

Vedanta

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Birth of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna
Swami Mukhyananda

Ram Dada
Girish Chandra Ghosh



Divine Wisdom

MANILAL (to the Master): "Well, what is the rule for concentration? Where should one concentrate?"

MASTER: "The heart is a splendid place. One can meditate there or in the Sahasrara. These are rules for meditation given in the scriptures. But you may meditate wherever you like. Every place is filled with Brahman-Consciousness. Is there any place where It does not exist? Narayana, in Vali's presence, covered with two steps the heavens, the earth, and the interspaces. Is there then any place left uncovered by God? A dirty place is as holy as the bank of the Ganges. It is said that the whole creation is the Virat, the Universal Form of God.

"There are two kinds of meditation, one on the formless God and the other on God with form. But meditation on the formless God is extremely difficult. In that meditation you must wipe out all that you see or hear. You contemplate only the nature of your Inner Self. Meditating on His Inner Self, Siva dances about. He exclaims, 'What am I! What am I!' This is called the Siva yoga'. While practising this form of meditation, one directs one's look to the forehead. It is meditation on the nature of one's Inner Self after negating the world, following the Vedantic method of 'Neti, neti'.

"There is another form of meditation, known as the 'Vishnu yoga', The eyes are fixed on the tip of the nose. Half the look is directed inward and the other half outward. This is how one meditates on God with form. Sometimes Siva meditates on God with form, and dances. At that time he exclaims, 'Rama! Rama!' and dances about."

Sri Ramakrishna then explained the sacred Word "Om" and the true Knowledge of Brahman and the state of mind after the attainment of Brahmajana.

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Growing Gracefully into Old Age

Growing gracefully into old age is an art. Like any other art it needs to fulfil certain conditions. It requires conscious knowledge, desire, and effort; furthermore, discipline, focus and patience are of absolute necessity. Besides, we can also derive inspiration and instruction from great people.

Vedanta tells us that there are six stages in life: birth, existence, growth, change, decay and death - known as six-fold changes. Every living creature has to pass through these changes. We know that old age is inevitable. Yet few of us are willing to accept it as an existential fact of life and behave as though old age does not exist. We ignore it not overtly, but covertly.

One of the bigger problems of old age is egotism. Sri Ramakrishna says: "Then there is an 'ego of old age.' An old man has many shackles: caste, pride, shame, hatred, and fear. Furthermore, he is bound by the ideas of worldly cleverness, calculating intelligence, and deceit. If he is angry with anybody, he cannot shake it off easily; perhaps he keeps the feeling as long as he lives. The 'ego of old age' is an 'unripe ego.'"

If good habits are not developed in active years, time hangs heavily. (People living in old people's homes are encouraged to play bingo!!). Sri Ramakrishna says, "The bound souls never think of God. If they get any leisure, they indulge in idle gossip and foolish talk, or they engage in fruitless work. If you ask one of them the reason, he answers, 'Oh, I cannot keep still; so I am making a hedge.' When time hangs heavy on their hands they perhaps start playing cards. I once met a relative of Keshab Sen, fifty years old. He was playing cards. As if the time had not yet come for him to think of God!"

The key to growing into old age is to accept it and strive to make it meaningful. Thanks to welfare states, many of the elderly are provided with good living facilities. But they feel lonely and unhappy. This affects both lay and monastic people. If the mind is not trained early, if some spiritual progress is not made, life can become problematic. So what can we do?

In order to grow gracefully we need to develop many good habits. Swami Saradanandaji says, "It is good to be active, but it depends on several factors. Your health must be good and you must be able to get along with fellow-workers. But suppose you have injured one of your limbs; then it would be difficult for you to do work. Therefore I request you to cultivate the habit of reading. Even that is not enough. Suppose you become blind. Therefore it is good that you also practise meditation, so that if you cannot read or work, at least you can meditate."

Old age is not merely a biological maturity. It means maturity on intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual levels.

Is there a solution to cope with the problems of old age and grow gracefully into emotional, moral and spiritual maturity? Yes, there is. Ultimately there is only one solution to all problems including old age. To be a saint, a spiritual person, is the only way to solve the problem of old age, for the old person as well as all those around him.

If there is ever a practical reason for taking spiritual life seriously, this is it. Those who in their younger years succeed in developing some inner life, who learn to take refuge in God, can in their later years be at peace with themselves, and bring joy to everyone.

Vedanta has a well developed plan for growing joyfully, gracefully and achieving the ultimate goal called Liberation. The *Mundaka Upanishad* puts this plan so succinctly: "But those wise men of tranquil minds who live in the forest on alms, practising

penances appropriate to their stations of life and contemplating such deities as Hiranyagarbha, depart, freed from impurities, by the Path of the Sun, to the place where that immortal Person dwells whose nature is imperishable. (*Mundakopanishat 2.11*)”

To summarise the points mentioned in the *Upanishad*: Tranquillity, solitude, austerity and practice of contemplation on higher realities.

Few of us realise how wonderful this plan is. If we can understand and plan well ahead we can minimise our suffering and grow morally, emotionally and spiritually. In order to follow this plan, first we have to accept the fact of old age. And we also have to strictly follow the instructions of the scriptures.

Intellectual maturity

In old age the biological faculties become less energetic. The body and senses become weak. But the mind can remain highly active. So it has to be directed to higher levels. Intellectual growth and maturity is a gradual process. We have to start early. Study of the scriptures, philosophy, and any other good subject can go a long way in using our time beneficially and keeping the mind healthy. Such a course can also help us use time creatively! It also makes people less dependent physically and mentally. But the real benefit is that we grow in awareness, rationality. Our understanding becomes deep and our outlook on life changes accordingly.

Emotional maturity

Biologically we may become old but emotionally most of us remain babes! We react violently even to the most insignificant event. Our tolerance levels wear thin. Jealousy, anger and frustrations may surface spreading unhappiness all around. To keep our emotional reactions in balance and direct them towards a higher reality is the goal.

Moral maturity

As we age, our understanding of life must grow deeper. If we grow properly, our outlook on life changes. We become more tolerant, less judgmental. Our love, so long confined within very narrow circles, should expand to include all life.

We also understand that throughout life we have been receiving many things from God through the universe. Now it is time to consciously give back what we received. This can be done through material sacrifice or prayer for the welfare of the world. Of course we cannot do this without acquiring something. If old people radiate joy, peace and harmony, others around them also derive inspiration from them. People used to flock to the humble cottage of Kshudiram, father of Sri Ramakrishna, to drink in the tranquillity, peace and joy that radiated from his home. By living a pure life he is, unconsciously, giving back to the universe what he has been receiving all along.

Spiritual maturity

To grow spiritually is the final goal of life. So *Vedanta* advises older people to lessen their physical activities and turn their energies inward. Practice of contemplation of God, *japa*, study of the scriptures, etc. is highly recommended. One can also keep holy company in the form of regular visits to monasteries, spiritual people, etc. We, in the modern age, are blessed with a lot of conveniences. TV, MP3 players, CDs, etc. These can be used creatively in viewing temples, holy places, festivals, listening to spiritual talks, devotional songs, etc. In fact, we are spoilt for choice.

Vedanta reminds us again and again that Self-knowledge is the only goal of life. If we keep spiritual growth as our goal, and strive sincerely, we can gain Self-knowledge and enjoy our old age; there is no other way.

Swami Dayatmananda

Birth of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna

Shri Mahendra Nath Gupta, a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, hiding himself in the first letter of his name 'M.' in English, and 'Ma' with the prefix 'Shri' in Bengali, has become known all over the world as the illustrious recorder of the wonderful *Lila* (sportive Divine intercourse on earth) of Sri Ramakrishna with his devotees and spiritual seekers from about 26 February 1882, when he most probably first came into contact with the Great Master, till a few months before the Master's passing away on 16 August 1886. These records, noted down in his diary on the days of his visits to Sri Ramakrishna in brief mnemonic form in Bengali, were elaborated in due course into a graphic and lively narrative, recreating the original scenes.

At first some selected portions of the records were rendered into English by M. himself, directly from the original notes, and published in the *Brahmavadin*, Madras, in four issues from October 1897 to May 1898 with the caption *Leaves from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. Later on, adding much more material to it, a volume was published by him through the *Brahmavadin Office*, Madras, in 1907, with the title *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. From early 1898 onwards, the narratives were published in original Bengali from Calcutta under the title *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*, at first in instalments in various Bengali journals, and later in five volumes between 1902 and 1932.

This nectar-exuding work, immediately attained the rank of a scripture and was hailed by religious people and liberal-minded all over the world as a great boon to humanity. It was compared to the ancient devotional scripture, the great *Srimad*

Bhagavatam, in which the illustrious sage *Veda-Vyasa* depicts the *Lilas* of Sri Krishna. The epithet of 'Modern Vyasa', who gave this new *Sri Ramakrishna Bhagavatam* to the world, was appropriately applied to M. it is interesting to note that the word *Kathamrita* itself is taken from a verse in the ancient *Bhagavatam*, which was used by the Gopis intoxicated with divine love to describe the 'Ambrosial-Story' (Divine Words and Deeds) of Sri Krishna.

In recent times, there has been a natural curiosity among some scholars and devotees as to (1) when did M. begin to feel that his diary notes of Sri Ramakrishna's divine acts and conversations, made for his own personal use, will be of benefit to humanity as a whole? (2) What are the factors that finally induced M. to elaborate them into narratives and publish them? (3) Why did M. first publish his Bengali notes in English rendering in far away Madras? and (4) Which and where are the two pamphlets of the *Gospel* that he sent to Swami Vivekananda in 1897, which drew from him very apt and highly eulogistic comments, authenticating their contents, in a letter?

The recorder and his nature

It was known to Sri Ramakrishna that M., who had the habit of keeping a diary from early boyhood, was keeping a record of the happenings in his presence, centering round himself (Sri Ramakrishna) and the devotees. And it seems he also knew the future role those notes will play in the life of humanity, for he provided opportunities to M. to be close at hand during conversations, and indirectly guided him to record the ideas correctly by asking M. often to repeat what he had said. It was as if M. was divinely appointed to do that work. It is also said that Sri Ramakrishna forbade Rakhal and Tarak from noting down, saying, that there is a person who is assigned the work by the Divine Mother. However, Sri Ramakrishna had cautioned M. not

to make propaganda about him by writing in papers and journals as Keshab Chandra Sen was doing.

The first express reference to M.'s notes was made by the great dramatist Girish Chandra Ghosh, the newly transformed ardent devotee of the Master who seems to have attached some sentimental value to it in his own way. M. has himself recorded that on 23 April 1886, a few months before the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Girish accosted him at the Cossipore Gardenhouse (where Sri Ramakrishna was staying for treatment of his throat cancer) and asked M. if he was writing down something about the Master. When M. asked him who told him about it, he replied "I have heard about it;" and asked M. "Will you please give it to me?" M., of course, refused and told him that he had written it only for his own use and not for others, and declared, "You can have it only on my passing away."

As time passed after the departure of Sri Ramakrishna in August 1886, M. (the epithet 'M.' however, came into use much later in 1897 after the publication of the *Gospel*, and being a teacher, he was known as Master Mahashay in the Sri Ramakrishna circle) began to meditate more and more intensely and vividly on the events of Sri Ramakrishna's *Lila*, with his notes in front of him to recall the scenes, to feel his presence constantly. He felt elevated and peaceful thereby and began to feel inwardly, in due course, that his notes would be of great benefit to a wider circle of devotees and spiritual aspirants in India and the world as well.

It is well known, however, that M. was from the very beginning highly sensitive, retiring, and even somewhat timid. He had a feminine nature and bashful, as mentioned by the Master himself, which expressed itself in shyness and withdrawal. He would often hide his devotion, intuitive faculty for high sentiments, and absolute dedication and loyalty. With

this amalgam of high qualities, Mahendra Nath was gradually transformed into M. under the influence of Sri Ramakrishna. But some of the untoward features like timidity, and tendency to withdrawal still lingered for sometime before they finally departed and M. would venture forth to publish the *Kathamrita*.

Contemporary writings on Sri Ramakrishna

Already writings on Sri Ramakrishna had appeared both in Bengali and English, and a few books also had been published in Bengali. Keshab Chandra Sen had been publishing some information about Sri Ramakrishna and his teachings in his journal *The Indian Mirror*, since 1875 when he came into contact with the Master. Later in his *Nava-Vidhan* (Bengali) he published his *Paramahamser Ukti* (Sayings of the Paramahansa) in Bengali in 1878. An enlarged edition of it was published in January 1887 with a short life appended.

In 1879 Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, an eminent follower of Keshab, had written a beautiful article on Sri Ramakrishna in English in the *Theistic Quarterly Review* dwelling on the Master's comprehensive *sadhana* and wonderful catholicity.

Suresh Chandra Datta, a devotee, had published a collection of Sri Ramakrishna's sayings in Bengali, *Paramahansa Ramakrishner Ukti* in December 1884, and a second part of the same in 1886. In 1890, combining parts one and two, and adding some more sayings, he published it under the title, *Paramahansa Srimad Ramakrishna Upadesh*. And again in 1894 he published another edition combining all the sayings so far collected, along with a short life of Sri Ramakrishna.

Ramachandra Datta, a householder disciple of the Master, had started a Bengali journal *Tattvamanjari* in July/August 1885 at Kankurgachi Yogodyan in which he used to publish information about Sri Ramakrishna. And certainly some articles had appeared

on the great life and teachings of the Master in it and in other journals and papers when Sri Ramakrishna passed away in August 1886. He also published a life of Sri Ramakrishna in Bengali, *Sri Ramakrishnadeber Jivana-vrittanta* in July 1890.

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Punthi in Bengali, in the traditional religious verse form, began to be written in 1887 by Akshaya Kumar Sen, another householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. An early edition was ready in part by 1895, a perusal of which earned great encomiums from Swami Vivekananda then in U.S.A. The *Punthi* was completed in 1901.

It is quite possible, as we shall shortly see, that M. may have helped others in the collection of the Master's teachings, directly or indirectly from his records, at least from 1884, though remaining in the background, a characteristic which he maintained even in the *Kathamrita*.

But what was taking shape in M. 's mind as a result of his devoted and intimate association with Sri Ramakrishna for about four and a half years, and his poring over his notes and intense meditation on them, was something quite different. Probably it was not even known as yet to his own conscious mind. He was not sure how to present those spiritually profound events in the most effective manner. Ideas take time to grow and mature, and they pass through different stages before they bear fruit, just as in the case of a plant. This was true in the case of Mahendra as well as Narendra, as events revealed.

M. had been gradually formulating his ideas. The seedling of the *Kathamrita*, in the form of his notes, had just begun to grow and put forth some tender colourful leaves by 1889. It had yet to wait some eight years and pass through several stages before it could take the shape of the present full-fledged *Kathamrita*. The outlines were just emerging: the Divinity of Sri Ramakrishna, his outpouring of joy and spiritual wisdom with frequent blissful

samadhis bringing the supreme Divine to the clear comprehension of all and within their easy reach, his love and consideration for the lowly and the lost, his upliftment and glorification of women as manifestations of the Divine *Shakti*, his equal regard for all religious expressions and the upholding of the unity of all religions, the catholicity, universality, all-inclusiveness, and harmony of his life and message, and finally his *Avatarhood* for the present age. M. felt a strong conviction, in common with Swami Vivekananda, about the great future of his notes.

But M. could not as yet gather up sufficient boldness to express his ideas fearlessly before all. His hesitant and sensitive nature stood in his way. He might have thought of the adverse reactions of the Brahmos who were in the lime light of the day; of the orthodox Hindus who would scorn the holding up of a newfangled *Avatara*; of the reactions of the people in general and of the modern educated in particular. He was afraid that critics and some others may even say, as they actually did later, that M. was putting his own words in the mouth of the illiterate priest.

It was still the late 1880s. The great life and message of Sri Ramakrishna, who had recently passed away, had yet to permeate to the other parts of India, and the world, and find appreciative echoes. Even the bold Vivekananda hesitated and took time and waited for the propitious moment to preach the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. Is it any wonder that the timid M. hesitated until he was enthused and reassured by the Holy Mother and Vivekananda, to come out boldly with the gospel of the Master before the world? Sri Ramakrishna was as yet an object of adoration and worship to only a few of his close devotees and disciples in and around Calcutta. The currents of religious thought and devotion flowed in the hoary traditional channels, and of Chaitanya and Jesus Christ in Bengal. There were people who were opposed to Sri Ramakrishna even during his lifetime,

and decried what they thought were his pretensions, and that his devotees were setting up an illiterate village priest as an *Avatara*.

The first visible sprouts

The first visible sprouts of M. 's groping efforts we come across at Antpur, the birthplace of Swami Premananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, about 40 miles to the northwest of Calcutta, where the Holy Mother had gone on 5 February 1889 with one or two women devotees and some devotees and young disciples of the Master, on her way to the close-by Kamarpukur, to spend a quiet week. Among them were Narendra (Vivekananda), Sharat (Saradananda), Yogin (Yogananda), Baburam (Premananda), Vaikunta Nath Sanyal, and Master Mahashay (M.). Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was not very far off (Feb/March), and they all wanted to spend some time in the contemplation of the Master's divine life and teachings and in spiritual *sadhana* in that quiet little village in the midst of natural surroundings.

In that informal atmosphere, away from the din and madding crowds of Calcutta, in the midst of the group of intimate devotees and disciples of the Master, headed by the Holy Mother, with Sri Ramakrishna's birthday drawing near, a little courage seems to have crept up M. 's mind. And one day, probably on 7 February 1889, it seems M. read out to Narendra or showed some writing of his on the Master. In what form it was, whether it was based on his diary-notes, and whether it was in Bengali or English, it is very difficult to say, for the present *Kathamrita* form took shape some eight years later. But from Narendra's note in English to M. written at Antpur, dated 7 February 1889, it is clear that it was highly impressive and brought out clearly the message of the Master:

Antpur, 7 February 1889.

Thanks 100,000, Master! You have hit Ramkrishto (Ramakrishna)

in the right point. Few alas, few understand him!

—Yours Narendra.

P.S. My heart leaps in joy - and it is a wonder that I do not go mad when I find anybody thoroughly launched into the midst of the doctrine which is to shower peace on earth hereafter.

According to Swami Prabhananda, M. read out a part of his elaborated notes from his Manuscript in its early form to the Holy Mother at Nilambar Babu's Gardenhouse at Belur on 11 July (*Ratha-jatra* day) in 1888, and again on 15 March 1890 at M. 's rented house at No. 2, Hemkar Lane, Calcutta, when she was staying there for a few days. We know that the Holy Mother wrote to him on 26 November 1895 in Bengali about the material he had saying, "Those things, that is, the words of Thakur, which he has instructed you to preserve for the purpose of propagation, do preserve them carefully."

It is in 1897 that we hear again about M. 's writings from the Holy Mother and Vivekananda, and by then the present form of the *Kaitamrita* had taken shape. Of this a little later.

M's probable early contribution

The next we hear of Mahendra Nath Gupta (M.) by name after Antpur, though spelt wrongly, is only in 1892. In that year one Satchidananda Gitaratna published a booklet of 24 pages in Bengali on the sayings of *Sri Ramakrishna - Paramahansa-deber Ukti*, dedicated to one 'Shrila Shri-jukta Babu Nilamadhab Ghosh', a Zamindar of Khosnagar, Birbhum District (West Bengal). It contained some sayings of Sri Ramakrishna on spiritual matters. The author has acknowledged his debt in the booklet to Shri Mahendra Nath Gupta for these sayings. As we have already mentioned, M. might have been giving out anonymously the Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna for publication to

others, and he may have helped even Suresh Chandra Datta in his collections of Sri Ramakrishna's Sayings, for Datta seems to indirectly acknowledge it in his Preface to the 1894 edition of his book by writing that “only the teachings which were communicated to us and were proved to be genuine by those men who kept reverent company with Paramahamsadev have found place here.”

We have already seen that in English Sri Ramakrishna's Sayings had begun to appear in Keshab Chandra Sen's *The Indian Mirror* after 1875. Pratap Chandra Mazumdar also wrote a beautiful article on Sri Ramakrishna in 1879. Prof. G.H. Tawncy of the Presidency College, Calcutta, and a Director of Public Instruction in Bengal, had written a paper on Sri Ramakrishna dwelling on “The character, genius, catholicity, and inspiring power of the great sage” in the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* under the title 'A Modern Hindu Saint' in about 1892. M. had been a student of Prof. Tawney, probably in the 1870s. By 1893-94, Swami Vivekananda's momentous triumph in the West was well known and Sri Ramakrishna's life and message began spreading in India and abroad.

When the *Brahmavadin* fortnightly was started in Madras by Vivekananda's disciples, with his guidance and encouragement, in September 1895, to promote the Ramakrishna Movement and propagate Indian thought, from its very first issue on 14 September 1895, the Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna began to appear in English translation regularly. It may be surmised with some certainty that M. was in close touch with Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples who were then living at the Math at Alambazar and with the other religious and intellectual circles. He was well aware of the starting of the *Brahmavadin* and the great and successful work of Swami Vivekananda in spreading the message of Vedanta and the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna in America and

Europe. Naturally, he must have contributed the Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna to the *Brahmavadin* in English, himself remaining incognito, so that they could spread all over India and the West. Prof. Max Muller now came in close touch with the *Brahmavadin* and occasionally wrote to it also. After getting some information about Sri Ramakrishna from Swami Vivekananda and others, the professor who was also acquainted with the writings of Keshab Chandra Sen and Pratap Chandra Mazumdar, wrote an article on Sri Ramakrishna entitled *A Real Mahatman* which was published in England in the *Nineteenth Century* in August 1896.

Another admirer of Swami Vivekananda, Prof. J. Estlin Carpenter also published an article in the *Inquirer* in England in August 1896 on the effect of the life and work of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda in the West. M. was acquainted with all these things as they were publicized in India through the *Brahmavadin* and other media.

(To be concluded)

Reprinted from *Prabuddha Bharata*, May 1988

The very appearance and movement of those who earnestly call on God become something uncommon and impressive. Their very presence brings happiness. Their faces are always happy, their hearts are pure, and their minds are free from likes and dislikes. They are ever eager to remain merged in the Bliss that is God. To them worldly good and evil lose their distinction - both are equal to them

Swami Akhandananda

A Saint meets a Sage

Swami Vivekananda and Saint Durgacharan Nag were both eminent disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. The following dialogue between them took place at Belur Math, the Headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, at the beginning of 1899.

The disciple (Sarat Chandra Chakravati) has today come to the Belur Math with Nag Mahashaya.

Swamiji to Nag Mahashaya (saluting him): “You are all right, I hope?”

Nag Mahashaya: “I have come today to visit you. Glory to Sankara! Glory to Sankara! I am blessed today verily with the sight of Siva!” Saying these words, Nag Mahashaya out of reverence stood with joined hands before him.

Swamiji: “How is your health?”

Nag Mahashaya: “Why are you asking about this trifling body, this cage of flesh and bones. Verily I am blessed today to see you. Saying these words, Nag Mahashaya prostrated himself before Swamiji.

Nag Mahashaya: “I see with my inner eye that today I am blessed with the vision of Siva Himself. Glory to Ramakrishna!”

Swamiji (addressing the disciple): “Do you see? How real *bhakti* (devotion to God) transforms human nature! Nag Mahashaya has lost himself in the Divine, his body-consciousness has vanished altogether. (To Swami Premananda) Get some *prasada* (consecrated food) for Nag Mahashaya.”

Nag Mahashaya: “*Prasada!* (To Swamiji with folded hands.) Seeing you all my earthly hunger has vanished today.”

The *brahmacharins* (novices) and *sannyasins* (monks) of the

monastery were studying the *Upanisads*. Swamiji said to them. "Today a great devotee of Sri Ramakrishna has come amongst us. Let it be a holiday in honour of Nag Mahashaya's visit to the Math." So all closed their books and sat in a circle round Nag Mahashaya; Swamiji also sat in front of him.

Swamiji (addressing all): "Do you see? Look at Nag Mahashaya; he is a householder, yet he has no knowledge of the mundane existence; he always lives lost in Divine consciousness. (To Nag Mahashaya) Please tell us and these *bramacharins* something about Sri Ramakrishna."

Nag Mahashaya (in reverence): "What do you say, sir? What shall I say? I have come to see you - the hero, the helper in the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna. Now will people appreciate his message and teachings. Glory to Ramakrishna!"

Swamiji: "It is you who have really appreciated and understood Sri Ramakrishna. We are only spent in useless wanderings."

Nag Mahashaya: "What do you say, sir? You are the image of Sri Ramakrishna; the obverse and reverse of the same coin. Those who have eyes, let them see."

Swamiji: "Is the starting of these monasteries and *ashramas* etc. a step in the right direction?"

Nag Mahashaya: "I am an insignificant being, what do I understand? Whatever you do, I know it for certain, it will conduce to the well-being of the world - aye, of the world."

Many out of reverence proceeded to take the dust of Nag Mahashaya's feet, which made him much agitated. Swamiji, addressing all, said, "Don't act so as to cause pain to Nag Mahashaya; he feels uncomfortable." Hearing this everybody desisted.

Swamiji: "Do please come and stay at the Math (Belur Monastery). You will be an object-lesson to the boys here."

Nag Mahashaya: "I once asked Sri Ramakrishna about that, to which he replied, 'Stay as a householder as you are doing.' Therefore I am continuing in that life. I see you all occasionally and feel myself blessed."

Swamiji: "I will go to your place once."

Nag Mahashaya (mad with joy): "Will such a day dawn. My place will be made holy by your visit, like Varanasi. Shall I be as fortunate as that!"

Swamiji: "Well, I have the desire. Now it depends on Mother to take me there."

Nag Mahashaya: "Who will understand you? Unless the inner vision opens, nobody can understand you. Only Sri Ramakrishna understood you; all else have simply put faith in his words, but none understood you really."

Swamiji: "Now my one desire is to rouse the country; the sleeping leviathan that has lost all faith in his power and makes no response. If I can wake it up to a sense of the Eternal Religion then I shall know that Sri Ramakrishna's advent and our birth are fruitful. That is the one desire in my heart: *mukti* (salvation) and all else appear of no consequence to me. Please give me your blessings that I may succeed."

Nag Mahashaya: "Sri Ramakrishna will bless! Who can turn the course of your will? Whatever you will, shall come to pass."

Swamiji: "Well, nothing comes to pass without his will behind it."

Nag Mahashaya: "Your will and his have become one. Whatever is your will is his. Glory to Sri Ramakrishna!"

Swamiji: "To work one requires a strong body; since coming to this country, I am not doing well; in the West I was in very good health."

Nag Mahashaya: "Whenever one is born in a body, Sri

Ramakrishna used to say, 'One has to pay the house tax.' Disease and sorrow are the tax. But your body is a box of gold *mohurs*, and very great care should be taken of it. But who will do it? Who will understand? Only Sri Ramakrishna understood. Glory to Ramakrishna!"

Swamiji: "All at the Math take great care of me."

Nag Mahashaya: "It will be to their good if they do it, whether they know it or not. If proper attention is not paid to your body, then the chances are that it will fall off."

Swamiji: "Nag Mahashaya, I do not fully understand whether what I am doing is right or not. At particular times I feel a great inclination to work in a certain direction, and I work according to that. Whether it is for good or evil, I cannot understand."

Nag Mahashaya: "Well, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'The treasure is now locked.' Therefore he does not let you know fully. The moment you know it, your play of human life will come to an end."

Swamiji was pondering something with steadfast gaze. Then Swami Premananda brought some *prasada* for Nag Mahashaya who was ecstatic with joy.

Shortly after, Nag Mahashaya found Swamiji slowly digging the ground with a spade near the pond, and held him by the hand saying, "When we are present, why should you do that?" Swamiji, leaving the spade, walked about the garden talking the while, and began to narrate to a disciple: "After Sri Ramakrishna's passing away we heard one day that Nag Mahashaya lay fasting in his humble tiled lodgings in Calcutta. Swami Turiyananda, I, and another went together and appeared at Nag Mahashaya's cottage. Seeing us he rose from his bed. We said, "We shall have our *bhiksa* (food) here today." At once Nag Mahashaya brought rice, cooking pot, fuel, etc. from the bazaar

and began to cook. We thought that we would eat and make Nag Mahashaya eat also. Cooking over, he gave the food to us; we set apart something for him and then sat down to eat. After this, we requested him to take food; he at once broke the pot of rice and striking his forehead began to say, 'Shall I give food to the body in which God has not been realized?' Seeing this we were struck with amazement. Later on after much persuasion we induced him to take some food and then returned."

Swamiji: "Will Nag Mahashaya stay in the *Math* tonight?"

Disciple: "No, he has some work; he must return today."

Swamiji: "Then look for a boat. It is getting dark."

When the boat came, the disciple and Nag Mahashaya saluted Swamiji and started for Calcutta.

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Never talk ill of anybody, be he a devotee, a monk, or an ordinary householder, nor despise any for a wrong act. After all, everyone is a child of the Lord. Who knows today's sinning will not make him a saint tomorrow? Other acts do not count so much as a moment's love for the Lord. Blessed is he who has loved Him even for a moment. Saint or sinner, the Lord loves all. It is a great sin to find fault with others. You will invariably find that it is such people as never do a good act themselves who easily see defects in others and energetically spread rumours.

Swami Adbhutananda

The Song of the Sannyasin (An interpretation) (cont.)

10 Truth never comes, where lust, and fame, and greed
Of gain reside. No man, who thinks of woman
As his wife, can ever perfect be;
Nor he, who owns the least of things, nor he,
Whom anger chains, can ever pass thro' *Maya*'s gates.
So, give these up, *sannyasin* bold! Say –
Om Tat Sat, Om!

Truth is that which never changes, and that can only be the Absolute - *Brahman*. How can Truth come then to a man who dwells in such perishable things as lust, fame and greed? That truth can only come through renunciation, *sannyasa*, the complete renunciation of everything that changes. In his conversations with Sharat Chandra Chakravarty, Swamiji says it very clearly:

Disciple: “Well then, is it true that without *sannyasa*, there can be no knowledge of *Brahman*?”

Swamiji: “That is true, a thousand times. One must have both internal and external *sannyasa* - renunciation in spirit as also formal renunciation.”

Some, of course, will argue that Swamiji is simply being fanatical here, for there are very well known cases in history of married people who have attained the knowledge of *Brahman*; even kings like Janaka. Yes, Swamiji or nobody else denies the existence of these cases, but these are very, very rare exceptions. So rare, that the words of Swamiji hold true for almost the totality of mankind. Besides, those like Janaka who attained to Truth, did so after living like perfect *sannyasins* in disguise, so to speak. For you cannot reach the Absolute without absolute renunciation. It is undoubtedly possible to make progress - even great progress - in

spiritual life while living in the world as a householder, but eventually *sannyasa* must be embraced by all, if we are to achieve the supreme Truth. Hence the insistence of Swamiji in this verse too, that “no man, who thinks of woman as his wife, can ever perfect be; nor he, who owns the least of things, nor he, whom anger chains, can ever pass through *Maya's* gate.” And this is a statement that has been made throughout the ages by all the divine Incarnations, saints and sages of all religions.

When a rich young man approached Jesus seeking spiritual instructions, first Jesus gave him general advice and asked him to follow the traditional commandments of his faith; but when the man told him that he had been following those commandments all his life and that he wanted something more, then Jesus said: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”¹ Mind the words! If you wish to progress in spiritual life and at the same time live happily here, then practice religion while living in the world; but “if thou wilt be perfect,” then renunciation is a must. Renunciation is the boat that takes us safely to the other side, across the waters of duality, to the blissful shores of the never-changing Truth.

11. Have thou no home. What home can hold thee friend?
The sky thy roof; the grass thy bed; and food,
What chance may bring, well cooked or ill, judge not.
No food or drink, can taint that noble Self,
Which knows Itself. Like rolling river free
Thou ever be, *sannyasin* bold! Say –
Om Tat Sat, Om!

The idea of 'home' implies limitation, smallness, and is a sign of attachment to a tiny place and habits of life that give us a

¹ Matthew 19: 21

sense of security, and we call it 'ours.' But in reality that inordinate affection has in itself the power to make us belong to the home as much as the home belongs to us.

Sannyasa, as we mentioned before, is the royal path to freedom. How can that puny sense of 'home' contain and satisfy the heart that longs to embrace the infinite! "What home can hold thee friend?" No home is enough; no country is enough; not even the whole world! When the call of freedom comes, the human heart becomes restless for expansion and it cannot rest until it fills it all. So the *sannyasin* walks away, leaving behind every physical and mental home, responding to the call. The very word *sannyasa* etymologically means: 'giving up completely,' or in other words: 'complete renunciation.'

The joy that it is experienced when one begins to feel that inner expansion that I belong to all and all belong to me! Then the *sannyasin* feels that 'home' is the whole universe; so he sleeps where sleep gets him and eats "what chance may bring," knowing fully well that whatever he needs will come to him unasked, provided by that universe of which he is now part.

For the ordinary man this is sheer madness, for he cannot conceive how a man or a woman can give up the struggle for existence and the pursuit of enjoyment, and be happy. Even those that call themselves religious make provision for their life; they need to feel that they are safe, now and in the future. They trust in money more than they trust in God. But what happens is exactly the opposite: the whole universe works in favour of those who have renounced everything in search of Truth. Jesus, who was a perfect *sannyasin*, said to his disciples: "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?"

"Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do

they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”¹

“Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”²

The monks of the Ramakrishna Order have a twin ideal: “For our spiritual freedom, and for the good of the world.” This means that they must sacrifice part of their external freedom in order to serve God in man, and they congregate themselves in big or small communities to perform that service better. But although they live in a house, the idea of home does not live in their minds. Therefore they do not develop attachment for the place they live in or for the people they deal with, giving them the freedom to move to another place without even looking back to see what is left behind. And every monk of the Order, at least for a few days, lives in the traditional way described by Swamiji in this verse.

12. Few only know the truth. The rest will hate
And laugh at thee, great one; but pay no heed.
Go thou, the free, from place to place, and help
Them out of darkness, Maya's veil. Without
The fear of pain or search for pleasure, go
Beyond them both, *sannyasin* bold! Say –
Om Tat Sat, Om!

The *sannyasins* are a source of inspiration to those who are sincere in their spiritual aspiration; but they are seen as a pest and a threat, or in the best of cases as lazy escapist, by those whose

¹ Matthew, 6:25-26

² Mathhew, 6:31-33

only goal is to enjoy the world. As Sri Ramakrishna used to say, “One offers a price for an article according to one's capital.”¹ If our capital is just enough to survive, how can we understand the value of a diamond? Hence Swamiji rightly says, “Few only know the truth, the rest will hate and laugh at thee...”

The truth that Swamiji speaks about is not only the ultimate Truth, but also the truth that the whole *Song of the Sannyasin* speaks about: that only renunciation can give us lasting peace and happiness. Swami Shivananda very earnestly said in a few words, “I tell you the essence of it all - the one thing that we feel in the inmost recesses of our heart. Nothing can be achieved without renunciation... It is through renunciation alone that one can become immortal. Yoga and bhoga, union with God and sense-enjoyment, cannot go together. One cannot get any taste of the bliss of *Brahman* unless one gives up the happiness of this world.”²

Swamiji then goes on to say that not only should the *sannyasin* pay no heed to those who slander him, but he should move among them to “help them out of darkness, *Maya's* veil.” Here we see once more (as mentioned in the previous verse) that new and inspiring ideal that Swamiji added to the traditional way of the *sannyasins*: no more should the life of a monk or a nun be for their personal freedom, but also for the good of the many.

For many centuries the *sannyasins* have remained aloof to the plight of the masses, avoiding thus the sufferings involved in any association. The new *sannyasins* are to live the old and the new way, accelerating thus the upliftment of mankind, without considering any personal sacrifice or advantage.

“Without the fear of pain or search for pleasure, go beyond them

¹ The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, pg 759

² For Seekers of God, pg 188

both...” There cannot be perfect freedom until every single soul has become free. That is the goal, for we are the eternal, infinite reality, the sum total of all souls.

13. Thus, day by day, till karma's powers spent,
Release the soul for ever. No more is birth,
Nor I, nor thou, nor God, nor man. The “I”
Has All become, the All is “I” and Bliss.
Know thou art That, *sannyasin* bold! Say –
Om Tat Sat, Om!

Here, as in verse nine, Swamiji speaks again of the *jivanmukta*, one who has attained freedom while still living in the body, and introduces besides a new idea: *videhamukti*, the final, complete freedom acquired when the body dies.

Is the *jivanmukta* not totally free then? Yes, of course he is. He has reached spiritual perfection and hence no more rebirth is necessary for him; neither in this world nor in any other world. But as long as some karma remains he will have to continue living in the body, although he knows himself to be completely independent of it. In the case of the *jivanmukta* this remaining karma belongs to the body-mind system only, for he is now only the witness of the play of nature. When the impulse of that karma wears away, the body falls automatically, like a ripe fruit falls from the tree. What is meant therefore by *videhamukti* is the complete freedom from any type of body - gross or subtle. Hence Swamiji says, “Thus, day by day, till karma's power spent, release the soul forever.”

When the body drops and *videhamukti* comes, then the mind dies, and with it all its content, all the concepts and ideas that it had; even the very highest ideas of God and freedom. They all die; all notions and perceptions disappear never to return. “No more is birth, nor I, nor thou, nor God, nor man.”

How can this happen? How can that be ever possible? Well, the answer is very simple, for Truth is the simplest thing: "The 'I' has All become, the All is 'I' and Bliss." At the end, when everything disappears, only Reality remains, all duality ceases to be - for it never truly was. The 'I' that earlier was limited or separate, has now become the only existence. So who is there to perceive whom, if I am the only existence? The dream is broken, and the Soul has become what it ever was: *Satchidananda*, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute, Freedom itself. □

No! Sri Ramakrishna did not make us great; he made us 'nobodies.' You also have to become 'nobodies.' Wipe out all vanity and all sense of ego. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'When the ego dies, all troubles cease.' 'Not I, not I, but thou, O Lord.' Look at the life of Nag Mahashaya! There was not the least trace of ego in him. G. C. Ghosh used to say, 'Maya tried to bind Nag Mahashaya and Vivekananda in her net, but Nag Mahashaya became smaller than the smallest, so that Maya's net could not hold him, and Vivekananda grew bigger and bigger; he became one with the infinite, and the net was too small to bind him.'

Swami Premananda

The Raja Yoga of St. John of the Cross (cont.)

India does not know any fixed dogma regarding infused contemplation, no special commandment from the Lord as to the particular form by which He reveals Himself, as opposed to the Catholic dogma, according to which "God is a Trinity in Persons and a Unity in nature." It would be easy to identify in the work of St John of the Cross other degrees of raja yoga which we have not mentioned, but that would take us beyond the scope of an article, and that is why we have limited ourselves to the principal phases of yoga: *dhyana*, *dharana* and *pratyahara*; for the same reason we have decided not to give more quotations related to those terms. The reader is now in a position to understand why the objections formulated by St John of the Cross in regard to meditation on an image cannot be applied to the *sadhana* of Indian raja yoga. In contrast to St John of the Cross, for us the image occupies an important place in the overall plan of raja-yoga, the reason for this divergence lies in our different points of view.

The repetition of "Our Father," such as St John of the Cross recommends, cannot be compared to meditation by the yogi on a *mantram*. For the disciple, the sacred *mantram* is identical with the divine presence. Just as the Catholic does not consider the bread and the wine of the Eucharist to be symbols, so the Indian disciple does not consider the *mantram* to be a symbol. The Indian tradition teaches us that after the consecration of the *mantram* by the guru, the *mantram* takes on the splendour of pure Consciousness. The repetition of the Jesus prayer in the Byzantine tradition is an echo of the practice of the *mantram*, without nevertheless having the same bases as in the Indian tradition. (See *The Way of a Pilgrim* and the *Philocalia*. Readers particularly

interested in these questions can profitably study the writing of Sir John Woodroffe).

Contemplating an object, the *Ishta*, synchronised with the contemplation of the *mantram* in *japa* (repetition), leads to a total realisation. The following illustration will clarify what we mean by "synchronisation:"

When we look at an image in a stereoscope, the vision of the right eye and that of the left take place at the same level, which gives a sense of depth, of a third dimension, which is not one composed of two visions. It is not a synthesis; it is a new vision. In the same way we envisage the synchronisation of time and space. This new vision is the opening of the third eye, the vision of *Maya* considered as Reality, The realisation that All is *Brahman*. That is what *Vedanta* calls Liberation. All that we have seen up to this point, is nothing other than ways, modalities, for expressing Brahman.

Beginning with that instant the intellect ceases to divide and fragment Reality into objects and thoughts, into time and space, since in the Truth, dualism, despite its fundamental appearances, does not exist. Before obtaining that direct experience, the disciple goes through a preparatory stage in order to purify his thoughts and reflections. He must liberate his intelligence and keep it safe from the expropriation of his intellect. One might say of intelligence that it is cosmic, in the sense that it is endowed with infinite possibilities: of representation in the *chitta* (mental substance), and of intellectual overtures, for the intellect is one of its functions.

Liberation is the authentication of the cosmic character of the mind; henceforth the individual mind is no longer imprisoned nor limited by a personal point of view. That liberty of the mind, which will never let itself be bound by opinions, which will no longer cherish opinions, as Zen puts it, or, according to

Vedanta, will not be the prisoner of opinion - that liberty is a realisation of Reality. The intellect considered as a "granary of opinions" is destroyed by this knowledge; it abandons definitively its beliefs, it is delivered from all particular points of view. Reality explodes like a thunder-clap, leaving behind effort, tension, and particular attention, which crystallize around the illusory I. The result, according to Shankara, is the experience of *Brahman*. The apparent contradiction between the futility of human effort and the final realisation is resolved by one word: Grace.

The Indian way of infused contemplation, like the philosophy and the metaphysics which govern it, is inadmissible to Christians. St John of the Cross says quite clearly: "We should seek not to attach our hearts to rites or manners of praying which differ from what Christ and his Church have taught us. We should not use other manners of prayer, formulas, or equivocal affectations, but we should follow only the prayers of the Church with the rite which the Church uses; everything can be reduced to the Lord's Prayer." (*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III. ch. 44, 4)

We have established that there are similarities and differences between the yoga of St John of the Cross and the classical *raja yoga* of India, but our presentation has followed an order which reverses the traditional one. Usually an explanation of *raja yoga* follows an ascending order: *yama* (rules of discipline), *nyama* (purification), *pratyahara* (meditation), *dharana* (concentration), *dyana* (contemplation) and *samadhi* (infused contemplation).

We studied *samadhi* first, which corresponds to the infused contemplation of St John of the Cross, and in descending order we undertook the study of the other branches of yoga. We have yet to treat *pranayama*, *asana*, *niyama*, and *yama*. The latter two have been largely dealt with in describing the Night of the Senses. St John of

the Cross does not mention anywhere the practice of *pranayama*. In order to find a parallel for Indian *pranayama* in the Christian tradition, our researches would have to take us to Ignace de Loyola. As far as *asana* (posture) is concerned. St John of the Cross gives some directions about the choice of a solitary place for prayer, but without prescribing the gymnastics that Indian *raja-yoga* borrowed from *hatha-yoga*. For him it is all simple and uncomplicated.

One of the fundamental principles required by St John of the Cross as well as by Indian *raja-yoga* is the absolute observance of chastity; that rule, which does not allow any derogation, immediately eliminates a certain number of candidates. We have cited the words of St. Paul to which St John of the Cross refers: "One thing is certain, my brothers: the time is short; consequently, let those who are married be as those who are not." (I Cor. 7:29)

Raja-yoga studies the question of chastity from the point of view of dispersion and concentration of energy; St John of the Cross observes the same attitude. "For God has so thoroughly weaned the soul from all its appetites, he has so well recollected them in Him, that they can no longer find any satisfaction in what they used to like. The end that God pursues in separating them from everything else and centring them in Him is to make the soul stronger and more fit to receive the strong union of God's love, which He is now beginning to give through this Purgative Way, in which the soul must love with great strength and with all her desires of both spirit and sense; which could not happen if they were dispersed in diverse other things. For this reason David said to God, to the end that he might receive the strength of this union with God, 'I will keep my strength for Thee' Ps. 58:10). That is, all the ability, appetites, my faculties and strength of - I do not desire to make use of them or find satisfaction in anything outside of You." (*Dark Night of the Soul* Bk. II ch. 11, 3)

Conserving strength, in the concrete and subtle sense, is called *Brahmacharya* in India. We read in the *Bhagavad Gita*, VIII, 2: "I am going to reveal to you briefly the way which those who know the *Vedas* declare to be indestructible, which those follow who are masters of themselves, free from all passion, that way which one cannot take without taking the vow of chastity." It is impossible to undertake a spiritual discipline leading to *samadhi* without that observance. Furthermore, the etymology of the term *samadhi*, which we pointed out above, is itself revealing: to hold together, to reassemble what is dispersed. This dispersion exists equally with the intellect, the memory, and the will. The role of active work which the soul must accomplish in order to penetrate into the Night was explained at the beginning of this essay and, according to St John of the Cross, as soon as the soul has done her part of "personal industry," namely witnessing the creature's love for God, God places the soul in a passive state which makes it qualified to contemplate Him in his eternal glory in a state of complete union.

Here we find the tenth and last rung of love of this secret ladder. The soul is wholly assimilated to God as a consequence of the clear vision of God which she enjoys immediately. When the soul arrives at the ninth rung, nothing remains but to abandon her body. Souls like this are few in number; as love has worked a complete purification in them, they do not go through purgatory. That is why St. Matthew said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." Now, as we just said, this vision explains the total similarity of the soul with God, according to the saying of St John: "We know that we will be like him." (Jn. 3:2). That does not mean that the soul will be as powerful as God, for that is impossible; but all that the soul is will become like God; thus she could be called, and in reality would be, God by participation: 'On that day you will not ask me anything' (Jn. 16:23). But until that

day arrives, there is always for the soul, however elevated she might be, something hidden in proportion to her lack of total assimilation to the divine essence." (DNS, Bk. II. ch. 20, 6)

This devotional result of *raja-yoga* is the favourite theme of Indian mystics. The different degrees are useful so long as the soul is not embraced by what St John of the Cross calls "the fire of love." The *bhakti* school of India mentions some extremely rare cases where divine love seized a soul enmeshed in sin, and without passing her through the different stages of discipline, brusquely placed her at the highest summit of perfection. Here, St John of the Cross tell us, is how this mystical theology and this secret love raise the soul above all created things and it mounts up to God. "For love is like fire, which rises always upwards, striving to reach the centre of its sphere." (DNS, Bk II, ch 20, 6)

At this point, whatever differences there might be between one yoga and the other escape us. Furthermore, the yoga of St John of the Cross is not limited to one of the four yogas: *jnana*, *bhakti*, *karma*, *raja*, to the exclusion of others, but it integrates all four. In this sense, one could name it "integral yoga," (or *Purna Yoga*, the term used by Sri Aurobindo). Among the Christian mystics, to whom in one way or another we can apply the term Yogi, St John of the Cross can be called the yogi par excellence, because in him alone do we find all the elements of different yogas harmonised by the supremacy of Christian faith.

(to be continued)

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Ram-Dada

Many know about the late Ramachandra Datta, the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. How his life of devotion developed has partly been published by his disciples in the *Tattva-manjari*. Partly, I say, because, however much anybody might write, nobody is capable enough to describe the deeply intimate relation of the devotee with the Master. That gem of devotion is secretly preserved in the core of the heart of the devotee and he only is capable to describe that. For, until now no language fit to describe those feelings of the heart, has been invented.

That picture abides in the devotee's heart. He alone sees it with wonderment. Nobody else has access there. That is the temple of the Lord, and He only resides there. In that temple goes on endless sport of the Lord with his devotee. I am only trying here to describe Ramachandra as I saw him.

I first met Ramachandra at his house at Simla in Calcutta. On the particular day a devotee named Tejachandra Mitra left a note in the Star Theatre (at that time in the Beadon Street) that Sri Ramakrishna would visit the house of Ramachandra Datta at Madhu Roy's Lane at Simla. The devotee left that note without being requested by me. Afterwards I came to know that he had done so at the direction of the Master. As soon as I read the note after going to the Theatre, I felt attracted. Slowly I moved on and was thinking at every step, "Why should I go uninvited?" Sometimes I stopped and thought of retracing my steps, but still went ahead. Even after reaching the lane in which Ramachandra's house was situated I was hesitating. At last I reached before the gate where Ramachandra was waiting. It appeared that he knew me. He welcomed me cordially as soon as he saw me and instead

of showing any social courtesy he began to speak in praise of the Master. He did so with great earnestness as though he was afraid that this man who had somehow gone there due to some momentary impulse might turn away after coming as far as the gates of heaven!

Ramachandra began to narrate the glory of the Master with great care. The Master had visited the theatre twice previously. Though I was known to him, I could not realize that the saviour had already given me shelter. Afterwards I met him, received his message of hope and came back.

Ramachandra would often accompany the Master wherever he went. But when the Master had come to the theatre, Ramachandra sent food for him but did not come himself! He used to consider the theatre as a polluted place. But seeing in his house the Master's grace on me, he expressed his sorrow to his friend, Sri Devendranath Mazumdar, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna with the words "Alas! what a fool have I been to have considered that place polluted where the Master himself had set his own feet to bestow his grace on the fallen! The Master alone understands his own play (*Lila*). How could I realize, foolish as I was, that the friend of the lowly had gone to the theatre on the pretext of witnessing a drama just to shower his grace on the fallen? Deven, you will see soon that these men of theatre will not remain ordinary persons any more, but through the grace of the Master all will become adorable to me."

After this I met Ram Babu at Dakshineswar. He approached very humbly and took me to the *Panchavati*. All the readers of the *Tattva-manjari* are aware that. Ram considered Paramahansa Deva as an Incarnation. He came to know from the aforesaid Deven Babu that my faith also was that the Master was an Incarnation. Hearing of this impression of mine Ram was overwhelmed! He addressed me as Girish-dada - elder brother

Girish. From that time onwards I also used to call him Ram-dada. In the *Panchavati* Ram-dada, with choked voice - words not properly coming out due to intense emotion of the heart - addressed me the following words, "Girish-dada, have you understood that this time there are three in one: Paramahamsa-deva is the sum total of the three, Gauranga Nityananda, and Advaita! His (Sri Ramakrishna's) idea is the synthesis of love, devotion and knowledge in one receptacle. In the incarnation as Gauranga they were manifested in three receptacles."

Ram-dada went on in this strain as much as he could, his inner feelings however were partly expressed and partly remained in his heart. I grew so much intimate with him that there was nothing that he could not give me. Repeatedly he began to fold his hands in reverence and possibly would roll on the ground in the *Panchavati* had I not prevented him. He took me as purer than the pure, and I became very closely related to him. There is a saying of Nityananda Prabhu in a song, "He who worships Gauranga, is my life itself." To him I became as if dearer than his own life. That day Ram-dada was beside himself with joy, as though he had got an uncommon thing! After that, we would meet often. The theatre became his place of pilgrimage, so to say. He would not be able to pass his days if he did not go to the theatre and discuss with me about the Master. That there might be anything contrary to what I said, would find no place in his brain. If anyone contradicted me, he would roar out, "What! contradicting Girish-dada's opinions! The Master said, 'His (Girish's) intellect is supernormal.'" Even thinking too highly of myself, I was unable to find out how I was in anyway more intelligent or considerate than Ram-dada, because I noticed at every step that he was very sagacious. And Ram-dada had but one subject for discussion and that was the Master! What he would do with the Master, how he would propagate his message, how best

he could serve him - these were his thoughts day and night. The Master said, "Ram is deeply devoted to me."

Through his devotion Ram was infallible regarding the Master. Whenever any one would arrange festivals in his house, he would mostly be compelled to consult Ram-dada. For, there were frequent festivals in Ram-dada's house with the Master in the company of his devotees. Ram-dada would not allow anybody who came to see the Master to go away without taking *prasad*. So while making arrangements for festivals one found it necessary to take Ram-dada's advice. But during the festival at his own house he would consult me about the arrangements of the items of food. "What do you say Girish-dada, let us prepare this kind of sweet or that sweet" and so on. Needless to say, it was not possible for me to improve upon a single item that he would decide upon.

Devotees are of different moods; even the rascal does not lack in moods. One day in the theatre, out of insanity I used most ugly names to the Master. While he was returning to Dakskineswar I made *pranam* also fully prostrating myself. Coming back to Dakshineswar, the Master began to tell anyone and everyone "Do you see! Girish Ghosh fed me with one and a half luchs and spoke ill of me in filthy language." Many of them began to say, "We know that he is a rascal. Why do you go to him even?" Being pained at my behaviour many began to chide me. Afterwards when Ram-dada came, the Master told him everything. It was characteristic of Ram-dada that if anybody would use taunting words at the Master he would immediately go forward to punish the man even if he did not have the strength to do so. Ram-dada already heard of my scoldings in Calcutta and also heard I had made prostrations at the end. So when the Master told him everything he said, "Why Sir, he has done well." The Master addressing all the people present, said, "Hear, hear what

Ram says. He called me ill names referring even to my parents, still Ram says that he has done well!" Ram-dada was unmoved and said, "Yes Sir, that's true! When Sri Krishna chastised the snake Kaliya, and asked, "Why do you emit poison?", Kaliya replied, 'Lord, you have given me poison, whence shall I emit nectar!' Whatever you have given to Girish Ghosh of the Theatre, he has worshipped you with that alone."

Hearing these words the face of the Master became Hushed and began to emit lustre. Still he smiled and said: "Even then should we go to his house again?" Many said, "No." But the Saviour of the fallen said, "Ram, call for a carriage then. Come, let us go to his house." Reader, this is my Ram-dada. Nobody easily wants to prostrate himself at the feet of another. But let the reader imagine whether or not one felt spontaneously inclined to bow before Ram-dada. Ram-dada alone recognised the sinner and the Saviour. The Master came to my house. Many devotees also accompanied him. Ram-dada, overwhelmed with joy, accosted me with a smile. Vivekananda also was in the party. "All glory to your faith," said he and took the dust of my feet. Surely he was firmly convinced that the Saviour had bestowed his grace on me.

The readers may be curious to know why I spoke ill of the Master. I had the impression in my mind that I was lacking in devotion and so would not be able to serve him. But if he became my son I could nurse him out of affection. Infatuated with this idea, I started pressing him, "Please be born as my son!" The Master said, "Why should I do so? I shall be your spiritual guide and remain as your chosen ideal!" As he did not agree to be born as my son, I started abusing him with all sorts of words.

Ram-dada used to have a lot of discussion and sometimes even controversies with many of those who were either believers or non-believers in the Master. Ram-dada was not at all eager to be

the winner in the wrangling but he was anxious as to how the disputant would take refuge in Paramahansa Deva! At the end of the controversy, if anybody would go away unconvinced, Ram Babu would regret, "Ah! The Master did not give me the capacity to convince the person! Oh, how unfortunate he is, not to have sought for the grace of such a compassionate Master!" True, Ram-dada would argue loudly, but his attitude would be found out at the end. He would never call the disputant, arrogant or barbarian, but would realize the lack of his own capacity and would pray for that to the Master. Such occurrences have been many. The day when Paramahansa Deva said "I cannot talk any more, please give power to Ram and others, O Mother! They will talk and prepare the people and I shall just touch them." Ram-dada's enthusiasm increased a hundredfold. Seeing his eagerness many people would remark adversely and would even ridicule him, but Ram-dada's enthusiasm went on increasing doubly day by day.

The readers of *Tattwamanjari* know that Ramachandra was born in a vaishnava family and that he had aversion to fish and meat. In boyhood when asked to take meat in a relative's house in the village, he left that house and having no money with him came back to Calcutta with great difficulty. This incident is mentioned in the *Tattwamanjari*. Even when he was an atheist he would not touch meat because of the family *samskara* (tradition). Fish and meat were prescribed as his diet when he became a diabetic patient. Being earnestly importuned by the doctor and the relatives he of course took fish, but he never touched meat. So great was his aversion for meat. But one day I prepared meat in the Theatre. Both Devendranath Majumdar and Ram-Dada were present. I offered mentally that meat to the Lord and said "Ramdada, this is but *prasad!*" He said "Of course, if you ask me to partake of it, put it in my mouth." I was in a fix. I touched the meat with the finger and put that finger in his mouth, Ram-dada

remained unperturbed. If anybody would see him at that time, he would think, that his hatred for meat was a lie. No sign of his aversion was noticed. It was *prasad* and so Ram-dada had no aversion.

From the Kankurgachi garden he would bring offered cooked food in carriage driven by Muslims. He would not take any cooked food other than *prasad*. When invited anywhere he would request the host to serve him all the items at a time, and would take that after offering! While in the process of taking his meals he would not permit any new course to be served. As people have great faith in the *prasad* of Jagarnnath, so he also had the same regard for the *prasad* of Sri Ramakrishna. If he knew that it was *prasad* he would take even the leavings of a low person.

The picture of Ramachandra will never be obliterated from the memory of those who saw him at the Kasipur garden on the day when Paramahansa Deva showered his grace like a wish-fulfilling tree. My brother Sriman Atulkrishna. says, "I got the grace of Paramahansa Leva through the kindness of Ram Babu only. I was standing in a corner. Ram Babu pulled me by the hand and presented me before the Master." While mentioning this Atulkrishna becomes overwhelmed. Many people felt the kindness of Ram Babu on that day.

Many days I had long talks with Ram Babu but we never had any controversy. I have mentioned above that it was Ram Babu who would ask for advice from me, but when my wife died many devotees came to me out of sympathy. Ram Babu also came. But there was no word of sympathy. He only said, "Girish-dada, now you are free. Don't accept bondage anymore." I thought that he was asking me not to marry again. Reading my mind Ram said, "No, no, I am not speaking about marriage. Even the thought of that will not come to you, that I know. You have children. Don't enter into *samsara* again with them and live a pompous life. Those

who have no other way, tolerate the pangs of sufferings due to the death of their wives. But you have Ramakrishna, why should you require any other diversion? “

Ram-dada was the teacher of Chemistry in the Science Association of Dr. Mahendralal Sarkar. It is not too much to say that he was an adept in chemical experiments. I was his student there. While returning home I would come with him in his carriage. At that time some scholar in Chemistry used to hold the view that everything has come out of hydrogen. While coming together with Ram-dada we would often discuss about hydrogen. The burden of the talk was the same, viz. from one came out many; even by the material science this has been proved. Discussion like this would ultimately turn to Paramahansa Deva. Charmed, Ram-dada used to say, “Wonderful is the glory of the Master! The same material science which made me an atheist, now I see - the divine eyes having been opened by the grace of the Master - expresses every atom as infinite , infinite, all infinite without beginning and end. Infinite consciousness is present directly in every atom. The discussions in the meeting on Chemistry would develop into higher discussion of knowledge and our meeting would come to an end for that day with praise to Ramakrishna Deva, the repository of all knowledge.

I shall bring this article to a close narrating one more incident. The Master, then in a sick condition, was living in a rented house at Skyampukur. The date of the Kalipuja came. The Master asked a devotee named Kalipada Ghosh, “Arrange the things necessary for Kalipuja today.” Kalipada did so with great devotion. In the evening all the articles necessary for the *puja* were placed before the Master. On one side there were various items of food including barley water as the Master was not able to take anything else. On the other side was a heap of flowers, red lotuses and red hibiscuses being in plenty.

The room with its lengthy side towards east and west was full of devotees. At the western end there was Ram-dada and I was near him. My mind was becoming very eager, almost restless. I was anxious to go near the Master. Ram-dada told me something which I do not remember exactly, I was not in a normal mood then, a certain change had come in me. I remember that Ram-dada encouraged me and said, "Go, why not, go!" At his words all my hesitation disappeared. I crossed the devotees and came before the Master. Seeing me the Master said, "What; these are the things to be done today." And immediately saying "Then let me offer the flowers at your feet," I took flowers with both hands and placed them at his lotus feet shouting, "Glory to the Mother!" Presently all the devotees began to offer flowers at his lotus feet. The Master spontaneously assumed the symbolic posture of granting boon and freedom from fear in his both hands and entered into *samadhi*. When I remember that scene I remember Ram-dada. I feel Ram-dada made me do the worship of the living Kali.

In conclusion I shall mention one more thing. After his passing away I saw him one day in a dream with a complexion like the molten gold, bare body, wearing a very ordinary white cloth! I asked, "Ram-Dada, what do you do now?" Ram-Dada answered, "I do now what I used to do previously; I serve the Master." Paramahansa Deva used to say, "Dreams about gods are not mere dreams but true." My belief is that the divine form of Ram-dada that I saw was real. It was true that he was engaged in the service of the Paramahansa Deva. It is also true that eternally he will be engaged in the service of the Master.

Reprinted from the *Vedanta Kesari*, Nov 1953

Leaves of an Ashrama 34: To Abandon One's Minority Status

I was just thinking: We all of us at times blame our troubles on the fact that we are a member of some minority. We get to believing that our miseries stem from, say, our having come from a lower-class family or from some origin colored, Jewish, unschooled, neurotic, foreign, or some other.

But would belonging to a majority group solve anything? Would all my troubles be over if I were, for example, a Chinese peasant - there are hundreds of millions of them - or a middle-class, Midwestern, Protestant Babbitt? Don't such people, numerous as they certainly are, have struggles too?

Perhaps what one is actually complaining about is not that one is a member of a minority but that one does not belong to the narrow class one believes he would prefer. To be, let us say, an aristocratic New Englander commanding great wealth and possessed of devastating attractiveness - this would certainly place one in a category of being a member of a minority; but such, we think, would be completely desirable. And yet, would it? Persons of such rare distinction do exist, yet they are no doubt as miserable as we are (as several moral tales popular with television audiences proclaim!).

No, the plain fact is that everyone is a member of an undesirable narrow class, the most limiting minority that exists: himself. The urge to resent one's strict confines is an authentic reaching out for freedom. We perceive that it is limitation which is at the bottom of our troubles. So what is to be done? Somehow I must come out, loosen that unhealthy concern for myself. I must move into a broader, airier world. Somehow I must identify with the Great Majority.

Of course it is only divine knowledge which can make me forget myself. But in my present stage as a struggling aspirant there are exercises, it seems to me, which can lead in this direction. I can take notice of the concerns of others and pray for them. Of people who annoy me and make me retreat behind the barricades of separateness, I can try to think wholesomely. I can, deliberately and systematically, as Buddha taught, send thoughts of love toward all corners of the world. Such steps do loosen the grip of self-concern.

Thus the center of my interest shifts. The elements in others which isolate me from them disappear; and those features in ourselves which separate us from them vanish as well.

Indeed, the curious truth is that we must be good to others not to help them, but because the alternative is so terrible. Who is the sinner, the madman, the desperado, but someone who has holed up inside his personal minority and bolted the door? Who is the happy man, the adjusted person, the saint, but one who has learned to live with others? It takes time and pain before we come to this understanding, but learn it we must. We see eventually and know that we must practice it; that indeed, like it or not, we must love or perish. □

Great souls, wherever they are, create a spiritual zone around them; and anybody coming within that zone realizes something like an electric current passing into him. It is a very strange phenomenon, impossible to explain, unless one has experienced it oneself... This is a wonderful play of energy, one's power involuntarily acting on another.

Swami Vijnananada

Book Review

Belur Math: Pilgrimage

by Swami Asutoshananda

Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai – 600 004

Price: Rs. 25.00

Founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1898, Belur Math is the headquarters of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. This little book meets a pressing need of pilgrims visiting Belur Math, who are keen to know the various places they should see there and other locations associated with Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda. This useful guidebook not only provides detailed information for the visitor to Belur Math itself, but also to Dakshineswar, Kamarpukur and Jayrambati, as well as various other associated sites within east reach of Belur Math. Maps and sketches are included, as well as full addresses of the places to visit. The guidebook will greatly assist pilgrims to Belur Math to enhance their visit and make it fruitful.

Gita for Everyday Living

A “Vedanta Kesari” Presentation

Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai – 600 004

Price: Rs. 70.00

The *Bhagavad Gita* must be one of the most widely read scriptures in the world. It has universal appeal, but its message needs to be restated and rearticulated in order to meet the changing circumstances of the contemporary world. In this way it

becomes more accessible and reveals new insights.

For this purpose The *Vedanta Kesari* published a special issue in December 2008 entirely dedicated to this theme. It was widely acclaimed and an additional 2000 copies had to be reprinted to meet the demand. It is now published in book form.

Beginning with Sri Ramakrishna's references to the *Gita* recorded in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the collection of essays continues with Swami Vivekananda's articles on the subject and then presents essays, mostly by swamis of the Ramakrishna Order, including our own Swami Dayatmananda, giving their views on the contemporary meaning of the *Gita*. Some of the titles are particularly intriguing, such as "Countering Stress and Lack of Motivation" and "Gita for Housewives". Also included are quotations by Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda on the *Gita*.

Vivekanandar Illam – Vivekananda House –

The birthplace of the Ramakrishna Movement in South India

Researched and edited by Swami Atmashraddhananda

Published by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai – 600 004

Price: Rs. 200.00

This large book is an illustrated chronicle of Vivekanandar Illam (earlier called the Ice House/Castle Kernan) since the year 1842. It contains a wealth of old photographs and recounts the story of Swami Vivekananda's stay at the Ice House, at it was then called, Swami Ramakrishnananda's days there and its subsequent use as a home for widows and a hostel for trainee teachers. It is now a sub-centre of the Ramakrishna Math, Chennai. Illam is the Tamil word for house and so Vivekanandar Illam can be translated as Vivekananda House. The book describes the history of the building and how it came to be called

the Ice House, as well as its association with many eminent people in modern India.

Vivekananda House, which is located on Marina Beach Road in Chennai now houses a “Permanent Exhibition of Indian Culture and Swami Vivekananda.” The room where Swami Vivekananda stayed is now used as a meditation hall.

This book can be ordered on the Chennai math's website www.sriramakrishnamath.org.

Energy + Space within / outside and beyond
By Swami Maheshananda and Dr Stuart Rose
Published by The Dual Publishers
Price: £6.50

This book purports to be a comprehensive description of life. It can be read from all perspectives. It recognises that truth can sometimes be painful, but says that absolute Truth is always joyful. This is a book for thinkers. It is not an “easy read,” but requires some effort. The text can be explored from many different standpoints and interpretations. A scientist or a philosopher might find inspiration in it, as would indeed any profound thinker.□

John Phillips

Programme for May & June 2010

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation.

At the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Tel: 01628 526464 - www.vedantauk.com

May	2	Selection from the Upanishads 1	Swami Dayatmananda
May	9	Selection from the Upanishads 2	Swami Dayatmananda
May	16	Katha Upanishad 14	Swami Shivarupananda
May	23	Selection from the Upanishads 3	Swami Dayatmananda
May	30	Imitation of Christ 1	Swami Dayatmananda
June	6	Day Retreat	
June	13	Imitation of Christ 2	Swami Shivarupananda
June	20	Imitation of Christ 3	Swami Shivarupananda
June	27	Imitation of Christ 4	Swami Shivarupananda

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda at
the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 6th June
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

Vedanta Study Circle in Cheshire Area

May 16 at 11:00 am

Mundaka Upanishad 2 *Swami Dayatmananda*

May 16 at 11:00 am

Mundaka Upanishad 2 *Swami Dayatmananda*

For information contact Mr Aswani (tel: 01625 527075)
between 9:30 pm - 10:30 pm

continued from the inside front cover

MASTER: "The sound Om is Brahman. The rishis and sages practised austerity to realize that Sound-Brahman. After attaining perfection one hears the sound of this eternal Word rising spontaneously from the navel.

" 'What will you gain', some sages ask, 'by merely hearing this sound?' You hear the roar of the ocean from a distance. By following the roar you can reach the ocean. As long as there is the roar, there must also be the ocean. By following the trail of Om you attain Brahman, of which the Word is the symbol. That Brahman has been described by the Vedas as the ultimate goal. But such vision is not possible as long as you are conscious of your ego.

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, March 9, 1884

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It is freedom to be affected by nothing. Do not merely endure, be unattached.

Swami Vivekananda



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