Radha-Kanta Temple

In the shrine of the Vishnu temple there is

also a two-tiered black marble pedestal on a white marble floor. On a silver throne on top of the pedestal stands Krishna in his *tribhanga* form (bent in three places). The image is twenty-one inches tall and is made of black basalt. To his left is the image of Devi Nistarini (Radha), which is sixteen inches tall. According to the recorder of the *Kathamrita*, 'The Radhakanta temple, also known as the Vishnu temple, contains the images of Radha and Krishna.' In Rani Rasmani's Deed of Gift the name of the deity at the Vishnu temple is given as Sri Sri Radha-Krishnaji.⁹ And in another place in the same document the names are Sri Sri Jaganmohan Krishna and Sri Sri Jaganmohini Radha.

In August or September 1855 (Bhadra 1262 BS), soon after the temple had been consecrated, one of Krishna's feet was broken due to the carelessness of the priest, Kshetranath Chattopadhyaya. The pundits then declared that according to the injunctions of the scriptures the broken image should be immersed in the Ganges and a new image installed. But when Sri Ramakrishna was asked, he said, 'If anyone of the sons-in-law of the Rani had broken his leg owing to a fall, would he have been forsaken and another person placed in his stead, or would proper arrangement have been made for his treatment? Let that procedure be followed here also; let the broken parts of the leg of the image be joined and the worship continued. Why should the image be thrown away?'¹⁰ Then, at the request of Mathurmohan, Sri Ramakrishna himself repaired the broken foot of Govindaji perfectly, and it continued to be worshipped. However, Sri Ramakrishna's ruling concerning the worship of the image—given on the principle of worshipping the deity as one's very own near and dear one—was not liked by the pundits. One day the zamindar Jaynarayan Bandyopadhyaya asked him, 'Sir, is Govinda of that temple broken?' Sri Ramakrishna replied: 'Ah! What a fine understanding! Can the One, who is an indivisible Whole, be broken?' But after Rani

Rasmani and Mathurmohan died, the overwhelming pressure of the tradition-bound culture prevailed, and the image was replaced with a new one.¹¹ The old image was then kept in a room to the north of the main shrine.

Rani Rasmani's Love for Mother Kali

It is said that on the night of the wedding reception given at the time of Rani Rasmani's marriage with Rajchandra, a sannyasin came to see her. Handing her an image of Rama, called Raghunathji, the sannyasin said, 'Serve him with sincere love.'¹² Raghunathji was then installed as the family deity.¹³ Even though daily worship and services were offered to him, Rani Rasmani cherished unflinching faith in the feet of Mother Kali. It is said that her father-in-law, Pritiram, built a Kali temple somewhere in the central part of Bengal. Rasmani's husband, Rajchandra, was also very devoted to Mother Kali. And when Rasmani inherited his estate, her seal affixed on all her official papers carried the inscription '*Kalipada-abhilashi Srimati Rasmani Dasi*' (Srimati Rasmani Dasi, ever craving for the blessed feet of Kali). But the most reliable testimony in this regard came from Sri Ramakrishna himself. In a divine vision he saw that Rani Rasmani was one of the Ashtasakhis (eight attending maids) of the Divine Mother. He said, 'For carrying out this work [of establishing the Kali temple] she took birth.'

Plans for the Consecration Ceremony

For the supervision of the construction work on the temples, Rani Rasmani was initially assisted by her eldest son-in-law, Ramchandra Das, and later by her third son-in-law, Mathurmohan Biswas. But she herself would often visit the site to supervise the work personally and to assess the progress of the actualization of her dream. The construction work was entrusted to M/s MacIntosh & Burn Co. Finally, after overcoming many obstacles and hurdles, the construction was completed under her able leadership in the early part of

1853, five and a half years after the land was purchased. Naturally then Rani Rasmani became eager to begin the worship in an auspicious way by having a grand inaugural ceremony. It was decided that the temple would be consecrated on Vaishakhi Purnima, 23 April 1853 (12 Vaishakh 1260 BS), and the news was announced in various papers and periodicals. On 14 March 1853 (2 Chaitra 1259 BS), the *Samvad Prabhakar*, a local newspaper, reported:

It has been brought to our knowledge that the said virtuous Srimati [Rasmani] would accomplish one of the noblest deeds at Dakshineswar on the ensuing Purnamasi *tithi* [the full-moon day] of the month of Vaishakh, for with great pomp and ceremony she would formally consecrate the Navaratna temple of Kali, twelve Shiva temples and other temples, including the pond. It is beyond the limits of our imagination to assess the extent of money that would be spent and the number of people to be benefited by this auspicious deed.¹⁴

Problems and Postponement

For some reason, however, the consecration ceremony was put off for a couple of years. Insurmountable obstacles had cropped up. About a century and a half have gone by since then, and it is now difficult to ascertain the precise reasons for the postponement of the temple opening. But there is no doubt that the following problems contributed to this delay:

a) It was only natural that Rani Rasmani would have a desire to offer cooked food to the Goddess after consecrating the temple. The problem was that no scriptural injunction could be found that would support the offering of cooked food to the Deity in a temple built by someone of the kaivarta caste.¹⁵ Although after painstaking research, scores of injunctions were given by pundits with long tufts of hair on their heads and who were well versed in the scriptures, their decisions did not support the Rani's cherished desire. When everything seemed hopeless, the Rani's spirits

were revived on receiving a ruling from the Sanskrit school at Jhamapukur run by Ramkumar Chattopadhyaya, Sri Ramakrishna's elder brother. According to *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, the ruling was this: 'If the Rani makes a gift of the property to a Brahmana and then installs the Goddess in the temple and makes arrangements for the offering of cooked food, there will be no violation of the injunctions of the scriptures. The Brahmanas and other high castes will not then incur blemish if they take Prasada [offered food] in the temple.'¹⁶ As Swami Saradananda said, 'Hopes revived in the Rani's heart. She decided to consecrate the temple in the name of her Guru and, with his permission, take the position of an officer for superintending his property and the service in his temple.'¹⁷ However, two points are worth mentioning in this regard.

First, according to Sashi Bhusan Ghosh, one of the most important biographers of Sri Ramakrishna, there was nothing innovative about the ruling issued by Ramkumar. He wrote:

The Gaudiya Vaishnava community, when teaching the concept 'Service to the deity as to oneself', never raises objections to the offering of cooked food to a deity installed by a shudra. Furthermore, pundits belonging to the school of the Smritis have, for a long time, allowed the offering of cooked food to a deity installed by a shudra but consecrated in the name of a brahmin. Therefore it is not proper to say that prior to Ramkumar nobody ever issued such an injunction. Besides, it does not seem to be correct to assume that Rani Rasmani could not secure such an injunction from any other well-known *chatuspathi* [Sanskrit school], and that she proceeded to act depending solely on the injunction issued by Ramkumar.¹⁸

Second, according to the legal documents relating to the temple, five years after the temple had been formally consecrated the Rani registered the Dakshineswar temple compound and a large estate at Dinajpur as endowment (*devottar*) property. Hence it is clear

that the Rani had not executed a deed of gift of the temple to the family of her guru. Actually, the temple was dedicated in the name of the Deity. But the *sankalpa* (solemn resolution) made at the consecration ceremony was made, at her request, in her guru's name rather than in her own name. So ultimately the cherished desire of the Rani to offer cooked food to the Goddess was fulfilled following this procedure.

b) Another problem that arose, creating obstacles for the inauguration of the temple, was in finding suitable priests who would agree to consecrate the temple and also to perform with devotion the daily worship and rituals for Mother Kali and Govindaji. The Rani's status as a shudra was a serious disadvantage. As Swami Saradananda wrote:

In those days, the Brahmanas born of good families and devoted to religious traditions did not even salute the deities installed by Sudras, let alone worshipping them. They regarded the degraded Brahmanas, such as the family of the Rani's spiritual teacher, virtually as Sudras. It was therefore no wonder that no Brahmana of virtuous conduct, able to perform the rituals and officiate as a priest, agreed to take charge of the worship in the Rani's temple.¹⁹

We have reason to believe that the initial opposition came from the local brahmins and pundits. To resolve the problem, the Rani raised the salary and perquisites and then sent messengers to find suitable priests. Maheshchandra Chattopadhyaya, from the village of Sihore in the Bankura district, was an employee of the Rani's estate. Hoping to earn some extra money, he volunteered to find the priests, cooks and other brahmin workers for the temple. His own brother, Kshetranath, was chosen as priest for Govindaji, and gradually cooks and other brahmin workers were appointed. But finding a suitable priest for the worship of the Goddess remained a problem. At last Mahesh came to Ramkumar with a special letter of request from the Rani. In order to honour the ruling that he himself had given,

Ramkumar agreed to officiate as the priest for Mother Kali until another priest could be found. This information was obtained from Hridayram. But according to Ramlal, the son of Sri Ramakrishna's second elder brother, Ramkumar was invited by Ramdhan Ghosh of Desra, who was acquainted with him, to accept gifts at the concluding ceremony on the day of the temple consecration. Ramkumar agreed and arrived at the temple on the preceding day. In Swami Saradananda's opinion, the requests made by both Mahesh Chattopadhyaya and Ramdhan Ghosh persuaded Ramkumar to go to Dakshineswar and agree to officiate as the priest.

The Consecration Eve

Extremely elaborate arrangements were made for the opening ceremony, and the entire temple complex was turned into a mart of joy. Ramkumar, along with his younger brother Ramakrishna, reached the temple complex the day before the consecration. If Ramkumar had engaged himself in the opening ceremony, he must have been very busy with the elaborate rituals connected with the inaugural worship. From the reminiscences of Sri Ramakrishna we learn that on the day preceding the formal opening of the temple a current of bliss flowed in the temple complex. There was a *yatra* (a dramatic performance) as well as songs on the glory of Kali and readings from the *Bhagavata* and the *Ramayana* and so on. Even during the night the celebration went on, and every nook and corner of the area was as bright as day on account of the innumerable lights. Sri Ramakrishna said, 'Going round the temple, one felt that the Rani had brought the Silver Mountain and placed it there.'

Many professors of the scriptures and brahmin pundits came for the occasion from famous centres of learning such as Kanauj, Varanasi, Sylhet, Chittagong, Orissa and Navadvip, and they each received a silk cloth, a wrapper and a gold *mohur* (coin). However, while those from far-off places participated in

the function and accepted gifts, the local brahmins and pundits refused to accept anything from the 'shudrani Rani'.²⁰ Still, in spite of this, a popular saying claims that the dust of the feet of more than a hundred thousand brahmin pundits was collected on that great festive occasion.

The Consecration

At last the long-awaited day of the consecration arrived. A thin layer of clouds floated above, providing a canopy over the entire area of the festival and protecting it from the scorching rays of the sun. On one side the Ganges flowed by, making a sweet murmuring sound. The entire area was vibrant with joy. Devotional songs and music filled the air. Besides the elaborate worship services, there were recitations and competitions between versifiers, while in the natmandir a hundred and eight brahmins chanted the *Chandi*.²¹ Under the supervision of the magnanimous Rani, the whole area clamoured throughout the day and night with shouts of '*Diyatam! Bhujyatam!*' (Give! Enjoy!).

The young Ramakrishna moved about freely in that mart of joy. Describing his state of mind at that time, his biographer Sashi Bhusan Ghosh wrote: 'Gadadhar was present at all the programmes as a spectator, but willingly he did not participate in any activity. In those days his mind was characterized by a disdain for all worldly affairs, by intense love of God, and above all by an urge to surrender at the lotus feet of the indwelling Divinity—without whose guidance his mind would not engage itself in any other pursuit.'²² In this state of mind, the young Ramakrishna reached the temple of the Goddess after wandering about here and there. Akshay Kumar Sen described Ramakrishna's reaction at seeing the Divine Mother:

In the meantime Gadadhar jostled his way through the crowd with great difficulty and came inside the temple. The incomparable beauty of the images made it difficult to differ-

entiate between Krishna and Kali. The image of Mother Kali did not appear to be an image but the Mother herself—as if she were residing in the temple after leaving Kailas and was illuminating the entire place with her ineffable beauty.²³

Four days later, on 22 Jyaistha, the magnificent ceremony was reported in the newspaper *Somprakash* as follows:

On Purnamasi *tithi* [the full moon day] in the month of Jyaistha, the virtuous lady Srimati Rasmani, a resident of Janbazar, inaugurated a unique Navaratna temple as well as some other temples with duly consecrated images of Gods and Goddesses. On that day about one hundred thousand people gathered there, and Rani Rasmani spent money lavishly for this auspicious occasion. For the installation of each Shiva linga she gave away sixteen kinds of silver gifts, plus various other things including valuable silk clothes and cash. For the installation of the image of Tara [Kali], all the required rituals were carried out with more than adequate bounty. And what to speak of the food and sweets! Let alone the Calcutta markets, even the markets in Panihati, Vaidyabati and Triveni were charging exorbitant prices for their sweets. It was rumoured that the demand for sandesh shot up to 500 maunds. The natmandir in front of the Navaratna temple was beautifully decorated with chandeliers. And from the natmandir all the way to Baranagore, on either side of the road, structures were set up to illuminate the path. Not a single fault occurred in the organization of the ceremony with all its details. The holy achievement of the pious lady was accomplished without a single flaw. It was almost impossible to keep count of how many pinnaces, barges, boats and *bhatialis* sailed past on the Ganges, or how many carriages and other vehicles were parked in the yard. Beggars and indigent people crowded the area in thousands, and after being fed with sweets and other delicacies to their heart's content, they left with a parting gift of a whole coin or a half of a coin or a quarter of a coin. Most of the goswamis arrived, and Rani Rasmani paid them generously with due reverence. It has been estimated that in this virtuous deed Rani Rasmani spent more than Rs 2,00,000. Admittedly quite a large number of il-

lustrious people have founded temples and shrines, but nobody has matched the excellence and magnitude of the exalted Navaratna temple and the natmandir here. The supreme Lord of the universe bestowed on the pious Rani Rasmani riches and wealth in abundance. He blessed her equally with a noble heart. Now she has vindicated her worthiness of this enormous wealth and enshrined her name eternally in this world by her immortal deed!²⁴

On 12 April 1856 (1 Vaishakh 1263 BS), the *Samvad Prabhakar* declared, 'In Jyaistha 1262, the pious lady Srimati Rasmani Dasi, a resident of Janbazar, consecrated the Navaratna and Shiva temples at Dakshineswar with great festivity, and incurred a huge expenditure.' According to most reports, the establishment and construction of the temples, plus the opening ceremony, cost her Rs 9,00,000, while others estimate that the opening ceremony alone cost her Rs 2,00,000.

(To be concluded)

References

1. Previously the tallest temple in Calcutta was the Navaratna temple built by Govindaram Mitra. It was located on Chitpore Road, and its height with the turrets was 165 feet. The storm and earthquake of 1737 razed it to the ground. (Radharaman Mitra, *Kalikata Darpan* [1980], 69.)
2. Panchanan Roy, 'Kalikatar Mandir o Mandap' in *Prabasi* (Shravan 1359 BS), 430.
3. David J McCutchion, 'The Temples of Calcutta' in *Bengal: Past & Present* (Calcutta: Calcutta Historical Society, January-June 1968), 52.
4. Binoy Ghosh, *Kolkata Saharer Itivritta* (Calcutta: Bak Sahitya, 1975), 672.
5. According to a local legend, Yajnesvar Shiva was there before the founding of the temple. Thus, he is honoured as the oldest and primary Shiva within the temple compound.
6. Sri Ramakrishna witnessed this incident and later said, 'Once a thunderbolt struck the Kali temple. I noticed that it flattened the points of the screws.' —M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 405.
7. Padmamani's son Balaram Das was a devotee of Krishna. When he was appointed manager (*sevatyat*) of the temple he stopped the practice of sacrifice and planted a sapling of the holy basil plant at the sacrificial altar. Even now when the turn comes, according to the rotation, for his descendants to manage the service of the deities, the animal sacrifice is suspended.
8. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1978), 1.139.
9. The Vishnu temple is also known as the Radha-Kanta temple and the Radha-Govinda temple.
10. *Great Master*, 1.505.
11. According to some people the image mended by Sri Ramakrishna was never worshipped. But others say that in 1930 part of the mended foot came loose, so a new image was installed and has been worshipped ever since. (Subodh Chandra De, *Sri Ramakrishna* [2nd edn.], 42.
12. Annapurna Devi, *Rani Rasmani* (Konnagar, Hoochly: M Devi, 1374 BS), 34, 44. When the *shraddha* ceremony was being performed for the deceased Rajchandra, this sannyasin again visited her. Another version says that this sannyasin presented her with a Ramshila, a stone symbol of Rama.
13. At present Raghunathji's image and the Ramshila are kept in the southern room of the Vishnu temple. Its doors and windows are kept shut.
14. *Samvadpatre Sekaler Katha*, ed. Brajendranath Bandyopadhyaya (Calcutta: Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, 3rd edn.), 2.746.
15. Though Swami Saradananda refers to her in *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master* as a kaivarta, Swami Gambhirananda, Radha Raman Mitra and others say that she was a mahisya.
16. *Great Master*, 1.134.
17. *Ibid.*
18. Sashi Bhusan Ghosh, *Sri Ramakrishna Dev* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Karyalaya, 1332 BS), 87.
19. *Great Master*, 1.135.
20. Subodh Kumar Roy, *Itivritta: Ariadaha o Dakshineswar* (1971), 105.
21. *Tattvamanjari*, 13.4.76.
22. *Sri Ramakrishna Dev*, 92.
23. Akshay Kumar Sen, *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi* (Calcutta: Udbodhan Karyalaya, 9th edn.), 44.
24. *Samayikpatre Banglar Samajchitra*, ed. Binoy Ghosh (Calcutta: Pyapiras), 4.775-6.

Bhavanath Chattopadhyay

SWAMI CHETANANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

One day the Master asked Bhavanath to buy a picture of Dhruva practising austerities in the forest. Bhavanath did not return to Dakshineswar for some time, so the Master did not get the picture. After lunch one day, the Master asked his nephew Ramlal to go to Baranagore to collect the picture from Bhavanath and to inquire after his welfare. Although it was a very hot summer day, Ramlal walked to Bhavanath's house, where he found him talking to his friends. Bhavanath received Ramlal cordially and fanned him, then told him: 'Brother, I am sorry that I could not take the picture to the Master earlier. I was busy with many things, but I did buy that picture of Dhruva that the Master wanted.' Saying so, Bhavanath handed the picture to Ramlal and told him that he would visit the Master within a day or two.

The Master was waiting for Ramlal. When he saw him, he asked: 'Have you brought the picture? You must have suffered from the heat. Did he entertain you?'

'Yes, Uncle.'

'Did he give you something to eat?'

'No. I arrived just after lunch, so it was not necessary for him to serve food.'

'This is a fancy of Calcutta people,' remarked the Master. 'If a person visits one's home, one should serve the visitor at least some sweets or molasses and a glass of water: God dwells in everyone's heart.' As he held the picture, the Master went into samadhi. Afterwards, he asked that the picture be hung on the wall in his room. When it was hung, the Master bowed down to it. That picture of Dhruva is in the Master's room to this day.¹

During Durga Puja in 1884, on 28 September Bhavanath, M, Baburam and Niranjan spent the night at Dakshineswar. In the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, M recorded the conversation that took place the next morning.

Master (to Bhavanath): 'The truth is that ordinary men cannot easily have faith. But an Īśvarakoti's faith is spontaneous. ... It is the nature of jīvas to doubt. ...'

Hazra can never be persuaded to believe that Brahman and Śakti are one and the same. ...'

So I prayed to the Divine Mother: "O Mother, Hazra is trying to upset the views of this place. Either give him right understanding or take him from this place." ...'

Bhavanath: 'Did what Hazra said really make you suffer so much?'

Master: 'You see, I am now in a different mood. I can't shout and carry on heated discussions with people.'

The Master's legs were a little swollen. So he asked Bhavanath to request Dr Mahendra Nath Pal of Sinthi to see him.

Bhavanath (*with a smile*): 'You have great faith in medicine. But we haven't so much.'

Master: 'It is God who, as the doctor, prescribes the medicine. It is He who, in one form, has become the physician.'

M recorded:

After his meal Sri Ramakrishna rested a few minutes. The devotees were on the veranda engaged in light conversation. He soon joined them and was happy in their company. It was about two o'clock. All were still sitting on the veranda, when suddenly Bhavanath appeared in the garb of a brahmachāri, dressed in an ochre cloth, kamandalu in hand, his face beaming with smiles.

Master (*with a smile*): 'That is his inner feeling. Therefore he has dressed himself as a brahmachāri.'

A hot-tempered sadhu who was staying in the Panchavati came to the Master to ask for fire to ignite his pipe. The Master bowed down to him and stood with folded hands as long as he remained in the room. Seeing the Master's humility, Bhavanath remarked: 'What great respect you showed the sadhu!'

Master (*smiling*): 'You see, he too is Nārāyana, though full of tamas. This is the way one should please people who have an excess of tamas. Besides, he is a sādhu.'

Bhavanath (*humbly*): 'I feel disturbed if I have a misunderstanding with someone. I feel that in that case I am not able to love all.'

Master: 'Try at the outset to talk to him and establish a friendly relationship with him. If you fail in spite of your efforts, then don't give it another thought. Take refuge in God. Meditate on Him. There is no use in giving up God and feeling depressed from thinking about others.'²

On 22 February 1885, a large group of devotees attended the Master's birthday festival at Dakshineswar. The devotees arranged for the Master to have a meal in his room. At the Master's request, Narendra sang:

The Master expected Bhavanath to be present more often during his terminal cancer. It seems that the childlike Master was a little piqued when he made the statement, 'He is not in my thoughts anymore.' But the Master's affection for Bhavanath was not completely cut off. The Master disciplined his disciples like a chastising father and a compassionate mother.

In dense darkness, O Mother,
Thy formless beauty sparkles;
Therefore the yogis meditate
in a dark mountain cave.
Who art Thou, Mother,
seated alone in the shrine of samadhi?

M recorded:

As Narendra sang [the last line], Sri Ramakrishna went into deep samādhi and lost all outer consciousness. After a long time, when he was regaining partial consciousness, the devotees seated him on the carpet and placed a plate of food before him. Still overcome with divine emotion, he began to eat the rice with both hands. He said to Bhavanath, 'Feed me.' Because of his ecstatic mood he could not use his own right hand. Bhavanath began to feed him. (692)

Bhavanath was fortunate indeed that he had the chance to feed the Master.

The festivities continued throughout the day. In the evening the devotees bowed to the Master and started to go home. The Master went to the western porch, accompanied by Bhavanath and M.

Master (*to Bhavanath*): 'Why do you come here so seldom?'

Bhavanath (*smiling*): 'Sir, I visit you once in a fortnight. I saw you in the street the other day, so I didn't come here.'

Master: 'What do you mean? What can you gain by mere seeing? Touch and talk are also necessary.' (697)

Sometimes the devotees would invite the Master to their Calcutta homes and arrange for a festival. On 24 April 1885, Girish invited the Master and his devotees to his home for a feast and brought in a kirtan singer to entertain them.

Master: '... jñāna and bhakti are twin paths. Whichever you follow, it is God that you will ultimately reach. The jñāni looks on God in one way and the bhakta looks on Him in another way. The God of the jñāni is full of brilliance, and the God of the bhakta full of sweetness.'

Bhavanath was seated near the Master, listening to these words.

Bhavanath (*to the Master*): 'Sir, I have a question to ask. I don't quite understand the *Chandi*. It is written there that the Divine Mother kills all beings. What does that mean?'

Master: 'This is all Her *lilā*, Her sportive pleasure. That question used to bother me too. Later I found out that all is *māyā*. Both creation and destruction are God's *māyā*.' (768)

On 9 May 1885 the Master went to Balam's house in Calcutta. Bhavanath and other devotees were present. The conversation turned to divine incarnation.

Bhavanath: 'M says: "As long as I have not seen the elephant, how can I know whether it can pass through the eye of a needle? I do not know God; how can I understand through reason whether or not He can incarnate Himself as a man?"'

Master: 'Everything is possible for God. It is He who casts the spell. The magician swallows the knife and takes it out again; he swallows stones and bricks. (773)

'Everyone is under the spell of this world-bewitching *māyā*. When God assumes a human body, He too comes under the spell. Rāma wandered about, weeping for Sītā. "Brahman weeps, entangled in the snare of the five elements." But you must remember this: God, by His mere will, can liberate Himself from this snare.'

Bhavanath: 'The guard of a railway train shuts himself of his own will in a carriage; but he can get out whenever he wants to.'

Master: 'The *Īśvarakotis*—Divine Incarnations, for instance—can liberate themselves whenever they want to; but the *jīvakotis* cannot. Jīvas are imprisoned by "woman and gold". When the doors and windows of a room are fastened with screws, how can a man get out?'

Bhavanath (*smiling*): 'Ordinary men are like the third-class passengers on a railway train. When the doors of their compartments are locked, they have no way to get out.'

Girish: 'If a man is so strongly tied hand and foot, then what is his way?'

Master: 'He has nothing to fear if God Himself, as the guru, cuts the chain of *māyā*.' (777)

In late 1885, the Master was diagnosed with cancer. In September he moved to Cal-

cutta for treatment. Bhavanath's visits to the Master gradually became fewer as he struggled to find employment, and became involved with family affairs. On 11 December 1885, the Master was taken to a garden house in Cossipore, a suburb of Calcutta. On 23 December M remarked that one purpose of the Master's illness was the final sifting of disciples.

Master: 'What you said about the sifting of disciples was right. This illness is showing who belongs to the inner circle and who to the outer. Those who are living here, renouncing the world, belong to the inner circle; and those who pay occasional visits and ask, "How are you, sir?" belong to the outer circle.

'Didn't you notice Bhavanath? The other day he came to Śyāmpukur dressed as a bridegroom and asked me, "How are you?" I haven't seen him since. I show him love for Narendra's sake, but he is not in my thoughts any more.' (933)

The bonds of affection and friendship are tested when one is faced with a dire calamity. Bhavanath failed that test. Although his heart was with the Master, he was engulfed with his family responsibilities, unemployment, lack of money and other problems. The Master expected Bhavanath to be present more often during his terminal cancer. It seems that the

When Surendranath Mitra offered money to start a monastery, Bhavanath found a dilapidated house in Baranagore, which was owned by the Munshi family. The house was said to be haunted, so the monthly rent was only eleven rupees. Bhavanath and Hutko Gopal cleared the whole house and made it livable for the disciples.

childlike Master was a little piqued when he made the statement, 'He is not in my thoughts anymore.' But the Master's affection for Bhavanath was not completely cut off. The Master disciplined his disciples like a chastising father and a compassionate mother. Any temporary withdrawal of affection was a terrible blow to his disciples; they had no peace until they re-established their connection with their beloved Master.

M recorded on 22 April 1886:

Bhavanath and Narendra were sitting at a distance, talking together. Bhavanath had married and was trying to find a job; so he could not visit Sri Ramakrishna frequently at Cossipore. He had said to M: 'I understand that Vidyāsāgar wants to start a new school. I have to earn my livelihood. Will it be possible for me to secure a job in that school?' The Master was much worried about Bhavanath's being entangled in worldly life. Bhavanath was twenty-three or twenty-four years old.

Master (to Narendra): "Give him a lot of courage."

Narendra and Bhavanath smiled. Sri Ramakrishna said to Bhavanath, by signs: 'Be a great hero. Don't forget yourself when you see her [your wife] weeping behind her veil. Oh, women cry so much—even when they blow their noses! (Narendra, Bhavanath, and M laugh.)

'Keep your mind firm on God. He who is a hero lives with a woman but does not indulge in physical pleasures. Talk to your wife only about God.'

A few minutes later Sri Ramakrishna said to Bhavanath, by a sign, 'Take your meal here today.'

The disciples of the Master loved one another, so their relationship was free and honest. They made the monastery a lively abode of bliss with their sadhana, passion and longing for God—and their wonderful humour.

Bhavanath: 'Yes, sir. I am quite all right. Don't worry about me.' (965-6)

Bhavanath must have visited the Master again before he passed away on 16 August 1886, but there is no evidence of this in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* or in *Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play*. When the Master passed away, two group photographs were taken; Bhavanath is present in both of them.

Bhavanath was a good singer and sang for Ramakrishna on several occasions. He also wrote two books: *Niti-Kusum* (Flowers of Morality) and *Adarsha Naranari* (Ideal Men and Women). In November 1888, Bhavanath wrote a short article on Sri Ramakrishna for *Sakha* magazine. Here is a free translation of the article, which was written in Bengali:

We are writing about a person [Sri Ramakrishna] who, like Chaitanya, was God-intoxicated and a devotee. Many people satisfied their eyes seeing his divine ecstasy. He explained intricate religious matters in such a simple way that even a child could understand them. His teachings are very helpful for seekers of God.

Keshab Chandra Sen was very impressed by Sri Ramakrishna, and the Master was very fond of him. Keshab respected him as his guru and never contradicted him. Keshab visited the Master at Dakshineswar, and the Master also visited his Calcutta home. Keshab learned from the Master to call upon God as Mother and introduced this practice to his Brahmo Samaj. Keshab wrote about the Master in *Mirror*, *Dharma-tattoo* and other magazines. He also published a booklet, *Paramahamser Ukti* (Sayings of a Paramahansa), and distributed it among the people. Thus the Master became known to the public. Although he did not have a formal education, many pundits and highly educated persons like Keshab Chandra Sen respected him as a guru.

He did not like to be addressed as guru. He was so humble that if anyone bowed down to him, he would also bow down to that person. He said, 'I am the servant of all.' He considered all women to be the manifestation of the Divine Mother and bowed down to them. He never hated anyone. His loving embrace transformed even the most horrible sinners. One could attain

more virtue by seeing him in ecstasy than by reading scriptures or hearing many sermons.

He could advise all, whether a person was Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Brahma or Sikh. He did not preach a new religion. He taught people according to their respective faiths. He respected a person who was truthful, and he practised what he taught.

Some think that one cannot be a jnani or be virtuous without studying books, but that idea will be dispelled if anyone studies the life of Sri Ramakrishna.⁵

When Surendranath Mitra offered money to start a monastery, Bhavanath found a dilapidated house in Baranagore, which was owned by the Munshi family. The house was said to be haunted, so the monthly rent was only eleven rupees. Bhavanath and Hutko Gopal cleared the whole house and made it livable for the disciples. In this way the first Ramakrishna Math came into existence in October 1886.

Sometime after the Master passed away, Bhavanath sold his Baranagore house and moved to Bhawanipur in south Calcutta. He received his Bachelor's degree and obtained a government job as a school inspector. Most probably his first daughter was born in the late 1880s; she died when she was two and a half years old. His second daughter, Pratibha, was born in 1890. As he was busy with his family and his job, he could not visit the monastery frequently, but whenever he found an opportunity he went to see the monastic disciples of the Master.

Swami Shuddhananda recalled:

Once Bhavanath came to the Baranagore monastery. He lamented: 'How wonderful that you are calling on God by renouncing the world. We are engrossed in the world and struggling to survive.' He then sang a song:

Why do you drink poison
thinking of it as nectar?

Why do you forget the goal
by enjoying momentary pleasures?

Have you thought of the main object of life?

Will you pass your days in this way?

Swami Ramakrishnananda tried to console him

by citing this example: 'A man buys some live fish from the market. He keeps some in the water and he fries some in the frying pan. The Master is now frying us by the fire of renunciation. He kept you alive in the water, and he will put you in the frying pan at the proper time.'⁴

Swami Ramakrishnananda later recalled:

Bhavanath was one of those whom the Master spoke of as having been 'born perfect'. He also said that Bhavanath and Narendra had a special affinity. But Bhavanath married. One day the Master told me to go to him, saying I could learn much from him. I wondered why he should send me to a householder to learn, but when I saw Bhavanath I understood. As we sat talking of God, he went into meditation, and tears of bliss and devotion poured down his cheeks. One could see that he was completely immersed in God.⁵

When the Ramakrishna monastery was moved from Baranagore to Alambazar in 1892, Bhavanath continued his visits. One afternoon he went to the monastery with his friend Kalikrishna of Baranagore, but soon after his arrival he decided to return home. He told the monks that he could stay no longer because he was hungry. The disciples told him to wait a little and offered him hot chapatis and curry. Bhavanath enjoyed the refreshments and joyfully exclaimed, 'Man cannot live on bread alone.' Before he could finish the quote, Swami Abhedananda humourously broke in,

'My friend, it is difficult to judge what is in a particular individual. Sri Ramakrishna has spoken highly of him; and he deserves our respect. Fie upon you if you have no faith even after so much experience! Does he love you? Please convey to him my hearty love and esteem.'

'But upon bread and mutton.'⁶ All laughed. The disciples of the Master loved one another, so their relationship was free and honest. They made the monastery a lively abode of bliss with their sadhana, passion and longing for God—and their wonderful humour.

Swami Vivekananda maintained his friendship with Bhavanath even when he was in the United States. In 1894 he wrote a letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda:

How is Bhavanath, and what is he doing? Do you visit him, and look upon him with an eye of regard? Yes, brother, the distinction between sannyasin and layman is a fiction. ... My friend, it is difficult to judge what is in a particular individual. Sri Ramakrishna has spoken highly of him; and he deserves our respect. Fie upon you if you have no faith even after so much experience! Does he love you? Please convey to him my hearty love and esteem.⁷

For the last eight years of Bhavanath's life, his duties as a school inspector took him to various places in Bengal. While he was traveling in Nakipur, Satkshira, Jessore (now in Bangladesh), he contracted *kala azar* (an infectious disease) and had to return to Calcutta, where he lived in a rented house on Ramakrishnadas Lane in Badurbagan. At that time there was an outbreak of plague in Calcutta, so Bhavanath was sent to Madhupur. However, Bhavanath lived for only one month after he returned to Calcutta. Towards the end he remained in an ecstatic mood, as if he were seeing the Master. Sometimes he would utter loudly, 'Kali, Kali, Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna.' He asked his relatives to burn incense in his room and not to touch his body.⁸ In the early part of 1896, at the age of thirty-three, Bhavanath died in that rented house in Cal-

cutta. His body was cremated at the Cossipore cremation ground where Sri Ramakrishna's body had been cremated.⁹

Sri Ramakrishna had householder devotees as well as monastic disciples. He said, 'There are two kinds of yogis, the "revealed" and the "hidden". The householder may be a "hidden" yogi. None recognizes him. The householder should renounce mentally, not outwardly.'¹⁰ Bhavanath was a hidden yogi. Perhaps the Master demonstrated through him how a householder should live in this world. *

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Gramophone

Whenever Swami Ramakrishnananda lectured, he carried in his pocket pictures of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother. He would touch these pictures as he lectured. He would say, 'Whatever the Master makes me speak, I speak like a gramophone. I don't claim any personal credit from it.'

Half a Century of Experiment in Character-building

Vivekananda Balaka Sangha, Bangalore (1953-2003)

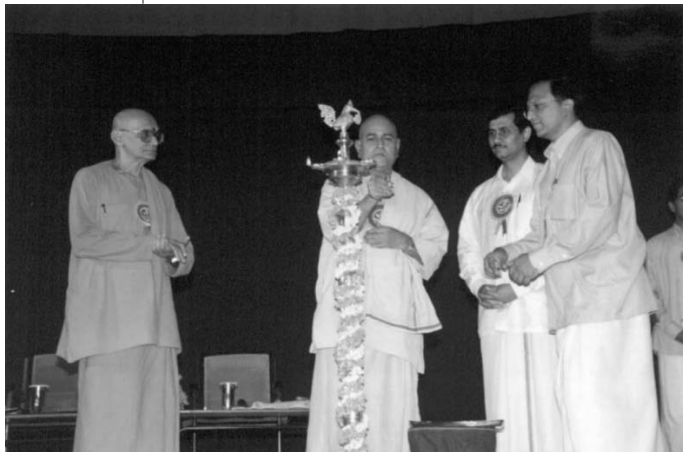
Not many might know that in the sylvan and pristine environs of the Rama-krishna Math, Bangalore, functions an ebullient organization called the Vivekananda Balaka Sangha (VBS). Started in 1953 by Srimat Swami Yatiswaranandaji Maharaj (the then President of Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore) as 'a cultural and recreational centre for boys' in the age group of 9 to 16 years, the VBS has worked in the fields of character-building, personality development and man-making for the young. VBS claims to be nothing more than 'an experiment in character-building for the young'.

Swami Yatiswaranandaji inspired all those who met him and transformed their lives by his sterling spiritual character and realization. Though advanced in years (he was 65), he was young, progressive and dynamic in his outlook and actions. A remarkable synthesis of the best of Eastern and Western cultures, he was particularly interested in the younger generation. And the youth too, both boys and girls, eagerly responded to his warm and affectionate influence. To many of the elderly people who came to him in search of solutions for their and the country's problems, he would say, 'I am interested in serving those who will have to serve others' and 'I am not so much interested in you, not even in your son, but I am very much interested in your grandson.' He loved the boys, and it is no wonder that his love sustained the work and all those

who implemented the programme. From 1953 till his passing away in 1966, Swami Yatiswaranandaji guided and nourished the activities of the VBS and took it upon himself to make the boys' centre an integral part of the Ashrama activity.

The Golden Jubilee Inauguration

The VBS celebrated its golden jubilee from 30 May 2003 to 1 June 2003. Swami Gautamanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, inaugurated the celebrations at the Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, on 30 May 2003. In the colourful function that followed the inauguration, Gautamanandaji reminisced about the days he had spent at the Bangalore Ashrama in the company of Swami Yatiswaranandaji. He spoke of his association with the activities of the VBS in its formative years and stressed the necessity of such organizations to impart training in morality and religion even at a young age. He hoped that the VBS experi-



Inauguration



Audience

ment would be replicated successfully elsewhere too, enabling the spread of Swami Vivekananda's message of man-making and character-building education.

Swami Sastranandaji was the first monastic director of the VBS. Swami Yatiswaranandaji had entrusted him with the implementation of his ideas about the VBS. The solid foundation and the philosophical basis of the VBS were laid during Sastranandaji's tenure as its first monastic director.

Viveka Manjusha, VCD, Photo Exhibition

Swami Gautamanandaji also released an elegant printed version of the annual manuscript magazine of the VBS, *Viveka Manjusha*. The magazine features reminiscences by past members of the VBS—monastic and non-monastic—about their experiences in the VBS and the influence it had on their life. Articles culled from previous issues of the manuscript magazine also form part of this special issue.

This was followed by the release and screening of a multimedia VCD entitled *Vivekananda Balaka Sangha—A Perspective*. The VCD contains a presentation of the ideals and principles governing the VBS, a profile of Swami Yatiswaranandaji, a peep into the multifarious activities of the VBS, and homage and tribute to the people who nourished it in these last

fifty years.

There was a photo exhibition focusing on the history and growth of the VBS as well as its multifarious activities. Besides group photos, the exhibition featured past events like dramas and public functions.

Members of the VBS enacted a dance-drama, *Kalinga Mardana*, depicting the exploits of Sri Krishna subduing the demon-serpent Kaliya. *Kolata* (a popular folk dance performed with sticks) was also enacted by the present young members of the VBS. Choreographed with songs

from the Dasa literature of Karnataka, the *kolata* performance was a masterpiece of elegant footwork, rhythm and sublime meaning. About 3500 devotees of the Bangalore Math witnessed these celebrations.

The 'Cultural Day'

On 31 May, Swami Purushottamanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Belgaum, presided over the second day's function, called the 'Cultural Day'. He had assisted Swami Sastranandaji at the VBS from 1960 to 1964, and was its monastic director from 1966 to 1993. During his tenure, Purushottamanandaji was instrumental in the growth and development of the VBS and adapted the activities and programmes to the changing needs of the times.

Recalling the eventful period in his life as the monastic director, Purushottamanandaji emphasized that creativity, intelligence and, above all, a patient and loving disposition are essential to handle the energy and exuberance of the youth. He declared that in trying to be a role model to the young under his care, he had learnt more than what he had given them.

Young boys narrated incidents in the life of Swami Vivekananda and recited uplifting stories with a powerful message of coopera-

tive endeavour.

This was followed by a musical ensemble with various instruments like sitar, veena, flute, violin, harmonium, keyboard, tabla, khanjira, mridangam and khol. Next was a bhajan programme comprising songs from the *Vinaya Patrika* of Tulsidas and Marathi *abhangs*, each bhajan preceded by a brief translation in Kannada.

Then there was a *kolata* performance by past members of the VBS, some of whom are trainers for the present members. *Dharma Digvijaya*, a drama depicting incidents from the life of Sri Shankaracharya, was then presented. The 'Cultural Day' was a three-hour spell-binding feast of colour, rhythm and gaiety.

Spiritual Retreat

On 1 June 2003 morning, a spiritual retreat was organized for past and present members of the VBS. 250 members witnessed the puja and homa and participated in a worshipful mood. Subsequently, various past members—monastic and non-monastic—as well as teachers, shared their VBS experiences and spoke of the positive impact it had on their life.

Alumni Association

Swami Harshanandaji announced the formation of an alumni association of the past and present members from 1 June 2003 to further the various causes taken up by Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Bangalore. He sought the members' cooperation in these activities. Members who could not attend these functions could enrol themselves at the Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road, Bangalore 560 019, or by e-mail at [vbs_rkmb@](mailto:vbs_rkmb@yahoo.com)

[yahoo.com](mailto:vbs_rkmb@yahoo.com).

The morning session concluded with a bhajan by Sri N Krishnaswamy (affectionately known as Kitty Master), who has been associated with the activities of the VBS since its inception in 1953.

The Evening Session

In this memorable session VBS members who had joined the Ramakrishna Order as monks as well as monastic and non-monastic teachers of the VBS were honoured with a citation and a memento. They had congregated from across the country and abroad for this celebration. Past and present members paid



Kolata

homage and tribute to people who made the VBS a glorious institution.

Swami Atmavidanandaji, President, Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Mysore; Swami Girjeshanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Jammu; and Swami Paramathanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad—all past members of the VBS—spoke of their VBS experiences. The common theme of their talks was their indebtedness to the training they had received from Swami Yatiswaranandaji and from the monastic directors of the VBS. They declared that the love, affection and training they received from their VBS teachers had left an indelible impression on their lives.



Dance-Drama: Kalinga Mardana

Conclusion

In the words of Swami Harshanandaji, who was associated with the VBS activities as a teacher from 1953 to 1958 and as President of the Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore, from 1993, the golden jubilee was a momentous occasion in the history of Bangalore Math. He said he was thrilled with the energy and enthusiasm displayed by the past and present members of the

In his presidential address Swami Harshanandaji spoke of the need for starting similar institutions across the country to give concrete shape to the ideals and principles advocated by Swami Vivekananda. He hoped that the golden jubilee would trigger the spread of these life-giving ideas through the formation of such organizations.

A drama entitled *Karuna Gange* depicting the transformation of Angulimala the bandit by Gautama Buddha was a fitting finale to the three-day inaugural function of the VBS's golden jubilee celebrations.

VBS, who were instrumental in the grand success of this function. Be it fund-raising, editing the magazine, preparing the multimedia presentation, organizing dramas, *kolata* and music programmes, or attending to the various tasks associated with the celebrations, these boys exhibited their talents and abilities and demonstrated the love and affection they have for the VBS. That the VBS was instrumental in the blossoming of their personality is a matter of pride.

*

Where There's a Will ...

An old man lived alone in Minnesota. He wanted to spade his potato garden, but it was very hard work. His only son, who would have helped him, was in prison. The old man wrote a letter to his son and mentioned his situation:

'Dear Son, I am feeling pretty bad because it looks like I won't be able to plant my potato garden this year. I hate to miss doing the garden, because your mother always loved planting time. I'm just getting too old to be digging up a garden plot. If you were here, all my troubles would be over. I know you would dig the plot for me, if you weren't in prison. Love, Dad.'

Shortly, the old man received this telegram: 'For Heaven's sake, Dad, don't dig up the garden!! That's where I buried the guns!!' At 4 am next day, a dozen FBI agents and local police officers showed up and dug up the entire garden without finding any guns. Confused, the old man wrote another note to his son telling him what happened, and asked him what to do next.

His son's reply was: 'Go ahead and plant your potatoes, Dad. That's the best I could do for you from here.'

Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*—An Exposition

SWAMI PREMESHANANDA

(Translated by Shoutir Kishore Chatterjee)

Chapter 1: The Section on *Samādhi* (continued)

21. *Tivra-sarīvegānām-āsannaḥ.*

Success is speedy for the extremely energetic.

22. *Mṛdu-madhyādhi-mātratvāt-tato'pi viśeṣaḥ.*

The success of yogis differs according to the means they adopt: mild, medium or intense.

Comment: Those who care for whatever is needed to qualify for the practice of yoga naturally hold the injunctions of the scriptures with full faith.

The development of energy (*vīrya*), memory or fortitude is possible only after the vital force and mind are fully developed in the aspirant. Such aspirants acquire the power of concentrating the mind even earlier. As a result, their *prajñā*, or the ability to discriminate, becomes developed. Among aspirants who become thus endowed, in some an intense yearning for attaining perfection arises in the mind, whereas in others it takes time—it all depends on favourable and unfavourable circumstances created by their *prārabdha*, the continuing effect of their karma that started bearing fruit in this life.

There are those who do not have any awareness of God and as such are not used to any kind of worship. They too can know the secret behind the universe through the yoga of meditation. We now describe the spiritual discipline appropriate for those who are aware of God.

Among the worshippers of God there are three categories. First, those who think of God through conceived divine symbols like Shiva, Vishnu, Kali and Durga. Second, Muslims and others who are not followers of the Vedas.

They think of God as without form. The third category consists of those who think of some avatara, or incarnation of God. The better one's knowledge about the reality of God, the better is one's worship; the more easily is one able to attain knowledge. It is essential for worshippers to know certain facts about God: (1) In this relative world, there is no connection between God and happiness and sorrow, or good and bad. '*Na me dvesyo'sti na priyaḥ*, There is none hateful or dear to Me.'¹ (2) God is omnipresent and omniscient. (3) It is He who has given all the knowledge that man possesses. When man becomes very degraded due to lack of spiritual knowledge, God appears as an incarnation to teach him religion. (4) The first word signifying God that was revealed to mankind was Om. On concentrating one's mind on the word Om, the mind soars above the world and one can feel God, who is the Cause of the world. Later seers discovered a number of seed words that symbolize various aspects of God, such as *hrīm* (the seed word for Shakti, the female Deity representing Power), *ram* (the seed word for Agni, the Deity representing Fire), *klīm* (the seed word for the aspect of God expressing His love) and *aim* (the seed word for guru, the spiritual teacher). (5) When we call a dear one by his name, we have the idea of his presence in our mind. Ex-

actly like that, when we repeat the name and the seed word of God as given by the guru, we have in mind the idea that this is the name of our Chosen Deity and that He would come when called by this name. For this reason, by chanting the guru-given mantra one gets a vision of one's Chosen Deity. (6) When we get a vision of God, we stand apart from the bondage of the body-mind complex. In other words, we attain freedom. True, that freedom is not perfect freedom, yet all those obstacles that earlier used to confront the aspirant during spiritual practice completely disappear now.

While contemplating a particular form of

23. *Īśvara-praṇidhānād-vā.*

Or by devotion to Ishvara.³

24. *Kleśa-karma-vipākāśayair-aparāmṛṣṭaḥ puruṣa-viṣeṣa īśvaraḥ.*

Ishvara (the Supreme Ruler) is a special Purusha, untouched by misery, actions, their results and desires.

25. *Tatra niratīsayam sarvajñatva-bijam.*

In Him becomes infinite that all-knowingness which in others is (only) a germ.

26. *Sa pūroṣām-āpi guruḥ kālenānavacchedāt.*

He is the Teacher of even the ancient teachers, being not limited by time.

27. *Tasya vācakah praṇavaḥ.*

His manifesting word is Om.

28. *Tajjapas-tadartha-bhāvanam.*

The repetition of this (Om) and meditating on its meaning (is the way).

29. *Tataḥ pratyak-cetanādhigamo'py-antarāyābhāvaśca.*

From that is gained (the knowledge of) introspection and the destruction of obstacles.

Comment: Kapila, the founder of the tradition of yogis, was a believer in the plurality of Purusha. But Patanjali, the author of the *Yoga Sūtras*, accepts the doctrine of a single God. According to him, a person can attain samadhi even by reflecting on God, who is omniscient, omnipotent, ever free and the supreme Teacher of man. To reflect on Him, one has to repeat Om while remembering that Purusha in one. If one does this for a long time,

God when the mind becomes completely absorbed in that idea, one experiences the words of the *Gita*: 'The senses are said to be superior (to the body); the mind is superior to the senses; the intellect is superior to the mind; and that which is superior to the intellect is He (the Self)';² that one is witnessing God, who is superior to the senses, the mind and the intellect. This is a form of *asmitā* (consciousness of the ego), the I-consciousness that makes us aware of all our activities and thoughts in life. As the devotee sang, 'O Śyāmā, I will cast you today in the mould of my mind and obtain a mental image.'

one becomes aware of the jivatman (the individual Self), or the *kṣetrajña*, or the *kṣara-puruṣa*. As a result, for such a person no further obstacle remains in the path of progress towards nirvana (complete emancipation).

Pratyak-cetanādhigamaḥ is exemplified in Sri Ramakrishna's realization of God as Kali. Following his guru Totapuri's instruction, Sri Ramakrishna raised his mind above Kali and easily attained *kaiṅvalya* [perfect isolation, or

freedom, coming from the realization of one's identity with the supreme Self].

30. *Vyādhi-styāna-samśaya-pramādālasya-avirati-bhrānti-darśanālabdha-bhūmikatvā-navasthitatvāni cittavikṣepās-te'ntarāyāḥ.*

Disease, mental laziness, doubt, lack of enthusiasm, lethargy, clinging to sense enjoyments, false perception, non-attaining concentration, and falling away from the state when obtained—these are the obstructing distractions.

31. *Duḥkha-daurmanasyāṅgamejayatva-śvāsapraśvāsā vikṣepa-sahabhuvāḥ.*

Grief, mental distress, tremor of the body, irregular breathing—these accompany non-retention of concentration.

32. *Tat-pratiśedhārtham-eka-tattvābhyāsaḥ.*

To remedy this, the practice of one subject (should be made).

33. *Maitri-karuṇā-muditopekṣāṅgāṃ sukha-duḥkha-puṇyāpuṇya-viṣayāṅgāṃ bhāvanā-taś-citta-prasādanam.*

Friendship, mercy, gladness and indifference, being thought of in regard to subjects, happy, unhappy, good and evil respectively, would pacify the mind.

34. *Pracchardana-vidhāraṇābhyām vā prāṇasya.*

By throwing out and restraining the breath [also the mind may be pacified. Prana, the word used here, generally means energy—the energy which is manifest in us as breath, motion, nerve current, thought and so on].

Comment: This creation is an ocean of matter. In it the body-mind complex of each of us living beings is just like a whirlpool. The body-mind is always in contact with the external world, resulting in a constant risk of obstacles in course of spiritual practice. As long as one has a body it is impossible to be free from the clutches of the three kinds of affliction [caused by (1) one's body and mind, (2) other living beings and (3) forces of nature]. Hence Maharshi Patanjali teaches spiritual aspirants

to remain alert on this point. To prevent such obstacles one has to keep the mind totally engaged in one desired object.

Again, due to one's past nature, the impact of the external world may generate various kinds of thoughts in the mind, making it restless. In that case one has to check them with opposite thoughts. If the mind does not become inactive despite that, one has to restrain the activity of prana (breath) to pacify the mind.

35. *Viśayavati vā pravṛttir-utpannā manasaḥ sthiti-nibandhini.*

Those forms of concentration that bring extraordinary sense perceptions cause perseverance of the mind.

36. *Viśokā vā jyotiśmati.*

Or (by the meditation on) the effulgent Light, which [is in the lotus of the heart and] is beyond all sorrow.

Comment: Long practice of yoga manifests a special power within oneself. As a result one sometimes gets sense-transcendent experiences. Then one feels zealous in mind

and one's longing for meditation grows. When the mind becomes concentrated, at times one sees various forms of light. That greatly enhances one's enthusiasm, for in the

language of Swamiji, such visions are ‘mile- | stones of progress’.

37. *Vita-rāga-viśayam vā cittam.*

Or (by meditation on) the heart [of some holy person or saint] that has given up all attachment to sense objects.

38. *Svapna-nidrā-jñānāmbanam vā.*

Or by meditating on the knowledge that comes [that is, the blissful condition that one sometimes dreams of] in sleep.

39. *Yathābhīmata-dhyānād-vā.*

Or by the meditation on anything that appeals to one as good.

Comment: Maharshi Patanjali speaks about all the ways of making the mind concentrated. The mind readily calms down when it thinks about the mental state of an all-renouncing person who has reached perfection. Sometimes we behold in dreams gods or goddesses or men of realization. Reflection on them also makes the mind calm. During deep sleep the external world completely vanishes for us. At that time we become as if free from our attachments and delusions. Thinking about that condition also pacifies the mind. Some people feel strong attraction towards some special object or person. They can readi-

ly attain samadhi if they keep the mind fixed on that object or person.

Mani Mallick’s daughter Nandini attained *bhāva* samadhi [a kind of samadhi in which the distinction between the object of meditation and the meditator persists] by thinking about her nephew. Vilvamangala was on the verge of reaching the state of samadhi in course of reflecting on a depraved woman. There is the story of a guru who gave his disciple the mantra of *gārol* [meaning sheep]. The disciple attained samadhi by meditating upon a sheep.

40. *Paramāṇu parama-mahattvānto’sya vaśīkārah.*

Thus meditating, the yogi’s mind becomes unobstructed from the atomic to the infinite [so that it can meditate as easily on the fine as on the gross objects].

41. *Kṣiṇa-vṛtter-abhijātasyeva maṇer-grahitṛ-grahaṇa-grāhyeṣu tatstha-tad-añjanatā samāpattiḥ.*

The yogi whose *vṛttis* have thus become powerless (controlled) obtains in the receiver, (the instrument of) receiving, and the received, (the Self [the qualified Purusha or Egoism], the mind [which is a fine object], and external objects), concentratedness and sameness like the crystal (before different coloured objects).

Comment: In course of practising mental concentration, a time comes when one acquires such a power that as soon as one intends to concentrate the mind on something, one is able to do that immediately. Then just as the mind is able to fix itself on very subtle matters (such as the various spiritual states of Sri Ramakrishna), it gets deeply absorbed thinking about vast objects like the sky, the ocean or

the Himalayas.

An example to illustrate this condition: if an object is placed near a very clear, transparent crystal, it would appear as if the crystal and the object are of the same colour. It would appear as if the object is situated in the crystal itself. If we keep a red hibiscus flower near a piece of glass, the glass looks red and it seems as if the flower is inside the glass. As a result of

extreme concentration of the mind, the mind-glass similarly gets coloured by, or totally identified with, the thing meditated upon. In

that state the mind and the object meditated upon do not appear to be different. One feels that they have both become one.

42. *Tatra śabdārtha-jñāna-vikalpaiḥ saṅkirṇā savitarkā samāpattiḥ.*

[When the mind achieves identity with a gross object of meditation and] sound [the word or vibration, that is the nerve currents which conduct the vibration], meaning [of the word] and resulting knowledge [the reaction in the mind-stuff] are mixed up, [it] is (called) samadhi with question.

43. *Smṛti-pariśuddhau svarūpa-śūnyevārtha-mātra-nirbhāsā nirvitarkā.*

The samadhi called 'without question' (comes) when the memory is purified, or devoid of qualities, expressing only the meaning [that is the idea] (of the meditated object).

44. *Yetasyaiva savicārā nirvicārā ca sūkṣma-viśayā vyākhyātā.*

By this process, (the concentrations) with discrimination and without discrimination, whose objects are finer, are (also) explained.

45. *Sūkṣma-viśayatvañcālīṅga-paryavasānam.*

The finer objects end with the Pradhāna [the equilibrium state of sattva, rajas and tamas constituting the primal or unmanifest nature, which is also called Avyakta].

46. *Tā eva sabijaḥ samādhīḥ.*

These concentrations are with seed. [They do not destroy the seeds of past actions and thus cannot give liberation.]

Comment: Vitarka (with question) and vicāra (with discrimination) kinds of samadhi are being discussed now.

Those who start practising yoga without doing selfless work and worship, do not have the power to think about subtle matters; to think about Brahman is beyond their capacity. Hence such aspirants need to begin their spiritual practice with some gross external object.

The aspirant must first practise continuously thinking about some gross object. At first his buddhi (intellect) will not be sharp enough. As such, however intently he may think, he will not be able to comprehend that at the time of thinking the mind is performing the act of thinking by moving between the ob-

ject of thought and buddhi. Thinking thus for many days, when his power of observation becomes sharp, his mind will merge as it were in the object of meditation. He will no longer recall whether he is thinking or not. He will only experience the object of meditation in his inmost consciousness like someone who is lost in himself. In this context it is good to remember Sri Ramakrishna's metaphor of an angler absorbed in catching fish with a fishing rod.

Thus thinking of subtle objects, when the yogi ultimately concentrates his mind on and merge it into the primal Prakriti, the cause of all objects, he will reach the ultimate limit of 'samadhi with seed'.

47. *Nirvicāra-vaiśāradye' dhyātma-prasādaḥ.*

[As one becomes established in] the concentration 'without discrimination', the *citta* becomes [pure and] firmly fixed.

48. *Ṛtambharā tatra prajñā.*

The knowledge in that [state] is called 'filled with Truth'.

49. *Śrutānumāna-prajñābhyām-anya-viśayā viśeṣārthatoāt.*

The knowledge that is gained from [direct sense perception,] testimony [of competent persons,] and inference, is about common objects. The knowledge from the samadhi just mentioned is of a much higher order, being able to penetrate where [sense perception,] inference and testimony cannot go.

50. *Tajjah saṁskāro'nya-saṁskāra-pratibandhī.*

The resulting impression from this samadhi [is so powerful that it] obstructs all other impressions [and holds them in check].

Comment: When one can concentrate the mind totally in Prakriti, the material cause of creation, all knowable things as it were come under one's control. Healthy, strong and well-off persons always feel [relatively] a sense of calmness because they do not have any physical or mental worry. Just like that, an aspirant who has reached the above state does not feel the least bit of disturbance in mind. In

that pure tranquil mind, solutions to all problems of this world remain distinctly revealed. No problem in life can disturb such an aspirant. Such a state of mind is not due to the power of discrimination of an intelligent person: it is a direct awareness. As a result of this experience, the aspirant's mind cannot get involved in samskara-dominated worldly affairs like that of an ordinary person.

51. *Tasyāpi nirodhe sarva-nirodhān-nirbijah samādhiḥ.*

By the restraint of even this (impression, which obstructs all other impressions), all being restrained [that is there are no thought-waves at all in the mind], comes the 'seedless' Samadhi.

Comment: This condition represents complete development of *jīvatva*, the state of a living being. A living being then gains power to control entire nature (Prakriti) according to its wish. An aspirant who even after reaching this condition deems it to be inferior to *kaivalya* (absolute independence, or realization of one's identity with Brahman), reflects on the essence of his own Self and rises above this samadhi too. That is the complete fulfilment of yogic spiritual practice, the attainment of *kaivalya*.

When one realizes God through samadhi, one can know everything inside Prakriti. But unless one is able to go outside (separate oneself from) Prakriti, one cannot attain full knowledge, or realize one's identity with

Brahman.

Whatever kinds of bliss a jiva can attain, Sri Ramakrishna attained all that through Mother Kali. After that he had sannyasa from Totapuri and realized his identity with Brahman. That was the last limit of all human endeavour!

(To be continued)

References

1. *Bhagavadgita*, 9.29.
2. *Ibid.*, 3.42.
3. The term *īśvara-praṇidhāna* appears in three other aphorisms: 2.1, 2.32 and 2.45. In his 'Raja-Yoga' Swamiji translates them respectively as 'surrendering fruits of work to God', 'worship of God' and 'sacrificing all to Ishvara'. —Translator.

Will power is not telling anyone that you have given up smoking.

Kuṇḍika Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

Synopsis

This Upaniṣad¹ belongs to the *Sāma Veda*. It sets forth the duties of a person prior to entering the life of a *sannyāsin*; describes how *sannyāsa* (renunciation) is considered essential for the cessation of rebirth (the birth-death-rebirth cycle); gives the rules for initiation into *sannyāsa*; gives an expression of the ascetic monk's spiritual experiences; describes the direct realization of Brahman through the practice of *yoga* as well as the graded process of liberation (*krama-mukti*) in the case of knowers of Brahman with attributes; and finally explains the liberation attained by the knowers of Brahman without attributes.

Peace chant (*Śānti-mantra*)²

ॐ आप्यायन्तु ममाङ्गानि वाक्प्राणश्चक्षुः श्रोत्रमथो बलमिन्द्रियाणि च सर्वाणि सर्वं ब्रह्मोपनिषदं माऽहं ब्रह्म निराकुर्यां मा मा ब्रह्म निराकरोदनिराकरणमस्त्वनिराकरणं मेऽस्तु तदात्मनि निरते य उपनिषत्सु धर्मास्ते मयि सन्तु ते मयि सन्तु । ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om. May my limbs and my strength be fully developed—the different parts of my body, my speech, vital force (*prāṇa*), eyes, ears and all my sense organs be nourished!³ All is [verily] the Brahman revealed in (and realizable only through) the Upaniṣads!⁴ May I not deny Brahman!⁵ May Brahman not deny me!⁶ May there never be denial on the part of Brahman! May there never be denial on my part!⁷ May all the virtues (divine qualities that are spoken of) in the Upaniṣads belong to me who am deeply devoted to the Self (Atman, which is identical with Brahman)!⁸ Yea, may they all belong to me!⁹ Om, Peace, Peace, Peace!¹⁰

Notes

1. In the *Sannyasa Upanishads*, Volume 1 of the Adyar Library series 'Minor Upanishads' published in 1912, some additional passages occur at the beginning. These are not considered here for two reasons: (i) most of the ideas contained in these passages do not appear relevant to the passages occurring in the main text, (ii) Upaniṣad Brahmayogin, the authentic commentator of the 108 Upanishads, does not seem to have taken any notice of these passages.
2. Chanted by the preceptor and the disciple at the beginning of Vedic study (*vidyārambha*). In the present *mantra* of the *Sāma Veda*, note the candid prayer for powerful, well-nourished and awakened senses and limbs of the body. (Compare Swami Vivekananda's insistence that even physical strength is extremely essential for launching upon the voyage in the uncharted sea of spiritual life with all its struggles and tumults.)
3. The physical body with all its sense organs and the vital energy (*prāṇa*) should remain healthy, energetic and awakened in order that the extremely subtle (*ati-sūkṣma*) Brahman-knowledge (*brahma-vidyā*) be properly grasped and integrated with one's life. Hence this important prayer. The Upaniṣad says, '*Nāyamātmā balahīnena labhyaḥ*, This Atman is not realizable by the weak.' Swami Vivekananda emphasized, as no other *ācārya* did before him, that strength, energy, vitality, even at the physical level—nervous strength and keen, awakened senses—are extremely essential for spiritual progress and ultimate realization of the inner Self, or Atman.

4. Vedantic dicta (*vedānta vākyas*) as found in the Upaniṣads—uttered by ṛṣis from the profound depths of their inner realization (*anubhūti*)—are alone considered authentic in regard to supersensuous spiritual truths. Brahman is thus emphasized to be *aupaniṣadam brahma* (Upaniṣadic Brahman, meaning Brahman as expounded and realizable through Upaniṣadic teachings), as distinguished from the Brahman of one’s imagination or fancy. The Upaniṣadic tradition (*sampradāya*) is considered essential for the realization of the Vedantic truths about Atman/Brahman.
5. As spiritual seekers of liberation (*mumukṣu sādhakas*) we deny Brahman when we pursue sensory pleasures constituting the world of duality, for Brahman is a matter of supersensuous perception, or realization, that cannot be attained as long as one is bound to the sense world. Compare the very first exhortation by Aṣṭāvakra in the famous *Aṣṭāvakra Samhitā*: ‘*Muktīm-icchasi cet-tāta viṣayān viṣavat-tyaja*, My child, if you really want liberation, renounce sense pleasures and sense experiences as poison.’
6. That is Brahman (in its *saguṇa* aspect, or with attributes) should be graceful or propitious to the spiritual seeker by turning his mind away from the world of duality and sensuality.
7. This is an assertion of the mutual commitment between the spiritual seeker and the supreme Truth, repeated twice in order to engender steadfastness in the heart of the aspirant.
8. The spiritual seeker (*sādhaka*) repeatedly reminds himself of his glorious self-image—the image in which he feels, ‘I am not an ordinary sense-bound mortal, but one deeply committed to spiritual pursuit, one devoted to the supreme Reality, or Atman, which is the core of my divine being.’ Cultivation of such a lofty self-image and inculcating it deep into one’s psyche are an extremely vital part of one’s *sādhana*. Swami Vivekananda calls this process ‘de-hypnotization’ on the part of the person who has hypnotized himself into believing that he is a puny little being bound to the body and the senses.
9. The repetition is meant for inculcating this luminous self-image deep into the aspirant’s consciousness.
10. As mentioned on earlier occasions, the repetition of ‘Peace’ three times is to ward off the obstacles or difficulties arising from three causes: *ādhibhautika*, *ādhidaiivika*, *ādhyātmika*.

The Kernel

If Swami Ramakrishnananda was a conservative in his mode of worship, he was essentially a liberal in his religious conviction. Tolerance, universality of outlook, freedom from all prejudice—these formed the keystones of his thought structure. Religion he defined as ‘the struggle of Spirit against matter’, and he gave welcome to whatever helped in the struggle. When someone came to him with words of condemnation on his lips, I heard him say: ‘Never find fault with any form of religion. Differences are all in the external customs. That which makes up the external is the shell. It may be hard and rough and perhaps not to our liking, but it holds a valuable kernel. The kernel of every religion is God. To whatever religion a man belongs, he has to worship the same God. The essential parts of religion are everywhere the same. It is only in the non-essential parts that differences are found. Various religious beliefs and doctrines are merely partial reflections of Truth, but because they have that little reflected light of Truth in them, we take them to be the whole Truth. Religion may be defined as giving God His due. “God alone is the proprietor of this universe, God alone is the proprietor of myself”—recognizing this and then giving up all to Him, that is religion. Wishing to keep all for yourself is irreligion. Throw away the idea of “me and mine” giving up all to God—this is the essential of every religion.’

—Sister Devamata

↔ Glimpses of Holy Lives ↔

God before Anything Else

Vichara Sharma was devoted to Shiva even as a child of five. When he was seven, his father Yajnadatta invested him with the sacred thread. The Gayatri mantra imparted to him before the homa fire further kindled Vichara Sharma's spiritual sensibilities; he experienced an inexplicable sense of purity and peace.

Now he had to go to school every day for scriptural studies. He was delighted at what the guru taught him: behind the body and beyond the mind, and pervading them both, is the divine Self in man: the Atman, and knowing that eternal Reality is the goal of life. While for most of his peers studies meant learning by rote, Vichara Sharma wondered how clear the scriptures were, how nicely the truths expressed. They struck a familiar cord in him. He grew inwardly as his schooling progressed.

The Worship

Cows going to the riverside to graze was an everyday sight on the way to school. One day Vichara Sharma saw a cow hesitating to move ahead. It was waiting for its calf, which had trailed behind. The cowherd was not bright enough to understand that. He thought the cow was giving trouble and tried to drive it onward with his shouts. Afraid of the din, the calf too stopped on its way to its mother. The cow shook its head as if to tell the cowherd to stop shouting. 'My child is afraid of you.' The dullard that he was, the cowherd could see nothing more than disobedience. With his stick he beat the cow hard on its face and stomach.

Vichara Sharma could not stand it any more. 'Stop it,' he ran towards the cowherd.

'It is trying to attack me,' said the cowherd.

'It doesn't without reason.'

'I drove it onward.'

'Why?'

'It doesn't move.'

'Why?'

'I don't know.'

'At least know now. Look why the cow doesn't move.'

'Laziness.'

'Shake off yours and look intently.'

'Oh, now I know. It's waiting for its calf.'

'You have inflicted so many blows on the poor creature. How rough you are!'

'Sorry for my ignorance.'

'You know the cause of your ignorance? It is your egotism, the feeling that you *know* how to graze cows.'

The cowherd remained silent.

'Go, learn how to graze cows and then come. Leave these under my care. I shall graze them.'

'Don't you need to go to school? If you graze cows ...'

'So what? Grazing cows is no less than scriptural studies if done with devotion. If you do anything with love, with the feeling that it is God's work, that becomes worship—grazing included. Now give me the stick and get back. I shall take care of the cows from today.'

Vichara Sharma tended the cows with great love. The cows too were very happy with him. Everyone back in the village was now happy that the cows yielded more milk. When he lay on the riverside letting the cows graze, they would come to him now and then and, as if to repay his love for them, dribble their milk on him.

Vichara Sharma was delighted at all this, but thought why should the milk go waste. Why should *he* need the milk? He fashioned a

small Shivalinga out of earth and encouraged the cows to shower their milk on it. This milk worship of his Beloved delighted him no end. From the next day he brought clean pots with him every day, fashioned a bigger linga, filled the pots with milk and worshipped the linga with great devotion. Curiously, the milk yield did not diminish, and the villagers got their due.

The Transgression

One day someone happened to see from a distance Vichara Sharma pouring milk on sand. The linga was not visible to him from there. He was scandalized and reported the matter to the village brahmins, asking them to stop this wastage. The brahmins summoned Yajnadatta and rebuked him for his son's foolery. Yajnadatta said with folded hands: 'I wasn't aware of all this, sirs. If what you say is true, I shall see that it doesn't happen again.' The brahmins were pacified.

The next day when Vichara Sharma was out with the cows, Yajnadatta followed him stealthily. He sat on a treetop to watch the proceedings. Vichara Sharma fashioned a Shivalinga out of earth as usual. The cows came to him one by one, and he collected their milk in the pots. Then began the puja. With great devotion he worshipped Shiva according to the Agama injunctions and bathed Him with pot after pot of milk.

With every pot of milk going 'waste', Yajnadatta's anger welled up within him. Although learned in the Vedas, he was only a shopkeeper in religion. He thought the milk worship could have been performed before a temple, or it could have been offered in a yajna. How many people would have come to know and how much glory and praise would have been theirs! Instead, to waste milk on this river bank? Nothing could be more foolish.

He descended from the tree and thrashed his son with a rod, hurling verbal abuses at him simultaneously. Since Vichara Sharma was intent on the worship, the harsh words

fell on deaf ears. Nor did the blows disturb his devotion, for he was free from body consciousness, deeply absorbed in his inner Self.

The Punishment

When the pot in hand was empty, Vichara Sharma's hand reached for the next. Yajnadatta lost himself completely. 'What defiance! How dare he disobey me, his father!' He began kicking the pots one after another, which rolled and spilt the milk. Vichara Sharma regained external consciousness and was shocked to see what was happening. 'Who is the intruder? How dare he kick the milk meant for the Lord!' he wondered in pain. Turning back, he saw his enraged father. 'You!' exclaimed Vichara Sharma. With the Lord's name on his lips, he flung the rod hard at his father's legs. His righteous anger invested the rod with missile power. It sliced through Yajnadatta's legs, bleeding him to death.

The Grace

No more obstacles now. Vichara Sharma continued his worship. Lord Shiva appeared there in his luminous form along with his consort Parvati. He embraced Vichara Sharma and said, 'You dared to kill your father for My sake! From now on I shall be your father.' With the Lord's embrace Vichara Sharma experienced ineffable peace and his body shone in a celestial light. Shiva removed the garland from His matted locks and wound it round Vichara Sharma's neck. He said all His food, clothes and ornaments from then on were his. He said He considered Vichara Sharma as Chandishvara, chief among His devotees. *Chanda* means 'angry'. The manifestation of the anger aspect of Shiva in him and his one-pointed devotion earned him the epithet Chandishvara Nayanar. He is adored as one of the sixty-three Tamil Shaiva saints called Nayanmars. Despite his transgression in Shiva puja, Yajnadatta too reached the abode of the Lord thanks to his son's devotion. *

The Ganges in Myth and History

Steven G Darian. Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, New Delhi 110 007.

E-mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2001. xvii + 219 pp. Rs 195.

A river is defined as that which flows making a lot of splashing noise. The Ganga is called a *nadi* for another reason: it flows towards the east. A river that flows towards the west is called a *nada*. No other river in India has influenced Indian culture and religious tradition as much as the Ganga. From its origin in the cold heights of the Himalayas till it merges in the Bay of Bengal, this sacred river has shaped and reshaped cultures and traditions and influenced the way of life of millions of Indians in its journey that takes it through some of the most sacred pilgrim centres of India like Kashi, Haridwar and Rishikesh. Yāska defines her as *Gangā gamanāt*. In other words, the Ganga flows (goes) and takes with her other living beings towards a noble destination.

This book is an exhaustive and interesting study of the Ganga as she appears in Indian mythology and historical literature. Written in a crisp and lucid style, the book is divided into twelve chapters beginning with a graphic description of the source of the Ganga and concluding with a masterly description of how the holy river of India was known in ancient Greece, Persia and other then-civilized parts of the world.

The first chapter of this book deals with the source of the Ganga at Gomukh, her birth in the Gangotri glaciers, her flowing past the villages of Gangotri and Badrinath, gradually reaching the foot of the Himalayas at Haridwar. In the second chapter, the author narrates the mythological descent of the Ganga due to the penance of King Bhagiratha, and the story associated with King Shantanu.

The innumerable illustrations of pilgrim

centres along the banks of the Ganga and the maps showing its route, ancient historical sites and cities, and those prepared by foreigners like Ptolemy, Strabo and Cosmas (an Egyptian monk) provide the general reader as well as researchers with ample new information about the river, and make the book an original and interpretative work of lasting value.

Chapter III deals with 'The Indian Legacy' and is of special interest to students of ancient Indian history. Chapter IV, 'The Settlers', which deals with the so-called Aryan migration and settlement, may raise one's eyebrows about the author's familiarity with the latest findings on this controversial topic. Many modern scholars reject the Aryan invasion theory as a myth. And the view that the Indus and Mohanjo-Daro-Harappan civilizations were non-Vedic or pre-Vedic is no more accepted even by many foreign historians. The author may well consult some of the better-known and latest works on this subject, works like Michel Danino's *The Invasion That Never Was*.

Subsequent chapters elaborately describe the different aspects of the Ganga as a civilizing force, her role in evolving Indian civilization (Chapter VIII is titled 'The Rise of Ganges Civilization'), the primordial relationship between Shiva and the Ganga, her place in the Indus civilization, and Hindu mythology, art, temple architecture and Puranic literature. Chapter X, 'The Image of Ganga in Indian Art', describing various sculptural features with the adjoining figures and pictures, is a graphic description of the influence of goddess Ganga on Indian art forms. The chapter titled 'The Ganges in Bengal' is an interest-

ing and exhaustive description of how a river influences almost all aspects of a people—their way of life, culture, art forms, mythology, poetry, festivals, folklore and religious life. The opening sentence itself is significant: ‘Bengal is literally a child of Ganga.’ If the Ganga renders the land rich and fertile she also brings untold miseries to the people living on her banks by her unpredictable fluctuations. She gives us our religion, art forms and culture, but often she displays her terrible form as well. The last chapter describes how thinkers, travellers and invaders described the Ganga in their writings (the author traces how Ganga was well known to ancient Greeks, Persians, Scythians as well as to the fifteenth-century adventurer Columbus).

To compare the Ganga to the Nile, the Tigris or the Euphrates will be an understatement; for, though these rivers have shaped and influenced civilizations, they have all been looked upon at best as glorious natural phenomena, whereas the Ganga is worshipped as a symbol of everything that is holy and sacred. She is the sacred river goddess who destroys the sins of mankind (*kalmaṣānāśini bhagavatī* —Sri Shankaracharya’s *Gangāṣṭakam*) and flows on earth as Bhagirathī, in heaven as Mandākinī and in the nether world as Bhogavatī. Her sacred touch liberates man from the cycle of life and death. The word *Ganga* itself brings to our mind a sense of holiness and a feeling of sacredness. For this very reason, it is more difficult for a foreigner to write about her than on Indian philosophy or history.

Off to the north, the Ganga flows through the ancient pilgrim centres of the Himalayas. Coming down to the plains it passes through what has been for centuries the most sacred pilgrim centre of the Hindus, Kashi. And farther east, it joins the Bay of Bengal after passing through one of the largest cities of the world, Kolkata.

There are times when ancient myths and images of a forgotten past come to the rescue

of modern man, who lives a disturbed life in an age of mutual mistrust, violence and hatred. Written with so much sensitivity, intensity of feeling and understanding of the Indian ethos, this work is an excellent introduction to an important aspect of Indian culture, since the Ganga is not only a river but adored as a goddess, an ideal of the holy and the sacred, besides being a religious symbol.

The author deserves our congratulations for accomplishing a task that even a traditional Indian scholar would find challenging. He has based his scholarly work on some original sources in Pali and Sanskrit, making extensive use of several Puranas, Dharma Shastras, historical works like Kalhana’s *Rājatarangīnī*, literary works like those of Kālidāsa and Sūdraka, Vedic literature, and the epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. He has also consulted several important works in Greek, Latin, English and other languages.

The systematic arrangement, the methodical treatment of the topic (something not natural and easy for someone new to the orthodox Hindu tradition) and a sensitivity to the age-old Hindu cultural ethos displayed in this work—all this makes this book an excellent contribution to the study of Hindu religious culture and mythology.

The book is fairly well brought out, though some illustrations leave ample scope for improvement in terms of clarity. The extensive bibliography and notes at the end enhance the value and usefulness of the book. But one would have expected a more comprehensive index in a book of this kind. This minor drawback apart, Mr Steven G Darian has rendered a great service to Indian cultural tradition and to millions Hindu pilgrims who travel thousands of miles to devoutly bathe in the Ganga every year, perhaps not knowing much about its mythological and historical aspects.

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Reviews



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

In Search of Hinduism. *Dr Prema Nandakumar.* Sri Aurobindo's Action, PO Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry 605 002. 2003. viii + 55 pp. Rs 30.

It is said that there are three types of knowledge. The first type is a simple collection of facts and pieces of information. The second is based on education. The third type is matured knowledge called wisdom. To take up an example of a mango falling from a tree, the knowledge of the fact that the fruit has fallen from the tree to the ground is a simple fact of information and belongs to the first type of knowledge. That the fruit has been pulled down by the earth by its gravitation force represents the second type of knowledge and is based on education. That all things originate from mud and go back to mud (including this mango) is the third type of knowledge and takes us to the realm of wisdom.

Dr Prema Nandakumar's booklet deals with the third type of knowledge. Throughout the booklet, the author attempts at a search for the foundational elements of Hinduism from among the contemporary mixture of vast literature, ritualistic practices and umpteen philosophical schools of thought. The search culminates in throwing light on the essential unity behind the diverse universe, a rare unity that looks beyond the superficial differences that an ordinary mind is usually trained to see. This distinctive feature forms the background of all the articles, which were originally published serially in the journal *Sri Aurobindo's Action* and is now being brought out in the form of a booklet for the benefit of a larger public.

The author's deep knowledge of Hinduism right from the Vedic age is reflected in her thoughtful observations, and is made interesting through anecdotes like Sri Ramanuja's bringing the idol of Bhagavan Narayana from the Sultan of Delhi and reinstalling it in the Melkote temple of Karnataka, where it originally belonged.

The author also supplements her thoughts with parallels from religions like Buddhism and Jainism,

which have striking similarities with Hinduism. The story of the founder of Jainism, Sri Mahavira, not accepting the food offered by the richest houses but sharing the watery gruel of the enchained slave Chandana, is heart-rending. On hearing this act of humanity and compassion of Sri Mahavira, the king of the province releases all his slaves to freedom. The author concludes that religious reforms should be positive like the one cited above, and never negative or violent, and warns against the present-day tendency of world religions towards fanaticism, fundamentalism and terrorism.

The small but beautiful booklet is recommended for all those who want to understand the roots of the hoary Hindu religion.

Swami Abhiramananda

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Love and Blessings: The Autobiography of Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati. *Ed. Peter Oppenheimer.* Narayana Gurukula, PO Sreenivasapuram, Varkala 695 145, Kerala. 1999. 755 pp. Rs 450, US \$ 20.

The modern times have seen an upsurge of people writing autobiographies, even with slight success in any field. The tell-all-bare-all no doubt quickly becomes popular. Frequently the rubbish in their lives acts like a balm on the reader's conscience, which brings in a tinge of feel-good. Writers in the process become rich and famous or notorious, thus making it an all-round profitable enterprise. Generally readers do not take the trouble of putting their energy into succeeding in anything like those people did.

One of the first principles of monasticism, however, is self-effacement, so autobiographies are irrelevant in this vocation. If they do, it is either for a subtle desire for recognition, or pressure from devotees and disciples. Technology has removed the old circumscribed barriers of travelling and preaching, making the teacher's influence widespread. And to keep the flock in tow constant phys-

ical presence of the teacher is substituted by the use of books, letters, audio tapes, videos and the like. There is also an inherent need to share knowledge and teachings, making the guru enter the literary world. The generality of people are interested more in personalities than in abstract principles and teachings; hence the relevance of an autobiography. No doubt it helps in that the devotee or disciple gets an insight into the teacher's mindset of problem-solving so that he or she can do that to some degree.

Love and Blessings has the quality of freshness and frankness. There is no overt or covert attempt at suppressing facts and foibles in guru Nitya's early life. He was born in a small village in Kerala. His inner struggles to know the Truth made him a disciple of Nataraja Guru, who in turn was the disciple of Narayana Guru. Part One of the book includes his recollections from childhood to his various philosophical and religious studies and spiritual disciplines. It details his travails and rewards of his long discipleship under his guru. Part Two highlights him as a preceptor in Portland, USA, and the training he gave his disciples. Part Three reveals his life through excerpts from his letters to thousands of people. In his pre-monastic life Nitya Chaitanya Yati was academically qualified in philosophy and psychology. He had a career as a professor in India, Europe and the USA. These experiences he enriched with eight years of mendicancy. He met the renowned sage Ramana Maharshi and Mahatma Gandhi. His later life sees him much interested in education, meeting people, establishing centres for contemplation, an East-West university, and authoring twenty-five books in English and over a hundred in Malayalam. The striking thing about him is that he embodies the hopes and aspirations of a wide cross section of peoples, both in the East and West. This made his spiritual and even secular teachings very effective in moulding the character of spiritual aspirants.

In his editor's introduction Peter Oppenheimer talks about the daunting task of putting the book together, even though he had known Guru Nitya Chaitanya Yati for more than thirty years. It is not easy to edit even an ordinary biography, not to speak of that of a religious person. What he has done admirably is, place Nitya Chaitanya Yati in different frames of reference and note down his own reactions. This gives a definite glimpse of whether Nitya Chaitanya Yati lived in an ordinary

level of consciousness or something higher. The book is wonderfully composed with clear type with good quality paper and binding. It clearly brings the author to the audience he addresses. Besides that, it wonderfully unveils the various people, places and circumstances he came across.

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The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (Abridged Edition). *Trans. Swami Nikhilananda.* Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. E-mail: srkmath@vsnl.com. 2002. xii + 700 pp. Rs 30.

Here is an abridged edition of the monumental and unique work by M, Mahendranath Gupta, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who recorded his guru's immortal conversations. The *Gospel* has become a landmark in religious history because for the first time the words of a prophet have been presented in it with almost stenographic accuracy and for the first time a vivid picture of spirituality in action is exhibited through the portrait of Sri Ramakrishna, every cell of whose body was vibrant and radiant with spiritual realization. While reading the *Gospel* we are witness to Sri Ramakrishna's transcendental state, his rapturous songs, ecstatic dance, witty conversations with a variety of people, great fun and merry-making with young boys, and his intense detachment. We also get a glimpse of his limitless love and deep sympathy for all who came to him. The real value of the *Gospel* lies in its straight, flawless narrative marked with a wealth of details and picturesque descriptions. Another special feature of the *Gospel* is that anyone who reads a page or two of this marvellous book is bound to feel that it helps him in facing a crisis or overcoming day-to-day problems. Many have experienced immeasurable peace of mind while reading the *Gospel*.

During the lifetime of M selections from the Bengali volumes of the *Kathamrita* were translated into English and published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, in two volumes in 1907 and 1922. Swami Nikhilanandaji published from New York a full English translation in 1942. As it was too bulky to carry about, the publishers thought of bringing out an abridged edition. Nikhilanandaji himself did the difficult task of pruning down the book without the least omission of any vital passage, and

published from New York an abridged edition of the *Gospel*. The present 700-page handy book is an Indian version of the abridged edition, composed in a reader-friendly, bigger type. The compact size makes the book a convenient travel companion to devotees who religiously read a few pages from it every day. We learn that the unbelievably low price of this book was possible thanks to a generous contribution of Rs 5 lakh from a humble devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. We are indebted to this devotee for his service and to the publisher for making this world-famous spiritual classic available at a very nominal price.

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The Eternal Way: The Inner Meaning of the Bhagavad Gita. Roy Eugene Davis. Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2001. 287 pp. Rs 250.

When on 9 May 1885, in the course of his conversation with M, Sri Ramakrishna observed, 'The *Gita* is the essence of all scriptures', he summed up in eight words the profound value of the great religious classic. In our own time Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj has written in the prefatory remarks to his *Universal Message of the Bhagavad Gita*: 'It is a book that is meant to be a help to realize the eternal spiritual reality within all men and women.' There cannot be a better estimate of the significance of the *Gita* (described by Sir Edwin Arnold as a 'famous and marvellous Sanskrit poem') for modern man.

There are numerous commentaries on the *Gita* in different Indian and foreign languages. The commentators include Shankaracharya, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Sri Aurobindo, to name only three of them. The book under review is one of the latest works on the *Gita*. The writer, who has himself noticed the fact that some of the commentators on the *Gita* have their own axes to grind, frankly admits at the very beginning: 'In this book I explain the inner meaning in the light of Kriya Yoga.' This is perhaps somewhat natural on his part as he is a direct disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda and so belongs to the kriya yoga tradition of Mahavatar Babaji, Lahiri Mahasaya and Sri Yukteswar. However, it is diffi-

cult to determine to what extent and how much the author's own special viewpoint has obscured the 'inner meaning' of the *Gita* which he wants to unfold and to which he refers in the subtitle of the book. Incidentally, a second subtitle reads: 'A Comprehensive Commentary in the Light of Kriya Yoga a Direct Disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda.' The preposition *by* is missing, and this glaring printing error on the very title page is galling indeed.

The plain, simple and obvious allegory underlying the *Gita* is that Kurukshetra is an analogue to mundane life itself and all human beings are most of the time utterly perplexed, frustrated and despondent, like Arjuna, on the battlefield of life. We also are obsessed by fear and tend to neglect our duty in this world, which is a *karmabhumi*, a synonym of *kurukshetra*, and not a *bhogabhumi*, or a land of desire and enjoyment. To attempt to find esoteric meanings in the *Gita* is, it seems to me, to go astray. The author is not careful enough.

In his Introduction itself, after giving a brief outline of the story of the *Mahabharata*, he starts hunting for esoteric meanings. He intends to 'examine the mythical genealogy and the unique behaviours of the participants in accord with the concepts of the philosophical system known as the Sankhya—the numbering and classification of the categories of the emanations and manifestations of Consciousness.' This is the far-fetched result that follows immediately afterwards: 'Santanu (pure Consciousness) interacted with Ganga (the intelligence of Om). Eight aspects of Consciousness are produced; seven remain subjective; the eighth is objective.' (15) No comment is necessary.

Notwithstanding all his undue emphasis on kriya yoga, Consciousness, Self-realization and Sankhya philosophy, Mr Davis has also, on certain occasions, given a number of interesting insights into the philosophy of the *Gita*. His elucidation of the basic idea of the *Gita* in the Preface is illuminating: 'The central theme of the *Gita* is that everything we do should be done to serve God's will: to serve the cause of evolution and facilitate the awakening and liberation of soul consciousness. By living like this, we can be in harmonious relationship with nature, purify the ego (the illusory sense of independent existence), and fulfil our spiritual destiny.' Wise words, and effectively expressed.

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❧ Reports ❧

Started. A new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission; in Muzaffarpur, Bihar; in July 2003. The centre was started with land and buildings received from Ramakrishna Vivekananda Sevashram, Muzaffarpur. Its address: Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Swami Vivekananda Path, Bela, Muzaffarpur, Bihar 843 116 (Phone: 0621-2272127). Swami Raghunathanandaji has been appointed head of the centre.

Laid. Foundation stone for a guest house; by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at Matri Mandir, Jayrambati; on 1 July.

Organized. 2 medical camps for pilgrims at the Ratha Yatra; by Ramakrishna Math, and Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri; from 1 to 9 July. Nearly 2300 patients were treated at the camps, which also served lemonade to over 14,000 pilgrims.

Visited. Vivekanandar Illam, Chennai; by Sri Jagmohan, Union Minister for Culture and Tourism; on 2 July.

Visited. Belur Math and Swami Vivekananda's ancestral house in Kolkata; by Sri L K Advani, Deputy Prime Minister of India; on 6 July.

Inaugurated. A 12-bed intensive care unit, a 12-bed neonatal intensive care unit, 5 operation theatres and a 4-bed dialysis unit; by Raja Mahendra Aridaman Singh, Minister for Health, Government of Uttar Pradesh; at Vivekananda Polyclinic, Lucknow; on 9 July.

Won. 'Best School-Industry Linkage Award 2003' for the state of West Bengal; by Ramakrishna Mission Shilpayatana (Saradapitha,

Belur); on 15 July. The award was given by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT).

Visited. Ramakrishna Math, Viveknagar; by Sri D N Sahay, Governor of Tripura; on 18 July.

Visited. Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Cherrapunji; by Mr K K Dkhar, Minister for Elementary and Mass Education, Government of Meghalaya; on 19 July. Mr Dkhar participated in the annual prize distribution function of the centre's higher secondary school.

Laid. Foundation stone for a senior boys' hostel; by Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at Ramakrishna Mission, Viveknagar; on 25 July. Revered Maharaj also inaugurated a tea plantation project of the centre on the same day.

Laid. Foundation stone for a new temple; by Swami Atmasthanandaji; at Ramakrishna Math, Barisha, Kolkata; on 27 July.

Distributed. Over 3 lakh earthen roof-tiles and 179 asbestos sheets among 119 families; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Ranchi; at Karagenayatoli village, which was hit by heavy hailstorm; in July.

Provided. Fodder for 150 cows; by Vivekananda Ashrama, Ulsoor; in Huvinayakana-halli and Mahadevakodigehalli villages. The centre is also widening a lake in Satnur village.

Distributed. 230 saris; by Ramakrishna Math, Puri; to poor widows in and around the town. ❧