

PRABUDDHA BHARATA *or AWAKENED INDIA*



SEPTEMBER
2004

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



VOL. 109
ISSN 0032-6178



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Internet edition at: www.advaitaonline.com

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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

SEPTEMBER 2004

No. 9



Traditional Wisdom



ASPIRATION

नायमात्मा प्रवचनेन लभ्यो न मेघया न बहुना श्रुतेन ।
यमेवैष वृणुते तेन लभ्यस्तस्यैष आत्मा विवृणुते तन् स्वाम् ॥

This Atman cannot be attained by the study of scriptures or by intelligence or by much hearing of sacred books. It is attained by Him who earnestly seeks It. To him the Atman reveals Its true form. (*Katha Upanishad*, 1.2.23)

Nothing whatsoever is achieved in spiritual life without yearning. By constantly living in the company of holy men, the soul becomes restless for God. This yearning is like the state of mind of a man who has someone ill in the family. His mind is in a state of perpetual restlessness, thinking how the sick person may be cured. Or again, one should feel a yearning for God like the yearning of a man who has lost his job and is wandering from one office to another in search of work. If he is rejected at a certain place which has no vacancy, he goes there again the next day and inquires, 'Is there any vacancy today?' (*The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 96)

Devotee: 'How can we speak of one person's deserving grace, and another not deserving it? Grace should apply to all!'

Holy Mother: 'If a man wants to cross a river he must pray sitting on the river bank. He will be taken across in proper time.'

Devotee: 'If everything happens in proper time, where does God's grace come in?'

Holy Mother: 'Must you not sit with a fishing-rod in your hands if you want to catch fish? A deer does not simply walk into the mouth of a lion which is fast asleep.'

In Bhakti-Yoga the first essential is to want God honestly and intensely. We want everything but God, because our ordinary desires are fulfilled by the external world. So long as our needs are confined within the limits of the physical universe, we do not feel any need for God. (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 7.83)

∞ This Month ∞

What makes work effective, at both subjective and objective levels? **Essentials for Effectivity**, this month's editorial, discusses this important question.

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago features (1) excerpts from an interesting article entitled 'Why Do We Live' and (2) some 'Occasional Notes'.

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita* is Swami Atulanandaji's commentary on verses 4 to 10 of the tenth chapter of the *Gita*. This instalment discusses the fact that the Lord is the Origin of everything in the universe. Commenting on the eighth verse, the author illustrates with a moving example how the Lord officiated for His devotee who was busy singing His names during his duty hours. The swami also elaborates on how devotees rejoice when they meet each other.

In the concluding instalment of his learned article **Ramakrishna Vedanta in the West: New Interfaces and Challenges**, Dr M Sivaramkrishna continues his discussion on the challenges before the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement. Referring to the attempts by Western scholars to interpret original Bengali texts and arrive at 'notions of texts strongly at variance with the Hindu hermeneutic traditions', the author underlines the need to 'intensify one's inner resources' in preference to polemics or 'absorbing the tainted, the defiled'. A former professor and head of the English department of Osmania University, Hyderabad, the author is a regular contributor to this journal.

Holy Mother's unique relationship with the Master, motherly love and service being the main melody of her unique life, her steer-

ing a fledgling Ramakrishna Order—such aspects of that embodiment of purity are worthy of adoration and contemplation. Dr Umesh Gulati does just that in his **Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi: Her Glory and Divinity**. The author is an emeritus economics professor from the United States, and enjoys studying Vedanta as lived and taught by the Master and Mother.

A Survey of the Mind by Swami Satyaswarupanandaji is the final instalment of his well-researched article on human mind. Marshalling irrefutable facts, the author dispels some common myths about Eastern psychologies, and concludes with an admirable presentation of the Yoga-Vedanta model of mind. A monk of the Ramakrishna Order, the swami is from the Order's headquarters at Belur Math.

A Special Event in New York City is a detailed report of the observance of the 150th birthday of Holy Mother by the Ramakrishna-Vedanta Center, New York. The report features the tribute paid to Mother and a concert held on the occasion, and the dedication ceremony of the Center's newly renovated buildings.

Parabrahma Upaniṣad is the third instalment of a translation of this important Sannyasa Upanishad by Swami Atmapriyandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Vidya-mandira, Belur. The elaborate notes are based on Upanishad Brahmayogin's commentary.

Glimpses of Holy Lives features some incidents from the life of Girivar, a devotee who believed that whatever God does is for our own good.

Essentials for Effectivity

EDITORIAL

No one likes to work for nothing. Even a dunce does not work without a purpose, says a well-known Sanskrit adage. Yet, there are as many different ways of doing work as there are people. Irrespective of how we work, all of us would certainly like our endeavours to be effective and successful. Is there a recipe for effectivity? Yes, says the *Chandogya Upanishad*. Its first chapter tells us what contributes to effectivity: ‘*Yadeva vidyayā karoti śraddhayopaniṣadā tadeva vīryavattaram bhavati*; Whatever is performed with knowl-

edge, shraddhā and meditation becomes more effective.’¹ The word *vīryavattaram* literally means ‘more strengthening’. It is also taken to mean ‘effective’ or ‘more powerful in bearing fruit’. Effectivity has two dimensions: external and internal. ‘External’ refers to the effective accomplishment of the work to one’s satisfaction. ‘Internal’ refers to the work’s long-term influence on the individual’s inner growth. Knowledge, shraddhā and meditation—we discuss these factors one by one.

Doing Work with Knowledge

According to the Tamil classic *Tirukkural*, one should ‘Think well before taking up any work. To start thinking after beginning the work is disgraceful.’² A sound knowledge of the nature of work, technical expertise, tools required and so on—obviously, all this is need to be considered before embarking on any venture. But is there anything more? Yes, according to the *Bhagavadgīta* there are certain important things we need to know before taking up any work. There are both objective (external) and subjective (internal) factors. First, the objective; these are discussed in the *Gīta*, 18.25.

Consequence

Every work leaves its pleasant and unpleasant effects on people—one who does the work as also those affected by the work. ‘No work is free from blemish, even as fire is covered by smoke,’ says Sri Krishna, and advises Arjuna not to shun work just because it is associated with defects.³ For work to be effective, one needs to consider all possible consequences of work and choose that option which

will mean maximum good to the maximum number of people.

Expenditure of Power and Wealth

Cost of human resources and fixed and running costs of systems need to be studied beforehand in order to be free from surprises and shocks later. Of course, we have cost escalation during project execution due to incompetence, inefficiency and other factors, but that doesn’t concern us here.

Injury

Any possible violence to people or animals resulting from work needs to be anticipated earlier.

Human Resources

This is perhaps the most important factor influencing effectivity. Having incompetent people at the helm of an organization is a sure recipe for ineffective work. The inefficiency and incompetence at the top effortlessly percolate down the line. Even otherwise, competent people too reach their level of incompe-

Cutting corners or adopting unethical means might help further the end sometimes, but the negative samskaras (mental impressions) arising from the questionable means can cripple an individual's character.

tence sooner or later, following the Peter Principle: 'In a hierarchy, every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetence.' A sound knowledge of who is suitable for what, and periodic quality audits of human resources can greatly contribute to the effectivity of an organization.

So we have seen some of the objective factors, knowledge of which can make work effective. Now for the subjective factors; these are discussed in the *Gita*, 18.30.

What to Take up, What to Leave Alone

True assessment of one's abilities: A dispassionate knowledge of our strengths and limitations helps us maintain sobriety and ensure that we don't live in a fool's paradise. Embarking on a venture without adequate competence is a compelling invitation to inefficiency, ineffectiveness and frustration. Says Swami Vivekananda:

There is, however, one great danger in human nature, viz. that man never examines himself. He thinks he is quite as fit to be on the throne as the king. Even if he is, he must first show that he has done the duty of his own position; and then higher duties will come to him. When we begin to work earnestly in the world, nature gives us blows right and left and soon enables us to find out our position. *No man can long occupy satisfactorily a position for which he is not fit.* (Emphasis added)

Taking care of the means: Cutting corners or adopting unethical means might help further the end sometimes, but the negative samskaras (mental impressions) arising from the questionable means can cripple an individual's character. It is good to keep in mind Swa-

miji's golden pronouncement: 'Let us perfect the means; the end will take care of itself. For the world can be good and pure, only if our lives are good and pure. It is an effect, and we are the means. Therefore, let us purify ourselves. Let us make ourselves perfect.'⁵

Trying to change others: We will understand the futility of our attempts to change others when we reflect on how difficult it is to change ourselves. In trying to effect external change, it is good to remember the well-known prayer: 'God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.'

What to Fear, What Not to Fear

'Fear arises from duality,' says the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*.⁶ True fearlessness is concomitant with God-realization, since in that state of Oneness, there is no second object to fear. Till we reach that blessed stage of realization it is profitable to cultivate some healthy fears. These fears have been discussed in 'From Fear to Fearlessness', editorial for April 2004.

What Is Bondage, What Is Freedom

Work binds when selfishness is the motive behind. According to Vedanta, the Atman is the eternal, blissful and infinite core of our personality. It is again the source of real Knowledge and everlasting Bliss. Ignorance (*avidyā*) of our real nature makes us look for happiness and fulfilment in the world. So we desire (kama) sense objects. Desire drives us to action (karma) for its fulfilment. Work done with desire steepens us more in ignorance, and the vicious cycle of *avidyā*-kama-karma ensures continuity of the 'misery-go-round' of birth and death.

While desire-prompted work forges more links in the chain that binds us to the

world, selfless work, done without anxiety about its result (if the means are taken care of, the end must come), purifies the mind, strengthens the will and triggers our progress on the path to freedom.

The Effect of Samskaras on Character

Samskaras are closely related to our discussion on bondage and freedom. The first chapter of Swamiji's illuminating lectures on karma yoga discusses this important topic.⁷ We recapitulate the salient points. Every action and thought is registered on our mind as a subtle impression (samskara). These impressions have a built-in property: they goad us on to repeat the action or thought. Each repetition strengthens and deepens the impression. The algebraic sum of these good and bad impressions, accumulated over years, nay, births, is what is meant by character. If the sum is positive, we have good character and if negative, bad. This sum total determines our reaction to situations, our personal life, work environment and so on. In short, what we are at any given moment is governed by these impressions. Just as bad impressions make us act bad in spite of ourselves, good samskaras make us act good in spite of ourselves. So freedom implies becoming free from the hold of good im-

pressions too. Augmenting good impressions can 'drive' our life on the path of good. The first step in strengthening our character is, thus, the cultivation of good thoughts and performance of good deeds.

Anything done consciously for long becomes a habit, thanks to the samskaras. Work done in a slipshod way or with questionable means also leaves its impression on the mind. The work may be accomplished all right, but the cumulative impressions resulting from how we work and the means we adopt will strengthen our bondage and slavery to the mind. We can appreciate how powerful these impressions are only when we attempt to turn a new leaf, try to live a moral life. The mental resistance offered by the bad impressions will be enough to unnerve us and make us retract from our resolves at self-transformation.

Vedanta, however, offers hope to everyone and condemns none. Only, more bad impressions will mean greater struggle. Everyone can turn a new leaf provided he is prepared to pay the price and struggle unremittingly. There is also an inspiring assurance from Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi that japa, or repetition of God's name, can minimize the intensity of karma.⁸

Doing Work with Shraddhā

Usually translated as 'faith' for want of a better word, shraddhā signifies a special mindset. It is a self-propelling force in us that keeps us riveted to the task in hand till its completion. Swamiji gives an example to clarify the point: What will be the mindset of a thief adjacent to whose room is a room full of gold? He will keep thinking about how to break the separating wall and acquire the gold. He will not rest till he accomplishes the task. The force that eggs him on despite obstacles is what is called shraddhā.⁹ Some

striking implications of shraddhā become evident from this example.

Implications of Shraddhā

First, a man endowed with shraddhā has an *ideal*, which goads him on to action till its attainment and endows him with the strength to

A worker endowed with shraddha does not let mental restless influence the quality of his work. He is endowed with fortitude and enthusiasm, two important traits of a sattvic worker outlined in the Gita.

overcome all obstacles in the way. The ideal of human life is Self-realization. Swamiji begins his lectures on karma yoga by saying, 'The goal of mankind is knowledge. That is the one ideal placed before us by Eastern philosophy. *Pleasure is not the goal of man, but knowledge (emphasis added).*'¹⁰ Second, a man with shraddhā will not need supervision for his work. Third, *quality*. He will set his own lofty standard for work and will strain every nerve to accomplish it. Fourth, *accountability*. Such a worker is more accountable to his higher Self. His accountability to the organization is a matter of course. Fifth, *enthusiasm*. A worker endowed

with shraddhā does not let mental restless influence the quality of his work. He is endowed with fortitude and enthusiasm, two important traits of a sattvic worker outlined in the *Gita*.¹¹

Faith in the Atman

Swamiji never tired of exhorting people to have shraddhā, burning faith in themselves, in their real, divine nature: 'The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls out the divinity within. You can do anything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power.'¹²

Doing Work with Meditation

Working with an Awakened Buddhi

Meditation during work refers to a mindset that helps us detach ourselves from the body and mind and remember our real nature (Atman) or, what amounts to the same, God, who dwells in the heart of all beings. For a beginner this amounts to refusing to identify with the body and the untrained mind, and trying to be a witness to his mental gyrations without getting affected by them. Practice enables one to become more alert and identify oneself with buddhi, the discriminative faculty. Incidentally, selfless work as a spiritual discipline is expected to result in this identification with buddhi, a step fundamental to any fruitful spiritual endeavour. We don't work mechanically anymore, but with an awakened buddhi watching the movements of the mind and bringing it back to the task in hand every time it strays, following the *Gita* dictum: 'Whenever the unsteady and restless mind strays, rein it in and bring it back to dwell on the Atman.'¹³

Doing work with an alert mind is what Swamiji advocates in his prescription for inner transformation through work: '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 be-

ing.'¹⁴

Need for Practice

Such a meditative awareness during work needs preparation and practice. When Arjuna asked Sri Krishna how to control the wayward mind, the Lord replied that it was possible through practice and detachment¹⁵—detachment from anything that is inimical to the attainment of one's goal. When someone remarked that it was extremely difficult to proceed towards God while leading the life of a householder, Sri Ramakrishna taught with a beautiful example how with practice one can work in the world with a major part of the mind fixed on God:

What about the yoga of practice? At Kamarpukur I have seen the women of the carpenter families selling flattened rice. Let me tell you how alert they are while doing their business. The pestle of the husking-machine that flattens the paddy constantly falls into the hole of the mortar. The woman turns the paddy in the hole with one hand and with the other holds her baby on her lap as she nurses it. In the mean time customers arrive. The machine goes on pounding the paddy, and she carries on her bargains with the customers. She says to them, 'Pay the few pennies you owe me before you take anything more.' You see, she has all these things

to do at the same time—nurse the baby, turn the paddy as the pestle pounds it, take the flattened rice out of the hole, and talk to the buyers. This is called the yoga of practice. Fifteen parts of her mind out of sixteen are fixed on the pestle of the husking-machine, lest it should pound her hand. With only one part of her mind she nurses the baby and talks to the buyers. Likewise, he who leads the life of a householder should devote fifteen parts of his mind to God; otherwise he will face ruin and fall into the clutches of Death. He should perform the duties of the world with only one part of his mind.¹⁶

Regular Prayer and Meditation amid Work

Regularity in spiritual practices amid work is a great help in cultivating meditative awareness. Holy Mother underlined its importance with an example:

No doubt you must do your duties. This keeps your mind in good condition. But it is also necessary to practise japa, meditation, and prayer. One must practise these at least in the morning and evening. Such practice acts like the rudder of a boat. When a man sits in the evening for prayer, he can reflect on the good and bad things he has done in the course of the day. Then he should compare his present mental state with that of the previous day. ... 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?¹⁷

Swamiji has a name for work done with an alert mind: 'self-conscious activity'. What are the benefits of such an activity? Over to Swamiji: 'Call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come,

and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.'¹⁸

* * *

In order that work becomes effective, three important things need to be factored into it: knowledge, shraddhā and meditation. Besides making work effective, these factors convert work into a spiritual discipline, effecting inner transformation. *

References

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5. CW, 2.8.
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8. Swami Nikhilananda, *Holy Mother* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1962), 222.
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10. *Ibid.*, 1.27.
11. *Gita*, 18.26.
12. CW, 8.228.
13. *Gita*, 6.26.
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18. CW, 3.193.

Pilot to passengers in mid-flight: 'I regret to inform you that we are in terrible trouble. Only God can save us now.'

A passenger turned to a priest to ask what the pilot had said and got this reply: 'He says there is no hope.'

—Anthony de Mello, *The Prayer of the Frog*, 1.76

Prabuddha Bharata—100 Years Ago

September 1904

Why Do We Live?

(A Japanese Sermon)

In a certain place there was once an extraordinary dunce by the name of Chokichi,' begins the preacher. 'Now, there are very many dunces in this world, but this particular fellow was a most accomplished dunce. In the matter of forgetting things he was a perfect genius.

'One day his mistress said to him, "Chokichi, this is the anniversary of the death of our principal ancestor, and his reverence the priest will be here before long. Therefore we must have the customary offerings ready to set before the household gods. So hurry to the market and buy me some carrots, dock, wild potatoes, mushrooms and lotus root—these five things."

'With this she gave him five farthings, and Chokichi, with an exclamation of assent, girded up his loins and started off. As he was hurrying along to market on a dog-trot he met his neighbour Chomatsu. "Hello, Chokichi!" said the latter, "you are in a great hurry. What are you after and where are you going, anyhow?"

"To the market to buy some things," answered Chokichi, as he hurried on.

"Well, what are you going to buy?"

"What am I going to buy? I don't know, I'm sure," was the reply.

'So the story goes. This forgetting [of] the important business that his mistress had sent him on, and only racing in the street—it was a great piece of folly, was it not?

'And yet this Chokichi is not to be heedlessly laughed at, for while it may not be true of this audience, yet in certain distant parts of the country there are many people who forget the essential thing, just as Chokichi did; whereas, so far as other matters are concerned, they know everything about them. If you don't believe it, ask anybody.

'Here, Hachibei! (*the preacher addresses an imaginary character*) They tell us that everything born into this world has a commission from heaven. For example, take the cow and the horse—what were they born for? And Hachibei will answer, "Why, anybody knows that! They were born to carry heavy loads and to save folks labour." But the cock, what was he born for? Ask him that and he will tell you, "He was born to tell the hours." The dog, what was he born for? "He is to guard the gate." But the cat, what is she for? "She is to catch rats." Ask anything you please, so far as general matters are concerned, and he knows all about them. Well, then, Hachibei, you yourself, what were *you* born into this world for? But Hachibei will scratch his head and finally answer, "What was I born for? I don't know. Most likely I came just to eat rice and find fault." For us to think that man alone came into this world to wander purposeless—that is, for us to belong to the foolish fellowship of Chokichi. It is man alone that has *not* come into this world just to eat rice and to grow old. Man is called the lord of the universe; of all things he is chief. He is not like the dog or the cat. It is not for him to wander aimlessly.

'But let us go on with our story. Chokichi reached the market-place at last, but he had quite forgotten what he came to buy. And so, as he was loafing around the place with the money in his hand he caught sight of some cakes in a shop window. Forthwith he bought and ate a dozen of them. Then he loitered here and there; he drank a little wine and loafed in the grog-shop. He spent every one of his five farthings buying things in the street and eating them on the spot. And then he went home

grumbling to himself: "It wasn't enough! Mistress didn't give me coppers enough! And so I can't get any fried eels or duck-hash!"

'Now, when he got home, maybe his master and mistress weren't waiting for him! And maybe they weren't hot!

"Look here, Chokichi, what have you been doing? Have you brought what you were sent for?"

'When they said this Chokichi answered, in a dazed sort of way: "No, I haven't brought anything at all."

"But what have you done with the money we gave you?"

"Oh, the money?" said he. "Why, I spent it all for things to eat in the street; only it wasn't nearly enough."

'Master and mistress sat completely dumb. At length they broke out. "Why, what are you thinking about? The five farthings—don't you understand? We didn't tell you to spend them in any such way as that! You were to buy carrots, and dock, and the rest! But instead of buying what we need, you spend them in stuffing yourself, and then on top of that you tell us that you haven't enough! You must be a perfect fool!"

'And they stormed and scolded away.

'Now, dunces are beyond redemption. "Why!" said Chokichi, with a look of utter amazement, "Do you want some carrots and some dock? If that is what you want, I've just been to the market, and why didn't you tell me so? That would have been the very time to get them."

'Well, well! He was an accomplished dunce! And in the wide world one could hardly find a master that would keep such a fellow for five minutes. So in the end there was nothing to do but send him away with two or three cuffs across the head. However, it is quite useless for any of you to hear a story of this kind and merely roar over it. This is nothing less than a parable. And with the words of Confucius on our lips, "If I see folly I look within myself", today both you and I should well consider whether we too do not belong to the company of this Chokichi.

'In the first place, we received at birth from our Master Heaven these admirable bodies that we call the five members. We were provided with what we call the five senses—far more precious than the five farthings—the five functions of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and feeling. In our hearts, likewise, we received at birth the five virtues of love, justice, courtesy, wisdom and truth. And the real meaning is simply this: heaven desires to have us buy what we call the five relations—the carrots and the dock, which are these five things: obedience to parents, loyalty to masters, concord between husband and wife, harmony among brothers, and a mutual fidelity in our intercourse with others. And yet, quite forgetting the essential business of the five rules or doctrines, day and night we spend our time in nothing but this buying and eating things in the street, with its "I want this; I want that; that will not do; or, there is not enough of this!" Why, is this not Chokichi? It was not to wander about thus purposeless that we were born.'

—Dr Scherer's Japan Today

We do not hold that the salvation of India lies only in the adoption by its people of a common religion. But we do believe that the acceptance of a common religion by Indians which is the substratum of all the various modes of faith—a religion which, like the string in a garland of many flowers, runs through, coordinates and makes into an organized whole all the different forms of religion—will at once arrest the national decay and advance the march of progress by strides.

—from 'Occasional Notes'

Reflections on the *Bhagavadgita*

SWAMI ATULANANDA

Chapter 10 (*continued*)

4-5. Intelligence, wisdom, non-delusion, forbearance, truth, control of the senses, serenity of heart, pleasure and pain, birth and death, fear and fearlessness, non-injury, equanimity, contentment, austerity, benevolence, fame and infamy—these different conditions of beings arise from Me alone.

Man is born with one or more of these qualities, according to his past karma. What we deserve, the Lord gives us. What we have earned in a previous life becomes our asset in the present life, the capital with which we start out. The child's history is already written before the baby is born. Whatever the child develops into, is stored up and remains latent at the time of birth. We start on our life's voyage with our pockets filled or empty according to how they were at the end of the previous life. Gross, material things, we cannot carry with us when we depart. But our character, our tendencies—all that is stored up in our subtle body stays with us and accompanies us when we are reborn. Our desires, ambitions, hopes, character traits—all these are stored up in our subtle body. The gross body can carry and enjoy gross things. And when we leave the gross body, we cannot carry gross things with us. But mental qualities being subtle, the subtle, reincarnating body carries these along through ages. The wise man therefore cares more to store up lasting trea-

tures—a noble, lofty ambition, intelligence, truthfulness and other ennobling character traits—than wealth and other perishable things. And rising above them all, the yogi stores up the highest knowledge, jnana, the realization of Truth, which lasts through eternity.

Whatever *is* arises from God. *Intelligence* is mentioned first. Some men are intelligent beyond comparison. They easily grasp subtle subjects of thought. They perceive things not comprehended by the ordinary mind. Others have *wisdom*. They know the Self. They perceive That which is beyond the reach of the senses. Again, others have sound judgment and the power of discrimination. Some have forbearance; no abuse or insult ever agitates their minds. Others are truthful; they give utterance only to their own actual experience of things. And so we find men with different dispositions, different qualifications and different acquisitions according to their characters. 'And all these differences are from Me,' says the Lord. And also:

6. The seven great rishis of old, as well as the four Manus, from whom have come all these creatures in the world, were born of My mind and endowed with My nature.

The Deity, as Creator Brahma, created, in a primeval age, from His own mind, the seven first teachers and the archetypes of rulers, the Manus. With their thoughts directed towards the omniscient Lord, these superhuman beings were endowed with power

and wisdom. From them has come all subsequent creation. Whatever spiritual knowledge exists in the world has been preserved by the spiritual descendants of the seven great rishis (Saptarshis), who are the primeval teachers of our race. And the ancient Manus are the pri-

meval kings or rulers. This again shows how | all creation has descended from God.

7. He who comprehends in reality these various manifestations and yoga power of Mine—he becomes well established in unshakable yoga. There is no doubt in this.

He who knows in truth the vast extent of My being; who knows Me as infinite; who knows the fact that the great rishis and Manus possessed their power and wisdom as partaking of a very small portion of the Lord's power and wisdom—he becomes well established in unshakable yoga, the state

of samadhi or right realization. The knowledge of the conditioned is the doorway leading to the knowledge of the Unconditioned.

And what is that realization in which they become well established? It is the knowledge that

8. I am the origin of all; everything evolves from Me. Knowing this, the wise worship Me with loving contemplation.

Those who know the Truth find their greatest happiness in the contemplation of Truth. They know Me as the supreme Reality, the Origin of all things, the One from whom all creation has evolved. They know that, controlled and impelled by Me as the inner Regulator, everything moves according to law. The *Gita* says, 'He who sees the supreme Lord dwelling alike in all beings, the Imperishable among the perishable—he sees indeed. For seeing the Lord as equally present everywhere, he does not destroy the Self by the self, and thus he goes to the highest Goal.'¹

Only those who see the emptiness of the world are fit for devotion to the Lord. Only those who know for certain that all else is vanity can turn to Him, who is eternal Bliss. 'There is fear in duality;² It is realization alone that makes one fearless,³ says the Upanishad. We are fearless when we are non-attached and free from desires. Knowing the Lord as the Self, the Cause and the omniscient Lord of all, we become devoted to Him. The knowledge of the supreme Reality leads to love, regard and earnestness, and these lead to devotion to the Lord. God is the only Joy in existence; but through the darkness that envelopes our nature, things that are not God seem attractive, and naturally, they don't give us lasting joy. The worship of God is our greatest privilege. It is the greatest delight to those who have tasted it. We look upon it as an obligation, a task, a

duty. But once we succeed in worshipping Him really, we will see how sweet a task it is. 'I will praise Thee with my whole heart.'⁴ 'Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.' (25.1) 'Praise the Lord; for the Lord is good: Sing praises unto His name; for it is pleasant,' (135.3) sings David. To worship God is the bhaktas' greatest delight, a privilege for which they have sacrificed all they possess, sometimes even their lives. As a bee is attracted to honey, so is a devotee attracted to God. As the magnet draws the iron, so does God draw His devotees to Him. As flies are attracted by syrup, so is the bhakta attracted by sweet communion with God.

In her *Master as I Saw Him*, Sister Nivedita tells a beautiful story told about a native soldier in India. He was Raghunath Das, a great lover of God. Raghunath Das was a soldier in the British service, faithful and good and much beloved by his officers. One night, while on duty, he heard a Ram-nam party. He tried to stay at his post, but the shout of 'Jay bolo ramachandra ki jay!; Hail Lord Ramachandra!' maddened him and he threw away his arms and uniform and joined in the worship. This went on for some time, till reports reached the officer. He sent for Raghunath Das and asked him whether what he heard was true and if Raghunath knew the penalty for it. Yes, he knew it: He was to be shot! 'Well,' said the officer, 'go away this time, and I shall report it to no

one. This time I forgive you. But if the same thing happens again, you must suffer the penalty.' That night, however, the sentinel heard again the Ram-nam party. He did his best not to join them, but it was irresistible. At last he threw all caution to the winds and joined the worshippers till morning. Meanwhile, however, the officer's trust in Raghunath Das had been so great that he found it difficult to believe anything against him, even on his own confession. So in the course of the night, he visited the outpost to see for himself. Now Raghunath Das was in his place and exchanged word with the officer three times. Satisfied, the officer went back and slept.

In the morning Raghunath Das appeared

9. With their heart fixed on Me, with their life resting in Me, mutually enlightening one another and perpetually singing My glory, they are delighted and rejoiced.

The true devotee has his very being in the Lord. His mind, his heart, is constantly fixed on Him. What we love is uppermost in our mind. We are never separated from anyone we sincerely love. Such a one is constantly with us. We see him with our mental eye; we feel his presence; we talk to him mentally; and our life is interwoven with him. To him goes our last thought when we drop off to sleep; he greets us when we return to consciousness next morning. And sometimes even in dream he is with us. So it is with the bhakta and his Beloved. The Lord is his lodestone. To Him his mind runs naturally. In Him he finds rest, peace and happiness.

We always speak of the thing with which our heart is most filled. What is dearest to us, what concerns us most, forms the object of our conversation. And so the bhakta talks of God. His whole nature rests in the Deity. Life is valueless without Him. All other desires have fled from him. The bhakta wants to enjoy his Lord. He is filled with the joy that is found in Him alone. He is truly happy, truly rich and rejoices always, because he has found a great and wonderful treasure. All earthly love is but a part of that infinite Love, which is God.

to report himself and surrender his arms. But the report was not accepted, for the officer told him what he himself had seen and heard.

Thunderstruck, the man insisted on being relieved from service. Rama, the Lord, had done this for His servant. Henceforth, in very truth, he decided to serve no other. And he renounced the world and became a *vairagi*.

The story most strongly illustrates God's love and care for His devotees. But it also shows how greatly attractive worship is for a true lover of God. Even death does not count with him.

In the next verse Sri Krishna describes the condition of His bhaktas.

'Never, O beloved, is the husband loved for his sake but for the sake of the Self in him. Never, O beloved, is the wife loved for her sake, but for the sake of the Self in her.'⁵ Wherever we truly love, there we love God. The husband, the wife, the child, the friend—all of them are only mediums through which a little of God becomes perceptible to us.

God is everywhere, but our sight is not properly adjusted to enable us to see Him. He, the Beloved, is the adjuster of our sight. Suppose we take opera glasses and look at the steps. We have to adjust the glasses, each according to his sight. The different persons we meet are like different opera glasses, differently adjusted. One suits my sight, another yours. One reveals in his personality love to *me*, another to *you*. But it is always a glimpse of God in the person that calls forth our love. I look through your glasses and everything is blurred. I see the person you most love, but do not find anything lovable in him. The God in him is blurred to my sight. Another person, like another pair of glasses, suits me. Yes, I love him and see a little of God in him. To you it may be quite hidden. Only a sage can see God through all mediums, all glasses, all man-

ifestations. His sight is so sharp that it burns through all veils. Says the Upanishad, 'Knowing that the same Lord inhabits all bodies, the sage will worship every body as such.'⁶ He sees God at the back of the personality. And having seen once, he speedily recognizes God in all. There is a puzzle card. We cannot find the hidden man. At last we discover him. Henceforth we will always see him whenever we see the card. In another place in the Upanishads we read, 'Of the cows of different colours the milk is of just one colour. The wise man regards the Atman like the milk and the different manifestations like the cows.'⁷ The Atman is the same in all, no matter how people differ.

In the *Chandogya Upanishad*, we see Shvetaketu receiving spiritual instructions from his father. The father asked him to bring a fruit of the banyan tree. Then he said, 'Split it into two.' The boy did that. 'What do you see?' asked the father. 'Seeds, small like particles,' said the boy. 'Break one of the seeds,' said the father. 'What do you see inside?' 'Nothing,' said Shvetaketu. 'I tell you, a banyan tree is there,' said the father. 'The tree is *there*, hidden from your sight. But it is there. Even so, my dear boy, the Atman is invisible, but It exists in every being.'⁸ The boy understood, but was not quite convinced. 'Bring a glass of water,' said the father. The son did that. 'Now put a lump of salt in the water, put the glass aside and come tomorrow.' The boy obeyed his father. The next morning the father said, 'Bring now that glass of water. Drink a little water from the top. What do you find?' 'It tastes salty.' 'Now drink a little from the middle. What do you find?' 'It tastes salty, sir.' 'Now drink from the bottom.' 'It is also salty, sir.' 'Did you see the salt?' 'No, sir.' 'So is the Atman hidden in the body.'⁹ 'Quite concealed in all beings dwells the Atman even as butter dwells in milk. Ever churn, O aspirant, with mind as the churning stick.' The bhakta always churns. He performs acts of devotion. And he obtains the butter and he is happy and

contented. He is satisfied.

Only he who has no desires is rich and contented. The bhakta is filled, satisfied. The Lord fills Him; he has no other desires. He is the greatest among men. He is fearless. The lover of God is greater than any potentate. One who renounces is superior to any king. He is stronger, more fearless and richer than anyone else. There is a story to illustrate this.

In olden times it was customary in Eastern countries for rulers to visit different parts of their domain and, while visiting, distribute wealth among the subjects. Once such a king in India went on his yearly tour and, being immensely rich, he brought great happiness wherever he went. Seated on a gigantic elephant he would throw pieces of gold among the poor and the people would follow him for a long distance, always expecting to get more gold. One day, departing from a village, this king had to cross a forest. Before he had gone far he saw a sannyasin seated under a tree. The man was all but naked and had no possessions of any kind. His staff and water pot was all that he possessed. Seeing the man so poor, the king called his minister and directed him to give him some gold. But when the minister offered the gold, the man refused to accept it. The minister reported to the king what had happened. The king told him to take more gold as the holy man probably thought the gift insufficient from such a rich monarch. The minister went again, but met with the same refusal. Then the king thought, 'Perhaps the sannyasin is offended because I have not personally made the offering to him. It is certainly not good to displease a holy man. Let me descend and ask his pardon and offer the gift to him myself.'

The king approached the sannyasin very humbly and begged of him to accept his gold. But the sannyasin said, 'Sir, how can I accept your gold? I am a rich man and you are poor and a paltry king.' The king was very much surprised. He did not understand what the saint meant. 'Don't you see, revered sir,' he

said, 'that I have come with all my retinue? And all these men following me are carrying boxes full of gold and precious stones. My wealth is almost inexhaustible. Please take as much as you may require. I see you have no belongings of any kind. Kindly accept my offer and bless me that I may go in peace. Then the saint said, 'Sir, you possess much wealth, but still I call you poor. For with all your wealth your unfulfilled desires are many. You always long for more and more and that keeps you unhappy, while I, who possess nothing, am perfectly contented. I don't desire gold or precious stones; I don't desire anything. I know my true Self and am always full of bliss. He who desires much is poor, but he who is free

from desire is the richest of the rich. Contentment is wealth and discontent is poverty and want.'

Bhaktas are always contented. They are rich in their love of God, rejoicing in the company of their Beloved. Says one of the Puranas, 'All the pleasures of this world and even of the divine sphere are not worth a hundredth part of the joy that comes from the cessation of all desires.' Then, the knots of the heart are cut asunder; all burning unrest vanishes to make room for peace.

In the next verse Sri Krishna states what kind of gift the Lord offers his beloved worshipper.

10. To these ever-steadfast and loving worshippers I give that wisdom-devotion (buddhi yoga) by which they come unto Me.

That is the reward of the bhakta: higher and purer love—that is all he cares for. 'Those who always worship Me devotedly (not for any purpose of their own, but out of love for Me)—to them I give the devotion of right knowledge (buddhi yoga). That is the extremely superior condition of mind, produced by contemplation, by which they realize that essential nature of the Lord, devoid of all limitations. They know Me, the supreme Lord, as their own Self. No matter to what creed or sect they belong, be they Jewish or Christian or Mohammedan or Hindu, they are My faithful servants. I will enlighten their minds and clear away all doubt and difference. I will remove all darkness and ignorance and I will gather them up unto Myself.'

(To be continued)

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6. *Evam sarveṣu bhūteṣu bhaktir-avyabhicāriṇi; Kartavyā paṇḍitair-jñātō sarvabhūtamayam harim*.
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7. *Gavām-anekaavarṇānām kṣirasyāpyekavarṇatā; Kṣiravat-pāsyate jñānam līnginastu gavām yathā*.
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8. *Chandogya Upanishad*, 6.12.1-3.
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According to my view, the sum and substance of the *Gita* is this: surrender yourself to God and completely efface the ego. To belong entirely to God and not to depend in the least on oneself or anyone else—this indeed is the main teaching of the *Gita*. In whatever way one accomplishes this, one's life becomes fulfilled.

—Swami Turiyananda

Ramakrishna Vedanta in the West: New Interfaces and Challenges

DR M SIVARAMKRISHNA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Obviously, Western explorations of Ramakrishna's sadhana as a tantric pose a *real* challenge in at least three interconnected facets: the according of primacy to the varied phases of Ramakrishna's sadhana, the role of canonization in hagiography and the nature of language in scriptural texts.

Tantra as the Primary Mode of Perception

Ever since Lex Hixon suggested the crucial significance of Tantra in Ramakrishna's sadhana,¹ several studies took the clue and elaborated the implications. In fact, the assigning of primary significance to Advaita in the hierarchy of Ramakrishna's sadhana and teachings, these studies contend, is arbitrary and contrary to 'facts'. This is merely institutionally supported canonization and not factually warranted interpretation. Walter G Neevel's essay² is a trendsetter in this regard but there is a possibility of the most extreme psychoanalytical and often irrational extension of the implicit issues. Though some studies are based on texts in original Bengali, they are nevertheless highly polemical, if not, at many places, pathological, 'torturing' texts for meaning, with the 'erotic' as the only semantic referent. And it shows a colossal ignorance of the functioning of linguistic frames in Indian hermeneutic traditions.

Radical Academic 'Assault'

However, one important issue that really poses a challenge is this: how far—or how long—can one regard Ramakrishna as impervious to further, more radical appropriations in the

light and context of more and more serious involvement of the scholarly, academic world. The academic world will bring all the scholarly apparatus with it: establishing authenticity of texts, the problem of allegedly 'intentional' omissions of passages in translated texts, the new historical perspective of religion as one of the discourses of signification among many, and so on. Above all, scholars these days are notoriously deconstructive, ferreting out small details ignored (or 'wilfully suppressed') earlier.

These perspectives are strengthened by another trend: many Western scholars of Ramakrishna Vedanta are today attempting to get to the originals in Bengali without reliance on any 'mediated' text. (Mediated texts are generally 'meditated' texts!) Thus, at least one complete translation of the *Kathamrita* claimed as the only unexpurgated one with explanatory notes is now available as doctoral work.³ Exposure to variations between the 'canonized' texts and the originals is, to say the least, intriguing to the Western mind, which is now arriving at notions of texts strongly at variance with the Hindu hermeneutic traditions.

Language: The Key

The central question here seems to me not a question of translation but the entire problem of hermeneutics or the religious implications of language. As Ernst Fuchs has put it elaborating his hermeneutical doctrine, 'language is not the abbreviation of thinking, but thinking is an abbreviation of language.'⁴ This is especially true of religious thought.

Language in religious contexts, though drawing from a common denotational, linguistic pool, has connotative implications which purely secular decoding can almost never interpret properly. For instance, words used in Bengali (which, one should note, is heavily Sanskritized) such as *ramaṇa*, *kriḍā*, *ud-dīpana*, *prema*, *dhāraṇā*, *bīja* are certainly tractable to varied de-coding. But that particular register has, in the context of Ramakrishna's use, no pathological erotic implications unless in an extremely irrational deconstructive myopia one is incapable of distinguishing the two entirely different realms of eroticism and spirituality. As Charles Malamoud suggests in a recent study, 'the image we have of the limpid beginnings of the immortals' Sanskrit language is one that we may deduce from the great pains taken to obscure it', and 'through scrambling of phonemes' suggest this obscurity⁵ (and Bengali is heavily Sanskritized).

Interpretations of Ramakrishna's emotive language and imagery are therefore, to use his own telling image, absorbing the *ucchi-shṭa*, the tainted, the defiled. Thus to deconstruct (or, rather, dismember) is a tribute to one's ingenious interpretive skills but hardly defensible. Even the so-called excesses of *vamachara* will, perhaps, recoil at this absurd reduction of Tantra sadhana to eroticism, imbuing it with all pervasive permutations and combinations of 'abbreviated' Freudian assumptions. In short, ferreting out the *gupta*—the insight for the initiated alone—need not be regarded as unearthing the 'grotesquely' erotic; or rather, the secret need not be equated with the sordid. But once the equation is drawn, then the simplistic bracketing of samadhi to eroticism becomes a predictable phenomenon. This is just the culmination of a process described so accurately by William Irwin Thomson talking about the 'reductionist thinking' of sociobiology—the new landslide of the detritus of nineteenth-century materialism—he says that 'it reduces a psychological or cultural complex to a gene, and then it con-

ceptualizes a gene as a hunk of matter rather than a crystal of sacred geometry and frozen music.'⁶ In short, so far as Ramakrishna as a tantric is concerned, 'the camouflaged passion and murky reasoning' of Freudians are certainly negligible for the devotee but challenging to the scholar. And most scholars Ramakrishna saw as vultures, a species proliferating in academic skies—though it is uncharitable to put it that way.

In short, the 'awakening of kundalini, knows quite a different relationship ... between language and sexuality.' (22) One certainly needs to keep the entire matrix of the *sphota* theory for de-coding Ramakrishna's language. Here is a necessity for caution between what Heidegger called the evil of 'provocative disclosure' instead of 'procreative disclosure'. The provocative disclosure is 'only out to rob that which is to be discovered, of all that might be of some use; in contrast to this exploiting, grabbing disclosure stands the procreative one, in which that which is to be discovered or revealed is to be brought with all possible care, into its own true and full being.'⁷

Madness

Along with Tantra, 'madness' is seen by a few Western academic enthusiasts as one of the 'central hermeneutic' principles to reckon with Ramakrishna. Interpretations range from seeing even his nirvikalpa samadhi as 'parental loss' consequent to Totapuri's (the submerged parental figure) departure from Dakshineswar, to those that continue to see it as an epileptic fit. For instance, Timothy Jensen interprets Ramakrishna's 'insanity' 'as not incidental either to his period of intensive meditational practices or his teaching, for in his understanding it was precisely through "madness" that God is realized, and it is through madmen that God speaks.'⁸

This suggests, in fact, a distinction, argues Jensen, ('a dichotomy') 'repeatedly seen between the one who has realized God and the

conventional, even though pious, household-er'. In short, while all madmen cannot be 'said to have realized God', madness is 'the closest *human* analogue to Ramakrishna's realization of the divine, in his own eyes and perhaps in those of his disciples as well.'

But far more significant frames are suggested by Carl Olson.⁹ Placing Ramakrishna alongside saints such as St Francis of Assisi, Olson sees madness as a negation of 'reasoning or rational argument based on scripture' that prevents one from 'direct realization'. As in the case of 'other ascetics and saints before him', Ramakrishna's 'madness' 'functions as a symbol of the holy person, the divine-intoxicated one, the realizer of ultimate reality, or the liberated one'. In addition to 'demonstrating wide mood swings', such a state of mind—'insanity'—'is an indication that the life represents one's final birth. The mad individual is no longer subject to the cycle of time.' In this sense, Ramakrishna's madness, concludes Olson, 'is a celebration of his freedom and a manifestation of it'. The sanity of divine madness unhinges the insanity of the ordinary. As Thomas Merton put it, 'The whole concept of sanity in a society where spiritual values have lost their meaning is itself meaningless.'

Thus Ramakrishna's 'madness' is a challenge to cognitive maps extant in the West. Controversion of common notions of rationality, emphasis on 'direct perception, the transcending of time and the cycles of birth—and an extraordinary range of 'mood swings' without a trace of abnormality—all these features suggest that the theories of cognition need radical updating. If updated in all its implications, we get in Ramakrishna an extremely effective prescription of the world and the incarnation who 'sports' in that as, cognitively, the world of *lila* and *nitya* as its alternate currents.

The Incarnation

'Ramakrishna's mystical experience with Jesus in 1874,' says Daniel Bassuk, 'is highly

significant as it marks the beginning of the assimilation of Jesus Christ into the Hindu religion on par with the Hindu Avatars. From this time forward, the Hindu God-men have a spiritual brother in Sri Isha, another Avatar to contend with, and a Western one at that.'¹⁰

'Contend with' are important words for, as Beatrice Bruteau says, this is a 'challenge in the Eastern attitude toward the divine incarnation'. Quoting Ramakrishna's words that 'when an incarnation comes, a tidal wave of spirituality breaks upon the world,' Bruteau spells out the Hindu point of view: '... for one religion to claim that its hero alone is the only incarnation is small-minded in several ways: bigoted, ignorant of world history, unaware of the largeness of God, spiritually undeveloped, immature, and leads to hostility rather than harmony.' She says, this is 'a severe challenge but one that has to be faced in a world that is truly global now, in which we are all drawing closer together, sharing our lives more and more intimately'.

These are insights largely shared by many students of the religious situation today. Dialogue on inclusive pluralism is increasingly heard. As Rev Kenneth Cracknell, conceding that 'there are indeed some black spots, places where challenge has gone unheeded', says, 'taken as a whole, the picture gives us grounds for hope: men and women all over ... have set out on the way of dialogue, and dialogue will lead to discovery and the discovery will be of God greater than our feeble thought had deemed possible.'¹¹ Finally, Diana L Eck points out that 'plurality of religions is not interpreted as a 'problem' to overcome. It is a fact of our world. And it is one we must encounter creatively if we are to make sense of the world.'¹²

Seen against this background, for the Ramakrishna Vedanta movement this could mean the challenge of interfaith dialogue as 'assimilation' of a 'faceless' nature. Thus Ramakrishna ceases to retain his 'uniqueness' as incarnate divinity. Of course, to 'Hinduize'

Ramakrishna is improper, but more than this, to 'universalize' him as on a par with global marketing strategies is, again, to make him an anonymous non-entity.

In this respect the equating of Ramakrishna and Christ has to be achieved with sensitivity and experiential spirituality. For instance, Hans Torwesten's insight could as well be an effective frame: 'What makes [Ramakrishna] so Christ-like that we can speak of an "unknown Christ in Hinduism", with a slight and yet momentous shift in meaning which the Indian theologian Panikkar gave to the title of his book, not a Christ hidden in Hindu philosophy, but a Christ who lived a hundred years ago and is still unknown to most Christians?'¹³

Lila as a Comprehensive Cognitive Map

The 'momentous' shift in meaning is actually the challenge of redefining the new model of the universe as conforming to and confirming the Great Master's central perception of the universe as lila, the playful enactment of the fun-loving Mother, the placing of 'Goddessliness' and its femininity at the centre of things. So if things fall apart, we have a second coming.

Lila as a concept has evoked tremendous interest. Apart from Bettina Baumer's pioneering work (and the seminal essay by Ananda K Coomaraswamy), the very idea is now regarded as constituting a crucial hermeneutic tool for interpretation across boundaries. The idea of lila, as William S Sax says in a recent volume on the subject, 'appears to mark a delightful difference between European and South Asian traditions, embodying a ludic dimension in Indian religious life that is muted or even absent in the dominant religions of the West.' Noting that 'though there may be examples of "playfulness" in Judaism, Christianity or Islam, still it seems fair to say that Hinduism had developed the doctrine of play more than any of the other so-called world religions, and that this idea has supported, par-

ticularly, in the most recent religious history of the subcontinent a pervasive attitude of joy and delight in God's lila.'¹⁴

The centrality of lila in Ramakrishna can hardly be exaggerated. As Malcolm McLean in a recent essay on the subject of lila has put it, Ramakrishna 'is fond of stressing the wilfulness of the Mother, her right to do with us and the world whatever she chooses.' But his lila — 'a constant theme that manifests itself through [Ramakrishna's] life'¹⁵ — constitutes several challenges: wilfulness, unpredictability, the assumption of several aspects including madness, are certainly challenges to neat mechanistic models of the universe. In other words, if all these negative aspects are put in the metaphors of Advaita, it is to allow the illusion of rope and snake to resolve itself not in terms of reality but of play. As Arthur C Danto has observed, 'When the snake gives way to the rope, the principles worked out for coping with snakes are not invalidated as such, but merely put out of play.'¹⁶

Ramakrishna would still say that putting something out of play is not ceasing to be part of the play but to catch the Mother, as children do in the game of hide and seek. Then one becomes a passive participant, a *sakshi*. If bad things happen to good people, good people play along and do not feel inclined to be bad since lila requires both for dramatic continuity.

Thus lila and our participation in it is an effective analogue for the meditative practice itself in which 'you are the actor, you are the one who is plowing' or, one can add, 'playing'. Lila predicates a balanced picture (stemming from *bhavamukha*) of the order emerging out of chaos. This is a challenging paradigm which resolves several anomalies without dissolving them—a fact evident in Ramakrishna's life itself.

Conclusion

In his study of the contemporary 'quest for wisdom' in the US, Tony Schwarz says,

'The flowering of more comprehensive approaches to wisdom, uniting the best of the East and the West represents a historic first. Never before have we had access to so many technologies of transformation or to so much knowledge about the full spectrum of human possibility. ... these comprehensive approaches, perhaps, never before have been so desperately needed.'¹⁷

Achieving 'comprehensive' spirituality is a challenge Ramakrishna Vedanta both poses and receives. It has to receive, specially, the nearly imperative need to interpret Ramakrishna Vedanta shruti in the light of Western smritis—without privileging either. Entering polemics is no answer; intensifying inner resources—perennial in their originating purity—*is*. *

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Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi: Her Glory and Divinity

DR UMESH GULATI

Without Shakti (Power) there is no regeneration for the world. Why is it that our country is the weakest and the most backward of all countries? Because Shakti is held in dishonour there. Mother [Sri Sarada Devi] has been born to revive that wonderful Shakti in India; and making her the nucleus, once more will Gargis and Maitreyis be born into the world,' wrote Swami Vivekananda in a letter to Swami Shivananda from the US in 1894.¹

Since Swamiji wrote these lines, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi has become a household name. One wonders, however, what prompted Swamiji to stress the glory and divinity of Holy Mother to his brother disciples. Perhaps Swamiji wanted to reinforce in them two ideas: One, to emphasize that Holy Mother was an equal of Sri Ramakrishna in divine treasures and his true spiritual successor. Second, and more important, he wanted his brother disciples to know the role Sri Ramakrishna had envisioned for her in the spiritual revival of Indian society in general, and the social rejuvenation of women everywhere in particular.

Mother in Sri Ramakrishna's Eyes

About the first idea, Sri Ramakrishna himself had indicated in so many ways that Holy Mother, who could only barely read, was indeed Sarasvati, the Goddess of Wisdom, who had come to impart spiritual knowledge to the world.² While the Master was like an 'unsheathed sword' in projecting his divinity and kept many great intellectuals of the time spellbound by his eloquence, Mother's divinity was, however, hidden be-

hind the veil of ordinariness and commonness of an Indian housewife.³ The Master therefore wanted to change that impression and set the stage for her future role in continuing his spiritual ministry and spreading his message.

One day in Dakshineswar the Master told some listeners, which included Narendra and Mahendranath Gupta (M), that God cannot be attained by reasoning; He is beyond scriptures. He went on to say, 'If I see a man with even one book in his hand, I call him a rajarshi (or a seer who appears with outer splendour, like a king), though he is a jnani (or a man of knowledge). But the brahmarshi (or a seer who dwells in Brahman-Consciousness) has no outer sign whatsoever.'⁴ It won't be an exaggeration to say that the Master regarded Mother as a true brahmarshi; her very ordinariness gave away her hidden spiritual excellence.

One in Spirit with the Master

He confirmed this impression about Sarada Devi as an acme of spiritual realization when one day she asked him how he regarded her. He replied, 'Really and truly I always regard you as the embodiment of the blissful Mother of the Universe.'⁵ The Master even formalized it by worshipping her as the Divine Mother in her aspect of Shodashi in the summer of 1872. After the worship both the worshipper and the worshipped merged into each other and became one in spirit. No wonder all the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna looked upon Holy Mother as one in spirit with the Master. Swami Abhedananda summarized his brother disciples' sentiments in his hymn to Sri Sarada Devi that begins with '*Prakṛiti*

paramām': 'Your essence is one with Ramakrishna. His name brings you great joy. O Embodiment of his thought alone, I salute you again and again.'

There are many examples by which Holy Mother showed how she had become one with the thought current of the Master. For instance, no sooner did he say to Narendra (later Swamiji) to eat in his room, seventy-five feet away from Mother's, than she began to cook Narendra's favourite dishes. Another time the Master asked Sarada Prasanna (later Swami Trigunatitananda) to get his carriage fare from Mother. Before the boy even reached there, his carriage money was on the steps of the nahabat. We would like to mention just one more incident. Once the Master had decided to take a number of his men and women devotees to attend the great Vaishnava festival at Panihati. Just before the departure of the party for the festival, Mother inquired through a woman devotee if she too could join the party. The Master told the devotee, 'She may go if she wishes.' Hearing these words, Holy Mother said to the devotee, 'Quite a number of persons are going with him; besides, the place will be filled with people. ... So I won't go.' As it turned out, the Master was pleased with that decision. He said after returning from the festival, 'If people had seen her with me, they would have made fun of us and teasingly said, "There go the hamsa and the hamsi [a pair of swans]." She is very intelligent.' (70) Informed about the Master's reaction, Mother said, 'I realized he was not wholeheartedly giving me permission to go. Instead of saying, "Yes, of course she will go," he merely said, "She may go if she wishes." He left the decision to me. So I gave up the idea of going.' (71)

Mother of the Ramakrishna Movement

In the letter mentioned above, Swamiji also revealed to his brother disciples that before he went to America he had sought Mother's permission and blessings, which she readily granted and prayed for the success of his

mission to the West. Swamiji noticed in America how the women there were free and self-confident and were the real shakti (power) behind enterprising men. 'Yet they worship Her [Shakti] ignorantly through sense gratification. Imagine then what a lot of good they will achieve who will worship Her with all purity, in Sattvika spirit, looking upon Her as their Mother!' That explains why Swamiji wanted to set up Sarada Math even before Ramakrishna Math and to make Holy Mother its central figure. Once back in India, however, Swamiji changed his mind about Sarada Math.⁶ No one was more pleased than Mother herself for bringing into being Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission first, for she had earnestly prayed to the Master for her monastic children to have a place of their own. In the words of Swami Tapasyananda, 'She is, in a very real sense, the Mother [and the de facto leader] who gave birth to the spiritual movement associated with Sri Ramakrishna's name.'⁷

Swami Saradananda says that one of the attributes of incarnations is their omniscience;⁸ they always live in the present. Being omniscient means that an incarnation has the awareness of 'the origin, middle and end of all objects of the world'. For example, Sri Ramakrishna, an incarnation of this age, knew very well the inner world of each and every one of his disciples as one sees an object in a glass case. He also knew who he himself was, his mission in this world, and how each one of his disciples and devotees fitted into the broader picture. Of course, an incarnation doesn't get this knowledge by discursive reasoning, as you and I would do, but by immediate and direct perception. That is how Sri Ramakrishna knew Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's place in his overall life and mission. True, he never verbalized it, and no incarnation ever does that. Unlike an ordinary person, an incarnation doesn't consider all the pros and cons before making a decision. And yet whatever he does is right. In other words, Sri Ramakrishna had anticipated Holy Mother's role in his fu-

ture spiritual ministry. That, after all, is the significance of the Master's marriage—not to satisfy any worldly desire but to make his wife as an equal partner in his divine play and mission. He foresaw in Sarada, then only five years old, a perfect instrument to teach humanity, especially householders, the meaning and purpose of life and how to live it. Only a few days before his mahasamadhi at the Cossipore garden house he finally told her that she had to do a lot more than what he had done.

All the brother disciples of Swamiji held Holy Mother in a very high esteem. In fact, they all thought her to be a living Durga. Such adoration and even supplication from such 'jewels of sons', however, would have turned

He foresaw in Sarada, then only five years old, a perfect instrument to teach humanity, especially householders, the meaning and purpose of life and how to live it. Only a few days before his mahasamadhi at the Cossipore garden house he finally told her that she had to do a lot more than what he had done.

the head of a lesser person. But Mother was divinity incarnate, with humility as its identical twin. Though conscious of it, she very rarely expressed it. For example, she told her cousin Shibu, a small boy then, 'Yes, I am Kali.' She once said, 'In the fullness of spiritual realization, a person finds that the God who resides in his heart resides in the hearts of all—the oppressed, the lowly, and the untouchable. This realization makes one truly humble.'⁹ As a corollary one also becomes more loving, caring and serves everyone as the manifestation of God.

Love Was Her Gospel

Holy Mother once remarked that renun-

ciation was Sri Ramakrishna's special message. Love is synonymous with renunciation, and it is love that was Mother's gospel. For love without renunciation becomes maya, but renunciation in action is karma yoga. If Sri Ramakrishna's message of renunciation, of 'woman and gold' and 'I' and 'mine', has to be actualized, it must get its bone and flesh in love and selfless service. That is where Mother Sarada comes in, who began her spiritual ministry of service from the very day she moved into the nahabat, the fifty-square-foot room that became the base of her operations. This small room served as her bedroom and the supplies room as well. It is from here that she served Sri Ramakrishna and his increasing number of disciples, working for more than twelve hours a day. Although the Master himself called this cramped room a 'cage', she herself had no complaints. On the contrary, she often remarked in reference to her days in Dakshineswar, 'How happy I was then!' Mother was happy because she loved the Master and his mission, *not for the sake of the husband but for the Self*, intuitively hearing the voice of Sage Yajnavalkya. The Master gave sermons on God and renunciation of 'woman and gold', but it was left to Mother to clarify their meaning by her own example.

One may not agree with Sister Nivedita's implied remark that without Rani Rasmani there would have been no Ramakrishna.¹⁰ But just as without Radha, there could be no Krishna or Vrindaban, the same way without Mother there would have been no Ramakrishna, or the Ramakrishna Order with God-realization and service as its twin objectives. Even Sri Ramakrishna acknowledged his indebtedness to her. He once said that if she were not that pure, who knew if he himself might not have lost self-control. As Swami Buidhananda has put it:

Sri Ramakrishna could not have been the 'Kapala-mochana' that he is, unless Sri Saradamani had been the Holy Mother that she is. Think for instance, what would have happened if Sri Ramakrishna were to turn an ordinary householder! There was no law under the sun which could have barred Sri Sarada from claiming her right according to Dharma. But how very easily she transcended the urge of becoming the mother of a few, for was she not the Mother of all? *Thus in one sense Sri Ramakrishna is the gift of Sri Sarada to humanity.*¹¹ (Emphasis added)

Mother above Anything Else

Although Holy Mother regarded the Master her guru, once in a while she turned the tables on him. One day Mother, as usual, carried a plate of food for the Master to his room when a woman devotee standing outside his room said, 'Mother, please let me carry the plate.' Mother agreed, and the woman carried the plate, and placing the plate before the Master, hurriedly left the room. Since the Master knew that the woman had led an impure life, he refused to eat from 'out of those defiled hands' until Mother promised that she would not let anyone else, especially that woman, carry the plate. Sarada Devi said firmly, with folded hands:

I cannot give any such promise, but I shall try to bring your food myself. If someone addresses me as 'Mother' and wishes to carry the plate, I shall not be able to refuse. You must not forget that you are not my Lord alone; you are the Lord of all.¹²

What woman would show such indifference to her exclusive right on her husband's attention! What a wonderful lesson on spirituality, divine love and detachment, from a disciple of a doyen of spirituality! Only a sage of equal standing could dare speak like that.

Her Compassion for the Fallen

There were other times when Holy Mother expressed her compassion and forgiveness for the so-called fallen women. A certain lady of ill repute used to visit Mother at Udbodhan

House in Calcutta. One day Balam Babu's wife informed her through someone that if that woman continued visiting Mother, she and her friends would stop coming. Holy Mother replied that anyone who had taken refuge in her would come regardless of whether anyone else liked it or not. In fact, she even accepted food from that devotee, and others fell in line. Unlike the Master, who was very selective in accepting his devotees, Mother was same-sighted and accepted all regardless of their purity and lifted them up from there. She even did japa on their behalf and often told them, 'When you are in distress, just say to yourself, "I have a Mother."' True to her words, Mother told another woman who, in a sincere mood of repentance, made a confession of her past sins: 'Come in, I shall initiate you. Offer everything at the feet of the Master. What is there to fear?'¹³ Truly, she spoke in the manner of Jesus to Mary Magdalene!

Conferred Prestige on Womanhood

Her empathy, compassion and forgiveness not only revealed the best of Motherhood, but also redeemed womanhood from eternal damnation since the Fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, for which women have been blamed for every evil in man. One day in great privacy Sri Ramakrishna asked Mother if she had come to Dakshineswar to drag him to the path of samsara. Mother's reply was spontaneous and direct. 'No. On the contrary, I have come to help you on your chosen path.' Here we quote Swami Buidhananda again:

The prestige which Sri Saradamani conferred on the entire womanhood by this act of supreme renunciation, has yet to be understood and assumed by the womenfolk of the world. This was not only a great event in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Sarada Devi; correctly understood, it is one of the greatest events in human history. This was virtually opening the gates of liberation for the millions [of women throughout the world].¹⁴

Concern for Her Children's Welfare

As the number of devotees visiting her began to increase, their physical comfort became her personal concern. She not only waited on them, but also often cleaned their plates and washed their laundry; indeed no work was too menial for her. She gave this loving care to everyone without any distinction of creed or caste. If a devotee protested that it was a sin to receive service from a brahmin, and a guru at that, she would say that devotees have no caste. She served Amjad, a Muslim worker, with the same loving care as she did for Sarat (Swami Saradananda).

Holy Mother kept a keen eye especially on the health of her monastic children, as she knew that the monastery couldn't provide them nourishing food. In 1891, nineteen-year-

Holy Mother wanted us to turn our gaze inside and awaken to the fact that the Self in us is the Self in all. By doing so, all differences separating us will vanish, and we will become one family of brothers and sisters, helping and serving one another.

old Kalikrishna, later known as Swami Virajananda, accompanied Swami Saradananda and others to visit Mother at her village in Jayrambati. When the time for them to leave arrived, they fell sick. So Mother did not allow them to leave until they recovered and gained strength. During their stay at her house she cooked for them nourishing food and went from door to door to procure milk for them. Many years later, ailing Gangadhar Maharaj (Swami Akhandananda) came to Calcutta to get medical treatment. When his brother disciple Baburam Maharaj (Swami Premananda) met him and asked why he had not visited his brothers at Belur Math, he said:

Mother compelled me to come from Sargachi for my treatment. She has appointed a Kaviraj (doctor). Here I take medicine regularly; I'm on

a diet. Now if I go elsewhere, Mother will scold me. Besides, (smiling) you are all renunciates; can you serve me a protein diet there?¹⁵

However, after Swami Premananda insisted and promised to do everything to make him comfortable, Swami Akhandananda left with him for Belur Math. Before anyone regards it as an insult to Mother, one must bear in mind that it is in the nature of a child to do exactly the things that its mother has forbidden it. One must also not forget that regardless of how much we might consider those swamis as spiritual giants, for Holy Mother they were her gems of children! And, it is this very playfulness of these saints that authenticated their Mother-child relationship.

Of course, everyone in the Ramakrishna Order, from Swami Vivekananda down to the last servant, respected Mother for that and went to her for advice or to lodge a complaint. In every case her word was taken as final. She based all her decisions on the criteria of the strength they would engender in forging a solid foundation for the infant Order and leading it into a fraternity of brothers. An

incident that occurred at the Koalpara ashrama is worth mentioning. The head of this ashrama was very stern and authoritarian in his dealings with workers. So these workers liked to spend more time with Mother at her village in Jayrambati. The leader mentioned to her about their disobedience and requested her not to encourage them by giving them good food. Mother was outraged by what the man said and remarked, 'What is the matter with you? What do you mean? Love alone is the essential thing. Our organization is growing only through love. I am their Mother. How impudent you are to mention to me their food.'¹⁶

Needed: Reorientation of Relationships

According to Aristotle, man is essentially a political animal. As such, we live in a rela-

tionship with one another in this world. The life of Holy Mother is a profound message in the art of living in a society of people, at home, workplace, organization and community; the secret is to live and work for others. Mother once said that the Master had left her to demonstrate to the world the Motherhood of God. What it means is that one should serve and work for others like a mother does for her own children. Working and serving out of love is called karma yoga, and for householders it is one of the best ways to realize God and attain moksha; it is also a therapy for leading a happy life.

Today the whole world is living in fear and insecurity. That is because we identify ourselves with the externals, our body forms, religions and nationalities. These are the breeding grounds for jealousy, hatred and fanaticism. Holy Mother wanted us to turn our gaze inside and awaken to the fact that the Self in us is the Self in all. By doing so, all differences separating us will vanish, and we will become one family of brothers and sisters, helping and serving one another. In order to make this a reality, Mother wanted us not to find fault with others, but be aware of our own faults. For no one is perfect, not even devas. If they were, they would have attained their liberation already. After all, morality or righteousness is not absolute; considering it so causes all the conflicts and unhappiness in the world. So Mother wanted us to choose, in the words of Rabbi Kushner, happiness over our own standards of righteousness.¹⁷ We should accept others as they are by cultivating virtues of forbearance and forgiveness. What a profound lesson in practical Vedanta! Reorienting relationships on these lines, and meditating on Holy Mother, will help us subdue our passions of lust, jealousy, hatred and

pride, and release so much of our dormant energy for constructive purposes like removing poverty, ending violence and securing world peace. *

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The genius of communication is the ability to be both totally honest and totally kind at the same time.

—John Powell

A Survey of the Mind

SWAMI SATYASWARUPANANDA

(Continued from the previous issue)

Some Psychological Issues

The experiential world of Yoga-Vedanta also delineates several issues of deep theoretical and empirical import to psychology. They outline a system of mental practices that explore and utilize the diverse capabilities of the human mind to help one discover the ontological ground of one's being.

Unfortunately, Western psychology, dominated for the most part by the behavioural and (Freudian) psychodynamic schools, has had very little to say about but the most commonplace human behaviour. The relatively newer humanistic and transpersonal schools, centred on the human, transpersonal and cosmic dimensions of the personality, and focusing on the individual's inner potential for growth, are still some way from becoming major forces in Western thinking. To make matters worse, most mainstream Western psychologists have been ignorant of the psychological insights furnished by Eastern thought, or harbour profound misconceptions about it. When Freud started a correspondence with Romain Rolland after the First World War, Rolland drew his attention to the spontaneous religious sentiment (as opposed to formal religion), 'the feeling of the eternal' (or 'oceanic' feeling), which, according to Rolland, is not only not uncommon but widely exerts a rich and beneficent power. Rolland asserted that this sentiment had never failed him through his life, was a source of vital renewal, never affected his critical faculties, and had nothing to do with his personal yearnings (it being a contact imposed on him as a fact).¹ He also sent Freud his biographies of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda (as exemplars of this 'spontaneous

religious sentiment') on publication. Freud admitted that he did not know how to explain this feeling, having himself never experienced it, but then proceeded to interpret it as an expression of a primitive (or infantile) ego—with poorly defined ego boundaries. He also believed that mystical intuition 'cannot reveal to us anything but primitive, instinctual impulses and attitudes—highly valued for an embryology of the soul when correctly interpreted, but worthless for orientation in the alien external world'. Franz Alexander's paper on 'Buddhistic Training as Artificial Cata-tonia' is another oft-quoted example of ill-informed psychoanalytic interpretation.

There have been others, however, whose experience pointed to the contrary. R M Bucke, a Canadian psychiatrist, had in 1872 a remarkable and immensely joyous experience of 'intellectual illumination quite impossible to describe'. He then brought out an anthology of the lives and teachings of personalities with a recorded history of similar experiences. This was his famous work *Cosmic Consciousness*, which also included a sketchy chapter on Sri Ramakrishna. Medard Boss, the influential Swiss existentialist and psychiatrist, wrote about his experience of Indian holy men in his book *A Psychiatrist Discovers India* (1965): 'There were the exalted figures of the sages and holy men themselves, each of them a living example of the possibility of human growth and maturity and of the attainment of an imperturbable inner peace, a joyous freedom from guilt, and a purified selfless goodness and calmness.' (187-8) Alan Roland, a contemporary psychoanalyst (and psychoanalytic writer) posits a 'spiritual self' as distinct

from the 'phenomenological self' studied by traditional psychoanalysts.

Scholars have noted that Freud's theories were influenced by his own personal idiosyncrasies, family and social upbringing, as also the intellectual climate of scepticism, rationalism and positivism that pervaded the Europe of his times. Although Freud used many analogies from physics to give his views a 'scientific' flavour, psychoanalysis failed to earn respect as an 'objective' science. But physics itself has taken some curious turns since the days of Freud, and in a remarkable reversal of positions mathematicians and theoretical physicists are now proposing models of the human mind. A subjective idealist, for instance, would find Penrose's world view quite akin to his own. The classical Aristotelian laws of thought stand modified today as a result of empirical observations (like the dual nature of light), while purely 'rational' mathematical insights have led to experimental discoveries in physics that would have otherwise appeared counter-intuitive (like the bending of light by gravity).

Some Misconceptions about Eastern Psychologies

The Yoga-Vedanta systems (as also the related Buddhist psychology embodied in the *Abhidhamma* and the *Vishuddhīmagga*) provide a comprehensive functional model of the human mind that explains not only instinctive and ordinary motivated behaviour, but also 'the farther reaches of human nature' and the many dormant potentials of the mind that are seen manifested only occasionally in especially gifted individuals or in persons undergoing special discipline. Unfortunately, these psychological perspectives have not received the scientific attention they deserve, because of several misconceptions, a few of which it would not be out of place to discuss and clarify here.

1. *Because Eastern thought is largely religious, the scientific bent of modern psychology has*

led the great majority of Western psychologists to ignore the teachings of their Eastern counterparts. On the issue of Advaita Vedanta being a religion, the philosopher J N Mohanty argues:

In the process of *sadhana* (or practice) *shravana* is hermeneutical, *manana* is philosophical, *nididhyasana* is meditative. None is religious. The meditative process is akin to explorations into one's own psyche, to what may be called auto-psychoanalysis, than to anything that could be called 'religious'. Moksha, the goal of this process, is not supernatural, otherworldly, soteriological. It is not salvation. It is discovery of the identity between the innermost truth of one's 'psyche' and the innermost being of the world: of psychology and physics. What is religious about it?²

D T Suzuki's remark, made with regard to Buddhism, is also a perfectly valid appraisal of the position of the Yoga-Vedanta systems: 'What would Freud have said to a religion in which there is no God, no irrational authority of any kind, whose main goal is exactly that of liberating man from all dependence, activating him, showing him that he and nobody else bears the responsibility for his fate?'³ On the contrary, as Joseph Byrnes notes, 'Hinduism and Buddhism are so "psychologically" oriented that the use within the traditions of anything other than experimental psychology would be a redundancy.'⁴ It is worth noting that while both the Advaita Vedanta and Sankhya-Yoga systems allow for a God, He (or She) is not central to its theory and practice. One can be an adept in these systems without even believing in God.

2. *Issues of singular importance to Western personality theories, like developmental and social influence as well as the role of sex differences on mental function are not addressed by Yoga and Vedanta.* Daniel Goleman has rightly suggested that the Eastern perspective of the human lifespan is radically different from Western concepts.⁵ Unlike Western psychology, Yoga-Vedanta takes a developmental perspective that not only spans across multiple lifetimes but also allows for ontogenetic

movement up and down the evolutionary tree. There are not only good philosophical arguments in favour of transmigration⁶ of the psychic apparatus, but many researchers have amassed impressive empirical data in its support.⁷ Transmigration of the personality structure and continuity of existence often render the environmental influences over a few years of relatively lesser consequence. Moreover the social organization at the time of codification of these Darshanas was relatively simple and at the same time stratified by well-defined codes of conduct, so that social influences on behaviour were not as complex as at present. These theories also do not recognize sex differences in the Atman, the core of individual personality, or any gender-related differences in overall mental capacities, though other texts (like the Itihasas and Puranas) often discuss such differences in personality traits and behaviour.

3. *These psychologies being essentially phenomenological and a descriptive theory of internal states, they are very difficult to study objectively and experimentally, and leave enough scope for self-deception.* This has been the stock argument of behaviourists, who refused to recognize mental states as the proper object of psychological study. But the newer and influential discipline of cognitive sciences specializes in the study of these very states. Electro-encephalography (EEG) and imaging techniques [Positron Emission Tomography (PET), Single Photon Emission Computerized Tomography (SPECT) and functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI)] now provide powerful tools for studying and correlating the electrical and metabolic activity of the brain with specific cognitive, emotional and volitional processes. It is now possible even to monitor the activity of a single neuron in situ. A whole host of positive physiological and psychological changes have now been scientifically found to be associated with meditation. Even differences in the types of meditation have been objectively documented. For example, in an oft-cited Indian

study it was found that the EEGs of yogis practising deep one-pointed concentration of mind showed a pattern that could not be disturbed by strong stimuli like flashing lights or loud noise. In contrast, in a Japanese study of Zen masters practising mindfulness, on their exposure to repetitive stimuli (a series of clicks, neutral sounds as well as affectively loaded words) the EEG showed a continual and steady registering of each sound. They responded as much to the last click as to the first in a long series, and equally to neutral sounds and emotionally loaded words.

4. *Meditation is the key to mental health in Eastern traditions.* The Western concept of meditation is coloured by the Judeo-Christian theistic tradition, where meditation is synonymous with discursive prayer or reflection after scriptural reading, and is intended as a scheme of moral and devotional training. In the Indian tradition dhyana is commonly translated as meditation and is the penultimate of a series of eight steps in Patanjali's Yoga. It involves a very high degree of internal concentration wherein a solitary train of thought is maintained to the exclusion of other thoughts and perceptions.⁸ But the six prior steps constitute a long preparatory discipline aimed at developing concentration of mind and the power of introspection along with detachment of the will from the hold of instinctual desires (*abhyāsa-vairāgyābhyām tannirodhaḥ*). Abstinance from immoral activities (*yama*), working with a spirit of objective detachment, invoking thoughts contrary to those arousing instinctual drives (*pratīpakṣa-bhāvanam*), mental repetition of a mantra (to train the mind to retain a single thought as well as to lay positive samskaras) are all primary disciplines that weaken drives (*kleśa-tanūkarāṇa*), neutralize complexes (by increasing awareness of one's thoughts and reactions) and prepare the mind for meditation. Many behavioural and cognitive therapeutic techniques used by Western psychologists—like avoidance and systematic desensitization by reciprocal inhi-

bition (equivalent to *pratīpakṣa-bhāvanam*), used for the treatment of anxieties and phobias—can be correlated with these basic yogic techniques. In its elementary stages, the Vedantic discipline of *viveka* or *vichara* would involve much of cognitive retraining, that is to say, alteration of maladaptive attitudes and reactions to events as well as biased thinking. Dhyana and samadhi, then, are higher states of yoga that can be sustained only after preliminary mental purification attained through strenuous practice. Also, it is only in these states that the higher faculties of mind become apparent.

The Yoga-Vedanta Model of Mind

(In the following discussion we shall be using rather freely concepts and terminology that have been separately developed by the Yoga and Vedanta systems in order to outline a comprehensive model of the mind). The Vedantists conceive of the human personality as possessing five components (termed *kośas* or sheaths), namely the physical (*annamaya-kośa*), the vital (*prāṇamaya-kośa* comprising psychophysical energies), the mental (*manomaya-kośa*), the intellectual and judgemental (*vijñānamaya-kośa*, also called *buddhi*, mediating judgement and volition and corresponding to the Western psychological concept of ego) and the blissful self (*ānandamaya-kośa*) that has no equivalent in Western psychology).

In terms of personality traits a common and basic classification is based on the Sankhya-Yoga categories (called *gunas*) of *tamas* (principle of inertia), *rajas* (principle of activity) and *sattva* (principle of equilibrium or equanimity), which are conceived of as the fundamental matrix of *Prakriti*, or nature. Details of the personality traits (based on varying proportions of the three *gunas*) have been discussed in the *Bhagavadgīta*.⁹

The Vedantists conceive of the mind, or *antaḥkaraṇa*, in terms of four functional modes: *chitta*, *manas*, *buddhi* and *ahaṅkāra*. (a) *Chitta* acts as the storehouse of memories, *samskaras*

(or subconscious impressions) and *kleśas* (literally, 'pain-bearing obstructions'; they stand for five instinctual mental forces). *Samskaras* are functionally classified into two: *vāsana* *samskaras* responsible for memories of past events, and *karma samskaras*, or *karmāśaya* (the residue of past actions). The latter, on an individual basis, provides the impulse to act in certain ways, and collectively, determines the species of birth, longevity and the general pattern of personality and life experiences. In its collective function the *karmāśaya* also has a transpersonal and cosmic dimension. (b) *Manas* comprises the constant perceptions and cogitations (termed *vr̥ttis*) derived from and working on sensory inputs, as well as memories rising to consciousness from the depths of the *chitta*. (c) *Buddhi* is the intrinsic capacity of the mind, or *antaḥkaraṇa*, to get concentrated into a limited number of (usually logically or emotionally linked) *vr̥ttis*. *Buddhi* manifests as a definitive judgement (*nīścayātmikā buddhi*) or a conscious decision to act (*saṅkalpa* or *kr̥tī*). It is worth remembering that in the overwhelming majority of people this *saṅkalpa*, or volition, is simply determined by the interplay of *karmāśaya* and *kleśa* and can hardly be termed free volition. (d) *Ahaṅkāra* is the mental mode of self-reference and self-awareness that all humans possess. It is responsible for appropriating all physical and mental perceptions and activities. In common parlance the term *ahaṅkāra* is equated with egotism or ego but technically it refers only to the 'I-sense' (the *asmīti* component of the *kleśas*). Pure consciousness (*chit* or *chit-shakti*), which is the very nature of the *Atman* or *Purusha* and is not related to any material category, gets identified with the unconscious material (*jaḍa*) dynamism of the mind and the product (*chit-jaḍa granthī*) is *ahaṅkāra*. The result of this combination is the sense of self-awareness, which is what we term empirical consciousness (*chetana*). It is only this *chetana* that can be the object of empirical study.¹⁰

In the Indian psychological context, be-

haviour is largely determined by samskaras, the dynamic residues of previous experiences lying dormant in the mind. They are stored not only during one's present lifetime but through innumerable previous lives, thus allowing for an almost inexhaustible repertoire of behavioural patterns, although in practice the species, the physical body and the environment in a given lifetime narrow down the range of samskaras that can actually have a free play.

The formation of *karmāśaya* as well as its fructification is closely related to the function of certain forces termed *kleśas*, of which *rāga* and *dveṣa*, the attractive and repulsive drives, provide the familiar feelings of attachment and hatred to perceived physical or mental objects and lead to corresponding behaviour. *Kleśas* of a more pervasive nature are *asmītā*, the sense of self, *abhiniveśa*, the instinctual preservation of the self, and *avidyā*, which by masking the underlying consciousness provides the matrix for the play of these psychic forces.

Linked to a memory trace or any specific action (the physical effect of *karmāśaya*), the *kleśas* not only result in the personal feelings of pleasure, pain and the like, but also leave fresh karma residues. Activated repeatedly, a *kleśa* gains strength and results in the activation of *karmāśaya* of certain types leading to fresh activity and fresh *karmāśaya* formation, thus setting the pattern for behaviour stereotypes. De-linked from *kleśas*, or overwhelmed by *karmāśaya* of a contrary nature, the karma-samskaras lose their inherent power of impulse generation in course of time. The *kleśas*, then, form the crucial link for all behaviour-modification strategies.

Over and above this deterministic mind is the Purusha or Atman, the source of the consciousness streaming through the buddhi as also the will (*chit-shakti*), which guide our conscious behaviour. The will is responsible for concentrating the mind and detaching it from the play of samskaras and extraneous forces.

This concentration and detachment of the mind (or the will) comprises the essence of all voluntary mental training.

According to this model, deterministic behaviour derived from the samskaras can be modified in several ways. First, voluntary actions contrary to the general trend of the *karmāśaya* weaken the force of the latter. Second, the *kleśas* can be consciously attenuated (technically termed *tanūkarana*) by contrary thoughts. This is distinct from subconscious repression. Repressed *kleśas* are technically termed *vicchinna*. Finally, the light of consciousness (*prajñāloka*), when brought to bear on the subconscious portions of the mind, can completely neutralize dormant samskaras. This focusing of the *prajñāloka* requires discipline of a very high order, but even ordinary awareness of our samskaras through an alert observation of their effects on the conscious mind can help profoundly alter these effects.¹¹ Most effective psychological therapies depend on this focusing of awareness for resolving conflicts and complexes. All meditators are aware of the power of meditative awareness in calming the mind, reducing impulsiveness and dampening vortices of negative thought.

This theory of the mind is in agreement with many recent neurophysiological findings.¹² Repeated excitation of a nerve leaves it easily excitable (termed 'long-term potentiation', or LTP), which then enhances its facilitatory or inhibitory function. Repeated stimulation has also been shown to alter gene expression, thus laying down long-term memories and patterns of behaviour. Also, emotionally charged cognitions (associated with strong *kleśas*) that are routed through the limbic system (responsible for mediating emotions) in the brain have been found to lay down memories very difficult to erase and thus modify behaviour accordingly. However, there is no known neurophysiological equivalent to the transpersonal dimension of *karmāśaya*. Also, neurophysiological understanding of awareness is still rudimentary. Researchers are fo-

cusing on the neural correlates of attention and short-term memory as well as global processing of information by the brain to build a theory of awareness. The theories proposed to explain the sense of self are, however, not very credible. For example, some neurobiologists have proposed that a major portion of the brain is primarily concerned with the mapping of bodily as well as external perceptions. A second order of neurons then creates a fresh representation of their interaction and this in itself gives rise to the feeling of a coherent self. Unfortunately, even personal computers deal with many second-order representations, but they have never reported self-awareness.

The most striking insights provided by Eastern psychologies are in the domain of mental powers and advanced capacities. As we noted earlier, the mind is actually structured to release tremendous power and attain apparently 'supernormal' insights if properly disciplined, purified of distractions and concentrated. Here we shall only consider two specific insights provided by these psychologies: (a) the Atman as the source of all pleasure; and (b) the mind's capacity to erase all thought (*nirodha*). Vedantists identify the Atman as the source of all joy, right down to the pleasure of ordinary sense perception. The Atman is identified not only as the ground of existence (Being), but also as of the nature of consciousness and bliss. As stated earlier, perception, in Vedantic epistemology, depends on the mind's 'taking the form of' its object (*tadā-kāra vritti*). This focused *vritti* illumined by the consciousness of the Atman constitutes objective knowledge. In every act of focused perception the Atman is revealed (*sākṣād-āparokṣād-brahma*).¹³ Consequently, every act of knowing leads to satisfaction—a manifestation of the bliss of the Atman. All sensual pleasure also is a result of this focusing of the mind induced by the object of pleasure.¹⁴ However, voluntary concentration of the mind is an arduous task (as any schoolchild can aver); in fact, forcing a desultory mind into concentration often

results only in reactionary distractedness. Hence the universal urge for novelty that transfixes the mind involuntarily. This also accounts for the sense of joy in and after deep sleep. It is worth noting that neurophysiologists have identified neurotransmitters that mediate pleasure. Every novel experience is found to release endogenous opioids (opium-like substances) in the brain, and this is associated with pleasurable sensation. Nevertheless, as we have noted earlier, identification of a chemical mediator does not in itself explain the psychological experience of pleasure. The fact that the core of the human personality is blissful or joyous is alien to Western psychology. In fact, some post-Freudian psychoanalysts tell us that there is a 'depressive core' to the human personality. Existential psychologists contend that guilt and dread (of Nothingness) are basic human existentials that none can transcend. In contrast, Yoga and Vedanta take this transcendence to be the very goal (*puruṣārtha*) of humanity. Recognizing this true source of joy can drastically alter one's perception of life for the better. Therapists can also use this insight to help patients with a whole range of disorders including anxiety and depression. Finally, for empiricists, this can be a hypothesis that can be put to objective test.

Meditators universally record the experience of joy that accompanies meditation once early distractions are overcome, and this increases till the mind is able to sustain a solitary thought (*samānājātiya pratyayaprovāha*), a state technically termed *savikalpa samadhi*. Yoga psychologists, however, speak of stages even beyond this. The mind can actually be turned off (termed *nirodha*), that is, made free of all *vrittis*. This is distinct from sleep since sleep itself is a *vritti*. As the phenomenon is very rare, authentic descriptions of its physiological effects are also difficult to come by. Evidently, the yogi practising *nirodha* is initially able to stop all *vrittis* for brief periods only, but once established in the *nirodha* of *asamprajñāta* yoga,

most yogis would not be able to reverse the process. About the characteristics of *nirodha* in the context of Buddhist meditation, Daniel Goleman writes:

Although *nirodha* can last for seven days of the human time-rhythm, there is no time sequence in the state itself: the moment immediately preceding it and immediately following it are experienced as of immediate succession. The limit of seven days given for the duration of *nirodha* may be due to its unique physiology: heartbeat and normal metabolism, it is said, cease along with consciousness though metabolic processes continue at a residual level so that the meditator's body can be distinguished from a corpse.¹⁵

Sri Ramakrishna tells us that for most yogis the body expires in three weeks' time following *nirodha*. The fact that Sri Ramakrishna's own heartbeat would stop during *samadhi* was recorded by his physician.¹⁶ An interesting eyewitness account of a yogi's passing away twenty-one days after what was apparently *nirodha*, at a Ramakrishna Mission hospital, was recently recorded in this journal.¹⁷ To the yoga psychologist this is no suicide. It is the culmination of the effort to regain self-identity (that is, the *Atman*) unhindered by the trappings of the mind.

Conclusion

We have briefly reviewed some of the important theoretical and experimental perspectives that have a bearing on our current understanding of the human mind. It is obvious that a lot of ground remains to be covered before we can have an adequate empirical understanding of the mind and mental processes. Developments in disciplines as diverse as psychology and theoretical physics are likely to have important contributions to make in this process. Interdisciplinary collaboration and collation of ideas will be needed to develop a working theoretical model of the mind that can not only explain known behaviour but also generate testable hypotheses. This is the very basis of scientific development. Much of the advances in higher experimental and ap-

plied physics has been accompanied (and often preceded) by advances in theoretical physics. The last decade was christened 'the decade of the brain'. Many people believe that this century will witness spectacular advancements in the empirical understanding of the mind and consciousness. The current trend of events does not belie that hope. *

Notes and References

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2. JN Mohanty, 'Advaita Vedanta as Philosophy and Religion' in *Vedanta: Concepts and Application* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2000).
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4. Joseph Byrnes, *Psychology of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Free Press, 1984), 240.
5. Daniel Goleman, 'Eastern Psychology' in *Theories of Personality*, eds. C S Hall, G Lindzey and J G Campbell (New Delhi: John Wiley, 1978), 373.
6. For example, see 'The Cosmos: Microcosm' in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), 2.212-25; and 'Reincarnation' in *ibid.*, 4.257-71.
7. Ian Stevenson, Director, Division of Personality Studies, University of Virginia, USA, has compiled an International Registry of over 3000 cases of individuals with memories suggestive of reincarnation. Dr Stevenson's reports are characterized by their attention to detail, rigorous attempt to cross-check the claims of the participants and scientific analysis of data to eliminate biases. In India the leading researcher in this field has been Satwant Pasricha, a clinical psychologist at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bangalore. Unfortunately, theological, dogmatic, cultural and personal biases have consistently worked

- against the incorporation of these findings in the orthodox scientific world view. Consequently, psychologists have to persistently keep ignoring many important behavioural issues (like the talent of prodigious children) inexplicable on the basis of a single lifetime, and several cultures fail to derive the benefits of a world view with wider existential 'givens' which can profoundly and positively affect one's approach to issues like disease and death.
8. William James thought this to be an impossible task. He wrote in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 'No one can possibly continuously attend to an object that does not change.'
 9. See *Bhagavadgita* 13.19-40 and 17.2-22.
 10. The *Gita* (13.5-6) identifies *chetana* as an attribute of *ksetra*, or Prakriti.
 11. The Gestalt psychotherapist F Perls had rightly noted that 'Awareness itself can heal.'
 12. This is not to suggest that the present neurophysiological model is the best way of explaining mentality.
 13. *Vedanta Paribhasha of Dharmaraja Adhvarindra*, trans. Swami Madhavananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1983), 8.
 14. See 'The Bliss of Objects' in *Panchadashi of Sri Vidyananda Swami*, trans. Swami Swahananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1975).
 15. Daniel Goleman, *The Buddha on Meditation and Higher States of Consciousness* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1980), 44-5.
 16. Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, trans. Swami Jagadananda (Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1978), 385.
 17. Swami Sarvagatananda, 'You Will Be a Paramahansa' in *Prabuddha Bharata*, January 2003, 16-7.

Two Wolves

An elder Cherokee Native American was teaching his grandchildren about life. He said to them:

'A fight is going on inside me.
It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves.

'One wolf represents fear, anger, envy,
sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance,
self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority,
lies, false pride, superiority and ego.

'The other stands for joy, peace, love,
hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness,
benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity,
truth, compassion and faith.

'This same fight is going on inside you and inside everyone.'

They thought about it for a while. Then one of them asked the grandfather, 'Which wolf will win?'

The old Cherokee simply replied, 'The one you feed.'

—from cyberspace

A Special Event in New York City

150th Birthday of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Dedication of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center Buildings

Observance of the 150th Birthday of Holy Mother: First Phase

The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York observed the 150th birthday of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi in two phases. The first phase took place on Sunday, 21 December 2003, at 11:00 am, when a special service to commemorate the occasion was held in the Center's chapel. The devotees attending the service filled the chapel. Those who could not be accommodated in the chapel were able to observe the service by means of closed-circuit television in other locations in the Center. Swami Adiswaranandaji gave a talk on 'Holy Mother, Embodiment of Divine Grace'. Vedic chanting and devotional songs were performed by the Center's choir. Following the service, a full-course dinner was served to the entire congregation. Throughout the season all books on the life and teachings of

Holy Mother received a special discount at the bookshop and through the Center's catalogue and website.

Observance of the 150th Birthday of Holy Mother: Second Phase

Later, from 23 to 25 April 2004, the Center continued with a second phase of its celebration of the historic 150th birthday with three programmes: a tribute and concert, a symposium and the dedication of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center buildings. To announce the events, beautifully printed invitations were sent to all members and friends of the Center. Participating in the programmes were the spiritual leaders of several Ramakrishna Order centres and other distinguished guests, community leaders and musical artists. The list of participants in the three-day event follows:



Swamis at the dedication ceremony (l-r): Swamis Tathagatananda, Chetanananda, Tyagananda and Yogatmananda

Swami Adiswarananda, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York; Swami Tathagatananda, Vedanta Society of New York; Swami Chetanananda, Vedanta Society of St Louis; Swami Tyagananda, Ramakrishna Vedanta Society, Boston; Swami Yogatmananda, Vedanta Society of Providence; Catherine B Carlson, daughter of Chester F and Dorris Carlson (*Chester F Carlson, scientist, inventor of Xerography and past president of the Center, and*

Dorris Carlson are noted for their lives of selfless service); Gerald P Gehman, President, Willard Straight Block Association, New York City; Alex Herrera, Director of Technical Services, New York Landmarks Conservancy (*Erin Tobin Beardon of the New York Landmarks Conservancy's Sacred Sights Division represented Mr Herrera, who was unable to attend*); Dr Mahendra Jani, Chairman, Department of Mathematics, William Patterson University, New Jersey, and Founder and President, Vivekananda Vidyapith, New Jersey; Henry Kohn, Past President, 92nd Street Young Men's Hebrew Association, New York City, and Founder and Director, American Jewish Society for Service; Dhan Gopal Mukerji Jr, lecturer on international affairs and son of noted writer Dhan Gopal Mukerji (*Dhan Gopal Mukerji's book, The Face of Silence (1926), is an English biography of Sri Ramakrishna that introduced Sri Ramakrishna to many notable personalities of the time, and thereby contributed significantly to the spread of the Master's teachings in the West*); Dr Jerome J Pollitt, Professor and Former Dean of the Graduate School, Yale University, and President, Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York; Jon M Sweeney, Editor-in-Chief, SkyLight Paths Publishing, Vermont, and author of *Praying with Our Hands, The Road to Assisi* and *The St Francis Prayer Book*.

There were musical offerings by the students of Vivekananda Vidyapith, an academy of Indian philosophy and culture, New Jersey, and the Randy Armstrong Ensemble, comprising Randy Armstrong, multi-instrumentalist, composer; Volker Nahrman, bass, key-

boards, percussion; and Jose Duque and Steve Ferraris, percussion. (*Formerly known as Unu Mondo and Doah World Music Ensemble, these artists perform on guitars, bass, keyboards, flutes, drums and over twenty-five traditional instruments from around the world, creating an exciting musical experience. By combining ideas from many cultures and traditions, this unique ensemble is dedicated to exploring and celebrating the spiritual unity and harmony of all humanity.*)

Details of the programme follow.

Tribute and Concert

The tribute and concert in honour of Holy Mother was held on Friday, 23 April, at 7:30 pm at the New York Academy of Medicine Hosack Hall, 1216 Fifth Avenue, 103rd Street, New York. As the devotees gathered and filled the beautiful 500-seat auditorium, they were greeted by a large image of Holy Mother projected onto the wall above the stage, while the organ provided a musical prelude. The programme then began with a procession of the swamis and other participants. Leading the procession was a group of more than thirty students of Vivekananda Vidyapith,



A view of the congregation: Seated in the front row are (l-r) Erin Tobin Beardon, Dhan Gopal Mukerji Jr, Gerald Gehman, Henry Kohn and Catherine Carlson



Students of Vivekananda Vidyapith performing Vedic chanting

who made their way towards the stage while performing inspiring Vedic chanting. After the chanting, the choir of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center performed devotional hymns and songs as offerings to Holy Mother. The chanting and music were enhanced by the projection of beautiful images of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, Swami Vivekananda, holy places of India and a variety of colourful flowers and natural scenes.

Swami Adiswaranandaji then welcomed the distinguished participants and spoke briefly on the life and message of Holy Mother, and said that in the advent and life of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi we find a modern-day fulfilment of the promise of Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavadgita* that from time to time in the history of humanity, whenever the need arises, the Lord incarnates in the world to set things right and guide us towards our spiritual destiny of unity with the Divine. 'One hundred and fifty years ago,' the swami continued, 'in the small village of Jayrambati in West Bengal, India, was born such a divine personality, Sarada by name, who would later come to be known affectionately by her devotees in India and throughout the world as Holy Mother. A rare combination of human

and divine qualities, Holy Mother continues to inspire millions of spiritual seekers. Her life and teachings touch our very souls and grant us peace and joy. In her invisible form she continues to give her blessings, even today, to anyone who accepts her as the real Mother and surrenders to her. Holy Mother Sarada is our real Mother, not an adopted mother, nor a vague mother, but our real Mother.' The swami concluded his remarks on this auspicious

occasion with a prayer to Holy Mother for her blessings of peace and happiness for all.

Swami Adiswaranandaji then introduced the distinguished participants, the four guest swamis and Jon M Sweeney, who proceeded to the podium in turn, each offering beautiful words of tribute to Holy Mother.

After the conclusion of this tribute portion of the programme, the swami introduced the musical artists of the Randy Armstrong Ensemble, who then began their concert, blending sounds from East and West and featuring an impressive variety of instruments from all parts of the world. Each musical selection was received with enthusiastic applause, and at the concert's end the audience expressed its appreciation with a standing ovation that subsided only when Swami Adiswaranandaji thanked the artists and once again offered a prayer to Holy Mother for the welfare of all. Feeling greatly uplifted by the evening's tributes and musical offerings, the devotees looked forward to the two remaining events of the weekend: the symposium on Holy Mother and the Center's building dedication.

Holy Mother Symposium

The symposium, entitled 'Make the Whole World Your Own', took place on Saturday, 24 April, at 7:30 pm in the chapel of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center at 17 East 94th Street, New York City. Nearly 300 devotees attended. The programme opened with the offering of Vedic chanting and devotional songs by the Center's choir, after which the life and teachings of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi were beautifully presented in talks given by Swami Adiswaranandaji and the other swamis, Dr Mahendra Jani and Jon M Sweeney. The presentations served to illustrate Holy Mother's teachings and how those teachings found expression in every aspect of her life.

Dedication of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center Buildings

The three-day programme concluded on Sunday, 25 April, at 11:00 am at the Center with a special service to dedicate the Center's newly renovated buildings. The programme's theme was 'The Spirit of Service'. In 2001 the Center purchased the adjacent building (19 East 94th Street), and soon thereafter embarked on an extensive project to join the acquired building with its own landmark building, restore the architectural details that had been lost over the years from the façade of the adjacent building, and completely renovate both buildings. Having almost completed this project after more than two years of work, the Center chose to formally dedicate the buildings as part of Holy Mother Sarada Devi's 150th birthday celebration. On this sunny



The new chapel altar

Sunday morning about 300 members and friends came to help the Center dedicate its newly expanded facilities. Everyone was very happy to see the bright new façade of the Center and its chapel and other rooms tastefully decorated with flower arrangements for the occasion.

Swami Adiswaranandaji led the visiting swamis and the other distinguished participants into the chapel and then the Center's choir offered chanting and Indian and Western devotional songs. After opening the service with a prayer, Swami Adiswaranandaji welcomed the participants and all those who came to the service and thanked them for being present for this occasion. The swami began his introductory remarks by pointing out that 'Upon his return to India, following his historic visit to America to participate in the World's Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Order with a dual motto: "For one's own salvation and the good of the world." Service to humanity is therefore one of the guiding principles of the Ramakrishna Order, and that is why the theme of this dedication ceremony is "The Spirit of Service".'



The restored façade of the Center's buildings

'For more than one hundred years,' the swami continued, 'the monks of the Ramakrishna Order have been carrying on works of service in the Order's many centres throughout India and other parts of the world. Seeing God in all people and serving that God through its hospitals, dispensaries, schools and relief activities, the Order has become a model for public service. Just two years ago the Order received the Government of India's Gandhi Peace Prize in recognition of its one hundred years of humanitarian service—the first time that the prize was awarded to an entire institution, rather than to an individual. In America and other Western countries, the works of service of our centres consist mostly of providing spiritual nourishment to people, teaching the universal principles of Vedanta and further-

ing the cause of interfaith understanding and cooperation, the harmony of religions, and universal tolerance. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York and all the centres of the Order in America have been working silently and steadily since 1895, and it can be said that in some form or other the ideals of the Order have gradually struck root in the American culture. Today, as we join together to dedicate our new buildings, our Center embarks on a new chapter in its life, and in its commitment of service. We fervently pray to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda so that they may bless us all to continue to work for the good of humanity for many years to come.'

Swami Adiswaranandaji then introduced the visiting swamis and other distinguished participants, who spoke on 'The Spirit of Service.' The swamis focused on the ideal of service as it pertains to the Ramakrishna movement as well as to the lives of spiritual seekers. Other participants reflected on the history and tradition of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York, its founding by Swami Nikhilanandaji more than seventy years ago, and recalled various interesting chapters in the Center's history. Community leaders addressed the Center's role in the community and thanked the Center for this latest contribution to the city and neighbourhood—the restoring of a landmark building to its original beauty. The dedication programme was brought to a conclusion by a joyous song by the choir, after which Swami Adiswaranandaji requested everyone present to join in a prayer to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda so that the Center may continue to serve as a source of spiritual inspiration for all. Following a brief tour of the Center, all in attendance were given a tastefully prepared luncheon and a souvenir of the occasion.

*

Parabrahma Upaniṣad

TRANSLATED BY SWAMI ATMAPRIYANANDA

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

... सर्वत्र हिरण्मये परे कोशे यथैष देवदत्तो यष्ट्या च ताड्यमानो नैवेत्येवमिष्टापूर्तशुभाशुभैर्न लिप्यते । यथा कुमारको निष्काम आनन्दमभियाति । यथैष देवः स्वप्न आनन्दमभिधावति । वेद एव परं ज्योतिः । ज्योतिषा मा ज्योतिरानन्दयत्येवमेव । तत्परं यच्चित्तं परमात्मानमानन्दयति । शुभ्रवर्णमाजायतेऽश्वरात् । ... ॥२॥

2. ... [Although the self] everywhere (that is, always) [is ever sporting] in the golden (that is, resplendent or self-luminous) supreme sheath, [it appears to go through the experiences of the three states due to ignorance],¹ just as this Devadatta (representing the *jīva*), [awakened from his sleep] by being beaten with a stick [lapses no more into the state of slumber once again, and] does not get involved (or tainted) by altruistic actions like *iṣṭā-pūrta*² or [any other kind of] good or evil actions [performed in the world of relative existence].³ [It is] just like a small boy who experiences [pure] joy [untainted by and] not born of any [selfish] desire.⁴ Just like this luminous being [after getting fatigued in the waking and dream states] experiences joy in sleep, so [it indeed] realizes, [that is, remains established in its own real nature as] the all-encompassing supreme Light [of pure Awareness that illumines even the external] lights [like the sun], thus rejoicing only [in the Bliss of its inner Self].⁵ The mind (*citta*), which becomes [transformed, as it were, into] That [Brahman] attains the Supreme Atman (*paramātman*) and delights in the Bliss [that is one's own *svarūpa*, or real nature].⁶ [In such a mind is] born the [pure] White [by the grace of] *iśvara* (God).⁷ ...

Notes

1. Although ever abiding in the self-luminous, transcendent state of supreme Knowledge, the self, nevertheless, falls into the pit of the three states (waking, dream and deep sleep) by traversing along the *nāḍīs* (*ramā*, *aramā*, *icchā* and *punarbhava*) being enveloped by its own covering of ignorance.
2. The term *iṣṭā-pūrta* is often used in Upaniṣadic literature to encompass all *kāmya karma* (motivated action). *Iṣṭa* denotes the actions enjoined in the *śruti*, like sacrifices (*yāga-yajñādi*), while *pūrta* denotes the actions enjoined in the *smṛti*, like digging ponds and tanks, and other works of altruistic or charitable nature. But all these actions are motivated by desire and hence fall in the category of *kāmya karma*.
3. In most Vedantic literature, Devadatta is often used as a generic name to represent a person or a *jīva*. Suppose a person who is deeply asleep is awakened by beating him with a stick. Such a person normally does not go back to sleep immediately. Similarly, this *jīva* too is awakened from his state of deep slumber by Vedantic knowledge attained through the grace of the *śāstras* and the *guru*, who teach him the highest truth: 'You are not the limited entity called *jīva*, subject to the experiences of the three states. You are verily that Substratum on which the three states are, as it were, superimposed and whose true nature is revealed by de-superimposition.' Having been thus awakened to his true nature as the immortal, ever-pure, ever-aware and ever-free supreme Self, the *jīva* never again gets deluded by the experiences of the three states.
4. A small boy experiences pure joy unsullied by desire, because no hankering arises in his mind that would make him feel 'Let this [object] be mine.' He thus derives joy from anything that comes to him

effortlessly and of its own accord.

5. Just as this shining being (*deva*, meaning the *jivātman*), though enjoying deep sleep, gets tired and de-energized on going through the transactions of the waking and dream states and longs to rush back to the joy experienced in deep sleep, even so, one who realizes the truth of the Great Saying (*mahāvākya*) ‘*Aham brahmāsmi*, I am identical with Brahman (which is pure Joy independent of everything other than Itself)’—having heard this great Truth from the scriptures (*śruti*) and the *guru* (*ācārya*, or spiritual preceptor), such a one, retracting from this external world of duality, remains as the inner Light of pure Awareness. He then realizes that his real nature as this inner Light of supreme Consciousness is the Light that overwhelmingly illumines or irradiates even the huge external lights such as the sun and the moon. Such an illumined soul then remains established in his *svarūpa* (real nature) as pure Joy unrelated to any phenomenal existence.
6. When the mind of the sage becomes so absorbed in the contemplation (*nīdīdhyāsana*) of Brahman that whatever thought arises in his mind becomes, as it were, of the form of Brahman alone (technically called *brahmākāra vṛtti*), then such an illumined sage attains the Supreme Self (*paramātman*). He then delights in the Bliss of his own Self and, being overwhelmed by That (Supreme Self), gets absorbed in It. This is sometimes spoken of as ‘the merging of the mind into the heart’, the heart being identical with the Self. (See *Bhagavadgīta*, 8.12; *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* [Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanashramam, 1989], 92-3, 378.) Through this merging or absorption, there arises the realization of absolute non-difference (*nirvikalpa jñāna*).
7. Suppose one asks, from where does the mind of such an illumined sage derive its Brahman-absorption? The answer is, from God (*īśvara*). The sage’s mind attains the colour of pure White, meaning the *nirvikalpa* state or the state of mind free from all mentations, a state of absolute non-difference. In fact, the mind then becomes ‘no mind’ (technically called *amanibhāva*; see ‘Advaita Prakaraṇa’, *Māṇḍūkya Kārikā*, 31), having taken, as it were, the form of the indivisible Brahman Itself (*brahmākāra*- or *akhaṇḍākāra-kārīta*). *īśvara* is endowed with the powers of action, knowledge and will (*kriyā-jñāna-icchā-śakti*) that are non-material and of the essence of pure Awareness or Consciousness. Being supremely compassionate (*parama-kāruṇika*), He devours, as it were, all the obstacles of His devotees, His children, on the path to supreme realization and leads them to the ultimate Goal out of His unbounded love.

In this connection one may recall Shelley’s immortal phrase: ‘The white radiance of Eternity.’

God alone is the way and the goal of all. Always meditate on Him in your heart. Don’t worry. He will set everything right. Wherever the Lord keeps you, always pray so that your mind dwells on Him. And however He may keep you, it is for your own good. ... It is always good to be content with wherever the Lord places you. He is all good and omniscient. He knows what is best and arranges everything accordingly. But we demand something from Him according to our liking and create a mess.

‘Those who have worldly desires suffer from restlessness even in the solitude of a forest. Those who have disciplined their senses practise austerities even while living in a crowded home.’ (*Hitopadesha*, Chapter 4) This is the real truth. There is no harm in praying thus: ‘O Lord, wherever I may be, may I never forget you. May I have the company of your devotees. Please keep me away from worldly people.’ Call on Him wholeheartedly and He will do what is good for you.

—Swami Turiyananda

Glimpses of Holy Lives

'Whatever God Does Is for Our Own Good'

Girivar was a farmer who lived in a small village on the banks of the Narmada. A man of staunch faith in God's mercy, he was fond of repeating his favourite maxim: 'Whatever God does is for our own good.' By God's grace, Girivar enjoyed favourable circumstances: his old parents were undemanding, he had a dutiful wife in Gauri and his young son Uday was always obedient. 'What more can a man ask for?' Girivar's neighbours would talk behind his back. 'In his place, anybody could say "Whatever God does is for our own good!"'

Quite right. A devotee must never make much of his reliance on God until it is put to the test and he passes.

The Trial Begins

Sorrow made its presence felt for the first time in Girivar's contented life when he lost his parents in quick succession. 'One gets the opportunity of serving one's parents in their old age as a result of great good karma,' he mused sadly. 'It is my misfortune that I could not serve my parents for a longer time. But then, these things are in God's hands. Whatever God does is for our own good.'

The real test, however, was yet to come. And it came soon.

Just as Girivar was getting over the pain of bereavement, fate snatched his son too. The eight-year-old was bathing in the river with his mother, when a crocodile caught the boy and carried him away before anybody had a chance to help. Shouting 'Oh, God! Save me!' little Uday disappeared under water. And they brought an unconscious Gauri home.

Girivar did his best to assuage his wife's anguish, but she was inconsolable. 'Gauri my

dear, do you think I don't share in your suffering? But try to understand. It is futile to wish things had happened differently. This world is but a wayside inn. Every individual comes to this world to work out his own karma, and when that is done he departs. Really speaking, people are not related to one another as we imagine. Did we know who Uday was before he came to us? Do we know where he has gone now? But we can be sure of this much: our son has certainly gone to a better place. After all, he called to God to save him—he did not call out to you or me—and the Lord will never forsake such a person.

'Gauri, remember what the sadhu told us the other day. This world is God's pleasure-garden and we are His servants. We may have grown a beautiful flower, but that does not mean the flower belongs to us. On the other hand, it should be a matter of great joy to us if the Owner of the garden should want the flower we have grown.

'Then again, how can we take it for granted that Uday is dead? What evidence have we of that?'

'Not I, but Thou'

'Maybe you are right,' said Gauri in between sobs. 'Deep inside, something tells me my Uday will come back to me, no matter when.'

'But that is quite beside the point. Why should you *expect* to see him again!' exclaimed Girivar. 'The thing to understand is this: If we consider ourselves God's servants, we must be ready to serve Him in whichever way He likes us to. Until now God accepted our service in one way, and now if He wants us to serve him in a different way, we must be pre-

pared for it. A servant cannot have preferences. He who hesitates to serve his master wholeheartedly is an unfaithful servant; and he who regards his master's things as his own is even worse—he is a thief! Don't you see, Gauri, nothing in this world is really ours: God gives, God takes away. We have accepted Him as our master, so let us not flinch from our duty; let us forget our happiness for His sake. But believe me, whatever God does is for our own good.'

Now Girivar saw no point in spending time on his fields. He leased out all his land and the couple gave themselves up totally to worship and meditation. Before long, their devotion started to show results. Gauri, especially, began to experience a kind of peace she had never before known in her life. Noticing the change that had come upon his wife, Girivar observed one day, 'How can man hope to understand the Lord's inexplicable ways? Could we even imagine He would draw us to Him in this manner? Maybe you can appreciate it now—a son is a son, no doubt, but our attachment to him might have led us away from the *only* thing that is to be loved.' Gauri nodded quietly. 'See? That is why I say, whatever God does is for our own good,' concluded Girivar.

Still, a mother is a mother. Memories of her beloved Uday continued to haunt Gauri.

Destiny Intervenes

Far away down the river, the crocodile that made off with Uday was challenged by another crocodile and lost its grip on the boy in the ensuing struggle. But Uday was already seriously injured and too weak to save himself. Luckily, some people in a boat passing a little distance away spotted his limp body bobbing listlessly in the water. As they pulled him aboard, Uday lost consciousness.

Inscrutable Karma

King Chandrasen, the ruler of the territory that straddled the Narmada, was childless. Recently he had lost his young wife too.

The suddenness of her death hit the king hard and he was contemplating giving up everything to embrace the monastic life. His sense of obligation to his subjects, however, was making it difficult for him to decide. At last, unable to make up his mind, Chandrasen approached his father's guru for guidance.

The guru was a yogi who possessed occult powers. 'It is not right for a king to neglect his royal duties, to leave his kingdom uncared for,' he advised. 'Moreover, I know you are destined to find a worthy heir—and I also know a secret rite that can make it happen very soon.' The king's face brightened up. 'Educate the boy, train him well, and when he comes of age, hand over the reins of the kingdom to him. You may become a sannyasin only then.' Then the guru added, 'But the boy will remember his antecedents on the day of his coronation.'

King Chandrasen decided to go ahead with the rite. It was the custom to feed the fish in the Narmada after the ceremony. The king was doing just this, when his officials caught sight of a bleeding figure drifting downstream. As karma would have it, it was Uday.

Everything turned out just as the guru had predicted.

When Uday regained consciousness after twenty-one days, he had forgotten everything except his name. He was taught that he was Prince Udayraj, son of King Chandrasen, and that his mother, Queen Kamaladevi, was dead. Gradually, under the tutelage of qualified instructors, the boy learnt all the skills a prince would need to run an efficient administration. And when Uday grew up, the king arranged for his marriage with the princess of Vijayanagar.

Chandrasen had discharged his responsibilities. Only one last thing remained, Uday's coronation, and the king, after consulting his ministers, fixed an auspicious day for it too. Now at last, he could give it all up and become a free sannyasin.

(To be continued)



Reviews



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

Meditation, Mind and Patanjali's Yoga.

Swami Bhaskarananda. Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004. E-mail: srkmath@vsnl.com. 2002. xviii + 253 pp. Rs 75.

Hosts of books have been written on the subject of yoga and meditation, but this book is special because of its author's credentials: Swami Bhaskaranandaji, a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order, is President of the Vedanta Society of Western Washington, Seattle, and the spiritual head of the Vedanta Societies of Hawaii and Vancouver—positions that require him to travel a lot and acquire wide experience in instructing and guiding people in spirituality.

The book opens with the pertinent chapter 'Why Should We Meditate?' It discusses the need of including meditation in our daily lives. However, in line with authentic teachers of yoga, the swami would have his readers meditate more to attain the vastly superior end of God-realization than just for reasons of health (although the latter is not entirely neglected). He gives special attention to the master-disciple relationship, explaining why aspirants need to follow a trustworthy guide if they hope to make any real progress in yoga practice. While cautioning them against posers, the author also does students a positive help by describing the characteristics of a genuine guru.

Then follow, chapter after chapter, the eight limbs of Patanjali's yoga, each one given extensive treatment. The inquisitive reader will come across interesting discussions on the different types of samadhi, and find diagrams, illustrations and photographs that aid his understanding. Separate sections dealing with the obstacles and hazards one is likely to encounter on the way are sure to be of immense help to the serious practitioner.

A practical teacher that he is, Bhaskaranandaji gives great importance to the practice of japa. Describing its various aspects and techniques in considerable detail, he points out how progress in japa can be an indicator of spiritual progress.

The physical and mental benefits that yoga practitioners reap, though they are actually only by-products, are not without value, especially in today's stressful world. So the swami does not forget to address the needs of those who turn to yoga for relief; at the end of the book he provides a few yogic techniques to control and reduce mental tension and enhance overall well-being.

Many thanks to Swami Bhaskaranandaji for sharing his insights with us.

Santosh Kumar Sharma
Kharagpur

How to Achieve Incredible Results by

Inspiration. *P Vatsala and T Gokulan.* New Age Books, A-44 Naraina Phase 1, New Delhi 110 028. E-mail: nab@vsnl.in. 2001. xvii + 154 pp. Rs 195.

An English poet rhymes, 'You beat your pate, and fancy wit will come;/ Knock as you please, there's nobody home!' A collection of interesting anecdotes, this book attempts to convince the readers that there is somebody home, unseen by human eyes, incomprehensible to human reason. The author has culled real-life incidents ranging from mundane hurdles to the problems relating to the practice of devotion at higher states, wherein aid comes from an apparently obscure source. Often man finds himself at crossroads, baffled which way to go, and at the crucial moment, suddenly help comes like manna from heaven. The stories in this book bring out well the mysteriousness of life, forcing us to stop and question. Narrated in simple style, they are interspersed with quotations from saints and seers. They discuss various means to establish communion with the unseen: meditation, prayer, self-surrender, yoga, grace, silence and many more.

The book's relevance stands unquestioned in these days of widespread scepticism, a trend induced by the modern empirical scientific outlook. How much has man known? How much of nature

has man understood, how much of himself? Beyond the birth-death spectrum, what *is*? Can human reason ever smoke out these mysteries? However, the divine promptings and guidance from a higher source within us, known as *inspiration*, belongs to a realm unknown to the rational man—far beyond the hard walls of reason. These anecdotes point at that inexhaustible source, which, when properly tapped, can help us redeem ourselves and achieve incredible results.

An interesting book that can help us gain a more comprehensive view of life and ourselves.

Swami Shuddhidananda
Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata

People's India: A Superpower. *Mama-chan Daniel*. Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Kurlapati Munshi Marg, Mumbai 400 007. E-mail: brbhavan@bom7.vsnl.net.in. 2003. viii + 171 pp. Rs 125.

At times we are not satisfied with what we have achieved, and feel perturbed about the fact that much more could have been done.

India after independence is a case in point. On many fronts—social, political, economic and educational—significant progress has been made, which is visible too. But equally true is the fact that much more could have been achieved, had certain errors, weaknesses and shortcomings been addressed at various levels right in the beginning. Despite democracy, we lag behind others in meeting the basic needs of the average people. Corruption eats into the vitals; a few power-hungry leaders manipulate the entire affairs of our great nation, while ordinary people remain helpless spectators. This raises a question mark about the political future of India.

The author of this book emphasizes the need to proactively intervene at the grass-roots level to bring about the desired change in socio-political reality. The concept is elaborated in eight chapters. The corrupt and listless bureaucracy, the greedy and callous leaders have reduced this great nation to mockery, and have led the people to suffering, want and misery. A significant percentage of Indians suffer from illiteracy, poverty, and ill health. The claim that we shall achieve superpower status in the near future is thus reduced to a myth, a mere mockery, at present. However, the author is not pessimistic about India's future, and maintains that

with the formation of people's will at grass-roots level, based on truth and justice, India can achieve the desired goal. For this the author has given a detailed plan that he calls 'a humble attempt to suggest a system in this regard, that is, the People's Samitis, which can incidentally solve many of our major problems'. Our democratic, secular and socialistic set-up and Constitution offer us hope, a silver lining, on which we can really build a new nation.

The book suggests a practical and novel way of 'collective living' for our entire people. This would be possible through small-group integration and economic activities, with gradual bigger and larger integration, both in terms of volume and expanse. A typical People's Samiti is an association of a group of enlightened citizens of neighbouring villages, taluks, panchayats and so on, who would directly try to form a 'mini parliament' concerned with progress, development, problems and prosperity at the block level. Such Samitis would fill the entire nation. These Samitis would be effective because they would have the people's will as their basis. The author prefers to call this will the holiest will, which would be based on truth and justice. The general will of the people on which the new way of living is attempted is based on our civilized existence, although owing to human weaknesses its implementation would be somewhat difficult and possible only in phases. There would be a self-imposed punishment for every failure, partial or complete. Thus, the author says, the solution lies through strengthening people's will through value orientation; the journey is from imperfect to more perfect to near perfect—achieved through collective efforts.

The book tries to emphasize the need for proper and effective implementation of the policies most of the governments planned in recent years. The book presents an idealistic approach to make India prosperous and morally strong in the near future. Devolution of power to village panchayats, general awareness and honest implementation of various national programs involving population control, religious harmony, social health, security, transport, food distribution and social justice—these are some common points on the agenda of various political parties. As an individual, every political leader and bureaucrat appears an angel whose sole interest appears to be to help the poor and needy. What goes wrong at the collective level or in social

implementation, one fails to comprehend!

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The Mind of the Guru. *Rajiv Mehrotra.*
Penguin Books, 11 Community Centre,
Panchsheel Park, New Delhi 110 017. 2003.
xv + 256 pp. Rs 395.

At a crucial juncture of human life dawns the insubstantiality of this world of day-to-day experience, and life seems a bottomless abyss with shadows flitting all over. The heart then seeks the spiritual light that can guide one out of this maddening labyrinth. A new hunt begins—for the great ones who know the way. The series of dialogues in this book is an outcome of such a search conducted by Rajiv Mehrotra for many years by interviewing gurus from different traditions.

The term *guru* has come to have various connotations in different traditions and in colloquial usage. Whatever be our understanding of the term, here we are in the presence of twenty exceptional minds—intellectual and spiritual masters of our times whose expanse encompasses a range wide enough to exclude none. Each has his perspective, rooted in a tradition different from another, yet they all play the same melodious note—that of love, compassion, humanistic impulse, selflessness, service and sacrifice.

Luminaries of various hues illumine the pages of this book: Sri Baba Amte, the heroic crusader against leprosy and the architect of a self-reliant cooperative community carved out by crippled social outcasts; His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the voice of Tibetan aspirations, who sees compassion as an indispensable factor in happiness; Swami Ranganathanandaji, one of the exemplary spiritual masters of the Ramakrishna movement, and the present, thirteenth, President of the Order, for whom one of the most potent methods for God-realization is service to humanity, irrespective of caste, creed or colour; Desmond Tutu, archbishop and crusader for justice and racial conciliation in South Africa; Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan, the Sufi master who worked hard to bridge the gap between the experience of contemplatives and the findings of modern physicists, biologists and psychologists; Mata Amritanandamayi, the messenger of love who has been a source of inspiration for many the world over; and Sri S N Goenka, the leading lay teacher of Vipassa-

na meditation—to mention a few.

Flashes of their deep insight into various issues, as much spiritual as secular, intertwining spirituality, socio-political issues, religion and general welfare, all so well broached—these are rewarding and enlightening. Perusing these conversations, the reader recognizes vast mental domains, becoming aware of so many luminous trails wide open for him to tread, all pointing at a sublime realm far above the tumult he finds himself in. The author brings out successfully the different facets of these masters, who have helped men and women find true happiness in their unique way. Superb portraits of these masters by Sujata Bansal further enhance the book's grace. In short, this book is sure to be a worthy possession by all who have just taken their first steps in search of a Lamp to light their hearts.

Swami Shuddhidananda

Gaṇeśa. *Paul Courtright.* Motilal Banarsidass, 41-UA Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, New Delhi 110 007. E-mail: mlbd@vsnl.com. 2001. xi + 274 pp. Rs 195 (paper), Rs 295 (cloth).

Paul Courtright is Professor in the Department of Religion at Emory University, Atlanta, USA. The Hindu deity Ganesha enticed him three decades before. He collected every little bit of information he could of this deity and is now presenting it with all relevant interpretations to the world at large in the form of this handsome monograph.

The volume has an expanse of 274 pages, and all the information about Ganesha, both mythical and otherwise, has been presented in six topical chapters. The chapters are well arranged and lead the reader comfortably into this exciting study.

The book begins with the origin of Ganesha right from the Vedic context and his prominence in the Puranic literature. The elephant symbolism in Indian culture is dealt with in the second chapter. Here the author describes in detail other mythical characters who bear physical similarity to Ganesha. These are Gajāsura, Gajendra and Airāvata, the mount of Indra, the lord of gods. There are a number of birth episodes of Ganesha. All these find a place here. The symbolism of the severed head and the broken tusk is also explained. The author cites many other instances from Indian mythology of severing a head and fixing it to another torso.

The third chapter, titled 'Ritual, Psychological and Religious Themes in the Mythology of Gaṇeśa,' is more analytic. The author is more critical in this chapter. He is aware that a traditional Hindu would view these myths differently than a Western reader would. The concepts of initiation and sacrifice are elaborated and the relationships of father, mother, son and brother are examined in minute detail. The author finds in these relations oedipal themes, which formed the core of psychological research in the twentieth century. The entire interpretation in this chapter is extremely fascinating and would convince the reader about the rationality of the author's interpretation.

Apart from being the lord of obstacles, Ganesha is the lord of beginnings as well. He is the lord of the *ganās*. As a remover of obstacles he gains the leadership of the *ganās*. As a lord of the beginnings, Ganesha is worshipped at the commencement of any new undertaking. Ganesha is installed on the *torāṇa paṭṭa* of a home or a temple. He regulates the flow of pilgrims in the sanctum sanctorum of the temple and also of souls in heaven.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the worship of Ganesha, individually in homes and collectively in annual public festivals. The annual Ganesha festival is held for ten days in the month of Bhādrapada (August-September). The regionalism of this festival is heightened by describing the festival in Maharashtra.

In his preface, the author has mentioned the hoax that sent a rumour round the world on 21 September 1995 that Ganesha sipped milk. It is not known whether there was any political motive behind this rumour. The author poses a number of questions in the preface and tries to answer them in his own way.

The author concludes that the protean nature of Ganesha continues to give forth vitality to the Hindu community. Ganesha is not displaced by the conditions of modernity. His mythology and symbolism adapt well to the novel circumstances brought about by a culture undergoing a rapid change.

Thus, the reading of this monograph is extremely rewarding. The volume contains twelve plates of historical icons of Ganesha and a map of Maharashtra showing various sites of Ganesha temples. The cover of the book exhibits a metallic icon of Bāla-Gaṇeśa, a yearling resting on one hand and holding a laddu in the other.

The volume offers good reading to scholars of religion and mythology. The extensive bibliography and the elaborate index are useful for all serious readers.

Dr N B Patil

Honorary Director, MM Dr P V Kane Institute of
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Asiatic Society, Mumbai

Mantrapushpam. *Comp. Swami Devarupananda.* Ramakrishna Math, 12th Road, Khar (West), Mumbai 400 052. E-mail: rkmkhar@vsnl.com. 2003. Rs 60.

Chanting of Vedic mantras, suktas and stotras has been a time-honoured Hindu spiritual practice. *Mantrapushpam* is a compilation in Sanskrit of the ten principal Upanishads, the *Mahānarayana Upanishad*, some minor Upanishads, many important Vedic *suktas*, Sri Rudra, some *sāma gānas*, hymns for meditation on the Formless, a number of stotras addressed to Hindu deities, and Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*. The speciality of the book is the use of intonation (*svara*) marks where necessary. Thanks to the painstaking work of the compiler, the book can be said to be almost free from proof-reading errors.

First published in demi octavo size in 1989, the book has gone through six editions and sold about 40,000 copies—an index of its popularity among spiritual aspirants.

The present book is *Mantrapushpam's* first, handy pocket edition. Though running to more than 600 pages, the book is quite compact in size, thanks to the use of feather-weight paper. The printing is good and easy on the eyes. The book will be a treasure in every devoted household.

PB

A conductor was rehearsing with his orchestra and said to the trumpeter, 'I think this part calls for a more Wagnerian approach, if you get what I mean: something more assertive, so to speak, more accentuated, with more body, more depth, more ...' The trumpeter interrupted: 'Do you want it louder, sir?' All that the poor conductor could say was, 'Yes, that's what I mean.'

—The Prayer of the Frog, 1.249

ॐ Reports ॐ

Arranged. Meetings, seminars and exhibitions commemorating Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birth anniversary; by Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati; at Champawat and Lohaghat; from 4 to 7 June 2004.

Organized. A 2-day symposium on the contribution of Marie Louise Burke (Sister Gargi) to Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature; by Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata; on 12 June. Swami Smarananandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, presided over the event and Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, addressed the gathering.

Organized. A 3-day medical camp; by Ramakrishna Math, Puri; at Bali-Harachandi Mela in Brahmagiri; from 14 to 16 June. 300 patients were treated. The centre conducted another medical camp during the Ratha Yatra from 19 to 27 June in which 3458 patients were treated.

Laid. Foundation stone for a school building; by Srimat Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission; at Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, Kalady; on 15 June.

Inaugurated. Foundation for Unity of Reli-

gions and Enlightened Citizenship', a forum designed to facilitate regular meetings between religious leaders in order to exchange universal religious ideas and thus promote religious harmony in the country; by Dr A P J Abdul Kalam, President of India; at Rash-



Swami Jitatanandaji presenting 'finalized ideas' of the Foundation to Dr A P J Abdul Kalam

trapati Bhavan; on 15 June. The foundation, whose membership includes the spiritual leaders of all the major religions of India—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism—is chaired by Swami Jitatanandaji, President, Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot.

Visited. Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi; by Sri Shyamal Dutta, Governor of Nagaland; on 17 June.

Inaugurated. A permanent exhibition on Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda; by Sri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, Vice President of India; at Ramakrishna

Mission Vivekananda Smriti Mandir, Khetri; on 22 June.

Served. Lemonade to about 25,000 pilgrims; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Puri; during the Ratha Yatra festival.

Conducted. A medical camp; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Guwahati; at the Kamakhya temple; during Ambubachi Mela from 22 to 25 June. The camp treated 3949 patients.

Celebrated. The centenary of Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Chennai. The Home organized a 2-day teachers' convention, which was attended by 1000 teachers and addressed by eminent educationists and senior monks of the Ramakrishna Order, on 22 and 23 June; and inter-school literary and music competitions on 30 June in which nearly 900 students from 100 schools of the city participated.

Completed. Desilting and deepening of ponds; by Ramakrishna Mission, Limbdi; in 3 more villages of Surendranagar district that face acute water scarcity every summer; in June. The centre also installed 6 hand-

pumps in different areas of Limbdi town.

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

Constructed. 10 houses for people whose houses were damaged by a violent storm; by Ramakrishna Math, Ichapur; in Kishorpur and Ghoshpur areas of Hooghly district; in June. Besides undertaking to build 35 more houses, the centre also distributed among the victims 85 dhotis, 85 saris, 60 blankets, 40 lungis and 40 towels.

Distributed. 480 saris and an equal number of dhotis and chadars, 240 mosquito-nets, 240 blankets and 240 sets of utensils; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi; among 240 families whose houses were gutted in a fire accident in Dhaparia, Nadia; in June.

Distributed. 30 dhotis, 30 saris and 28 towels, among other things; by Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Malda; among 28 families whose houses were reduced to ashes by a fire in Basantatola, Malda; in June. *

Liberation by Alms

In the fifteenth century, the Church announced that it was possible to free a soul from purgatory by giving alms. In Madrid, the Count of Villamediana, who loved a good joke, entered a church one day and encountered a priest with a collection tray, asking for money to save souls in purgatory. The count dropped a gold coin on the tray and asked, 'Are you sure my contribution will liberate a soul from its torment?' 'Absolutely,' said the priest. 'Then,' continued the count, 'since I have already given you my alms, that soul has left purgatory.' 'Yes,' responded the priest.

Villamediana then took the coin from the tray and put it back in his pocket saying, 'Well, he'll be a darnn fool if he goes back in.'

—from *cyberspace*