

PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or* **AWAKENED INDIA**



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



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Cover: Sri Sarada Devi, the Holy Mother's temple at Jayrambati seen today and a period photograph in the foreground. Mother was born in this sanctified village for the good of all Her children in 1853.

उत्तिष्ठत
जाग्रत
प्राप्य
वरान्निबोधत ।

PRABUDDHA BHARATA

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

Vol. 109

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No. 8

Traditional Wisdom

FAITH

श्रद्धावाँल्लभते ज्ञानं तत्परः संयतेन्द्रियः ।
ज्ञानं लब्ध्वा परां शान्तिमचिरेणाधिगच्छति ॥

He who is endowed with faith and zeal and has disciplined his senses obtains Knowledge. Having obtained Knowledge, he soon attains supreme Peace. (*Bhagavadgita*, 4.39)

Unless one becomes childlike in faith, it is difficult for one to realize God. If the mother says to the child, 'He is your brother,' the child fully believes that the person referred to is really his brother. If the mother says, 'Don't go there, there is a boggy,' the child is indeed convinced that there is a boggy. God is moved to pity when He sees in a man that kind of childlike faith. None can attain God with the calculating nature of the worldly-minded. (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*, 158)

Does one get faith by mere study of books? Too much reading creates confusion. The Master used to say that one should learn from the scriptures that God alone is real and the world is illusory. (Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi)

All such ideas as we can do this or cannot do that are superstitions. We can do everything. The Vedanta teaches men to have faith in themselves first. As certain religions of the world say that a man who does not believe in a Personal God outside of himself is an atheist, so the Vedanta says, a man who does not believe in himself is an atheist. Not believing in the glory of our own soul is what the Vedanta calls atheism. (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 2.294)

If you are always worried about hypothetical obstacles, your work will suffer and you will gain nothing. Have this faith: 'I have taken refuge in God. All my obstacles will go away. How can there be any danger for me?' (Swami Turiyananda)

☪ This Month ☪

How solitude influences different mind-sets, what is inner solitude, how it can lead to true Solitude—these are discussed in this month's editorial **Solitude**.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features excerpts from an illuminating article titled 'Incarnation of God' by 'Divinity-in-man'.

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita* is Swami Atulanandaji's commentary on the *Gita*. This instalment discusses how devotion transforms even the most wicked into a great soul, how everyone irrespective of any distinction can attain the supreme Goal—important points dealt with in verses 30 to 34 of the ninth chapter. This instalment also features an introduction to the tenth chapter, followed by commentary on its first three verses.

Swami Vivekananda's ideal was 'conquer the world with your spirituality'. And he showed the way by his tireless work in the West from 1893 to 1897. In **Ramakrishna Vedanta in the West: New Interfaces and Challenges**, a two-part article, Prof M Sivaramkrishna studies the salient features of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement in the West and the challenges before it. The author is a former professor and head of the English department of Osmania University. He is a long-time devotee of the Master and a regular contributor to this journal.

Sri Ramakrishna lived and taught the important truth that God-realization is the goal of human life. How to help even one aspirant on the path to God was his sole concern till his last. **They All Came** by Smt Sudesh is a devoted portrayal of different classes of

people who came to the Master and what they got from him. The author is a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna from Ambala.

In the second instalment of his research article, **A Survey of the Mind**, Swami Satyaswarupanandaji discusses the interesting parallels between Penrose's view and the Vedantic conception of the mind; the biological perspective of the mind; and the Yoga-Vedanta analysis, which probes deeper into the mind. The author is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order from Belur Math.

In his thought-provoking article **Sri Ramakrishna: The Significance of His Advent** Swami Sandarshananandaji discusses the relevance of the Master's advent and the topicality of his message, which is shorn of all dogmatism and narrowness and can teach us how to bring God into our everyday life. The author also explains how Swami Vivekananda was the Master's worthy disciple who effectively disseminated the Master's message to the world at large. The author is a monk of the Ramakrishna Order and serves at its Deoghar centre.

Parabrahma Upaniṣad is the second instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

Eknath was a much adored saint of Maharashtra. **Glimpses of Holy Lives** features some inspiring incidents from his life. God Himself served this saint, whose devotion to God and service to His creation were legendary.

Solitude

EDITORIAL

Going to holiday resorts, participation in retreats and seeking solitude are some well-known attempts at stress relief. People do get some relief out of all this, but the effect usually wears off in no time; the situation is back to 'normal' soon after one gets busy with one's usual activities back home. How does solitude influence our mind? Can it further our inner growth? What is true solitude? We shall examine these questions in the light of Vedanta.

Varied Effects of Solitude

A brief retreat to a quiet place does refresh our mind and help us meet the challenges of life once again. But it is also true that the duration of this effect depends largely on our mental state. A turbulent or sense-bound mind may derive little benefit from solitude. We are inseparably bound with our mind. It does not let us alone despite a change of place, influencing our behaviour all the time. Our mind and senses are by nature outward-going: the mind is ever eager to be in contact with the sense organs, which in turn are happy to meet their sense objects. We are accustomed to living in company and relish talking to others, sometimes possibly on no subject. The mind loathes retreating into solitude, leaving its accustomed outward mode. Sometimes, thanks to its vagaries, we could strike a discordant note in quiet places, a retreat exclusively meant for studies, prayer and meditation, for example.

Again, an attempt at meditation without proper preparation and discipline can unsettle us, since the mental churning involved will bring to the fore hitherto-unknown strange and frightening things stored in the deeper recesses of the mind. Incidentally, this scary pos-

sibility and the consequent inability to sit quiet are the reasons why some people are always busy with some activity or other, or tend to be nosy about others.

Solitude has its own effect on the guilty and those with strained relationships: their mind starts working against them in solitude. The story goes that a dying woman told her husband that she would haunt him if he married or fell in love with someone after she was gone. A few months after she died, he did fall in love with a lady. That very night, he was terrified to see his wife's ghost walk into his house and accuse him of infidelity. This went on for a week. He couldn't take it any longer and consulted a Zen guru. The guru asked him, 'How are you sure that it is her ghost?' He replied, 'She knows and describes to me everything I've said and done and thought and felt.' The holy man gave him a bag of soya beans and said, 'Make sure you don't open it. When she appears before you tonight ask her how many beans are there in the bag.' The man did as he was told. And the ghost fled for good. 'Why?' he asked the guru when he met him next. He smiled and asked him, 'Isn't it strange that the ghost knew only what *you* knew?'

Solitude and Mental Restlessness

Resorting to a solitary place (*vivikta-deśa-sevītvam*) is extolled as a sign of Knowledge in the *Bhagavadgīta*.¹ Solitude here refers to river banks, forests, temples²—any place that is pure and conducive to calmness of mind.³ But a novice in spiritual life may not reap the benefit of solitude till he attains some semblance of calmness, learns to separate himself from his mind and witness its workings. Till then, thanks to his poor will power, he is

sucked into his mental vortex and feels miserable identifying himself with it. Let alone getting benefited by solitude, he will hardly be aware that he is in solitude in the first place.

Advantages of Solitude

Though the effects of solitude vary depending on our mental state, life in solitude grants us two significant benefits: (1) we begin to know the workings of our mind and that it takes us for a ride—not a small gain considering that it is difficult to have this knowledge amid the whirlpool of everyday activities; (2) we become aware of our strengths and limitations. Those who complain about inadequate time for japa, meditation and studies due to pressure of work realize in solitude that this complaining is also a trick of the mind. We understand how long and how satisfactorily we can devote ourselves to these pursuits when there is no other demand on our time. Then we discover how restless our mind is, how much it lets us sit still, let alone meditate. If we are true to ourselves, we will be humbled by the findings, stop complaining about our work and environment, and try to assume more responsibility towards ourselves. We will develop a proper attitude towards work and strive to convert it into a spiritual discipline,⁴ besides, of course, being regular in our prayer, meditation and studies to the best of our abilities.

True Solitude

We saw that a restless mind prevents us from reaping the benefit of solitude. That is because true solitude lies within us, not outside. We experience this inner solitude to the extent we are able to detach ourselves from our mind and witness its gyrations. As long as we identify ourselves with the mind, this inner solitude remains just a concept for us. Vedanta says that we are essentially the Spirit, the Atman, the immortal core of our personality and the source of infinite Knowledge and Bliss. It is the ignorance of our spiritual nature that

makes us identify ourselves with our body and mind; we think that we are different entities—Johns, Joans or Jeans.

The Determinant of Inner Solitude

Two significant functions of the mind are relevant to our discussion. When the mind is in a flux or is busy analysing the pros and cons of an issue, it is called *manas* or the deliberative faculty. When it exercises discrimination or takes decisions, it is called *buddhi* or the discriminative faculty. What is called will is the dynamic aspect of *buddhi*. The more awakened the *buddhi*, the stronger the will power. As long as the mind is not disciplined it remains sense-bound and drags us towards sense enjoyment. In the process, *buddhi* lies dormant and the will remains weak. Life in such circumstances is 'led' by the mind and the senses. Selfishness remains the core value, and circumstances dictate our behaviour. Things appear to be fine as long as we are party to this slavish existence. The mind is accustomed to the path of least resistance: senses, objects and enjoyment. Once we try to train the mind, it rebels with all its might, advancing all plausible excuses not to lose its upper hand over us. Nor does it cooperate with us in acquiring good habits or kicking bad ones.

Such a mind the *Bhagavadgita* calls our enemy, and teaches us to how to befriend it: by discipline and control.⁵ The only tool for this mind discipline is our *buddhi* or a strong will. Every exercise of discrimination, conscious thinking and decisive action goes to strengthen our will. With this will we learn to patiently bring back the straying mind to the task in hand or to the divine form we try to meditate on. Every success in this attempt, again, goes to fortify our will against the mind's lures. The purer the *buddhi* and stronger the will, the more will our identification be with the divine core of our personality and less with our body, mind and senses. Such a purified will paves the way to inner solitude; we learn to remain

unshaken by circumstances, good and bad. When the mind is fully purified, says Sri Ramakrishna, there is nothing to distinguish it from the Atman.⁶ The Upanishads say that the Atman (or Brahman) is one without a second,⁷ and a knower of Brahman becomes Brahman.⁸ The knower is truly alone in that blessed state of Oneness. True solitude thus really refers to that state of Self-realization.

Effects of True Solitude

How does a person who has attained true Solitude live and move about? The answer is in the second chapter of the *Gita*, where the Lord describes the characteristics of a man of steady Wisdom.⁹ Right, but how to cultivate these seemingly superhuman virtues? The all-pervading, supreme Reality assumes, out of compassion, a human form now and then to teach us the way to that true Solitude. And in Sri Ramakrishna's words, such a divine being is the doorway to the Infinite.

Holy Mother Sarada Devi lived such an ideal life of true Solitude. She did not renounce the world, but lived in it and braved its problems, with her mind deeply rooted in the state of Oneness. Her share of worldly problems was much more than that of any average human being. But, always oriented towards God, her pure mind helped her remain unnerved by the untoward happenings around her. Like all of us she did laugh and cry in certain situations. Her cries, however, were more due to her empathy with the suffering, which lightened their grief in the process. She demonstrated in her life how, rooted in true Solitude, one can remain detached even when the body and mind are active. A discerning study of her life and message can help us find our spiritual mooring in the vicissitudes of life.

Effective Use of External Solitude

Sri Ramakrishna advised his household disciples to retreat into solitude now and then. He also taught them how to make use of this retreat: 'Whenever you have lei-

sure, go into solitude for a day or two. At that time don't have any relations with the outside world and don't hold any conversation with worldly people on worldly affairs. You must live either in solitude or in the company of holy men.'¹⁰ 'By meditating on God in solitude the mind acquires knowledge, dispassion, and devotion. But the very same mind goes downward if it dwells in the world.' (82)

Prayer for love of God: 'Even if one lives in the world, one must go into solitude now and then. It will be of great help to a man if he goes away from his family, lives alone, and weeps for God even for three days. Even if he thinks of God for one day in solitude, when he has the leisure, that too will do him good. People shed a whole jug of tears for wife and children. But who cries for the Lord? Now and then one must go into solitude and practise spiritual discipline to realize God.' (138)

Prayer to God to remember Him amid one's duties: 'Yes, you can perform them [worldly duties] too, but only as much as you need for your livelihood. At the same time, you must pray to God in solitude, with tears in your eyes, that you may be able to perform those duties in an unselfish manner. You should say to Him: "O God, make my worldly duties fewer and fewer; otherwise, O Lord, I find that I forget Thee when I am involved in too many activities."' (140)

Reflection on the impermanence of life: The *Gita* describes the world as impermanent¹¹ and an abode of misery (8.15) and prescribes cultivation of 'non-attachment to and non-identification (of self) with son, wife, home and the rest'. (13.9) In Sri Ramakrishna's words:

The world is impermanent. One should constantly remember death. ... Remember this, O mind! Nobody is your own: / Vain is your wandering in this world. / Trapped in the subtle snare of maya ¹² you are, / Do not forget the Mother's name.

A man must practise some spiritual discipline in order to be able to lead a detached life in the world. It is necessary for him to spend some time in solitude—be it a year, six months, three

months, or even one month. In that solitude he should ... say to himself: 'There is nobody in this world who is my own. Those whom I call my own are here only for two days. God alone is my own. He alone is my all in all. Alas, how shall I realize Him?' (856)

Preparations for a Life in Solitude

We saw that detachment of the will from the mind and the senses is fundamental to experiencing inner solitude. This detachment is not something to be strived after during meditation and lost sight of during other times. Constant wariness about the deceitful mind and alertness about its functioning is a prerequisite to the cultivation of true detachment. Here are some helps on the way.

Detachment in everyday life: When M visited Sri Ramakrishna for the second time, he wanted to know how to live in the world. The Master replied:

Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all—with wife and children, father and mother—and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you.

A maidservant in the house of a rich man performs all the household duties, but her thoughts are fixed on her own home in her native village. She brings up her master's children as if they were her own. She even speaks of them as 'my Rama' or 'my Hari'. But in her own mind she knows very well that they do not belong to her at all. (81)

Proper attitude towards work: Doing our daily actions with the whole mind, not letting it think of anything else, is a good way to reduce the gyrations of the mind and strengthen our will. In his illuminating lectures on karma yoga, Swami Vivekananda lays down a golden rule: 'When you are doing any work, do not think of anything beyond. Do it as worship, as the highest worship, and devote your whole life to it for the time being.'¹³ Again, doing some selfless work without expectation of returns can reduce our selfishness and strengthen our will.

Japa and prayer: Japa done with a prayer-

ful attitude is another great help on the path to true Solitude. Holy Mother emphasized regularity in japa, meditation and prayer: 'One must practise these at least in the morning and evening. Such practice acts like the rudder of a boat. ... Unless you practise meditation morning and evening, along with your work, how can you know whether you are doing the right thing or the wrong?'¹⁴

* * *

For external solitude to effect inner transformation, we need to prepare ourselves by training and disciplining the mind. Minus this preparation, solitude could give us just some fleeting peace, but that would not be adequate to brave the challenges of life. The way to true Solitude is paved with mental alertness, discipline, detachment and regularity in spiritual practices. *

References

1. *Bhagavadgita*, 13.10.
2. Sri Shankara on the said verse.
3. Sri Shridhara Svamin on the said verse.
4. See 'Making Work Work', editorial for January 2003.
5. *Gita*, 6.6.
6. M, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, trans. Swami Nikhilananda (Chennai: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2002), 844.
7. *Sadeva somya idam agra āsit ekam eva advitīyam.*
—*Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.2.1.
8. *Brahmaveda brahmaiva bhavati.*
—*Mundaka Upanishad*, 3.2.9.
9. *Gita*, 2.55-72.
10. *Gospel*, 326.
11. *Gita*, 9.33.
12. *Gospel*, 589.
13. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 1.71.
14. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1962), 220.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

August 1904

Incarnation of God

Almighty, omniscient, one without a second, infinite and similar other attributes are given to God. They are born of the attempts to describe the worshipped as transcending the limitations of the worshipper. Such attempts are observable even in the most crude forms of worship. The ghost worshipper believes that the ghost can pass through air and do many extraordinary things which he cannot. In ancestor worship, the departed souls are supposed to possess powers which their descendants on earth do not.

Infinity and Infinities

As very few realize God and as it is the question of questions if He can ever be conceived, much less realized, in His entirety, nothing can be more presumptuous than to dogmatically assert ideas about the real nature of God. The fact is that God is an unknown entity and the attributes given to Him are only human ideas of infiniteness. Just as the ghost worshipper associates extraordinary powers with the ghost whom he perhaps never sees, the advanced man associates his ideas of infiniteness with God, whose real nature perhaps he can never conceive. The ideas of infiniteness attributed to God broaden with the broadening of his mind and are different with different men. Every religion is based upon one or other of man's ideas of infinity. The lower infinity (Apara-Brahman) of the non-dualist Vedanta is an infinite which is the summation of an infinite number of finite parts. It is an omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient Being. His higher infinity (Para-Brahman) is an infinite that is infinite at every point, is the only one infinite and besides which there is nothing else. Hence, looked at from the Para-Brahman point of view, the lower Brahman as well as soul and matter are non-existent; otherwise their existence is real. The infinity of the qualified non-dualist is an infinite which is the summation of infinite finite parts. It is the only one infinite, besides which there is nothing else. Hence, according to him, the existence of soul and matter is not in any sense unreal; they are two parts of the infinite whole, the remainder being the repository of infinite power, knowledge and other blessed qualities, which is called God. The dualist believes in more than one infinity, each being a summation of infinite finite parts, and holds that besides the infinities, there can be finite things as well. God and nature are two such infinities and besides, there is an infinite number of finite individual souls. The infinity of the Christians is a union of three infinities, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost in one.

What Is Incarnation of God?

Incarnation of God means His embodiment in human form. Human form is finite and can therefore manifest only what is finite. Consequently divine incarnation would be a possibility if there is some finite element in the Godhead capable of manifestation in the finite human form. If a man's idea of God is an infinity which is infinite at every point and has no finite element, to him divine incarnation is an impossibility. On the other hand, it is a possibility to those whose idea of God is an infinity which is the summation of finite parts infinite in number. It would then mean embodiment of some of the finite parts of the infinite whole. That whole comprises in it infinite power, knowledge, bliss and other qualities, and of these some part, exceedingly great, yet not infinite, and not certainly too great for

manifestation in a human form, is manifested in the incarnation. In consistence with human experience and reason, divine incarnation is understandable only in this sense.

This understood and states of existence other than human admitted, the belief that, after the state of His earthly existence, an incarnation, if not withdrawn and reabsorbed in the Fountainhead at the completion of His earthly mission, can exist in some other state of existence, whence He can continue to help the world, would not be regarded an absurdity.

What the real nature of God is, whether He incarnates or not, what is the manner of His incarnation if He does incarnate, are questions He and he to whom He reveals Himself can rightly answer. In our bigotry, ignorance and self-conceit, each of us may be sure that his idea of God is the best, that his conception of divine incarnation and of its possibility or impossibility is the most rational; but careful reflection in a spirit of love of truth ought to remind us that our ideas of God are *our* ideas, that, knowing as we do the liability of human judgement to error, we cannot be too chary of considering others in the wrong and ourselves in the right. ...

The difference between an ordinary soul and an incarnation is that the former knows himself only as a finite being, a man subject to the limitations of nature, while the latter is always conscious that He is an infinite being, the one Lord of all matter and souls, almighty and omniscient, yet He is manifesting but a part of His infiniteness through a finite form. The common man cannot understand Him, just as he cannot understand many things, but men highly advanced in spirituality recognize their God in Him and like Arjuna, worship him as the ideal embodiment of Divinity in man. ...

An incarnation, being God, does not need to go through any spiritual practice to know Himself. But He comes to help the world. Of His own free will He may therefore go through spiritual practices that the world may see and learn them. He, for the time being, acts like man that His actions may be intelligible to man, showing, by treading them Himself, the paths required to be trod by him to reach the goal. He is like the king playing the part of a beggar on the stage, knowing all the while he is the king and not a beggar.

Yet His actions are said to display extraordinariness and compel people to realize that He is not of their kind. What others do in years, He may do in days. 'He can transmit spirituality with a touch, even with a mere wish. The lowest and the most degraded characters become in one second saints at His command,' says Swami Vivekananda. Many miracles are also ascribed to Him. ...

Sages and Incarnations

The difference between sages and incarnations is stated as under: The sages free themselves from the bondage of nature and realize God through long prayers and hard practices. But they cannot free others. An incarnation can free and impart spirituality to hundreds if He wills. 'A sage is like a reed floating on water, which sinks with the weight of even a crow; an incarnation is like a mighty raft of wood floating down a stream that carries on it hundreds and does not sink.' (*Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna*) Only an incarnation can say, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest'; (*Matthew*, 11.28) 'Giving up all the formalities of religion, seek Me as thy sole refuge. I will liberate thee from all sins; do not grieve.' (*Gita*, 18.66) But as through Him, only a part of His infiniteness can be manifested as we showed before, it is irrational to say that He can save the whole world. True, He saves many. Also it is true that, in spite of there being several incarnations, the world is not saved yet. So can we not safely say that He saves only as many as it is possible to save through that much of His infiniteness which admits of manifestation in a human form?

Christianity and Vedanta are the two religions that advocate the belief of incarnation. While the former upholds Christ was the only incarnation, Vedanta believes God's incarnation cannot be limited by time, place or nationality. According to it, there were many incarnations in the past and there will

be many in the future. Every religion can have them. Nor are incarnations limited by distinction of sex. They appear in masculine or in feminine form according to the needs of the time and the place.

The climax of egotism is reached when man institutes comparison between those he takes as incarnations. Sunk deep in the mire of lust and greed, with the mind perverted by wrong prepossessions, how can we understand incarnations, not to speak of holding comparisons between them? An incarnation is as inscrutable as God. ...

God-realization through Incarnation

We are far from insinuating that incarnation is the only way through which to realize God. God is omnipresent and dwells in the inmost depth of every soul. Look for Him there and He will reveal Himself. Incarnation is regarded as only one of the many ways through which we reach Him. But it is the easiest way. One can get water anywhere by sinking a well with much toil and trouble. As such, an incarnation is the flowing spring from which the spiritually thirsty easily allay their thirst. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna, an incarnation is a ready-made mould of the Divinity in which one has only to cast oneself to be divine.

Try as we may, so long as we are bound by the limitations of the human mind and senses, we can never conceive God except as a Man, as a Being with the highest human attributes, without the human imperfections; all our endeavours to think of Him as He is in His absolute perfection prove miserably futile; our best and highest conceptions of Him are at best our conceptions of an ideally perfect Man. Infiniteness, omniscience, omnipotence and similar other terms convey to us no idea unaffected by our human nature. Only when we transcend the limitations of our human nature do we know God as He is. Convinced that, in keeping with our human nature, we have to think of God as an ideally perfect Man and so thinking, form only false notions of Him, we may not try to form any notion of Him at all, but struggle in the dark to catch a glimpse of His light, which we know is at the same time completely beyond the ken of our vision. Or, because we cannot help thinking of God as Man, we may try to see Him through a *man* in whom there is a manifestation of Him, that is, through an incarnation. Either method leads to the goal. Detachment of the mind from things other than God is the primal condition for His realization. Those with whom religion is not talk but practice know how hard it is to detach the mind from things. Harder becomes the task when there is nothing else for the mind to attach itself to. In the first method, because one forms no notion of God, one has to detach one's mind from all things, without at the same time having any other idea to which the mind can be attached. In the second method, one can do so by attaching the mind to an incarnation. Hence easier becomes realization in the latter than in the former method. 'Greater is their trouble whose thoughts are set on the Unmanifest; for the Goal, the Unmanifest, is very hard for the embodied to attain. (*Gita*, 12.5) Moreover, the very attachment of the mind to an incarnation fills it gradually with His characteristic divine love, knowledge and power. 'Whatever one thinks, one becomes.'

Again, on account of the very limitations of our human constitution, we are bound to see and have relations with God as a Man, as an incarnation. How to man even the highest manifestation of the Unmanifest can be but a human embodiment of It, we do not understand.

Two classes of men do not worship God as Man—the Paramahansa, who has risen above the limits of human nature and therefore can realize and worship God as He is in His superhuman perfection, and the man with whom religion is not realization but mere talk, or, at the most, struggle in the dark.

—*Divinity-in-man*

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*

SWAMI ATULANANDA

Chapter 9 (continued)

30. Even if the most wicked worships Me with undivided devotion, he should be regarded as good, for he is rightly resolved.

Love of God is the road to salvation for the sinful man. No matter how evil someone's life has been, when he adopts the path of righteousness, abandoning his evil ways and worships God and Him alone, then, says Sri Krishna, such a person is to be regarded as a good man, because he has formed

a holy resolution to serve God. And if he remains true in the new path, then he will soon become righteous and attain eternal peace. The Lord answers the prayer of every sincere person. He will cleanse our heart and renew the right spirit within us. Sri Krishna says in the next verse:

31. Very soon he becomes righteous and attains to eternal Peace. O son of Kunti, you can boldly proclaim that My devotee never perishes.

This is the truth,' O Arjuna. 'Proclaim it boldly. There is hope for everyone; none need despair, for I despise no one.' 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not

come into condemnation: but is passed from death unto life,' said Jesus.¹ A humble and contrite heart, the Lord despises not. He receives all who take refuge in Him. We read in the next verse:

32. For taking refuge in Me, O son of Pritha, they who might be of inferior birth—women, vaishyas as well as shudras—even they attain the supreme Goal.

It is always the one command: 'Take refuge in Me.' Why? Because God is the only true Existence, the only Real part of the whole universe and every being. Truth, which is God, alone can save us, not falsehood, not appearance, not unreality. And Truth not only can, but *is* sure to save us, no matter who or what we are, as long as we take refuge in Him, who is Truth. Whether we are men or women, of high birth or low birth, matters not at all with God. It is not a question of birth or position, but of heart. Women and the two lower classes are especially mentioned by Sri Krishna because in those days they were not sup-

posed to give their time to the study of the Vedas. But the Lord does not care for our learning or good qualities or training. Only love is required and love makes all equal before Him. Publicans and harlots believed in Jesus and were saved. Is there love? Is there devotion? Is there sincerity and perseverance? That is the question. So even those of inferior birth, less favourably placed for spiritual aspirations—even they attain the supreme Goal through bhakti. How much easier it is then for those born under more favourable conditions. This is expressed in the next verse:

33. What need is there then to speak of the holy brahmins and the devoted royal sages. Having come into this transitory and joyless world, worship Me.

If those of inferior birth and lower station in life, less educated, not versed in the holy scriptures and occupied with business and menial service, come to Me through devotion, how much easier it should be for the holy brahmins and rajarshis, kings who have attained to sainthood.

Brahmins are the highest caste in India, the priest caste, and as such they have opportunities for spiritual progress as no other caste has. Their entire life is set aside for the study of the scriptures and the worship of God. That is what society expects them to do, and they have no care or anxiety about their wants; society looks after that. Therefore it ought to be easier for them to reach the spiritual goal. And for the saintly kings, too, it ought to be easier as their wealth and position makes them independent and they need not slave for their maintenance like those born in lower castes.

34. Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, worship Me and bow down to Me; thus steadfastly uniting yourself with Me and regarding Me as your supreme Goal, you will come to Me.

This is the end, the last word on this path of Sovereign Science and Sovereign Secret. The highest bhakti and jnana are combined. 'First know that I am the Self in all beings and that I am the supreme Goal, and then take refuge in Me. Fix your mind on Me. Anchor your mind in Me. That will keep you away from sin and ignorance. Worship Me and bow down to Me. Remember, I am the Soul of all living beings. Bow down to all men, for I dwell in all. Protected and strengthened by that knowledge, approach all beings. Then you will be a blessing to all. Sinners will be converted into saints by your very presence. A touch, a look, a word will change a man. For love will flow from you, love holy and divine, and the love of God will operate through you. You will then not meet people in order to gain something. No, you will be the giver. Take, take, take all I have—that will be your attitude. Take the highest; take my love. You will have no axe to grind. You have become a true

It follows then that the way is open to all. God is the door through which we all may enter nirvana. If we long for freedom, then we all (no matter who we are) have the opportunity, for God is the same to all.

'Therefore, Arjuna, as you have come into this world, where everyone may run to gain the spiritual prize, do you also worship Me. Remember, this world is transitory, a question of only a few years. And it is a joyless place after all for one who has tasted spiritual bliss. Now that you have attained a human birth, make the best of it. Animals are not fit for spiritual life. Their instincts never rise above the sense plane. And the devas are so much engaged in enjoyment that they forget everything else. You are a kshatriya and everything is favourable for spiritual development. Do not waste your life. Think of Eternity; take refuge in Me.'

renouncer, for you have found your treasure in God, and nothing short of God can satisfy you.' Such men live in God. Their abode is in Him; they love God; they sing His praise; and they talk of Him. Such bhaktas have been called God-intoxicated. They are inebriated with the love of God.

Sometimes their minds are so entirely withdrawn from the world that they appear as mad. Love is a great power, a wonderful energy and force. And when the love of God surges into their hearts they cannot contain themselves. They dance, jump and roll on the ground like one insane. But they are very sane indeed, the sanest of the sane, for they have broken through the illusion, freed themselves from the hypnotic power of maya. 'We are all mad,' said Sri Ramakrishna. 'Let me be then mad for God. Like a madman you slave and work and fight and cheat and ruin your health for a few dollars; let me be absorbed in God. I may not have your beautiful home and dress

That is the result, the outcome of the Sovereign Wisdom taught in this ninth chapter. Freedom is the goal of life and the Gita points out the different roads to freedom, how to grow spiritually till the individual becomes the Universal, the limited becomes the Unlimited, man becomes God.

and food, but I have peace of mind and spiritual bliss, which you do not even know. My home is God. My clothing is wisdom and my food is the Spirit.'

Dadu the saint said, 'My earnings are God. He is my food and my supporter; by His spiritual sustenance have all my members been nourished. God is my clothing and my dwelling; my mind is intoxicated. God is my ruler, my body and my soul. Even as you see your countenance reflected in a mirror or still water, so behold God in your minds, because He is with all. As the plant contains oil, the flower sweet odour, as butter is in milk, so is

God in everything—He who made the mind, formed it as it were a temple for Himself to dwell in, for God lives in the mind, and none other but God. O my friend, know that Being with whom you are so intimately connected. Think not that God is distant but believe that like your own shadow, He is ever near you. Receive that which is perfect into your hearts, to the exclusion of every-

thing else. Abandon all things for the love of God, for this, Dadu declares, is true devotion.'

That is the result, the outcome of the *rājavidyā*, Sovereign Wisdom, taught in this ninth chapter. Freedom is the goal of life and the *Gita* points out the different roads to freedom, how to grow spiritually till the individual becomes the Universal, the limited becomes the Unlimited, man becomes God.

In the next chapter God reveals another path.

Chapter 10: The Path through Glimpses of the Divine Being

In the seventh chapter the Lord declared the mystery of His divine Being pointing out both His essential nature and manifestations. Sri Krishna then spoke of His two Prakritis or aspects. From the standpoint of Reality the Deity is absolute and without attributes, One without a second. But in consequence of the inscrutable power of the Deity called *maya*, there is an apparent relation between the absolute Deity and conditioned existence. He then appears as the essence of all things: the liquidity in water, the soul in man and so on—the seed of all beings. The whole universe proceeds from Him, but He remains distinct from His creation. We have seen that though it is hard to know him, still there is a way, and Knowledge is pointed out as the

means to *mukti*.

In the ninth chapter the Lord took up the same subject once more and taught that the power of the Deity comprehends and yet transcends the universe, for the universe is nothing but the power of God, His *maya*. The Deity is not the universe. For, says Sri Krishna, 'By Me is all this world pervaded, I sustain all, I am the cause of all, but I remain unconnected, as the Witness. Prakriti energized by Me produces all things. I am inscrutable, but I can be attained through the highest devotion.'

In pantheism, the universe is regarded as identical with God. But if the universe and the Deity were the same, then there would be no meaning in speaking of the Deity *and* the Universe. At the same time we cannot say that

God and the universe are different and both *real*, for then there would be a higher Reality embracing both the Deity and the universe. But two *realities* cannot enter into *One*. We see how difficult the subject is. Vedanta reflects both pantheism and deism. 'Motionless and profound, neither light nor darkness, without name and manifestation, a mysterious Reality'—such is the description of the Deity in the

Upanishads. The universe is a portion of the divine Power, yet there is another portion, by reason of which the Deity is not the universe.

And now, in the tenth chapter, called 'Vibhuti Yoga', Sri Krishna declares in what forms of being He should be thought. And His essential nature is described once more, the subject being so very difficult to comprehend and it being such a great mystery.

The Blessed Lord said:

1. Again, O mighty armed, listen to My supreme word, which, wishing your welfare, I declare to you, who are rejoiced (to hear Me).

Sri Krishna's words are nothing but the unsurpassed Truth. And Truth can never be heard too often. So, although the same Truth has been revealed by Sri Krishna again and again, once more, in His great compassion and love for Arjuna and for all humanity, He repeats it in a different way. It is because the Lord is ever watchful over His devotees and loves them so dearly that He never tires of teaching them.

And to Arjuna, especially, the Lord is constantly giving advice because Arjuna received His words with such great joy. It is for that reason, says Sri Krishna, that He is teaching him.

No teacher can give the best in Him unless He has disciples to appreciate and understand Him. When the disciples drink in the words of the guru as immortal nectar, then Truth flows from the teacher as from a perennial spring. The real guru possesses all Truth. But the disciples carry away with them only as much as they can comprehend and contain. The holy man is like the fabulous stone called *chintamani*, which yields anything its possessor thinks of. The guru draws out the best in us. But if we approach him with an indifferent mind full of worldly desires and thoughts, then he will

not be able to draw out much spirituality. The mental attitude in which we approach a teacher is so important. There must be humility, a great desire to learn, gratitude and willingness to serve. In India the guru is approached with great reverence and never empty-handed. No matter how humble the little gift may be, something is offered to show one's attitude willingness to serve the guru.

Hear from the *Vivekachudamani* how the disciple approaches the master:

I submit myself to you, Master, friend of those who bow down to you, and a river of selfless kindness. Raise me from the ocean of the world by a straightforward glance of your eyes that pours forth the nectar-like grace supreme. I am burnt by the unquenched hot fire of relentless life and torn by the winds of misery. Save me from death, for, terrified, I take refuge in you,

No teacher can give the best in Him unless He has disciples to appreciate and understand Him. When the disciples drink in the words of the guru as immortal nectar, then Truth flows from the teacher as from a perennial spring. The real guru possesses all Truth. But the disciples carry away with them only as much as they can comprehend and contain.

A constant stream of illusory suggestions runs against our brain. We are told every moment of our existence to accept as reality that which is only a passing dream. We hear, see, touch and imagine untruth or relative truth all the time.

finding no other rest. Sprinkle me with your nectar-like words, which brings the joy of eternal Bliss, pure and cooling, for I am burnt by the hot, scorching flame of the world's fire. Blessed are they on whom a passing glance of your eyes rests even for a moment, and who accept you as their own. How shall I cross the ocean of the world? Where is the path? Which way should I follow? I know not, Master. Be gracious to save me from the pain of the world's wound.¹ Then the master is pleased. His compassion is aroused and he answers the disciple: 'Fear not, wise one. There is no danger for you. There is a way to cross over the ocean of the world, the way by which sages have gone beyond it. This same path I will show you. Crossing the ocean of the world by this path you will attain the supreme Bliss.'³

We are all differently benefited by the same teacher. The difference is caused by *us*, not by the teacher. We receive what we want and what we are ready for. Different persons come to a well to draw water. One has a pitcher, another a can, another a pail. Each one will carry away what his vessel can contain and no more. But the well is filled with water. No one can drain it. So it is with the real teacher. In him is Truth. And Truth is limitless and inexhaustible. All may come and all may receive, and still Truth is there, undiminished.

2. Neither the hosts of devas, nor the great rishis, know My origin, for I am the Source of all the devas and the great rishis.

Who can teach about the Lord? Who knows Him? Even the gods and the great sages know not My origin or My great Lordly power. How can they know

The great teachers are the salt of the earth. They are the bread of life. 'I am the bread of life,' said Jesus. 'He that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst.'⁴

Again, Arjuna is listening to the same Truth as declared by Sri Krishna. Arjuna never tires of listening to his Friend and Master. Sometimes we get annoyed and irritated having to listen to the same thing so often. We think that we know it by this time. We forget that hearing, we do not hear; for hearing has no worth if it is not accompanied by assimilation. Yes, when we have assimilated the Truth then we need not hear it again.

Let us remember that our entire life runs in the opposite direction. We are constantly filling our mind with thoughts contrary to Truth. A constant stream of illusory suggestions runs against our brain. We are told every moment of our existence to accept as reality *that* which is only a passing dream. We hear, see, touch and imagine untruth or relative truth all the time. It requires therefore a strong current in the opposite direction to counteract these false impressions. It is therefore so necessary to listen to what is true at every opportunity that presents itself and to cherish and keep alive whatever of Truth we receive.

It is the Lord Himself who teaches, for who is there who has realized the Spirit? Who can teach? Only he who knows. And very few know. Therefore Sri Krishna Himself teaches us. We read in the next verse:

it? They all came after the Lord, who is eternal and who existed in the beginningless past. They are all born of Him, who Himself is birthless. All that is known of Him is only His

manifested power. The Lord is omniscient. He is the great Guru, the Teacher of all teachers.

Therefore, listen to Me, says Sri Krishna, for He can teach as no other can. Moreover:

3. He who knows Me as birthless and beginningless, the supreme Lord of the universe, among mortals he is undeluded and is freed from all sins.

What does Sri Krishna mean? He says here that those who know Him as birthless and beginningless are free from all sins. Don't we all know that God is birthless and eternal, without beginning and without end? Don't we all know that He is the supreme Lord of the universe? How then can Sri Krishna say that those who know this are undeluded and freed from all sins? For though we know all this, we also know very well that we are not free from the delusion of *maya*; we also know that we are by no means sinless.

The answer is, we think we know, but we really *don't* know. Our life, our deeds, our words—everything indicates that we do *not* know God. And without knowing Him, how can we know that He is eternal and the Lord of the universe? There is but one convincing proof and that is not knowledge or hearsay but direct perception, realization. Until we meet God face to face, we do *not* know Him or anything concerning Him. We may think and guess and imagine, but that is not knowing. *Knowing* in Vedanta means *realizing*. And only *that* Knowledge, or realization, can make us free and sinless. When Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda) was in search of a spiritual teacher, he went all over to find someone who knew God. 'Have you seen Him?'—that was his first question. And he did not rest until he came to the saint who could answer, 'Yes, my boy, I see Him face to face, in a more real sense than even I see you.' *He* could teach Naren, for he knew, he saw God. But such men are very, very few in this world. Among mortals, they are undeluded and freed from all sin, for they know the Lord and they know themselves, and they know all that is to be known.

Religion is not learning, but being and be-

coming. We may know all the shastras by heart; we may be conversant with all the philosophies; we may be able to hold our own in arguments—and still be ignorant of God. 'If any religion is true,' says Swamiji, 'then it must be able to show us the soul and show us God and the truth in ourselves.'⁵ The study of books will not reveal God to us, says the *Amritabindu Upanishad*: 'After studying the scriptures, the intelligent one who is solely intent on acquiring knowledge and realization, should give up the scriptures entirely, like the man who looking for the rice rejects the husk.'⁶

'This Atman is not to be reached by too much talk; no, not even by the highest intellect; no, not even by the study of the Vedas themselves.'⁷ It is very difficult to know God. We think in our foolishness that we know Him. What does the *Kena Upanishad* say? 'It is known to him to whom it is unknown; he knows it not to whom it is known. It is unknown to those who know, and known to those who do not know.'⁸

To know God, we must be born again. We must be born in the Spirit. 'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.'⁹ When we are God's children, then we know Him. Not before that. 'But the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.'¹⁰ Yes, when we are God's children, then we are undeluded and freed from all sins, whether consciously or unconsciously incurred. *Then* we know the Truth. Then Truth alone triumphs in us and not falsehood. Through Truth alone lies the path of Bliss. When we know God as the divine Spirit, birthless and beginningless and as the supreme Lord of the universe, we are no longer

under delusion; we are no longer ignorant; we are no longer under the curse of sin. Then all the desires for the sense life disappear. The mind has become pure and free from attachment. 'Where there is Rama there is no desire (kama); where there is desire there Rama is not' is a Hindu saying. Where God is realized there is no desire, no sin. Where sin dwells, there God is not.

How different our lives would be if we knew God. For when we know Him we will know ourselves and all beings. Then we will know that we are all Spirit—blissful, divine beings, all united in Spirit. We will see that our personalities are simply so many shapes and forms through which the one Spirit manifests. Then the brotherhood of men will be truly es-

When we know God in His true and highest aspect, then we have reached perfection.

Evolution for us has accomplished its purpose; we stand free, sinless, undeluded.

Then we shall know that God alone is Real and everything else is unreal. By Real is meant unchanging, eternal, and by unreal or false is meant that which is subject to change.

tablished in our hearts. We will not care so much for this body of ours that now claims our entire attention. Hatred, envy and jealousy will vanish forever. We will take our place in the play of life as long as the body lasts and then will lie down contentedly when the last hour comes, for we will enter peace. Our life will be sinless and our mind peaceful, free from anxiety and egotism and self-seeking. The entire universe and everything in it will be surrounded by a halo of bliss.

When we know God we realize that everything comes from Him, that everything lives in Him and that everything will return to Him in the end.

When we know God in His true and highest aspect, then we have reached perfec-

tion. Evolution for us has accomplished its purpose; we stand free, sinless, undeluded. Then we shall know that God alone is Real and everything else is unreal. By Real is meant unchanging, eternal, and by unreal or false is meant that which is subject to change. The Spirit is Real. Nothing, nothing can affect it, because It is beyond time, space and causation. Matter is unreal. It is subject to these: birth, existence, growth, change, decay and death.

Man as we know is a combination of these aspects of God, the Real and the unreal. The apparent man will vanish some day, first the gross manifestation and later also the fine or subtle manifestation. The gross body as we know may last a hundred years at the most,

but the subtle body exists through ages. It comes and goes. It leaves one gross body behind and then assumes another. But this subtle body will also be dissolved when it has served its purpose, just as the gross body is laid aside after its task is finished. When both these bodies vanish, only the Spirit remains. The Real man stands naked in his own glory,

the blissful Spirit. The *Shvetashvatara Upanisad* describes this state in two beautiful mantras:

I know this mighty Purusha, sun-like, beyond all darkness. By knowing Him and Him alone one transcends death. There is no other path.

To whom there is nothing superior, from whom there is nothing different, than whom there is nothing either smaller or greater, who stands alone, motionless like a tree, established in His own glory—by Him, the Purusha, all this (universe) is filled.¹¹

We dream. And compared with the dream state, *we* are real and the dream is false. From the standpoint of the Absolute, God is Real and the Spirit in man is Real; all else is false. The gross body, the subtle body and the entire universe is then no more; then on wak-

ing, the dream disappears. Similarly, in samadhi the universe disappears. That is mukti or nirvana. But as long as we have not had that realization, we cannot deny the existence of the universe. What then is this universe? Where has it come from and where does it go when it disappears in the state of samadhi?

The universe is an illusive creation. Maya is the great magician who produces all these worlds, as the magician produces illusive sights of persons and objects when we come under his hypnotic spell. But even *this* is a vision very hard to attain, and a consciousness so grand, so sublime that only the most spiritual can attain it. As from one lump of clay, many various objects can be made, and every one of those objects is only clay, not different from the original lump except for name and form, even so from our Atman, from our Spirit, has emerged this whole universe.¹² It is not different from the Atman except for name and form. The Atman seen through maya, caught as it were in the net of name and form, becomes the universe.

God, the Spirit, our own true Self, enclosed in name and form, becomes man, beast and all that exists. Name and form are but ignorance, only a dream, but we do not realize that fact so long as we are asleep and dreaming. From our present standpoint, therefore, the world exists. *We* exist; everything exists. All rests on Brahman, who is the real basis of all. Brahman, God, is the ocean. The universe and everything in it are so many waves. God is the cause of all. There could be no wave without the ocean. But He Himself is without any cause. He remains always Himself, glorious and blissful. He is the gold and the universe contains the different ornaments made of the gold. But the gold never changes. It always remains pure gold, no matter how it appears

through name and form. It undergoes no real change. The change is only apparent. When we see the gold we see the reality. When we see the ornaments, we see the changeable, the unreal.

And just as the ornaments come from the unchangeable gold, just as the ornaments are only gold with an apparent difference, caused by name and form, the entire creation is Brahman alone, appearing as split up and divided through the power of maya, called name and form.¹³

Remembering this, we will be able to understand the truth of the next verses, where Sri Krishna enumerates the different changes appearing in Brahman. We will then understand that nothing exists outside of God. He is all. He is all in all. All the different conditions we are subject to come from Him.

(To be continued)

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7. *Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.23.
8. *Kena Upanishad*, 2.3.
9. *Romans*, 8.14.
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11. *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, 3.8-9.
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Life is a grindstone. But whether it grinds us down or polishes us up depends on us.

—Thomas Holdcraft

Ramakrishna Vedanta in the West: New Interfaces and Challenges

DR M SIVARAMKRISHNA

The power and ideas that are within this body will automatically spread all around in course of time. Hundreds of Himalayas will not be able to suppress that power. —*Sri Ramakrishna to Keshab Chandra Sen.*¹

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a very unusual person. It is good to remember our 'past masters' to re-examine their teachings in order to apply them to our present-day problems.²

The Nineteenth-century Ethos of the Sacred

In his incisive study of the state of oriental religions (particularly Theosophy) and the cult of the gurus in the West, Peter Washington observed, '... towards the end of the nineteenth century it was becoming clear that an enduring public appetite existed in the West for new and exotic forms of religious belief to supplement or even replace orthodox forms of Christianity. Swedenborg has shown one possible way forward by uniting religion and science. Mesmer and the spiritualists had demonstrated another by opening doors to the spirit world.'³

Pointing out further facets of what Frank Kermonde has called 'a neglected story of serious frauds and delusions that had no small influence on modern art and thought', Peter Washington adds that in this ethos, 'Hinduism drew doctrinal subtlety and sheer exotism.' And he devotes a chapter to Vedanta as exemplified by Swami Prabhavananda and his writer devotees, notably Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood, commenting that Swami Prabhavananda 'managed to stay

above the temptations of Hollywood, where more adeptly self-dramatizing gurus were constantly in continuous demand. People were impressed by his ability to live chastely in a notoriously corrupting world.'

The New Mystical Renaissance

Obviously the role of the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement has been to steer clear of all the fads gaining ground in this ethos. Neither esoteric nor messiah-based, it advocated the way of Vedanta not theorized and mystified but lived in the lives of Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Vivekananda. By the 1960s when the 'Eastern masters made a concerted Westward push' the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement was a quietly authoritative and authentic one.

The result is evident today in what 'analysts' are pointing to as a new spiritual renaissance, the novelty lying in the integration of spiritual rhythms in everyday living. As Peter Ochiogrosso, in his study of 'a small but representative sample of those transformative experiences' (the sampler includes Lex Hixon) says, 'Somewhere between the hard edge of Christian fundamentalism and the self-satisfaction of secular humanism, each of which in its own way seems to threaten dominance of American life at times, a whole world of spiritual growth and transformation is taking place.'⁴ While Lex Hixon calls this 'the General Theory of Relativity of Religions', it seems to signal for Andrew Harvey 'the new mystical renaissance that is struggling to be born against terrible odds in the rubble of our living civilization.'⁵

On 'The Edge of One of the Megatrends'

The quiet but crucial role of Ramakrishna Vedanta in ushering this new renaissance can hardly be exaggerated. As Carl T Jackson, the cultural historian of oriental religions in the USA, has declared, 'One hundred years in the United States has given the movement a visibility and degree of acceptance unequalled by any Asian group.' Identifying the reasons he says, 'the Ramakrishna movement's obvious commitment to present Vedanta at a high level, the swamis' strong intellectual qualifications, and an ecumenical attitude toward other religious bodies have won over most critics.' Finally, 'predicting' the future he says, 'As a pioneer in paving the way for introduction of Asian religious perceptions in the West, the Ramakrishna movement may be said to stand on the edge of one of the "megatrends" of modern world history.'⁶

More or less, the same view is validated by Diana L Eck in her study of the pluralistic, inclusivist religious situation today: 'Vivekananda's perception that the crying need of the West was something he called "spirituality" has been borne out in the one hundred years since the Parliament.'⁷

Similarly in a recent study of world religions, Peter Ochiogrosso says, 'The ... yogic practices taught by the succeeding waves of Indian gurus to come West are all more or less descendants of the Vivekananda approach and in one form or other were appropriated by the Beat culture of the 1950s, the counter-culture of the 60s and the current New Age movement.'⁸

The 'perception' to which both Jackson and Eck refer is, indeed, far-ranging, deeply interior and coextensive with the other prophets. A deeply moving example is evident in Henri Nouwen. This widely respected father reports, 'Over the years many new pictures have appeared on my inner walls. Some show words, some gestures of blessing, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing. Many show faces: the faces of Jesus and Mary, the faces of

Therese of Lisieux and Charles de Foucoud, the faces of Ramakrishna and the Dalai Lama.'⁹ (From our forthcoming bibliography of writings on Ramakrishna, a random survey reveals nearly 250-300 citations during the last two years alone.)

Movement versus Message/Ideology

The Ramakrishna Vedanta movement will still face institutional challenges which increasing acceptance and visibility engender. The Asian groups may become larger in patronizing and may, by sheer numbers, make Vedanta centres extensions of ethnic religiosity. Islands of 'India', the 'motherland', may build themselves up with the swami as the nucleus. This, if it becomes persistent, may overshadow the interiority and inwardness of the characteristically Western responses to Ramakrishna Vedanta. Whatever one may say to the contrary, Ramakrishna Vedanta needs mediation in terms of what Andrew P Tuck called 'isogesis'. This is employing one's 'personal cultural perspectives', to make appropriation of the 'other' 'intelligible'. The 'act of productive understanding—*isogesis*—is an integral part of the interpretive process.' The Western appropriation of Ramakrishna Vedanta has to be in the logic of its own historical/cultural frames.

The challenge here is to respect the autonomy of Western interpretations and not overly 'Hinduize' Ramakrishna, however dominant Hindu paradigms and symbolic forms are in his life and message. One may have to balance what the *paramaguru* of post-modernism, Jacques Derrida, called 'philosophy proper' and 'exemplary philosophy', signifying respectively cultural specifics, and areas that 'transcend' these cultural specifics by offering an idiom translatable across boundaries.

The movement has to face, consequently, the legitimating of autonomy for the Western exponents of Ramakrishna Vedanta. The considerable growth of the Western counterpart

—far flung in its centres in Europe (even Russia), the Far East, the USA, the UK and so on—necessitates that the movement *re-cognize* in terms, strictly, of autonomy. The Great Swan's wide waters can no longer be contained in the Ganga alone. New rivers are ready to receive Ramakrishna but in their own spiritually individualistic territorial waters! The movement's greatest challenge is to consider how far to let the 'Western' Ramakrishna Vedanta movement go its own way. Perhaps increasing insurgency may be the outcome if imaginatively conceived checks and balances are not voluntarily worked out. Institutional challenges are relatively manageable but they are linked to the more formidable ideological ones. Interfaces counterpoint challenges.

Interfaces: *Bhavamukha*

Bhavamukha seems to be, what Western seekers are calling 'ordinary magic', the perception of everyday life itself as a spiritual path. What Pema Chodron says—'self-liberate even the antidote'—seems approximate to this. 'The ultimate perfection,' she says, 'must be some sense of completely realizing that samsara and nirvana are one, not preferring stillness or occurrence but being able to live fully with both.' In this balancing vision, even the despised ritual dimension finds a paradigmatic place. 'When things are properly understood, one's whole life is like a ritual or ceremony. Then all the gestures of life are mudra and all the sounds of life are mantra—sacredness is everywhere.'¹⁰

Similarly, in his careful (though not always defensible) analysis of the implications, Timothy A Jensen says that *bhavamukha* is 'a crucial element in ... the transforming experiences' of Ramakrishna. 'Both the literal meaning of *bhavamukha* and the discussions by the hagiographers point toward a resolution of the problems of identity and vocation,' he says, adding that through *bhavamukha* Ramakrishna 'could ... see the possibility of living ... in close contact with the world yet without clinging to it.'¹¹

This is making everything sacred not as a pious, static axiom but as a vibrant, live transfiguration of the world. The Master himself pins it down: '... I see it is He who is moving about in different forms, now as an honest man, now as a cheat and again as a villain.' 'Try to know the nitya,' he commanded, 'through the lila', and 'the Eternal is to be reached by means of the non-eternal, the Real through the help of the unreal, and the Noumenon through the help of the phenomenon.'¹²

Interpreting this in terms of Christian faith, Beatrice Bruteau (who notes that she learnt the synthesis of the four yogas 'mainly from the swamis of the Ramakrishna Order') says, 'In the Christian vocabulary ... the liberating spiritual death is not the end of the path of growth. It must be followed by resurrection, *the return to embodied life* which itself is a developmental state. ... In resurrection, *we experience unity in differentiation, we see the Absolute in every differentiated being.*' (*emphasis added*) Citing Ramakrishna specifically, Bruteau notes that he 'pointed out ... the state in which to abide for ordinary daily life, ... the coming back into consciousness from the absolute unity and formlessness of samadhi. In his tradition this state is called *bhavamukha*, and in the symbology of his spiritual life, he heard Divine Mother tell him, "Remain in *bhavamukha*." 'We might say,' adds Bruteau, 'this means ... he was told "Be true God and true man."¹³

Finally, Hans Torwesten brings out the uniqueness of *bhavamukha* and states, 'Many—as perhaps Teilhard de Chardin—have "dreamed" of that other state in which the whole world is transformed in a trice. Ramakrishna did not dream of it; he lived in that state every day. It was not just poetry, not a vague pantheism—he simply saw God with eyes open, wherever he looked.'¹⁴

The 'New' Celibate

Abiding in ordinary life with strong spiritual bases is fraught with several challenges

of which, for the West (and through increasing exposure of its media for the East, too), is love in the context of marriage. This implies what John Welwood calls 'challenge of the heart', 'the need to be pioneers in territory that has never been fully and consciously explored. Men and women have never had to face each other with such honesty and awareness.'¹⁵ Many are inclined to see marriage as a sacrament, and it needs, as Henri Nouwen holds, celibacy not only 'for physical, mental or spiritual reasons, but also because intimacy of marriage in itself is based on the common participation in a love greater than the love two people can offer each other.'¹⁶

Ramakrishna advised that after the birth of two or three children, husband and wife should live as brother and sister and 'fight' for realization 'from within the fort of samsara'. This is a paradigm increasingly being held as inevitable for inner growth. Paradoxically, the very excesses of eroticism evident everywhere are reinforcing the vitality of celibacy within marriage. Indeed, as Adolf Guggenbuhl-Craig tersely puts it, 'the central issue of marriage is not well-being or happiness; it is salvation. Marriage involves not only a man and a woman who happily love each other and raise offspring together, but rather two people who are trying to individuate, to find their soul's salvation.'¹⁷

'Goddessliness'

A related interface (with Ramakrishna Vedanta) is the figuring of Sarada Devi as an exemplar of what Diane Mariechild calls 'the lineage of feminine wisdom'. Equating 'mindfulness' itself with feminism she says that both suggest 'pay attention, explore and check it out for yourself'. Choosing two of Sarada Devi's sayings ('I am the Mother of the virtuous ... say to yourself: I have a mother' and 'If you want peace ... the whole world is your own'), Mariechild regards Sarada Devi 'as a human being who has fully manifested her godliness and goddessliness'. The 'embodiment of di-

vine love' Sarada Devi's words 'indicate that her love is impersonal; it is given to all, regardless of their behaviour. The Holy Mother is there reaching out to every individual, wherever and wherever they are.' Consequently 'the edges will soften more easily without the attitude of criticism and faultfinding.'¹⁸

Viewed thus, Beatrice Bruteau's contention that 'a second challenge that still seems to threaten the West is the popularity in the East of feminine images of God', finds an interface in the attitude and practice of Ramakrishna Vedanta towards woman as the potential of Shakti as an imperative for interior illumination (exemplified gloriously in Sarada Devi's life). This brings us to another challenge emerging again, from 'desire' as embodied woman.

Challenges: Tantra

The most formidable challenge to the interpretation of Ramakrishna as a sadhaka and Ramakrishna Vedanta as a path of sadhana now seems to stem from the larger Western landscape of Tantra studies in general and the focusing on Ramakrishna in particular. The work by scholars such as Mircea Eliade, Erich Neuman, Ken Wilber (notably his recent *Sex, Ecology, and Spirituality*), Georg Feurstein, Julius Evola, Herbert Guenther, Indra Sinha and Gunter Nitschke has focused on what they contend as sexual origins and foregrounding of spirituality. They seem to strongly endorse Paul Ricoeur's assertion that 'it is not possible, in point of fact, to understand the adventurous history of sexuality apart from that of the sacred among men.'

One can see this as, also, an important aspect of the 'feminist' discourse of desire 'interwoven with gender issues and values'. To be more precise, as Kim Power in her remarkable study of St Augustine's writings on women observed, 'The Christian discourse of desire sets up a choice between woman and God, wherein the sexually desirable woman is represented as being in direct conflict with God

for the hearts of men. The other side of the coin is that properly ordered desire for God will eradicate disorderly desire for women.¹⁹

Tantra—specially, the left-handed one—is seen by many as a way out of the paradox. Yati calls it ‘perhaps the most exotic and at its initial ritual levels certainly the most erotic of all the methods arousing the evolutionary sleeper.’²⁰ Julius Evola notes that ‘the idea of arising and assuming the forces of desire’ in order to make them ‘self-consuming, that is, to transform or, better, to destroy their original nature finds its most classical expression’ in Tantra.²¹ He goes a step further and claims, interestingly, that Tantra is more Western than Christian: ‘Tantrism, in its spirit—leaving out of consideration the framework of local traditions—should be considered distinctly Western. It is more conspicuously Western than Christian soteriology, is looked upon as a “vale of tears” and contemplates the destiny of a human nature that has been infected with sin and that stands in need of redemption ...’ (158) Commenting on the implications, Evola adds that ‘the password of Tantrism is not the incompatibility but rather the unity of spiritual discipline (sadhana) and enjoyment (bhoga) ...’ (158)

(To be continued)

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Principles without programmes are platitudes. —Bernard Shaw

They All Came

SUDESH

I

They all came to him: some on foot, some by carriage, some by boat and some by steamer; but the destination was the same: the pujari of Kali at Dakshineswar. Whether he was a realized soul or an advanced sadhaka, a monk or an incarnation of God they knew not, but still they came. They came in spite of themselves, as if under a spell.

Mahendra Nath Gupta

M came to him, his guru, in an utterly despondent mood, when he was on the verge of ending his life due to clashes in his joint family. He was told that life was too precious to end like that over fleeting worldly relations. No, no. He did not have to renounce worldly relations or his responsibilities. Like an ideal householder he was to serve them all, knowing that He alone would abide who dwelt within the heart. He alone would give him a place of rest when all friends and relatives have deserted him in his dying hour. How quickly did M grasp the evanescence of the world! He also realized through his guru's grace that the guru himself was the *ishta*, the eternal companion of his soul who had protected him during the great storm of Ashwin! Thakur had seen M in the sankirtan party of Chaitanya, in his incarnation as Chaitanya.

When M first came to Dakshineswar he believed in God without form. But we see that right from the first moment he was unwittingly meditating on that 'serene-looking man'. Even at home he was unable to banish the thought of Thakur for a moment. On the day he could not go to him, he mentally visualized every word, every gesture, of this enchanter of his soul. He noted it down in his diary. The re-

sult was the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Through the *Gospel* M has recreated the Deity of his meditation, who was to nourish beings all over the world with spiritual food. On M's second visit, Thakur scolded him for criticizing those who worshipped images: 'Who are you to teach others?' And yet, interestingly, it looks as if M was brought to the world exclusively to teach the words of his divine Master to posterity. In the proximity of Thakur new vistas and limitless horizons opened up to M's inner vision. He realized that the Personal and Impersonal Gods were both two aspects of the one Reality. He was established in the state of a jnani and at the same time enjoyed the mellowed sweetness of bhakti.

M had once wanted to bid farewell to this 'playhouse of deception', but now he could not take any risk with his life. One day while coming to Dakshineswar with Prankrishna in a boat, he found the river a bit choppy. In spite of Prankrishna's assurance that they would reach safely, M insisted on being left on the shore. He did not mind covering the remaining distance on foot in scorching heat, but reach he must. Ah! He had seen the Master singing and dancing intoxicated with God. Day after day he had seen him going into samadhi. While singing the glories of Divine Mother he was like a celestial vina. The words that came out of his lips were as if from the Goddess of Wisdom Herself. Enthralled, M wanted to see his divine play till the end.

Girish Chandra Ghosh

Girish came, though he intended not to come. A literary genius and the father of Bengal theatre, it was beyond Girish to accept a

human being as guru. Still he came to his saviour, drawn as if by some invisible ethereal attraction. In him he found a 'huge pit' where he could throw all his sins—Himalaya-high—and was transformed so much that he was given the ochre robe and rosary along with the would-be giant monks of the Ramakrishna Order; so much so that he in turn became the saviour of the women who due to abject poverty were forced to lead immoral lives. We can't but 'marvel' at his transformation.

Others saw in Girish a debauchee, a drunkard, a bohemian and a rebel against God. But Thakur saw in him a man of deep faith and a heroic devotee. He saw in him the inner divinity and sincere love for God. Could he otherwise have delineated divine characters so realistically, so intensely through his plays *Chaitanya Lila* and *Prahlada*? True, he could not submit to any set routine of spiritual practice, his timings of sleep and food being so irregular. Nor could his free spirit be bound to any rules. But how phenomenal was his surrender to the will of Thakur, the slayer of hell's dire woes, whom he gave his power of attorney! Girish was moulded by the Great Moulder from then on. Girish had to suffer a number of bereavements. His two daughters, his wife and son died. He himself suffered from terrible asthma during the last few years. To his brother disciples he said with his usual vigour, 'Do you think I cannot get rid of this ordinary disease? If I roll on the ground of Panchavati and forcefully pray to the Master, this disease will go away. But I know the Master is all-merciful. It is his will that I am undergoing this disease, grief, pain, and suffering. Everything is for my good.'¹

Thakur knew that deep-rooted samskaras cannot be uprooted by mere doctrines. Silently he moulded Girish through the influence of his transcendental love. The garlic cup was heated, removing all odour. All his 'poisoned blood' came out, coming into contact with this holy man. Girish kicked all his old habits and gave up drinking altogether. Girish

had come to his saviour, who knew him more intimately than he himself did. One ray of Light from him illumined all the dark nooks of his mind. Girish later said:

Sri Ramakrishna has taken full possession of my heart and bound it with his love. ... If I have acquired any virtues, it is not through my own efforts, but solely due to his grace. He literally accepted my sins and left my soul free. ...

To this redeemer of my soul I have paid little homage. In a drunken state I have abused him. ... In my attempts to escape all discipline I found myself disciplined without knowing it. Such is my Guru's grace.²

Narendra

The seed of spiritual life was sown in Narendra during his childhood by his mother. Sitting in her lap he heard the tales of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He was an adept in meditation right from his childhood. He could quote passages after passages from the two epics and worshipped Sita-Rama with great devotion. One day their syce denounced married life and told young Naren of the bondage it entails. This gave a terrible blow to his devotion to Sita-Rama. Next moment out went the image of Sita-Rama down below on the pavement. In its place he installed an image of Shiva. What passion for truth even at the tender age of five or six! How easily he could break the illusion, howsoever sweet!

As Naren grew he evinced a preference for intellectual pursuits. John Stuart Mill's *Three Essays on Religion* shook his boyish faith. The study of Hume's scepticism and Herbert Spencer's doctrine of the Unknowable further strengthened his unbelief. A blazing flame of spirituality, Narendra was filled with harrowing conflicts pierced his soul through and through. The great spiritual leaders of Bengal could not satisfy the yearning of his soul. Brahma Samaj, a great organization, filled him with momentary peace but it was far from giving him a remote glimpse of Truth. He wondered if God really existed; and if He did,

could He be seen? In such restlessness of mind Narendra came to his guru, nay, to his own Self, as it were.

As Narendra came to the portal of Thakur's room, the mist of philosophical scepticism vanished, the doors were flung open and he saw God face to face. We see him in the *Gospel* singing 'O Lord, must all my days pass by so utterly in vain?/ ... My poor heart's humble cottage door is standing open wide;/ Be gracious, Lord, and enter there but once, and quench its thirst!³ But the following songs appear best to describe his feelings when he met Thakur:

Lord, Thou hast lifted all my sorrow with vision of Thy face,/ And the magic of Thy beauty has bewitched my mind. (736) The Sovereign of my soul has entered my lowly hut:/ The springs of my love are welling forth on every side./ Tell me, my Beloved! O Thou, the Lord of my heart!/ What treasure shall I lay before Thy Lotus Feet?/ Take Thou my life, my soul; .../ Deign to accept my all. (898-9)

Doubts now gave way to a fiery devotion to the guru, and intellectual scorn ended in total self-surrender. Who could have extinguished the hellfire that was burning in Narendra's mind but he who was the roaring of fire of spirituality himself. Who else could slake the thirst of his soul but he who was the Ocean of Bliss itself. Who else could pierce the veil and show him God but he who had seen Him himself—not only seen but had talked to Him in whispers as if He were nearer than the nearest. Where was Narendra searching for God? Were not all the poor, the miserable, the downtrodden Gods? In vain was he trying to dig a well on the shore of the Ganga. Through the guru's grace he realized that nothing else existed but God. Not only in the highest Brahman but even in the insignificant worm, down to the minutest atom was the same God. Only the manifestation differed. And He was there in the saint and the sinner, the virtuous and the wicked, the sentient and the insentient. Where was He not? The essence of all exist-

tence was divinity of the Soul, only covered by the dust of ego. As soon as the mud is removed it would shine forth in all its effulgent glory. And it could be done by following any of the yogas: karma, bhakti, raja or jnana. Narendra became the heir to all the spiritual treasures of Thakur, the heir to 'immortal Bliss'. Exuberantly he went out into the world, east and west. He proclaimed to all the message of his beloved Master that they were all the sinless pure Self, 'heirs to immortal Bliss', till life-breath departed from him even before he completed forty years on earth.

Keshab Chandra Sen

The Brahmo leader came to him with his followers. Influenced by Western culture, the Brahmo movement stood for various educational and social reforms like widow remarriage, education of women and the abolition of caste. Brahmo Samaj declared the supremacy of reason; it was not founded on the deep spiritual experiences of saints. Keshab was an orator and had written books and articles. His fame spread to the distant shores of London. Queen Victoria herself entertained him. Yet he visited the sage of Dakshineswar bare-chested with offerings of flowers and fruits. He saluted the Master bowing low, touching the ground with his forehead. He dared not open his mouth before this unlettered priest of Kali, fearing that it would be like trying to 'sell needles to a blacksmith'. Fascinated, he and other Brahmo leaders listened to various melodies sung by Thakur as he sang now of Kali, now of Krishna or Gauranga. He could not be monotonous like them who harped only on a monotone of 'I am He' or 'I am Brahman.' Under the influence of Thakur, Keshab's devotion to the Divine Mother deepened. Sometimes Keshab and his followers danced and sang for hours in his company, the Master in the centre and all others dancing around him in circles.

Nor could the other Brahmo leaders escape the spell of Thakur's spiritual fervour. Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, an accomplished

Brahmo preacher in Europe and America, wrote:

I, a Europeanized, civilized, self-centred, semi-sceptical, so-called educated reasoner, and he, a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrour, friendless Hindu devotee? Why should I sit long hours to attend to Him? ... And it is not I only, but dozens like me, who do the same. ...

He worships Shiva, he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna, ... yet is a faithful and most devoted meditator on the perfections of the One Formless, Absolute, Infinite Deity. ... His religion is ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight. ... He, by his child-like bhakti, helped to unfold it [God as our Mother] in our minds wonderfully. (45)

II

The Old Came

To them he said that the world was all hollow without any substance. It was like pickled hog plum—all stone and little pulp. In old age one should retire to Varanasi like Pandit Jaynarayan or to a solitary place away from home and devote one's time to contemplating God and repeating His name. One should not keep on clinging to the world making one's grandson an excuse. When the teeth are all gone how could one enjoy worldly pleasures?

The Young Came

They came in spite of the resistance from their elders. They came to get the 'leather jacket', the armour of bhakti; attracted by his love, who fed them *khir* and other sweets with his own hands; like a mother caressed them, touched their chins and took them on his lap. He made them roll with laughter by his mimicry of the funny *kirtani*, and the silly prattle of the women who went to bathe in the Ganga. In his presence it was a perpetual festivity with God. Amidst all this fun and merrymaking, he always kept before them the goal of God-realization. He constantly warned them of the snares of 'woman and gold' and encouraged them to cultivate knowledge and devotion.

Scholars Came

They came to him though they could read in the shastras all the things they heard from him. They came to hear them from his lips and to see a life lived according to the pre-

cepts of the shastras, a life that was a living shastra. To them he said that one has to purify oneself through sadhana. Who could understand the ways of the Spirit through scholarly reasoning? While expounding scriptures one should remove the 'head and tail' and not confuse others in a maze of scriptural words and *karma kanda*. Being dependent on food, life in Kali yuga was too short to perform scriptural rites.

The Shaktas Came

They thought that their Divine Mother was the Empress of the universe. She had employed that fellow Krishna to ferry men across the ocean of the world. And, lo, their delusion was broken when they learnt from the holy man that Krishna, Hari and the Divine Mother were one and the same Reality. The difference lay only in the names as *jal*, *pani* and water are the various names for one single substance.

The Vaishnavas Came

They thought that Krishna was the Lord of all. None could go to the other shore without taking refuge in Him. They were stunned out of their wits to hear that the Charmer of Radha's heart, the Player of the flute, the Friend of the cowherd boys of Vrindaban and the Darling of Ma Yashoda was none other than the terrible Kali with dishevelled hair, wielding her sword in the battlefield—Kali, whose terrible laughter fills the quarters, Kali, under whose weight the earth trembles and whose three great eyes roll in frenzy while de-

stroying the demons. Who could refute Thakur's words?

The Vedantists Came

To them he said that the path of Vedantic discipline was the path of 'neti, neti; not this', in which all that is unreal is negated and renounced. Reasoning thus, the mind merges in the eternal Brahman and the aspirant goes into samadhi. But was it easy to realize one's identity with Brahman? How hard the rishis laboured to realize Brahman as their inner Consciousness? As long as one was conscious of the body and the objects around, one could not realize 'I am He.' Moreover, as long as one was conscious of doing one's duties, it was not right for one to say that one was the actionless supreme Self. He told them to give up 'I am He' and stick to 'I and Thou' to make merry with God. Even if one has reached the Absolute it would be best to keep oneself in the rela-

tive to enjoy the love of God.

The Bereaved Came

Hari came. He had lost his wife, and did nothing in particular, but was 'taking good care of his parents, brothers and sisters'. He said to him not to lead just a meaningless life like 'Elder, the pumpkin-cutter' but to provide nourishment to the Spirit too by reading books like *Chaitanya Lila* and the *Bhagavata*. To Sarada Charan, who had lost his only son, he asked to take up arms against death by chanting the name of Kali. It was the strongest hedge where Kāla himself shuddered to enter. The disconsolate Brahmani had lost her only daughter. He filled her with peace by telling her that the Ocean, God, alone was real; children were like so many bubbles having a moment's existence. Why grieve? Why not cultivate love for the lotus feet of God?

The story is endless and can go on and on.

III

They all came to Sri Ramakrishna: Hindus, Mussalmans, Sikhs and Christians. To him came countless pilgrims, sages, sadhus, fakirs, and visionaries. To slake their thirst they came to him, who, as Romain Rolland said, 'realized in himself the total unity of this river of God, open to all rivers and all streams'. To each he pointed the way to immortal Bliss according to his own natural taste and inclination. And they are still coming to him: people from all strata of society, from all corners of the world. When the heart is flooded with bhakti one may not come even on foot, by boat, by carriage or by streamer.

One can plunge straight into the waves and waves of liquid love that are rolling on and on from the depths of this ethereal Being. *

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You will have to pray and pray very earnestly. ... There is nothing He will withhold from you. He will give you faith, renunciation, purity, discrimination, dispassion and all. Whatever He has He will give you. He embodied Himself as man because He wanted to give you all these virtues. ... My child, be resigned to Him. Everything will come in time.

—Mahapurush Swami Shivananda

A Survey of the Mind

SWAMI SATYASWARUPANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Like most physicists, Penrose is clearly no idealist. He believes that just as quantum physical theories have been highly successful in explaining the physical world, they should, with suitable modifications, be able to account for 'mentality'. He primarily bases his thesis on the non-computational aspects of mathematical thinking. There are many mathematical problems that a computer could never possibly solve, but which the human brain can grasp and resolve. Penrose believes that such non-computable elements need to be incorporated into the quantum theory to make it complete. He is convinced that effects like quantum entanglement (physically separate particles behaving as if they were somehow interlinked and able to communicate instantly) underlie mentality, and that large-scale quantum effects could be occurring in the brain and could explain its intuitive capabilities.

There are some interesting parallels between Penrose's ideas and the Vedantic conception of the mind. The mind, according to Vedanta, is definitely material. But this material stuff is conceived of as subtle or *anu*, where subtlety implies sensual imperceptibility. This position is similar to Penrose's suggestion of the mind being determined by material properties at the quantum level, which, by definition, is beyond objective observation (as any observation reduces it to the classical physical plane).

But Vedanta does not grant ontological primacy to mentality; it is only a later evolute, while the fundamental entity that acts as the source and also underpins the entire cosmos (both living and non-living) is of the very na-

ture of consciousness (termed Brahman or Atman). The non-relational nature of this entity clearly does not help the positivistic bias for objectification, but the Penrose programme for a material explanation of mentality is certainly not against the Vedantic position.

This Vedantic position needs to be taken serious note of by empiricists. A whole host of confusing terminology, opinions and theories could be sorted out if one accepted the fact that pure consciousness is an entity *sui generis*, that it is the very essence of subjectivity and cannot be objectified. What we *can* study are its effects in the objective world (which follow definite laws) just as the existence of fundamental particles in physics is known from the effects they produce. This Vedantic idea has been very eloquently echoed by the philosopher of science David Chalmers (although he does not seem to be aware of Vedanta):

Physical theories are best suited to explaining why systems have a certain physical structure and how they perform various functions. Most problems in science have this form; to explain life, for example, we need to describe how a physical system can reproduce, adapt and metabolize. But consciousness is a different sort of problem entirely, as it goes beyond the scientific explanation of structure and function.

Of course, neuroscience is not irrelevant to the study of consciousness. For one, it may be able to reveal the nature of the neural correlate of consciousness—the brain processes most directly associated with conscious experience. It may even give a detailed correspondence between specific processes in the brain and related components of experience. But until we know why these processes give rise to conscious experience at all, we will not have crossed what philosopher Joseph Levine has

called the explanatory gap between physical processes and consciousness. Making that leap will demand a new kind of theory.

In searching for an alternative, a key observation is that not all entities in science are explained by more basic entities. In physics, for example, space-time, mass and charge (among other things) are regarded as fundamental features of the world, as they are not reducible to anything simpler. Despite this irreducibility, detailed and useful theories relate these entities to one another in terms of fundamental laws. Together these features and laws explain a great variety of complex and subtle phenomena.

It is widely believed that physics provides a complete catalogue of the universe's fundamental features and laws. As physicist Steven Weinberg puts it in his 1992 book *Dreams of a Final Theory*, the goal of physics is a 'theory of everything' from which all there is to know about the universe can be derived. But Weinberg concedes that there is a problem with consciousness. Despite the power of physical theory, the existence of consciousness does not seem to be derivable from physical laws. He defends physics by arguing that it may eventually explain what he calls the objective correlates of consciousness (that is, the neural correlates), but of course to do this is not to explain consciousness itself. If the existence of consciousness cannot be derived from physical laws, a theory of physics is not a true theory of everything. So a final theory must contain an additional fundamental component.

Toward this end, I propose that conscious experience be considered a fundamental feature, irreducible to anything more basic. The idea may seem strange at first, but consistency seems to demand it. In the 19th century it turned out that electromagnetic phenomena could not be explained in terms of previously known principles. As a consequence, scientists introduced electric charge as a new fundamental entity and studied the associated fundamental laws. Similar reasoning should be applied to consciousness. If existing fundamental theories cannot encompass it, then something fundamental is required.¹

Incidentally, Vedanta and Yoga are specifically concerned with the study of the laws that

pertain to consciousness and its manifestations in the physical world. A detailed study of these laws, however, is beyond the scope of this article.

The Biological Perspective

Human biology has not yet measured up to Penrose's speculations. Despite remarkable advances in molecular biology, mental function still remains largely equated with the brain and neural network. However, many recent developments call for a fundamental change in this viewpoint. First, neuronal conduction appears to be simply too slow to account for a number of rapid, conscious, split-second responses (termed 'ballistic' movements) that we make during many of our daily activities. Second, the neural network is not simply transmission lines for electrical impulses. A whole host of chemicals—neurotransmitters—act as mediators in the process of neuronal transmission, and have important independent roles in modulating brain function. Further, the nervous system is not the sole control mechanism in the body. There is the endocrine system, which modulates a whole host of functions through a series of hormones. The neural and endocrine network is in turn closely linked with another class of molecules comprising the immune system, which defends the body against the constant assault of foreign organisms and chemicals trying to enter the body. A fourth factor that is being increasingly recognized as crucially related to these three is the human psyche. This forms the psycho-neuro-endocrine-immune axis, the control system of the body, each of the four components of which interacts with the others to produce a harmoniously orchestrated 'master-control' mechanism. The psyche is the odd one out in this quadruple, being poorly defined in material terms. At the present state of knowledge physiologists identify neurotransmitters and related brain chemicals as closely associated with psychic function. The evidence for this comes from the alter-

ations in brain biochemistry noted in individuals with psychiatric illnesses. Also, specific chemicals injected at particular sites in the brain can elicit very specific emotional responses. And, of course, the familiar sensation of sudden fright or anger is well correlated with the release of catecholamines from the adrenal glands, which course through the blood stream to all body tissues.

So, if organic molecules are the prime mediators of psychic function, how do they actually manage to do this? Organic molecules have always been closely associated with the structure of living organisms, but if, and why, they have a specific role in mediating life remains unclear. The two defining characteristics of life are metabolism and reproduction. Metabolism enables living organisms to maintain their integrity, organization and growth in the face of the constant movement towards dissipation and disintegration, a fundamental physical process governed by the second law of thermodynamics—the law of entropy. Reproduction, the process by which an organism is able to produce one or more similar organisms starting with a part of itself, ensures growth and continuity of the herd. Both these activities require what may be termed ‘intelligence’, that is, the ability to possess, organize and put to use a specific piece of information or know-how. Of course, we are here speaking of intrinsic ‘intelligence’. Thus a computer chip that is able to run a programme to solve a complex mathematical problem does not in itself possess the intelligence inherent in the programme. Its inherent ‘intelligence’ is the ability of its semiconductor body to either allow or prevent (depending on the biasing) the flow of a current through its parts which codes the 0 and 1 of the binary logical system fundamental to its complex use. (It is true that we are not apt to look at material properties as intelligent just as the Sankhyas look upon Prakriti, or nature, as insentient. Our analogy here is with respect to intrinsic capabilities. Also, it is worth remembering

that according to Advaita Vedanta even the apparently non-intelligent nature is an evolute of consciousness, and is capable of mediating it.)

Traditionally, researchers have tried to track down this intelligence to a specific cellular component (the cell being the basic living unit of most organisms), and the most obvious candidate is the DNA (or in some cases the RNA), the chemical constituent of the genes, which code all the information necessary to maintain cellular function. This brings one back to the basic question: If the DNA molecules are nothing but hydrogen, carbon, nitrogen and oxygen atoms arranged in a specific double helical structure, what enables them to mediate the intelligence necessary for life, something that the hundred-odd other atoms known to man seem unable to do? Or, for that matter, is there any fundamental difference between the molecular components of living and non-living objects? The recent discovery of prions (which are small strands of protein that by virtue of an unusual configuration can replace similar proteins in the brain and are thus responsible for the devastating mad-cow disease) has made the dividing line between the living and the non-living very fuzzy. They lack nucleic acids, which have till now been taken as a sine qua non of life, but behave like infectious agents and can increase in numbers by a process of recruitment—inducing normal prion proteins to change their configuration to that of the abnormal prion. Molecular configuration clearly has important implications for the ‘intelligence’ associated with life. There is evidence that even the water associated with cells (and our bodies are, in terms of weight, seventy per cent water), is ‘ordered’ differently than the water in the environment. These orderings and configurations are obviously determined by the physical interactions at the subatomic or quantum level. Quantum physical interactions are also crucial for the integrity and functional capacity of the nucleic acid sequences that make up the genes and they are

again centrally involved in such molecular interactions as 'recognition' of foreign antigens by the immune molecules of the body. But it will be some time before the biologists will be ready to explain important biological phenomena in quantum physical terms. Swami Ranganathanandaji had insightfully noted in his correspondence with Julian Huxley over thirty years ago: 'Molecular biology has now some understanding of the genetic material and its chemical properties and processes. But the conclusions about life as a whole based on this understanding are bound to undergo revolutionary changes as and when molecular biology develops, as in the case of twentieth-century physics, into first its atomic and then its nuclear dimension.'²

The concept that the physical properties of the elements and molecules making up the human body have an important role in mediating mentality has important ramifications.

First, each human cell is potentially 'intelligent', and the human mind could as much be associated (as the Vedantists point out) with the entire human body as it is with the human nervous system. After all, developmentally speaking, it is a single-celled zygote that develops into an entire human being, and hence the zygote contains all the information necessary for the process (a capacity termed *totipotency* or *pluripotency*). Another remarkable phenomenon that is being widely recognized is the capacity of pluripotent stem cells in the blood and bone marrow to migrate into other tissues and get transformed into the cells of that particular organ. Even cardiac muscle cells (which were till now thought to be incapable of regeneration) have recently been reported to have been formed by this process in adult humans. Most of the mature tissue cells were thought to lose this capacity for de-differentiation. But the recent success of cloning experiments have shown that almost any body cell can be induced not only to de-differentiate, but to serve as the precursor for an entire living being (like a sheep).

That all this marvellously coordinated function of the tissues in our body remains largely beyond our conscious perception and conscious control does not run counter to the notion of mentality. That most of our mental activity occurs at a subconscious or even unconscious level is now a well-accepted fact, especially after the popularization of this concept by Freud and other psychologists, although Yoga psychology had not only recognized this fact but systematically elaborated on this a couple of millennia ago. Moreover, the fact that conscious and unconscious mental activity can profoundly affect body physiology, and that, conversely, our mental disposition can be altered by physiological changes in the body, are facts supported by numerous objective studies.

A second, and even more intriguing, corollary of the quantum physical determination of mentality is the ability of mental effects to override the physical boundaries of the body. If, as the philosopher of science Abner Shimony (reiterating the viewpoint of Alfred N Whitehead) has suggested, a 'proto-mentality' needs to be granted to elementary particles, then biological systems are simply more sophisticated organizers of mentality, which literally makes up the physical universe. Incidentally, this position, termed *panpsychism*, has been espoused by a whole host of thinkers over the ages, including men like Leibniz and Teilhard de Chardin. It has been criticized for proposing too radical a transformation of physics; but this is precisely what Penrose is now proposing. So, even though we readily recognize the physical influence of the environment on our bodies and our capacity to alter the environment through physical means, we usually fail to take notice of subtler interactions that are often characterized as 'mental'. Most of us would have had the experience of our thoughts coming true, of a thought casually passing through our minds physically coming to pass, or of a premonition coming true. We are usually apt to pass these off as mere coinci-

dences unless we have some exceptional or remarkably elaborate experience. Carl Jung, who named this phenomenon *synchronicity*, believed that many of these experiences cannot be explained as chance coincidences; instead, they suggest that there is another kind of 'order' in the universe in addition to that described by causality, an order attributed to what Jung called the 'collective unconscious' or the 'archetype', which is 'psychoid' in character, that is, it is both psychological and physical.³ Popular science writers are apt to relate such phenomena to the quantum physical phenomenon of 'entanglement', but at present such associations remain highly speculative. But the fact remains that our present psychophysiological models are far from satisfactory in explaining transpersonal interactions even though we tacitly assume them to be so. There are numerous areas in which non-verbal communication predominates—the rapport and understanding that we share with our colleagues and friends, the finely coordinated activity generated in complex team efforts (team sports and orchestral music included), the ability of animals and even plants to respond to the thoughts and emotions of their caretakers, are all common occurrences that are very difficult to explain in terms of physical interactions alone. Even more striking are incidences of clairvoyance and clairaudience and related paranormal phenomena. Unfortunately, studies in these areas are often vitiated by frauds and the credulous, and genuine events are summarily dismissed by the orthodox scientific establishment steeped in scientific dogma or biased by personal and theological inclinations.

There are, of course, notable exceptions. Several groups at important medical centres in the US have recently shown a keenness to study the efficacy of prayer and of what they term 'distant healing intention'. In several reports investigators have found that if one gets people to pray for or send strong thoughts for healing critically ill patients, then they seem to

do better than similar patients for whom no such measure was undertaken. The effect did not appear to depend on the proximity of the patient and the person praying, nor on their knowing each other.⁴ The reputed international journal *Annals of Internal Medicine* recently reviewed twenty-three studies of intercessory prayer (that is, a prayer by somebody else for the patient), found a positive effect in fifty-seven per cent and concluded that 'the evidence thus far merits further study'. A recent American study, the MANTRA (Monitoring and Actualization of Noetic Training) project, of patients with life-threatening heart problems, found that off-site intercessory prayer reduced the rate of short- and long-term complications (although the difference was not statistically significant, probably because the number of patients studied was small). None of these studies was very sophisticated and the results were far from conclusive, yet the very fact that such phenomena are being seriously studied is of importance.

Insights from Yoga-Vedanta

The Vedanta and Yoga systems have very important insights to offer in this matter. The traditional Vedantic epistemological position requires the mind to reach out and make contact with the object for perception to take place.⁵ In the case of visual perception it amounts to the mind using the eye and associated visual systems as the portal for reaching out to the object and getting 'moulded' in the form of the object (leading to the formation of a mental mode, or *vritti*, of the form of the object). The self of the subject is thus linked to the object by this *vritti*, and the consciousness underlying and illuminating this complex gives rise to the subjective awareness of the object. The light rays reaching the eye only have an auxiliary role in this process. It is worth reiterating here that the Vedantists recognize consciousness as a distinct entity independent of and prior to the objective material world from which the latter evolves by a process termed

vivarta, or apparent transformation. It is omnipresent, the eternal subject 'illuminating' all objective phenomena and is not to be equated with perceptual awareness (*chetana*), which depends on the functioning of a material mind. Swami Vivekananda, who had met Hermann Helmholtz when he participated at the International Electrical Congress in Chicago in 1893, and had probably known about the latter's formulations on the physiology and psychology of vision (and these are still considered valid), has presented a slightly modified version of the Vedantic epistemology of perception. According to him, the sense organs carry the impulse generated by light falling on the retina to the mind which then 'reacts', and this reaction is what we call visual perception.⁶

In the 'mind equals brain function' model of the 'identity theorists' there is simply no scope for anything reaching out of the body from within. Neuroscientists, who, by and large, would vouch for this theory, try to explain vision in terms of electrical impulses generated as a consequence of photo-chemical reactions in the specialized cells of the retina called rods and cones, when light falls on them. These impulses are then systematically processed and transmitted to the brain, where it gives rise to conscious visual awareness. Now, even in this model vision does not simply involve a passive flow of impulses from the peripherally situated eye to the brain. Impulses also flow down from the higher brain regions to the periphery and influence what we consciously see. More importantly, there is simply no explanation for the qualitative component (technically termed *qualia*) of the visual experience. After all, we see *colours*, blue, red and the like, and not electrical impulses. Way back in 1671, Newton had observed, 'The rays (of light), to speak properly, are not coloured. In them there is nothing else than a certain power and disposition to stir up sensation of this or that colour.'⁷ Also, although the electrical impulses coursing through the optic

nerves are identical in all neurons, they get interpreted variously as spatial configuration, colour and so on. Hence colour, psychologists argue, is in the mind.⁸ We therefore need a more fundamental understanding of the structure of the mind than what the neurophysiologists now offer us in order to understand this interpretive function (the 'reaction' in Swami Vivekananda's words). And when we learn to think in terms of physical properties more subtle than electrical impulses, the 'reaching out of the human mind' posited by Vedantists may not appear as counter-intuitive as it does now.

Patanjali's Yoga system notes that not only does the mind reach out to particular objects, it can reach out to virtually any object in the universe. This all-pervasiveness of the mind, termed *vibhūta*,⁹ is not so much a spatial extension in classical physical terms, but comprises the inherent potential to know any and every object in the universe. This is not something mystical because scientists are actually reaching out to the farthest reaches of the universe as much with their minds as with their instruments of astronomical observation. In fact, there is nothing unreasonable about the efficacy of mathematical and related scientific thought in explaining the objective world, simply because this capacity is built into the very structure of the mind (as is the human capacity for abstract language).

Patanjali has detailed the process (called *saṁyama*) by which the mind not only gets to know an object but can exactly ascertain its modifications in the past and future. *Samyama* (comprising sequentially of *dhāraṇā*, *dhyana* and *samadhi*)¹⁰ involves concentration of the mind on an object to the exclusion of all other mental processes. In a successful *saṁyama* the concentration is of such high order that the object alone occupies the field of awareness and the mind is able to exclude awareness of the experiencing self as also of its own functioning. We all have had fleeting, involuntary glimpses of this process when something riv-

ets our attention, but a consciously controlled and prolonged *samīyama* calls for a prolonged and disciplined practice of yoga. The yogi proficient in *samīyama* can use it to focus on the flux (*parināma*) in terms of time, state and content of any objective system and get to know the exact past course and the most likely future fate of the system.¹¹ This is precisely what we do, though very clumsily, when we infer the past and project the future of any object, and this is how scientists build up the edifice of science, again in a very halting fashion. But the mind, Patanjali tells us, is structured to see this past and future as a continuum in the present instant, much like seeing the lifeline of a system in a space-time graph or phase-space diagram. In fact, for a mind focused in *samīyama*, the very concept of temporal flux disappears (this actually is a test of successful *samīyama*, or of one-pointed concentration in general). It may be mentioned in passing that there are physicists who believe that a valid unified field theory would eliminate time as a variable.¹²

The conative capabilities of a mind in *samīyama*, as detailed by Patanjali, are even more impressive, in that there is hardly a thing that the mind cannot accomplish provided its energies are controlled, focused and appropriately directed.¹³

It is worth remembering that the mental properties that Patanjali delineates become evident only in a mind capable of sustained and habitual, one-pointed focus after it is purified of its own inherently distracting habits and passions. This is a dauntingly difficult task, as any sincere practitioner could tell, no less difficult than the task of actually getting a system into a quantum coherent state at room temperatures, a property that Penrose believes is important in the physical description of the mind. All the same, any satisfactory model of the mind must account for these properties, difficult as they may be of objective observation, even as unified field theorists must account for the host of real and virtual

subatomic particles, whose existence only the rare physicist involved in very high energy experiments can actually corroborate. And just as astrophysicists reach out to the deeper recesses of outer space and particle physicists go deep underground to detect elusive subatomic particles, researchers need to develop sophisticated methodologies to study the rare minds that have attained to higher states charted out by Patanjali, for an accurate understanding of the structure and function of the human mind.

(To be concluded)

Notes and References

1. David Chalmers, 'The Hidden Mind' in *Scientific American*, Special Edition, 31 August 2002, 96.
2. See Swami Ranganathananda, *The Message of the Upanisads* (Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2001), 603.
3. One of Jung's patients vividly brought home this concept by having an elaborate hallucination that closely resembled an ancient Persian myth about which the patient could not have had a prior knowledge.
4. See Larry Dossey, *Reinventing Medicine* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 37-60.
5. See 'Perception' in *Vedanta Paribhasha of Dharmaraja Adhvarindra*, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983).
6. See 'The Real and the Apparent Man' in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2,263-88.
7. Quoted in P G Zimbardo, *Psychology and Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 229.
8. Ibid.
9. See Vyasa's commentary on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, 4.10.
10. *Yoga Sutras*, 3.1-4.
11. Ibid., 3.16.
12. Tim Folger, 'From Here to Eternity' in *Discover*, December 2000, 54.
13. Compare 'Vibhuti Pada', *Yoga Sutras*.

Sri Ramakrishna: The Significance of His Advent

SWAMI SANDARSHANANANDA

Prologue

The world is now wearing an unsightly look, reeking of an imminent calamity. The sacrilege committed by the self-serving everywhere is unbounded; its purging seems impossible. Among the animals, tyranny of the strong over the weak is instinctive. Unfortunately, it seems to be the case with the intelligent *Homo sapiens* too. Might and money seem to rule the roost. The two have melted into a dubious one to perpetrate the mischief. The richer we are, the larger is our influence. Throwing a piece before the hapless, we draw him to owe allegiance to us; if he chooses to remain wayward, we take umbrage at him and lead him to face dire consequences. Prowess of the penny is the peril of the day. As it is true for individuals, so is it true for nations.

This lamentable condition earnestly bids us to wake up to our senses immediately. While pride and pleasure have on the one hand reduced a few of us into brutes, penury and privation on the other have turned a majority of us cynical. It is, in fine, the crisis of our character that has relegated us to the dungeon of distress. To change the prevailing circumstances is indeed difficult, but not absurd, given the right intention for its accomplishment. We ought to realize the fact that the world will not change unless we change ourselves.

Needless to mention, due to globalization our fates are inextricably linked with each other. Accordingly, 'sharing' is said to be the key to a healthy society. But can it be effective without a thorough change in the attitude of man? Is it not ridiculous to expect brotherly behaviour between man and man before his spiritual regeneration? Why should one feel

for others if one harbours no sense of belonging to them? Addressing basic queries such as these could perhaps pave the path of peace for us.

Talking of the inner transformation we have to simultaneously think about an effective stimulus for its achievement. There is hardly any room for argument regarding the truth that, despite numerous sedulous attempts to obliterate it or use it for evil purposes, religion has not lost an iota of its importance yet. Undoubtedly, it is still the only means to do good to humanity, for religion is essentially ingrained in man and it alone rekindles all auspicious qualities in him, when he makes it the summum bonum of his life. It is the great 'milch cow' that 'has given many kicks, but never mind, it gives a great deal of milk. The milkman does not mind the kick of the cow which gives much milk.'¹

Paradoxically, although man could ill afford to dispense with religion, he has nevertheless failed to comprehend that religion is, in fact, one and universal; only its manifestations are many and variable; its core is immutable and eternal as it is primarily concerned only with the Absolute, or God. The story of human civilization is a procession of rise and fall of events with the progress of time. And religion is all the time beside them, remaining in people's constitution, occasionally unfolding itself, bringing out the propitious in every sphere of human endeavour. But sometimes when it is deeply buried under the rubble of arrant materialism, its physical appearance before us is urgently necessitated, and the most practical way of its happening is the arising in a human form of what we call an incarnation of God. Being man, maybe he then behaves like any other person, but he lives the

life of Religion Eternal, demonstrating its intricacies in his own character, which conspicuously sets Him apart from the common run of men.

Ironically, because of our ignorance our inane selves are seldom aware of his august presence in our midst, though we require him the most. He is there in front of us in blood and flesh and incessantly working to lay the foundation for a revolution to be perpetuated for centuries, evolving a spiritual metamorphosis in the world.

The significance of the advent of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna in modern times becomes intelligible only if it is considered in this light. While he was living with us sometime ago, we were not bothered about him. Now that we are in trouble and are in search of a mooring to lay anchor, we are beginning to learn the implications of his contributions. He was so long a 'gift unopened', as it were.

Man today is tired of the rat race and the persecutions of gross sectarianism. The hard slogs of genuflections and homilies from the pulpits have bored him intolerably. It is Sri Ramakrishna who has first shown that religion is intense love of God and its surge washes out all discriminations. Smitten with its intensity man is able to transcend all human limitations. Barriers of colour, clime and creed no more pose vicious distinctions before him. To him then the Lord is the Source of all beings and we, His children, have a common identity in His existence. This simple but profound message of Sri Ramakrishna is the panacea for all human sufferings since it bears no stigma of fanaticism and lopsidedness.

The Preceptor

Sri Krishna is compared to the milkman who milks the cows of supreme Knowledge (the Upanishads) for the benefit of the wise and Arjuna, the calf.² Being His able disciple, Arjuna manifests the best in him and works like a medium to carry the *Bhagavadgita* to the world at large for its spiritual nourishment.

The relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda is somewhat similar. When the existence of God was critically questioned in the nineteenth century, Sri Ramakrishna made God palpable to Swamiji so surely as to make him his follower for life. Since then Swamiji did not waver from that position till he breathed his last. Swamiji asked Sri Ramakrishna if he had seen God. Pat came the reply, 'Yes, I see Him just as I see you, only in a much intenser sense. God can be realised. One can see and talk with Him as I am doing with you.'³ These words he spoke with extraordinary aplomb. It diminished all confusions in Swamiji and he was sure that religion is direct perception of God. In 1896, while interpreting religion in a logical and scientific language to an enlightened audience in America, he said, 'It is a vision, an inspiration, a plunge into the unknown and unknowable, making the unknowable *more than known*, for it can never be "*known*" (*emphasis added*).'⁴ But it took almost a quixotic effort for Sri Ramakrishna to tame the 'bull' in Vivekananda. Once tamed, his loyalty to him was total, as indicated by his confession later: 'I love that Brahmin priest [Sri Ramakrishna] intensely, and therefore, love whatever he used to love, whatever he used to regard!' (7.413-4)

On the eve of taking his sannyasa vows, Swamiji was torn between his obligation towards his mother and younger brothers and to his guru. He wrote in a letter to Haridas Viharidas Desai from Chicago on 29 January 1894, 'So on the one hand, my vision of the future of Indian religion and that of the whole world, my love for the millions of beings sinking down and down for ages with nobody to help them, nay, nobody with even a thought for them; on the other hand, making those who are nearest and dearest to me miserable; I choose the former.' (8.297-8) Swamiji was grateful that he 'had the good fortune to sit at Sri Ramakrishna's feet for years.' He observed that Sri Ramakrishna

would see in every sect the same spirit working,

the same God; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the outcast, for the downtrodden, for everyone in this world, inside India or outside India; and at the same time whose grand brilliant intellect would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonise all conflicting sects, not only in India but outside of India, and bring a marvellous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart into existence. (3.267)

Sri Ramakrishna makes a clean breast of the fact that a particular religion is not a strait-jacket that must fit all and sundry in the same manner, irrespective of their individualities. The only purpose of religion is realization of God. And there may be innumerable ways to serve this purpose. As one kind of food cannot be suitable for all, so also one single faith cannot be equally useful for all, though the aim of all faiths is to win love of God, which is the ultimate unifying factor among their followers in the one universal perspective of Religion. Any deliberate attempt to bind it in the stringent laws of rituals and practices is a sham. He, therefore, professed varieties of religious experiences by dint of his own spiritual attainment. He said that he would like to taste the love of God in as many ways as possible. His one constant prayer to the Lord was that he should not be made a 'plastic saint'.

The Precept

Laden with such teachings, the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* is a treasure trove to many all over the world, cutting across the boundaries of countries and creeds. That relentless flood of passion for God with continuous flow of scenes is never to be found in any other book of its kind. The slightest suggestion or hint regarding Him from any aspirant, whether Christian, Hindu or Muslim, was enough to transport Sri Ramakrishna to the realm of God in blissful ecstasy. Vivid descriptions of such day-to-day happenings from his life have made the *Gospel* a precious document.

The lucre fetched by technological ad-

vancement has made man arrogant and restless. The cause of his moroseness is his restive mind engrossed in the lust for pelf and power. He has consciously put their chain upon himself and has missed thus the freedom of thought. The crusading mind of Sri Ramakrishna revolted against their atrocity and forsook the tinsel of modern society. His conscience was clear:

Just because ... this proving that man is *not a machine* is the essence of all religious thought, it is impossible to think it in the routine mechanical way. It is the tendency to bring everything down to the level of a machine that has given the West its wonderful prosperity. And it is this which has driven away all religion from its doors. Even the little that is left, the West has reduced to a systematic drill. (8.302)

Sri Ramakrishna was left disgruntled, though unscathed by the deep agony inflicted by extravagant epicureanism. He abandoned 'bread-winning education' to show that academic exercise is not absolutely necessary to be happy in life. Rather, if it is pursued with an ambition in view, it multiplies desires and strengthens the ego. In the demeanour of a poor villager with a veneer of rusticity, he exhibited that living a simple life surrendering to God was the only means for happiness and tranquillity. Poised at the farthest end from the formal study of scriptures and metaphysics, he exerted an undeniable appeal on the educated clique around him who were believed to have been responsible for the Indian renaissance. To stay indifferent in the face of the irresistible lure of the spiritual opulence of his character was difficult for them. What is the harm in recognizing a personality such as his who proved himself to be nonpareil among his peers, as our pathfinder

who never did or thought anything unholy, whose intellect only through intuition stands head and shoulders above all the other prophets, because they were all one-sided? It was he that brought first to the world this idea of truth not *in* but *of* every religion, which is gaining ground all over the world, and that without the

help of science or philosophy or any other acquirement.' (8.299)

The concept of 'the divinity of man' propounded by Sri Ramakrishna was an illustrious landmark in the history of mankind. It has altered the long-nurtured concept of 'man the sinner'. He argues, if we are the children of the Lord, and if He happens to be immortal Bliss and Holiness per se, where is there space for us to be sad and sinful? Light and darkness cannot reside together; one replaces the other. One who takes refuge in the Lord and whose mind is absorbed in His glory can never nurse impious thoughts. He practises what he preaches and reaches its acme, showing that in him 'the man was all dead and only God remained; he actually could not see sin, he was literally "*of purer eyes than to behold iniquity*".' (7.85; *emphasis added*)

Polytheism and idol worship would not perturb Sri Ramakrishna the least. Contrarily, they were grist to his mill as he was keen on realizing God through different methods of spiritual practice. 'If God was infinite, infinite were the ways to reach Him' was his conviction. Why should he then be short of anything? So, resorting to the essence of all the major religions, apparently conflicting, he realized God, and in the process confirmed that devotion to God is central to all religions; short of that religion is nonsense. All quarrels are over the chaff leaving the grain, which is available in all faiths. Dualism, qualified non-dualism and pure non-dualism, he professed, were not contradictory, but complementary to each other. Adopting these moods from time to time like a 'psychic amphibian', he used to float between them with ease and brilliance. Watching him day in and day out, Swami Vivekananda arrived at the following conclusion:

Such a unique personality, such a synthesis of the utmost of Jnana, Yoga, Bhakti and Karma, has never before appeared among mankind. The life of Sri Ramakrishna proves that the greatest breadth, the highest catholicity and the

utmost intensity can exist side by side in the same individual, and that society also can be constructed like that, for society is nothing but an aggregate of individuals.

He is the true disciple and follower of Sri Ramakrishna, whose character is perfect and all-sided like this. The formation of such a perfect character is the ideal of this age, and everyone should strive for that alone.' (7.412)

Gradually but perceptibly, it is dawning on the probing minds of people of all walks of life from all parts of the world that Sri Ramakrishna gave in one single life the remedies of all human maladies, for the present and for centuries ahead. In that respect he is more modern than the most modern man of our times and, eventually, is the most indispensable spiritual leader for us. Evidence of this fact is traceable to the works of minds susceptible to the compelling spell he is unobtrusively casting everywhere. For instance, introducing himself as 'a Christian who finds himself just as much at home in the Indian spiritual sphere as he does in his inherited Catholic faith', the German author Hans Torwesten writes introducing his book *Ramakrishna and Christ*:

For most Christians, Ramakrishna—if they know him at all—is fortunately not a red rag to a bull. Christians have written almost always with approval about him and about the Ramakrishna Mission founded by his disciple Swami Vivekananda. When his picture was placed on the altar one evening in an English Dominican friary during a retreat in which Hindus as well as Catholics and Protestants participated and an Indian Swami celebrated a short Arati service before it, none of the Christians stood up to tear down the picture. It even happens that a Benedictine monk hangs up a large picture of Ramakrishna in his study and this not in India, as a gesture of tolerance, but in Germany, in the very depths of the Western World. One at once asks oneself what such a monk can see in Ramakrishna—a sage, a Hindu Saint Francis or even a revelation of God—only of course on a more modest scale than the revelation of God in Christ.⁵

Torwesten then describes Ramakrishna as a 'phenomenon' which has always been approached with a certain warmth of feeling and sympathy 'though a serious encounter with him has been avoided, because in some way he is too close to Christians.' And the alluded apprehension is understandable because of Sri Ramakrishna's all-consuming spiritual eminence.

Sri Ramakrishna repudiated book learning, but was taught by nature itself, so his learning was not partial. His knowledge was complete. His penetrating insight was able to perceive our weaknesses and, thereby, provide their treatments. He worshipped God as the Mother of the universe. He was a child in Her lap; he was never separate from Her. Hence his whole being was obviously saturated with the sentiment of God the Mother. He was aware that the world was Her divine play and we are all caught in its mesh, a make-believe of unreality as reality. Winning Her affection we have somehow to wiggle ourselves free from the hook of Her inscrutable charm.

That is what is practically displayed by Sri Ramakrishna. The tenor of his life demonstrated that to surrender to God totally is to be entirely independent of the flux of mundane affairs. He had proved that 'The ideal man is he who, in the midst of the greatest silence and solitude, finds the intensest activity, and in the midst of the intensest activity, finds the silence and solitude of the desert.'⁶ The complexity of our life has made us too self-conscious and lonely in spite of our coexistence with our dear ones. The frustration of this 'loneliness' is the root of our sufferings as it is taking us away from God. Sri Ramakrishna has shown us how to be at rest being alone with God in the midst of the din and bustle of the world. The blissful state of 'Aloneness' in the company of the Divine Mother, as he enjoyed without break, only can save us from the predicament of this mire. We must know for sure that the love of God is the only recipe that can make our life

delectable and meaningful; in its absence everything on earth is dull and deplorable.

Swamiji punctiliously performed the task of teaching the universal religion as entrusted by his Master. His allegiance to him was exemplary. In the course of a lecture delivered after returning from America, he publicly pronounced with extreme humility: '... let me say now that if I have told you one word of truth, it was his and his alone, and if I have told you many things which were not true, which were not correct, which were not beneficial to the human race, they were all mine, and on me is the responsibility.' (3.268)

Epilogue

Of all the persons who came in close contact with Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji was the one whom he considered the most competent bearer of his message, for he alone could judge its importance for posterity. He says, 'He is the method, that wonderful unconscious method! ... He lived that great life; and I read the meaning. Never a word of condemnation for any!' (8.267)

The problem is with our endless cravings. Sri Ramakrishna says the hassle will be over once the desires in our hearts are extinguished for good. The culture of self-aggrandizement has induced us into the worst kind of contest and jealousy. In the strain of his voice Swamiji therefore says, 'The Lord has hidden Himself best, and His work is best; so he who hides himself best, accomplishes most.' (7.15)

Should we require assistance to earn solace, to be away from the inferno of worldly suffering, we must not hesitate to pick up the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* lying at our elbow. We will know from it how to put God in the middle of our existence in order to convert our life into a 'pleasure hut'. In this connection, the book *Sri Ramakrishna: A Prophet for the New Age* by Richard Schiffman also commends itself for useful reading. The author concludes his work saying about Sri Ramakrishna:

The Baul [a pastoral folk singer of Bengal] had come and gone. But his band would continue to dance their way through nearly half of the twentieth century. Through most of the nations of the earth, through India, through the alien lands of Europe and America and the Far East, they would dance their heady dance—unsung, unknown perhaps to the great mass of men, but not without sowing the flaming seeds of Love on the winds of the dark age of untruth.⁷

Sri Ramakrishna is the spiritual paradigm for the new era and Swamiji is the spearhead of the movement initiated by him. They have shown a silver lining of hope, in the midst of the chaos, of a seeming grey future of mankind. The earlier we fall in line with their direction, the better it is for us. *

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3. Swami Gambhirananda, *History of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), 16.
4. CW, 3.1.
5. Hans Torwesten, *Ramakrishna and Christ* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1999), xi.
6. CW, 1.34.
7. Richard Schiffman, *Sri Ramakrishna: A Prophet for the New Age* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1994), 228.

An Interview with God

I dreamt I had an interview with God.

I asked, 'As a parent, what are some of life's lessons you want your children to learn?'

God replied, 'To learn they cannot make anyone love them. All they can do is let themselves be loved.'

'To learn that it is not good to compare themselves with others.'

'To learn to forgive by practising forgiveness.'

'To learn that it only takes a few seconds to open profound wounds in those they love, and it can take many years to heal them.'

'To learn that a rich person is not one who has the most, but one who needs the least.'

'To learn that there are people who love them dearly, but simply do not yet know how to express or show their feelings.'

'To learn that two people can look at the same thing, and see it differently.'

'To learn that it is not enough that they forgive one another, but they must also forgive themselves.'

'Thank you for your time,' I said humbly. 'Is there anything else you would like your children to know?'

God smiled and said, 'Just know that I am with them—always.'

—from cyberspace

Parabrahma Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

The means to the realization of the three-footed (*tripāda*) Brahman¹

त्रिपाद्ब्रह्मप्रापकोपायः

प्राणदेवाश्चत्वारः । ताः सर्वाः नाड्यः सुषुप्तश्येनाकाशवत् । यथा श्येनः खमाश्रित्य याति स्वमालयं कुलायम् । एवं सुषुप्तं ब्रूतायं च परं च । स सर्वत्र हिरण्मये परे कोशे अमृता ह्येषा नाडीत्रयं संचरति । तस्य त्रिपादं ब्रह्म एषात्रेष्य ततोऽनुतिष्ठति । अन्यत्र ब्रूतायं च परं च । ... ॥२॥

2. The deities presiding over *prāṇa* (vital force) are four.² All those *nāḍis* (nerves) [wherein the above four deities are experienced are also four.³ Of these, the first two deities rest during deep sleep as a hawk [flying] in the sky.⁴ Just as a hawk flying in the sky goes [when fatigued] into its own abode, [that is,] the nest, [even] so the speaker [*jīva*, the self, after experiencing] this [that is, waking-state phenomena] and the other [that is, dream-state phenomena, rests in] deep sleep.⁵ That self [though always and ever moving] everywhere in the golden (resplendent, self-luminous) supreme (transcendental) sheath⁶—[being] immortal indeed, this [self] well traverses [along the] three *nāḍis*.⁷ Of this self [leaving one foot (or quarter) as being related to *avidyā*, or ignorance, there remain three feet (or quarters). Hence [it is] called the ‘three-footed’ or] *tripād-brahman*. Now, [the shining one (Deity) designated as the *jīva*], on thus attaining [its own true nature], remains from then on [as That Brahman alone, having been liberated or released from the bondage of ignorance].⁸ Elsewhere [in the state of ignorance], the speaker [that is, the *jīva*, wanders about in] this and the other [that is, in the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep, and the world of relative existence arising therefrom].⁹ ...

(To be continued)

Notes

1. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin introduces this new section with the following introductory remarks: What are the means leading to the ‘three-footed’ Brahman (*tripād-brahman*) attained through the knowledge of the attributeless Brahman (*nirviśeṣa brahman*)? This is being stated presently, starting with ‘The deities presiding over *prāṇa* ...’. It has been stated in the earlier section that selfless (desireless) action does not drag a person down; on the other hand, such action (work) leads him to the attainment of Brahmanhood through Knowledge arising from purification of the mind. The question then arises: What is the nature of that Brahman? What are the means of attaining such Brahman? The elucidation of the answers to these questions is begun with the statement ‘The deities presiding over *prāṇa* are four in number.’ The spectrum of these four deities ranges from *viśva* on the one side to *turiya* on the other.
2. The names of these four deities are mentioned in Upaniṣad Brahmayogin’s commentary as follows : ‘Beginning with *viśva* and ending in *turiya*.’ It is clear from this that the first of these four *devas* is *viśva* while the last is *turiya*. Traditionally, the modes of the Self associated with the states of waking, dream and deep (dreamless) sleep have been designated as *viśva*, *taijasa* and *prājña* respectively, so that one can infer that the other two, the second and the third, are *taijasa* and *prājña* respectively.
3. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin gives the names of these *nāḍis* as follows: *ramā*, *aramā*, *icchā* and *punarbhava*.
4. The two deities, taking recourse to the *ramā* and *aramā* *nāḍis*, fatigued during waking- and dream-

state transactions quietly rest during deep sleep just as a tired hawk roaming in the sky seeks rest in its own nest.

5. The *jīva*, or the self, goes through a variety of experiences in the waking world (*jāgrad-avasthā*) and experiences another series of phenomena in the dream world (*swapna avasthā*). Being fatigued by both these experiences and transactions (*vyavahāra*), it enters into deep sleep going through the channels of the twofold *nāḍis*. See *Byhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*, 4.3.19.
6. The space of the heart (*hṛdayākāśa*), which is the resting place of the self in deep sleep.
7. Upaniṣad Brahmayogin gives the following elaborate explanation on the space of the heart, which is said to be the resting place of the *jīva* during deep (dreamless) sleep, how it traverses the three states of waking, dream and deep (dreamless) sleep, and so on:
 “The question being raised as to where the self rests during deep sleep, the answer is given following and on the basis of the *śruti* passage “Just as there is this (external) space, even so is this inner space of the heart.” Everywhere in this all-pervading golden (self-luminous, resplendent) supreme sheath, which is the space of the heart, this immortal Deity (shining one) in the form of the self (*jīva*) moves about in the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep, in the conditions of bondage and freedom.’
8. Leaving one foot (or quarter) of the self, namely *viśva* [corresponding to the waking state], as being related to *avidyā*, or ignorance, there remain three feet (or quarters) of the self. Hence it is called the ‘three-footed’. That which is attained by the ‘three-footed’ self, that is, That [whose knowledge] is engendered through the ‘three-footed’ self which remains as Itself, is called *tripād-brahman* as stated in the [relevant] *smṛti* passage. The shining one (Deity) designated as the *jīva*, on thus attaining its own true nature, remains from then on as That [Brahman] alone—that is, the self gets liberated or released [from the bondage of its ignorance consisting of the illusory notion that it is separate from Brahman].
9. The *jīva* attaining liberation or release from the bondage of ignorance has been mentioned above. On the other hand, in contrast to the above, the self, in a state of ignorance, or *avidyā*, imagining falsely that there is something apart from itself, lapses into a state of self-forgetfulness and roams about hither and thither—that is, in the three states of waking, dream and deep sleep, as well as in the world of duality (relative existence) created by these states.

Does God Exist?

A man went to his usual barber shop for a haircut. He started talking to the barber who attended him. The conversation turned to the existence of God. The barber said, ‘Look sir, I don’t believe that God exists.’ ‘Why do you say that?’ asked the client. ‘Well, you just have to step out into the street to find out. If God existed, would there be so many sick people? Would there be abandoned children? Would there be so much suffering?’

The client thought for a while but chose not to argue with the barber. The job over, the client left the shop. Soon after, he saw in the street an untidy man with a long hair and beard. The client returned to the shop and said to the barber, ‘You know, barbers don’t exist.’ ‘How come?’ asked the barber. ‘Well, I am here and I am a barber.’ ‘No!’ said the client. ‘If they did, there would be no people with long hair and beard like that man there.’ ‘Ah, barbers do exist, what happens is that people don’t go to them,’ said the barber.

‘That explains it,’ said the client. ‘God does exist, but people don’t go to Him, don’t look for Him. That’s why there’s so much pain and suffering in the world.’

—from *cyberspace*

Glimpses of Holy Lives

God, the Devotee's Servant

Service to God in an image or in His creation is a time-honoured spiritual practice. But sometimes God Himself chooses to serve His devotee, inspired by his devotion.

Eknath was a sixteenth-century saint born in Paithan, Maharashtra. Commissioned by Sant Dattatreya, he composed the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavata* in Marathi. He chanted these compositions at home daily. No only that; he also expounded them to people around. Lord Panduranga of Pandharpur Himself became so eager to hear the chants and expositions that He decided to be with Eknath and serve him.

God as Servant

The Lord appeared before Eknath one day as an orphan and asked to be permitted to serve him. Eknath was impressed with the boy's physical features. He also understood that he had a pure heart. 'What's your name, my boy?' he asked. 'Khandya Krishna,' the boy said. Eknath said, 'Look, my dear, I know only how to serve others, not how to accept their service. Moreover, I have no means to pay you a salary. But I can't tell why, I don't feel like turning you away either.' 'Please don't worry about my salary, sir. I have heard that many devotees assemble at your place to hear your expositions. I would consider it a great blessing to be of service to you all. You don't need to pay me anything. I shall be content to have just the tulsi water sanctified by your puja.' Eknath retained him. Khandya soon won the heart of the household: there was no work he did not do, and he did everything to perfection.

God in the Poor

Eknath's father's shrāddha was to be per-

formed that day. Khandya swept and mopped up the house, filled the vessels with water from the nearby river and began cooking. The aroma from the dishes filled the place and also wafted across to the opposite hut, housing a low-caste family. The woman told her husband, 'Ah, how sweet! How tasty the dishes should be! Are we ever destined to eat such food in our lifetime?' Her voice wafted back to Eknath's house. Eknath was moved. 'Khandya,' he called out. 'Serve the cooked food to those people in the hut. You are such a nice cook. Won't you, my boy, cook all over again? Let us be done with the purificatory ceremony after the brahmin guests arrive. You can then begin.' Khandya joyfully served the food to those hapless low-castes, whose joy knew no bounds. Eknath was immensely gratified to have satisfied their desire.

The brahmin guests arrived and heard what happened. Incensed at the transgression, they told Eknath, 'That's sacrilegious. How could you feed those low-castes before finishing the shrāddha ceremony?' And they left the place immediately. Eknath was downcast. Khandya smiled and said, 'Why do you worry, sir? You know the mantras. Do the purificatory rites yourself.' 'True, but there are no brahmins to eat from the leaf-plates meant for Lord Vishnu and Vishvadeva.' 'Don't worry, Lord Vishnu Himself will come here to accept your offerings. And with Him will come not Vishvadeva, but Lord Vishvanatha Himself. Not only that; your father, grandfather and great-grandfather will also personally accept your offerings.' Eknath was stunned at the boy's firmness, but went about the purificatory ceremony all the same.

Khandya started to cook again. After the ceremony, plantain leaf-plates were spread

and wooden seats arranged for the the divine beings and ancestors. Khandya's prediction came true: Lord Vishnu, Lord Vishvanatha and Eknath's father, grandfather and great-grandfather—all came and accepted the offerings. Eknath couldn't still understand his servant's greatness. He thought it was the power of his mantras that had effected the miracle.

Eknath was still sorry he couldn't feed the brahmins on the shrāddha day. He called them again and said, 'I would like to atone for my sin with a bath in the Ganga. Kindly help me perform the *sankalpa* (solemn resolution) to undertake the journey to North India.' When the *sankalpa* was about to begin, they had a strange visitor. A leprosy-afflicted old brahmin came there and told Eknath, 'I am a devotee of Lord Panduranga. After days of supplication to Him, He appeared in my dream yesterday and said, "Eknath fed some low-caste people during his father's shrāddha. The merit accrued to him by that noble act is unequalled. Request him to offer you that merit. If he does that, that will cure you of your disease." That's why I came running here. Will you kindly offer your merit to me?'

God in the Suffering

Eknath wept to think that the Lord should have doubted him. Did he feed those poor people anticipating any merit? Why did the Lord say, 'If he does that...'? As a mark of offering his merit to the old man, Eknath poured into his outstretched hands the water meant for *sankalpa*. The water forthwith transformed into the sacred Ganga water, containing offerings usually made in the holy river. The old man was cured immediately. The brahmins too were cured—of their bigotry and sense of superiority. Eknath's greatness was now clear to them. Since Ganga herself had come to him, Eknath felt there was no need for him to visit North India for now.

Khandya served Eknath for twelve long years. His (Lord Panduranga's) consort Rukmini could not bear it any longer. She sent a

devotee to fetch Him back to Pandharpur.

The devotee reached Eknath's place. Khandya had gone to the riverside then. When the visitor asked if Khandya worked with him, Eknath said yes and asked him how he was related to his servant. 'He is my all in all,' cried the devotee. That puzzled Eknath. For all he knew, Khandya was an orphan. Then things appeared to clear up a little and Eknath's face lit up with a smile.

Khandya returned after his bath, carrying water-panniers on his shoulders. He rushed immediately to the puja room. The devotee followed him crying, 'Khandya, Khandya'. Khandya merged into the Lord in the puja room. Eknath was overwhelmed to think that the Lord was his servant all these years.

God in All

Later, Eknath visited Varanasi and the sacred Ganga. It is customary among Hindus to carry some Ganga water from Varanasi to the Rameswaram temple in the South to perform *abhishheka* (sacred bath) to the Shivalinga there. Eknath decided to follow the custom. But the Lord decided to encounter him on the way. Eknath had crossed the River Godavari. In the scorching midday sun he saw a donkey writhing around with a parched throat. He didn't hesitate. He poured the Ganga water in the mouth of that suffering animal.

Those who accompanied Eknath were scandalized. They said, 'That's a transgression. Why did you do that? You shouldn't have offered the donkey the Ganga water meant for Lord Shiva's worship.'

Without a word, Eknath devotedly gazed at the animal's belly with folded hands. So did the others. What did they see there? A Shivalinga inside the animal's stomach, accepting Eknath's *abhishheka*! Eknath chanted hymns when the Lord was being given the ceremonial bath. The others were astounded at Eknath's devoted heart that felt one with all beings. *



Reviews



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

The Grand Option: Personal Transformation and a New Creation. *Beatrice Bruteau.* University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556, USA. 2001. ix + 180 pp. Price not mentioned.

The significance of the book under review has thus been beautifully summed up by Sue Monk Kid: 'A book as luminous as it is deep, *The Grand Option* presents us with a global spirituality for the future. Reading it, one cannot help but be seized by the wish that every person on the planet would take Dr Bruteau's profound vision to heart.' In fact, the description of the book as 'a modern classic of practical spirituality for the twenty-first century' is no exaggeration.

Although Dr Bruteau's ideas may first appear to be revolutionary, they are actually based upon the age-old wise words of Jesus Christ. And her sincerely felt guidelines for a new social order, based on global inclusiveness and the uniqueness of each individual, are simply brilliant.

Written with clarity and elegance, Dr Bruteau's book combines a rich legacy of intellectual wealth with her own valuable personal experience and mystical contemplation. She believes in the need of human endeavour for continuing the creative work of evolution; if it does not continue, then we are doomed to extinction. Our will is very important. In fact, she thinks, *we are* evolution. 'If we are to make the grand option in favour of forming the new hyperpersonal being, we will have to redirect these energy currents.' (4)

It may not be out of place here to mention that Bernard Shaw conceived of a future superman, and Sri Aurobindo (curiously enough, although immensely relevant, the seminal works of this modern Indian philosopher are not mentioned by Dr Bruteau at all) thought that it was possible through yoga to have the Supermind descend to the human mind.

Dr Bruteau is of the view that we are undergoing, to use her own words, a critical moment in our

evolution as human beings, one in which 'feminine' values of wholeness, unity and synthesis will integrate with the 'masculine' values of abstraction, specialization and distinction into a new and higher level of consciousness. The new consciousness, she thinks, moves away from the 'domination paradigm' of human society, which has characterized most of our thinking and behaviour up to now, and towards a 'common paradigm'.

The author looks upon the transcendent person as the 'living one' who exists in radical and creative freedom. She further suggests that the act of living is the projection of free, creative love-energies at the mysterious frontier between the present and the future. She suggests that where we really live is not in the fixed forms of the past but on the verge of the future, a future genuinely non-existent and unknowable, a future of radical novelty created by improvisation. (These are the author's own words.) She thinks that erotic love (the expression is used in the special sense of selfish love) should be replaced by the higher love of agape. Agape, it is rightly pointed out, does not value the beloved for the sake of the lover but strictly for the beloved's own sake. Agape, like forgiveness, is an expression of creative freedom and is future-oriented.

If the reader asks the author 'Who do you say I am?' her answer is, 'You are the new and ever-renewing act of creation. You are all of us, as we are united in You. You are all of us as we live in one another. You are all of us in the whole cosmos as we join in Your exuberant act of creation. You are the Living One who improvises at the frontier of the future; and it has not yet appeared what You shall be.' Words of a great visionary eloquently expressed.

Beatrice Bruteau reminds us that it is for us to decide whether we are going to create a future linked to a new vision of humanity enlivened thoroughly by agape—the vitalizing spirit of love, both human and divine. The choice is ours.

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Saint Sara: The Life of Sara Chapman Bull, the American Mother of Swami Vivekananda. *Pravrajika Prabuddhaprana*. Sri Sarada Math, Dakshineswar, Kolkata 700 076. E-mail: srismath@vsnl.com. 2002. xx + 546 pp. Rs 150.

In his biography of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Saradanandaji wrote that Sri Ramakrishna had four main pillars that supported him. One of them was Sara Bull. This becomes evident when we read this extremely perceptive, well-organized and illustrious biography of Sara Bull, the American disciple and mother of Swami Vivekananda, revealing her strong character and immense contribution to the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda tradition.

Sara was born in 1850 to wealthy American parents in Oxford, New York. Her father was a seasoned businessman and mother a reformist, active in movements aimed at bringing spiritual and social freedom to women. Sara inherited her father's sharp business acumen and managerial skill, and her mother's self-righteousness, strong will and spiritual outlook. It was because of her mother that she had broad exposure to intellectual and cultural life during her youth. At the age of 20, she married Ole Bull, a 56-year-old Norwegian patriot and renowned violin virtuoso. He was also a voracious reader. Sara herself was a very good pianist and accompanied her husband on many concert tours. Ole Bull's friendship with the best of thinkers, writers and musicians helped cultivate Sara's intellectual, social and public life. Sara was widowed at the young age of 30 and since then her interest in Indian spirituality grew. Before Swamiji's arrival in America, she had earned reputation as an enlightened citizen and accomplished author. Thus, destiny had set the stage for the expansion of Swami Vivekananda's Vedanta movement.

Sara probably met Swamiji in New York in 1894 and soon a mother-son relationship was established between them. She had been arranging the Cambridge and Greenacre spiritual conferences and introduced him to the intellectual milieu of America, thus helping him to put the message of Vedanta into the mainstream of American thought. The New York Vedanta Society was taking shape, and by her constant financial and moral support she helped it flourish. She started a formal system of membership of the Society that is still in vogue. Owing to her aristocratic background, initially she

tried to advise Swamiji on giving lectures to 'right kind of people' and charging fees for the lectures, which of course Swamiji refused. However, gradually Sara realized Swamiji's 'superhuman dimension' and accepted him as her guru. Swamiji's dream of starting monasteries for men and women henceforth was also her dream, for the realization of which she sacrificed all her interests. Sara also supported Holy Mother and the mothers of Swami Vivekananda and Swami Saradananda. Saradanandaji acknowledged Sara's consoling motherly affection and encouragement in all his letters to her. Swami Vivekananda used to say, 'I have full faith in you and I depend on you in all the matters, at any time.' He called her Saint Sara and believed that to see her was a pilgrimage. Swamiji gave her the name 'Dhira Mātā', acknowledging her calmness and poise.

The author has extensively used the correspondence of Sara Bull with Swami Vivekananda, Swami Saradananda, Josephine MacLeod and Sister Nivedita which bring out in graphic detail the various facets of Sara's personality; what emerges is the strong, powerful, yet motherly character of Sara Bull. Giving was her life's mission. She was a true Vedantist who saw things from the universal point of view, and aimed for a synthetic and holistic view of things; the purpose of her life was to realize herself as the Mother. She was gravely serious, yet cheerful, with a keen foresight and an authoritative manner. She was mature in her judgment, clear-headed in money matters, a vivacious conversationalist and a leader in the true sense. She always disciplined her emotions and sacrificed them in the brilliant fire of her intellect. Her life was conspicuously marked by incessant activity, totally given to the responsible motherhood of entire humanity. Her personal life was tragic but her spiritual triumph was inspiring, worth emulating.

The book also gives us an insight into the spiritual movements of the USA at the end of the nineteenth century; the wonderful freedom and dynamism displayed by American women; Swamiji's impact on famous Western thinkers; Sara's deep friendship with Josephine MacLeod, 'a friend of Swamiji', and with Sister Nivedita; Swami Saradanandaji's efforts in consolidating women's work; the zealous and missionary efforts of Sisters Nivedita and Christine for opening their girls' school in Calcutta and putting women's work on a strong footing; the inauguration of Belur Math; Swamiji's

and his brother disciples' reverence for Holy Mother; and the initiation of philanthropic activities by the Ramakrishna Mission.

Publications like this help readers and devotees get a glimpse of the divine plan and its accomplishment in a huge mission. This book is an inspiring and path-breaking publication, and is a must-read for the devotees of Swami Vivekananda. A casual reader will also be awestruck at the profundity and intensity of Sara's character and her role in the Ramakrishna Movement.

The language of this book is pithy, the style charming and racy, the narrative effective, and the nature of coverage extensive. We are indebted to Pravrajika Prabuddhapranaji for this thoroughly researched and voluminous biography of Sara Bull. One cannot help but bow one's head in reverence before Saint Sara, the Mother of Swamiji.

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Encountering Bliss: My Journey through India with Ānandamayī Mā. *Melita Masmann, trans. Shridhar B Shrotri.* Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar. New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: *mlbd@vsnl.com*. 2002. x + 277 pp. Rs 195.

Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma ranks high among the divine personalities India saw in recent years. Her simple life shaped by the divine grace showered on her and her simple message rich with spiritual ideas, have inspired people of all faiths. To the author, who was hounded out from Germany after the War, the serendipitous meeting with Anandamayi Ma at Kankhal near Hardwar proved to be an encounter with an 'ocean of bliss'. Living with Ma in different places in India, the Western-educated, critical-minded author was fascinated by her simple and divine personality, which uplifted all who went to her. While describing Ma's infinite compassion to all beings, the author also reveals her own spiritual sensibilities.

The life and religious ecstasies of young Nirmala Sundari Devi (Ma's earlier name) are discussed briefly in the opening chapter. The book does not have many details about her childhood days, as they have limited 'documentary value'. Of her divine powers during her younger days, the book

mentions her extraordinary memory, the supernatural power of her conversation with animals and her going into trances during bhajans as a teenager.

The book is thickly dotted with miracles performed by Ma, though she declares, 'But later I had a *khayal* not to perform any miracles.' Though she was endowed with divine bliss, one wonders why Ma didn't give initiation to her followers. Ma's explanation here is worthy of introspection: 'No distinction is made between the guru and the pupil where Ma is in union with Brahman.'

The author sincerely records her impressions of places like Varanasi, Ahmedabad and Bodh Gaya. The chapters on 'Tapasya, Kundalini and the Theory of Vibrations' and 'West/East Realities' are enlightening.

The height of the experience of Advaita by Ma would resolve all unnecessary conflicts among various people and religions. Ma said, 'You and I are two persons in your eyes, and yet you and I are one and even the distance between us is me, myself. There is no question of being two here.' Ma's words to spiritual aspirants are as illuminating as they are awakening. She said, 'Now is the time to mould yourself. You will have to take refuge in renunciation and inner strength.' Her utterance, 'There are as many ways of enlightenment as there are people', is very significant to the contemporary world ridden with conflicting ideas and opinions on the basic tenets of different religions.

The book has a rich sprinkling of Sanskrit words. The glossary at the end enhances its value and facilitates smooth understanding for a non-Indian in particular. If this translated version itself causes rapt attention while reading the incidents of the infinite compassion of Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma towards suffering humanity, what greater joy and bliss might one experience going through the original text!

Dr Shrotri's efforts in rendering into lucid English the original German text deserve all accolades. This reasonably priced book is worth possessing by all spiritual aspirants. The publishers deserve our appreciation for their endeavour to bring to the general public the life and message of Sri Sri Anandamayi Ma. Externally she looked an ordinary saint but she was really an extraordinary divine person.

Swami Muktidananda

Correspondent, Sri Ramakrishna Vidyashala
Mysore

ॐ Reports ॐ

Started. A new branch centre of the Ramakrishna Math; at Ghatshila; with land and buildings received from Sri Ramakrishna Vivekananda Ashrama, Ghatshila; in May 2004. The name and address of the centre: Ramakrishna Math, Dahigora, Ghatshila, East Singhbhum District, Jharkhand 832 303 (Phone: 06585-227144). Swami Amritarupandaji has been appointed head of the centre.

Moved. Ramakrishna Mission, Vijayawada; from its Gandhinagar location to its new premises in Sitanagaram; in May. The present address: Ramakrishna Mission, Sitanagaram Village, Tadepalli Mandal, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh 522 501 (Phone: 08645-272248; E-mail: rkmvijay@sancharnet.in)

Inaugurated. A dispensary building; by Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Contai; on 2 May.

Visited. Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi; by Lt Gen S K Sinha (retired), Governor of Jammu and Kashmir; on 31 May.

Secured. 2nd rank in the humanities group; by a student of the higher secondary school run by Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kadalady; at the Kerala Higher Secondary Education Board examinations.

Distributed. 6000 kg rice, 400 kg pulses, 300 plastic tarpaulin sheets and building materi-

als; by Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Silchar; among 1725 people belonging to 6 different villages of Cachar district whose houses and crops were damaged by a violent storm and heavy rains; in April. The centre also conducted 6 medical camps at which 2967 patients were treated.

Distributed. 88 GI sheets, 132 bamboo poles, 22 mosquito-nets, 11 bed covers, 22 mats, 34 saris, 36 dhotis and 60 sets of children's garments; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Midnapore; among 11 families whose houses were gutted in a fire accident in Gajipore Kismat village; in April.

Completed. The work of desilting and deepening ponds; by Ramakrishna Mission, Limbdi; in 6 villages of Surendranagar district that face acute water scarcity every summer; in May. The centre has taken up similar work in one more village of the district.

Supplied. 1,00,000 litres of drinking water daily; by Ramakrishna Math, Pune; to 18 drought-struck villages of Ahmednagar district; in May.

Distributed. 1500 kg rice, 300 kg pulses, 600 kg potatoes, 350 kg salt and 350 kg biscuits; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda; among 1575 persons belonging to 335 families; at the Deklapara, Madarihath, tea garden; in May. The people were affected by violence sweeping over tea gardens in Jalpaiguri district. *

Each man takes care that his neighbour shall not cheat him. But a day comes when he begins to care that he does not cheat his neighbour. Then all goes well—he has changed his market-cart into a chariot of the sun.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson