

Vedanta

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Man and Book

Swami Kailasananda

As a Candle Whirled

Zoe White



Divine Wisdom

MASTER: "After attaining samadhi some souls of their own accord keep the 'ego of Knowledge.' But that ego does not create any attachment. It is like a line drawn on the water.

"Hanuman kept the 'servant ego' after realizing God in both His Personal and His Impersonal aspects. He thought of himself as the servant of God. The great sages, such as Narada, Sanaka, Sananda, Sanatana, and Sanatkumara, after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, kept the 'servant ego' and the 'ego of Devotion.' They are like big steamships, which not only cross the ocean themselves but carry many passengers to the other shore.

"There are two classes of paramahamsas, one affirming the formless Reality and the other affirming God with form. Trailanga Swami believed in the formless Reality. Paramahamsas like him care for their own good alone; they feel satisfied if they themselves attain the goal.

"But those paramahamsas who believe in God with form keep the love of God even after attaining the Knowledge of Brahman, so that they may teach spiritual truth to others. They are like a pitcher brimful of water. Part of the water may be poured into another pitcher. These perfected souls describe to others the various spiritual disciplines by which they have realized God. They do this only to teach others and to help them in spiritual life. With great effort men dig a well for drinking water, using spades and baskets for the purpose. After the digging is over, some throw the spades and other implements into the well, not needing them any more. But

Shankaracharya: Life & Teachings (continued)

Stay at Kasi

Following the instructions of his Guru, Govindacharya, Shankaracharya made his way to Kasi (Varanasi) and stayed there for some years. Kasi is considered not only as the holiest of places in India, it is also a seat of learning and scholarship. Any one who wishes to become known as a scholar must come here and get the certificate!

Shankara lived for some years in Kasi. He spent his time in meditation and teaching of the scriptures. Interpreting scriptures like the *Upanishads* and *Bhagavad Gita*, etc., he boldly propounded the profound doctrine of Non-duality: "*Brahman*, the All, is the only Reality; this world is unreal; the individual soul is none other than *Brahman*." By the Realization of *Brahman* alone can one really become liberated; there is no other way.

His listeners consisting of both the learned and devotees were charmed and stirred to their depths by the power and eloquence of the young ascetic, Shankara. Some of them wished to pursue the *Vedantic* studies seriously and became his disciples and stayed with him.

The story of Padmapada

One among them was a young man named Sanandana from South India. His devotion to his teacher was unparalleled. In later years he became famous as "Padmapada."

The story of Padmapada is a telling lesson in *Guru-Bhakti*, devotion to one's Guru. Everything can be achieved by devotion to the Guru.

Swami Brahmanandaji used to say: "Through the grace of

the Guru not only can the *Kundalini* be roused, but everything else can be had, even the knowledge of *Brahman*. But this grace cannot be attained easily. One has to strive one's utmost to get it." In this connection we can, perhaps, recall the story of Swami Adbhutanandaji.

"Latu is the greatest miracle of Sri Ramakrishna," Swamiji once said with reference to Swami Adbhutananda. "Having absolutely no education, he has attained to the highest wisdom simply at the touch of the Master."

Swami Adbhutananda was popularly known as Latu. Once Shri Ramakrishna attempted to teach young Latu how to read and write. But in spite of repeated attempts, Latu pronounced the Bengali alphabet in such a distorted way that the Master, out of sheer despair gave up the attempt to educate Latu. It did not matter, however, that Latu had no book learning. Books supply us with knowledge by proxy, as it were. Latu had direct access to the Fountain-head of knowledge. The result was that great scholars and philosophers would sit dumb at his feet to hear the words of wisdom that dropped from his lips.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that when a ray of light comes from the great source of all light, all book-learning loses its value. The life of Swami Adbhutanandaji bore testimony to this fact. We can see this exact phenomenon in the life of Sanandana also.

At Kasi, Shankara met his first disciple, a youth named Sanandan. This youth travelled far and wide in search of a Guru, and at last came to the Holy City of Kasi. There, day and night, he called on Viswanath, the Lord of the Universe, to lead him to a Guru who would liberate him from the bondage of this world, and help him towards God-realization.

Shankara saw the youth, and struck by his sincerity, spoke to him. Then, in a flash, the youth's past, present, and future was revealed to him. Sanandan, he saw, would be one of his most

faithful disciples. He embraced the boy and said, "Come and follow me. I accept you as my disciple."

The youth was struck with wonder. In great joy he jumped to his feet. No doubt, the Great Lord had heard his prayer. Falling at Shankara's feet he offered himself heart and soul to the service of his Guru.

The life of this first disciple of Shankaracharya makes a wonderful story. He was *Guru Bhakti* personified. In his life it was actually seen that true love for the Guru is the surest means of liberation. In the scriptures it is written that "Without reading even a single *Veda* a *Guru-bhakta* will know all *Vedas*." In Sanandan's life this was proved to be true. It was his greatest delight to serve his Guru. This he considered his highest duty, his religion.

Shankara was highly pleased with Sanandan, and showed him many favours. The other disciples could not understand this and became jealous of him. They thought Sanandan was a dull and ignorant student because he did not grasp the purport of the scriptures as they did. They wondered why their *Guru* loved this dullard so much, for he did not even perform the religious duties which they themselves so carefully observed. Sanandan was busy only in serving his master. How could he learn anything that way? It did not take long for the great Guru to understand the feelings of his disciples. He waited for an opportunity to teach a good lesson to them.

Once it happened that Shankara, being in need of something, as usual called for Sanandan. The youth, however, did not come. He asked the other disciples where Sanandan might be. They replied that he had gone to the other side of the river to collect firewood. Shankara went to the river, and called loudly. This time Sanandan heard the call, and he ran towards the river.

But there was no boat to take him across, and the current was swift. What to do? His beloved master was calling, he must be in need of him. He must go at once. Then he thought, "He who is able to take me safely across the rough ocean of life, would he not be able to take me across this river?" Without a second thought he ran across the river. Seeing his *Guru-Bhakti* the river supported him. Wherever he put his feet, lotus flowers sprang to hold him up. Thus he reached his master soon.

Shankara blessed him, and said, "Sanandan, from this day you will be called 'Padmapada', the lotus-footed."

The other disciples seeing this miracle taking place in front of their eyes were wonderstruck. Now they understood the greatness of this unread fellow-disciple. They saw the power of *Guru-Bhakti*.

At this time Shankaracharya was planning to write elaborate commentaries on the *Upanishads*, *Bhagavad Gita* etc. He thought this was best done at Badarikashrama. So along with his disciples he made his way there in a few months time.

(To be continued)

Swami Dayatmananda

Man and Book

Let us suppose for a moment that our world had been and is entirely without books! The very thought is maddening! We simply cannot imagine such a possibility! For if books had never been written, our beautiful earth will have been a far different world from what it is now, and mankind will have grown into quite a different type of community. A world without books will indeed be a desert of poverty of thought, dearth of refinement, absence of all poetry. Life in such a world will be an unendurable dragging on.

The most sweetening influences on existence on earth have been the thinkers and writers, the authors and poets who have reflected keenly, conceived sublimely, and expressed themselves in immortal words of music and meaning. These geniuses not only reduce to deathless literary forms the impulses which sway all mankind, and thus help all men catch glimpses of their own hidden souls, but also hold before ordinary men alluring vistas of higher idealism and loftier rapture. They thus serve a two-fold purpose: a faithful mirroring of the human spirit, and its lifting to rarefied heights. And books are but the very stuff of what grand fancy and noble imagination have captured, and the irrepressible urge for expression into word-artistry has pictured out. The word is but the physical form of the intangible idea. Books are therefore the colourful visible vesture clothing the soul's roaming on the thought plane. They therefore have the power to add to our knowledge, to correct and clarify our concepts, to impel us into subtler query and research, either through striking a chord of sympathy or through kindling the critical faculty or through

providing a board in the mind from which springs are possible to superior atmospheres of reflection. It cannot therefore be gainsaid that books have made our civilization of today.

Books are not mere paper and print; they are on one side the tongues of illustrious dreamers and on the other side open windows providing a peep into the animations of gifted souls. They link even the drabest of mortals with the high flights of superminds. Books have therefore become indispensable to enlightened living. Not all books of course are of equal value, quite a number of them are unhelpful, if not poisonous. A few are worthy only of a distant nodding acquaintance. Only a very small number are the healthiest food for the soul. Again many are of a pleasing exterior, but they befoul the mind. Many excellent books have often the fewest readers.

Books alone make race-continuity on the intellectual plane possible. It is not always that the most easily understood books are the best ones; often they that give hard exercise to the mind are the best ones. Time has its own way of passing judgment on books. There are books which are for all time, and books which flash and die in the course of just a while. It is in the self-interest of society to propagate among its members, by persuasion or even by force, good books; for the nature of existence is such that if the word of God is not sounded and caused to be received, the word of the Devil will circulate and be heard. The mind of man is highly impressionable, and if noble thoughts are not made to impress themselves on it, base ones will surely get lodged in it; and noble thoughts are ready at hand only in books, which are really written learning.

Books are in fact treasure-houses of thoughts, and the world is ruled by thoughts and ideas rather than by other factors. It must be remembered that no book, however well written, ever reveals the author's mental contents in full. The mind that thinks

is far bigger than the word that is penned and printed. The reader must therefore cultivate the ability to get behind the expressed word to the vastness of the author's unexpressed thought. Only then does reading become a pure pleasure and also a useful lesson. The poor author who shows away his all is but a mason who places brick on brick without any art; the talented author, like the architect, gives ample scope for the play of the reader's imagination.

Books are, indisputably, noble things. Life and nature have well been described as God's Book, whose end is never reached, "a marvellous book in which the *Bible*, the *Vedas*, the *Koran* are but so many pages and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded."

The power which books exercise over the human mind is tremendous. People swear by their pet books. They even subordinate reason and judgment to whatever is uttered in their favourite, especially religious, book. Religions seem to have their life-centre in their respective sacred books. "The book becomes the God." Even a prophet cannot transcend with impunity the holy book of the sect he is born in. The surest way to inculcate even a new idea is to link it somehow to a statement in the ancient venerated literature of the community. As Swami Vivekananda points out, "There is a great advantage in book worship; it gives strength. All religious sects have disappeared excepting those that have a Book. Nothing seems to kill them... One of the great advantages of a Book is that it crystallizes everything in tangible and convenient form, and is the handliest of idols..."

Reverence is the dominant trait of the Hindu mind: reverence based on a deep appreciation of the fine things in creation. It is this underlying attitude of reverence, devotion and adoration that has made and kept the Hindu race so very religious. This reverence has passed into national culture and that

culture comes to every soul which takes birth in India as an inescapable inheritance. To cite one instance of this quality of reverence, the Hindus, once a year, celebrate the Saraswati Puja, (the worship of learning) when all the books in the house - not merely the so-called sacred books, but all books on all sorts of subjects, printed and in manuscript, on paper or on palm-leaf - are brought out and dusted and cleaned and are placed on a decorated altar and are worshipped, as an image of a Deity is worshipped, with sacred mantra and significant tantra and with offerings, waving of light, chants and recitals, and the holy day on which all this is done is a national holiday. Again no Hindu will ever set his foot on any piece of printed paper; it is too holy to be touched with the foot. Just as the Puja patras (the vessels and utensils used in ceremonial worship) are as sacred as the Deity itself, so are books as worthy of veneration as learning and the learning's Deity are.

The pious Hindu who sits for the daily chanting of the 18 chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita*, begins the chanting only after uttering a few verses to Lord Krishna, but along with the prayer to Krishna he also utters this prayer to the *Bhagavad Gita* itself: "Om, O *Bhagavad Gita*, with which Partha was illumined by the Lord Narayana Himself, which was composed within the Mahabharata by the ancient sage, Vyasa - Divine mother, Destroyer of rebirth, Showerer of the Nectar of *Advaita*, eighteen-chaptered Mother dear, I meditate on you. "For the very book *Gita* is as adorable as the *Gitacharya*. The flute by association is as fascinating as the Flute-player.

All that has been said above is the bright side of the book picture. But there is the dull side to it too. It is a moot question whether books are an unmixed blessing. Have books helped the ennoblement of the mind or the enslavement of the intellect? Do books open wide the heavy gates to the vast domains of

unexplored knowledge or are they only little holes which provide a few peeps into very narrow sections of the limitless expanse of information and understanding? Have they only served to deepen the human lack of wisdom, passion and prejudice, or have they been instrumental in clearing the sky of superstition, wrong belief and muddy thinking? Have they irrigated the plant of the human soul with the right waters or have they served merely as a frost which kills the sprouting plant? Have pilgrims on the path to perfection often felt grateful for the ideas put into their brains by the books they have studied, or have they more frequently cursed the books they have spent valuable time on, for having made their path more difficult than it need have been? Is the book-made scholar with numerous intellectual arrows in his quiver the greater favourite in the halls of heaven, or is the unlearned innocent rustic incapable of a single quotation the more liked in the celestial realm?

Sri Ramakrishna was gifted above all men, because he could see life from an angle from where he got a whole picture of it and not just the partial view which is all that is vouchsafed to ordinary mortals. His judgments of and verdicts on life's affairs were therefore very often strikingly original and uncommon, but very sound and true. While others quoted commonplace stuff with an air of learning, what came out of Sri Ramakrishna were flashes of the profoundest intuition. He was of course very modest and humble, scarcely pushing himself forward to gain recognition or approbation, but when the power in him got kindled, out flowed from him rushing waters of illumination. Here is a description of this trait of his in his own words: "When I heard that the pandit was coming to see me, I got frightened, for I am not even conscious of the cloth I am wearing. I had no idea of what I should reply when he talked with me. To the Mother I said: 'Apart from Thee I do not know anything - these

scriptures and other matters.' So I told the people here, 'You all sit here. I shall feel encouraged by your presence.' When the pandit actually came, I still continued to have a little fear. I sat quiet, gazing at him and listening to him. Just then I saw the Mother revealing to me the whole of the pandit's mind. What is the good of reading the scriptures if one has no discrimination and dispassion? Here (pointing to his own body) I felt something creeping up to the head. All my fear was gone and I ceased to be anxious of myself. I raised my face and words began to flow from my mouth. I felt as if somebody was replenishing my thoughts as they were spoken out. At Kamarpukur, when people measured grain, one person would be pushing the grain forward as another measured it. It was like that, I myself did not know all that I spoke. When I regained my external consciousness a little I saw the pandit weeping and his body wet with tears. I experienced such states now and then."

Ruskin said that genius is only a superior power of seeing; and Sri Ramakrishna had that power. He had his own way of preceiving and performing, for as has been well remarked, "genius finds its own road, and carries its own lamp," and unless there be a little of genius in our own selves we may not recognize genius adequately or even at all. Sri Ramakrishna was distinguished for his total dissociation from books. He drew many learned scholars to him, and he spoke to them about the very insignificant place which books occupy in the scheme of things relating to the culture of the soul. Those that came to him marvelled at his native genius, at his unlettered wisdom. He never repented his unschooledness. Sometimes he could be devastating in his characterisation of the worthlessness of studies. He once told Keshab Chandra Sen, "The kite and the vulture soar high up in the air, but all the time their eyes remain fixed on charnel-houses, in search of putrid carcasses; similarly the minds of the

so-called learned men are attached to the things of the world, to lust and wealth, in spite of their erudition in sacred lore, and hence they cannot attain knowledge." He taught that familiarity with plenty of sacred texts and couplets and reading them off to the astoundment of hearers were no good unless the truths embodied in the scriptures were realized. The pandits were but parrots repeating by rote Radha-Krishna, up to the moment of being caught by the cat and then relapsing into their natural screams of Kang, Kang. The almanac contained information about the year's rainfall possibilities, but not a drop of rain could it yield even if squeezed. The atlas was not the actual country. A book for all its useful contents might well become a knot of encumbrance.

Paramahansa Deva put everything about the value of books in a nutshell when he spoke to this effect: "Sacred books only point out the way to God. Once you have known the way, what is the use of books? Then comes the time for the solitary culture of the soul in solitary communion with God. Para-Vidya, that is higher knowledge, is that by which we know God. All else, mere scriptures, logic or grammar, as such, only burden and puzzle the mind. They are good only when they lead to the higher knowledge. Many think that knowledge of God cannot be attained except through the study of books. But higher than hearing is seeing or realizing. Better than reading about Benares is hearing about the place from the lips of one who has actually visited it; but the best is to see Benares with one's own eyes! A devotee utterly unlearned used to attend a pandit's *Bhagavad Gita* exposition and sit spellbound shedding tears. This was strange, because such tears were possible only where there was deep understanding, and the poor fellow could not follow a single text of the *Gita*. He was questioned, and he explained his position. It was true he did not know a syllable of the *Gita* verses, but as the

verses were being read out, his mind conceived the form of the expounder himself sitting on the chariot and instructing Arjuna. It was this direct vision of Krishna and not any understanding of the *Gita* that caused him to shed tears. All that the pandit did was mechanically explain the *Gita* text; what the illiterate devotee gained was the blissful experiencing of the presence of Krishna.

It speaks a lot of the sturdy spiritual sense of the Hindu race that its ancient sages bifurcated vidya (knowledge) into *para* and *apara* (higher and lower) and that even the four *Vedas* which are highly venerated in India were listed under the *apara* units of knowledge along with other arts and sciences, while the status of *para* was accorded only to that knowledge by which is realized the Immutable.

Narada once went to Sanatkumara desiring to be taught by him. Sanatkumara like a good teacher wished to have an idea of the pupil's background before he started instructing him, and so asked Narada to tell him what he already knew. Then he said he would teach him what was beyond what he knew. Narada gave out an impressive list of the sciences he had mastered. They were as many as the four *Vedas*, the *Itihasa-purana*, grammar, rules for ancestor-worship, mathematics, the sciences of portents and treasures, logic, ethics, etymology, ancillary knowledge of the *Vedas*, physical science, military science, science of the stars, serpent science and fine arts. Narada added that he had however no sense of completion and fulfilment. He told Sanatkumara "I am only a knower of verbal texts, not a knower of *Atman*. Indeed I have heard from persons like you revered sir, that a knower of *Atman* goes beyond grief. I am in such a state of grief. May you revered sir take me across it." It is always like this, the advancing soul first seeks satisfaction in the mastering of external knowledge and then finds that all that knowledge is only fit to be thrown out,

then he turns round, changes his direction, goes within himself, and gets to the inmost fountain of knowledge.

Swami Vivekananda in his youth was learning's favourite child; his young brain had grown big and heavy with amassed scholarship. But when the passion for spiritual fruition possessed him he spurned the acquisition of years of learning, and declared, "I shall feel greatly relieved if I find a medicine that will make me forget all I have studied."

The Hindu mind knew the value of the study of books. In the Hindu code of discipline a very important place has been assigned to *swadhyaya*, which is the study of the *Vedas*. But it has also been pointed out that, "philosophy is not got by studying books; and the more you read books, the more muddled becomes the mind." Swami Vivekananda affirmed in his *Inspired Talks*, "Books cannot teach God, but they can destroy ignorance; their action is negative. To hold to the books and at the same time open the way to freedom is Sankara's great achievement. The very books are a part of the ignorance they help to dispel. Their duty is to drive out the ignorance that has come upon knowledge.... Do not go to great religious teachers to learn physical science, their whole energy has gone to the spiritual.... Books suggest the inner light and the method of bringing that out, but we can only understand them when we have earned the knowledge ourselves. When the inner light has flashed for you let the books go, and look only within. You have in you all that is, and a thousand times more than there is, in all the books.... Books are useless to us until our own book opens; then all other books are good so far as they confirm our book.... We are the living books and books are but the words we have spoken."

The defect with man is that he often loses the right sense of values. Books are no doubt excellent aids, but they are aids and no more. But man becomes a slave to books and gives them a

virtue they cannot have. To quote Swami Vivekananda again, "We may study books all our lives, we may become very intellectual, but in the end we find we have not developed at all spiritually. It does not follow that a high order of intellectual development always shows an equivalent development of the spiritual side of man, on the other hand we find cases almost every day where the intellect has become very highly developed at the expense of the spirit. Now in intellectual development we can get such help from books, but in spiritual development almost nothing. In studying books, sometimes we are deluded into thinking that we are being spiritually helped, but if we analyze ourselves, we shall find that only our intellect has been helped, and not the spirit.... By reading books, we become parrots; no one becomes learned by reading books."

Spiritual luminaries are not book-fed. Neither Jesus nor Ramakrishna penned a thesis, nor wrote a book and patented it. Like singing and soaring birds do saviours waft their melody into the air, and men catch their notes and repeat them. Book-making is the job of the lesser luminaries. As a tyrant establishes his dictatorial rule only over a weak populace, books rule over an unthinking community. Getting into the habit of seeking all guidance from books, we come to relish and enjoy book-domination. We forget the warning, "Do not live by a book, the purpose of man is man."

High mystical truths used to present themselves to Sri Ramakrishna in the form of enchanting visions full of suggestion and significance. One such vision is germane to the theme of this editorial. One day at Dakshineswar the Master was seated on the verandah of the Vishnu Temple. A reading of the *Bhagavata* was going on, and Sri Ramakrishna was listening. He was soon in an ecstatic mood, in which he saw the shining figure of Sri Krishna. Bright rays came out from Krishna's lotus feet in the form of a

cord, which touched the *Bhagavata* and then the Master's own chest. The *Bhagavan*, the *Bhagavata* and the *Bhakta* (Sri Ramakrishna) remained thus resplendently linked to one another for a time, demonstrating the identity of the Blessed Lord, the Lord's Scripture and the Lord's Devotee. Such a high status is vouchsafed to a book - provided it is, like the *Bhagavata*, "fried in the butter of knowledge and steeped in the honey of love." □

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You must rightly differentiate the true soaring spirit, to which earthly ties are as nothing, from the rebellious spirit which is impatient of restraints. If your spirit is of the former kind, do you really feel within you the irresistible and unmistakable call? Such a call comes to very few indeed, and they stand in no need of weighing or asking the question if they will incur any sin by breaking the shackles of *Samsara*. They hear the voice and are not conscious of anything but of obeying it. If yours is not such a spirit, then submit yourself to a searching self-analysis of the true motive of your action and find out for yourself if it is not akin to the spirit that fights shy of bearing the burdens of life, the spirit that lacks the heroism to accept life as it is, the spirit that is loath to be useful in humble grooves best suited to itself, because of its false ambition to loom large in the broad daylight of the world for the sake of name and fame.

Swami Ramakrishnananda

As a Candle Whirled

I sat alone with streaming eyes, yet these drops were not from sadness; They were through fullness that Thou, merciful One, hadst given me hearing for Thy precious song. Flying at 35,000 feet over Bhagdad, I lift the window-shade and gaze out into the night sky. A crescent moon lies on its back with one star in attendance, ahead I can just make out a faint red glow on the horizon. I am en route for India: the land of seeing and the land of seers; heading off into a new day.

It was in 2001 that I first came into contact with Sri Ramakrishna. It's hard to believe now that I knew nothing of him before that day, a little over ten years ago, when I happened to pick up a copy of the book *They Lived with God* and first began to feel the pull of a very great soul. At first there was much about Hindu devotional practice and Vedanta philosophy which was unfamiliar, but there was no denying that whenever I turned my mind in Sri Ramakrishna's direction I could feel a faint pulsing, as if sound waves were echoing in the cells of my body. The depth of this man's self-surrender had clearly made such an impact on the world that the air was still ringing with the light and force of it.

The more I read over the years, the more I thought I would one day like to visit the Dakshineswar Temple, just north of Kolkata, where Sri Ramakrishna had served as a priest, undergone his spiritual practices and taught his disciples, but I certainly had made no plans to make such a trip. In fact, the original impetus for this pilgrimage didn't initially seem to come as a result of anything to do with him.

I was watching a TV programme one evening about the wandering minstrels known as the Bauls of Bengal. The programme documented something of Baul philosophy and tantric practice. It also followed some Bauls on trains and busses as they sang their soul - stirring songs of love, joy and longing for union with the divine. I had no idea that anything unusual was taking place while I was watching, but after the programme I turned off the TV and went to bed with a mind full of light. It was only then I realized that the programme had communicated something more than information, but I had no idea what, so I decided to begin finding out more about Bauls the very next day.

Baul life is unconventional, non-conformist, often misunderstood and ridiculed. Their music is palpable, their songs capable of disturbing, inspiring and drawing others like magnets. It became quickly apparent to me that the spirit of Baul life, as traditionally lived, has much in common with that of Sri Ramakrishna and that the inspiration which I had received through the TV programme was clearly part of that larger stream which had "hit" me all those years ago when I first began to read about Sri Ramakrishna.

When I discovered that much Baul activity goes on in Bopul, West Bengal, an area not far from the Dakshineswar Temple complex, the desire to go there on pilgrimage quickly grew in me. Coincidentally, some money which I'd had in a 10-year savings account had just been released. It was clear what I had to do: in a matter of weeks I had booked the flight, got the visa, had the injections and was on my way.

I knew that I wanted to visit the Dakshineswar Temple, the shrine of Mother Kali, and the room in which Sri Ramakrishna had lived and taught. But it had also become clear to me that this pilgrimage was about more than visiting specific places. What

the TV programme had done was reawaken in me the poetry of the love song. My quest, like that of the Bauls, is to dive deep into the depths of the soul and discover “person of the heart” where the divine is enshrined.

So when I go to the Belur Math Office on the day of my arrival and one of the monks asks me if I’d like a list of places to visit connected with the life of Sri Ramakrishna, I am already clear that I have to resist the temptation to pack my days too full. The point of this pilgrimage is not so much about where I go or what I see; the point is to travel in Baul-spirit. Like walking; like breathing. Take the name of the Beloved into the heart. Allow for the unexpected. Appreciate all. Let the heart - song take over and see what happens!

In preparation for the pilgrimage I’ve been reading Swami Vivekananda’s Inspired Talks, just one page per day, letting myself soak in the scope of his vision and the depth of his inspiration. So naturally, the first place I am drawn to after breakfast on my first full day at Belur Math, is Swamiji’s room.

Walking through the temple grounds in the early morning my mind begins to quieten: Let go of your ideas. Take things as they come. Enjoy the scene of Mother’s Play as it arises. All is Her theatre: the theatre where anything can happen. Whatever comes, feel Her to be beautiful. Relinquish all thought and all questions; pray only to see the light of Her face everywhere.

Climbing the steps up to Swamiji’s room I am accompanied only by the caw-cawing of the crows. Standing by his window, conscious of the sun rising behind me on the other side of the Ganges, gently warming my back, I peer into his room and let my eyes adjust to the darkness. These are the things he has touched: his turban, his walking stick, his shoes and musical instruments. They are so personal, these things. It is as if at any moment I may open the door and walk in to fetch them. A thin

beam of light shines into the room through a crack in the curtains and falls across a small wooden altar on the desk. This altar contains an image of Swamiji as a wandering monk. Someone has lovingly placed a rose on the altar and I watch as the sun slowly spreads its light across the petals at his feet.

Becoming aware of some quiet footsteps behind me, I watch out of the corner of my eye and see a swami coming to pay his respects. He kneels at the other window and prostrates himself on the ground. The movement is soundless and simple; the supple gesture of a body used to devotion. The swami leaves and I stand for a while alone again listening to the water of the Ganges lapping softly against its banks. Then I too kneel and touch my forehead to the ground. As I do so my heart swells and fills; tears begin to stream down my cheeks and a quiet resolution arises in me: Don't be afraid to let your heart be seen. There is no voice; just an inner knowing that this is why I have come. This is why I am here. Defences are dissolving, banks are crumbling and I let the tears flow as the Ganges flows, untroubled beside me.

After sitting a while in meditation I get up and walk down the steps from Swamiji's room towards the bank of the Ganges. I glance down into the water and there just a couple of meters from my feet I see a body floating. Still jet-lagged and culture shocked, I stand staring, trying to take it in. At first I think it is some kind of grotesque, life-size, blow-up doll; some sinister dummy. But the presence of the crows pecking at the face quickly tells me that this is real; a real human body. It is the body of a man, the brown skin has a grey pallor, the limbs, stomach and face are swollen. Then I notice that the body has been placed on a raft of Bel leaves and that some yellow flowers have been scattered. I realize this must be a kind of burial but it wasn't immediately obvious because the leaf-raft was falling apart. The body, the leaves and the flowers are all parting company.

Everything is quietly drifting, freely floating in its own fashion back to the ocean.

Death has always appeared static to me before, in hospitals or funeral homes. I have never seen death floating like this, moving so fully in the mid-stream of life, and at the same time, so utterly detached from it. Walking along the river-bank, following the body as it floats down-stream, I see a group of young men ahead of me. They watch the body approach in silence for a few minutes, then they catch sight of some young women dressed-up in their finest saris for the Sri Sri Saraswati Puja later this morning. Their interest in the dead body evaporates.

Further still along the bank some children have also noticed the body floating on its slowly disintegrating bed of leaves. At first they point excitedly and giggle: "Ugh!" After a while though they gradually fall silent and become serious. Then, noticing my approach, one by one the children shift their gaze. Their solemn eyes, so recently considering the corpse, now come to rest on me.

Meanwhile, still trying to get a handle on this happening, my mind is rushing on. I'm thinking about the environment, about hygiene and disease, worrying about the people a little further downstream who are even now standing washing themselves in the river just a meter from where the body will shortly pass. But even as my mind spins on in this fashion I see that it is useless. The body is simply passing me by, unconcerned, unimpeded by my thoughts. Some words from Swamiji's *Inspired Talks* return to me: "Let it flow as a current through your mind; let it be whirled as a candle before your eyes, without asking who holds the candle, and you will get the circle... Do not try to pick out the themes and so destroy the pictures."¹

¹ *Inspired Talks*, by Swami Vivekananda, 126

By now, crowds of people are arriving at the temple for the Puja. Conch shells are being blown, bells are being rung. The temple is resplendent, the atmosphere festive, but I've already seen more than I can take in for one day.

Some days later, while waiting outside the Math's office, a woman approaches me and introduces herself saying she is an English teacher organizing a school trip for her children. They are coming to visit the Math on Thursday and then they are going to visit a local school where there is a chair once used by Swami Vivekananda when he attended a prize-giving. The woman says she'd love to "show" me to her children. Would I accompany them? I agree.

On Thursday Dhira comes to pick me up for the school trip as promised. Grabbing me by the wrist, as if she's afraid I might escape, she leads me to the front entrance of the Temple where the school bus is waiting. The children gather round me, excited to see a foreigner at such close quarters, some of them taking pictures. Once I've been introduced to all the staff we climb aboard the bus and set off to visit the Chair.

On the way, some of the girls are eager to recite some English nursery rhymes for me. The bus shudders and shakes; car horns honk; bicycle bells jangle. "Twinkle, twinkle little star..." Music blares from radios; beggars clang their metal alms dishes. "Jack and Jill went up the hill..." Sounds merge. Rhymes blend in to the Great Cacophony of All. Undeterred, the children continue their recital, staggering and swaying around in the aisle, as the bus bumps through the potholes and swings round the bends.

At the school, the headmistress explains that it was in 1901, one year before he died, that Swamiji came here to give out prizes. He was already sick with diabetes, and had refused the invitation several times, but had eventually agreed when pleaded with.

When we have all been upstairs in groups of 10 to pay our respects to the Chair, I teach the children a rhyme which I used to teach some of my English students and then, before we leave, I tell them that some people in the International Guest House where I'm staying have travelled half-way round the world to visit the temples in Belur Math and how lucky I think they are to live right here on the doorstep! The girls hadn't seen things this way before. Newly aware of their privileged position in the world they look up at me with wide, sparkling eyes and when it's time to go they won't leave the classroom until they all have my autograph.

Emerging from the school, we are awash with vitality, buoyed up on a rush of energy which seems to radiate through us all. It's as if we have all been immersed in one enormous feast and, as we wave our goodbye's, I'm sure I'm not alone in feeling that Swamiji has enjoyed our visit to his Chair as hugely as we all did.

At first I find it impossible to meditate in Sri Ramakrishna's room at the Dakshineswar Temple because tears keep welling up as if someone has left a tap running. So I just sit on the floor among a few other people and quietly take in the scene around me. High up on the walls surrounding the room are photographs of all the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. As I sit I remember their stories, calling to mind all those people who stepped over this threshold, as I've just done, to make acquaintance with a man who was to change the direction of their lives forever. People continue to enter the room, some of them sit to meditate, others stand for a while, some casually look around and walk out again.

After a while a man dressed in a simple white cloth enters. Without looking around, he walks to the centre of the room, lifts his face towards the photographs of Sri Ramakrishna's disciples, raises his arms, turns once - almost as a Dervish whirls - then

steps out of the room, into the bright sunlight and is gone. The moment passes before I've had time to register what happened. Who was that man? Where did he come from? Where did he go? I had seen many imposing temples, grand shrines and striking images on this trip but nothing I had seen communicated so eloquently or described so gracefully what is, for me, the essence of Sri Ramakrishna's life: utterly unselfconscious, spectacularly simple and so swift I could easily have missed it.

A few days after my visit to the Dakshineswar temple, towards the end of my stay in India, someone mentions a book about Sri Ramakrishna which I might enjoy. I borrow the book from the guest-house library and there, in the final chapter, read that some weeks before his death Sri Ramakrishna had said: "A band of Bauls descends upon a house. They chant the name of the Lord and dance with joy. Then suddenly they leave. As abrupt in going as in coming! And the people know them not."²

Recalling the sudden appearance and disappearance of the man in Sri Ramakrishna's room, the connections are immediately clear to me, but it's not until the day after I return home as I'm standing in the kitchen making some coffee that I fully register the impact of what I saw. Whatever happened in that room in Dakshineswar, it is only back here in Amsterdam that the memory of that one Baul-like gesture flows as a current through my mind and I get the circle: the phenomenal reach of it.

A pilgrimage leaves many impressions on the mind. Before setting out I had certain ideas about where I was going. When I returned I had ideas about where I'd been and what I'd brought back with me. Whatever my meanings and interpretations though, the actual experience – the *pulse* of the pilgrimage – can't be described in these terms because it is not 'mine.' As the body flows, as the Ganges flows, so the pilgrimage flows. The Kali-

² *Sri Ramakrishna: a prophet for the new age* by Richard Schiffman, 227

continuum is everywhere and nowhere: composing, decomposing, recomposing. The brilliant colours of the saris; the perfect petals of the rose; the solemn eyes of the children and the crows feeding on the rotting corpse.... All points to the same divine conception: the inexorable rhythm of the heart-song, as intimate as it is immense. □

Some look upon these works as inferior to meditation. They do not know what they say. What is meditation? Why is it so highly looked upon? Because it is the way to the soul's union with God. Now let us see what Swamiji who initiated the works meant. Did he ask you to merely attend on the patients or to worship Narayana in and through them? How then is this worship of Narayana different from meditation! It may be one cannot serve in this spirit, but one has no right therefore to call it inferior. Swamiji proclaimed this new path after realizing the Self as immanent in all things. But people do not understand it, and so want to move in the old grooves of spiritual practice. Three days of such service done in the right way will bring about spiritual realization. Such indeed has been the experience of everyone who has tried it. K. has told me that in those days when he was working in the hospital, he would always feel highly lifted up in spirits. Is not every man God Himself? "The Lord abides in every heart." If one fails to realize this, it is one's own fault, none else's.

Swami Turiyananda

Blessed Angela of Foligno

The green valleys and murmuring streams of Umbria have been the silent witnesses of many a saintly life and of many a heart given to God and to the fulfilment of His will, and Umbrian's cities and villages in the planes and the hills - beginning with Assisi, the home of the Poverello - preserve almost without exception the name or the holy memory of a saint. Whoever travels through those parts with an open eye and ear is met at every step by the luminous record of some holy life, spent in the service of the Divine and humanity, that has left an indelible impression in the hearts of the people.

In one of these places, Foligno, Blessed Angela was born in the year 1249. The first part of her life was given to worldly pursuits and worldly ambitions. She married, had a number of children, and was so possessed by worldly thoughts and wishes, that she wholly neglected her religious duties, going even so far as to make fun of all those who tried to bring her closer to that which is unchanging.

Then, all of a sudden, as in the case of many a saint, there came a great change over her. One night in a dream she heard a voice asking her to alter the course of her life. So, the following day, while crossing the Cathedral Square, she decided to enter the church for a few moments, where she listened to the words of a monk who happened to be preaching when she came in. And there a great light illumined her soul, making the indefinite yearning of her heart all the more strong and inexorable. A short time afterwards death carried away her husband and all her children, leaving her free to follow and to fulfil her mission in the

world. She sold her house and her estates, distributed the proceeds amongst the poor and the helpless, and began to dedicate her whole life to God, freeing herself from all worldly obstacles and following Christ's all too often forgotten commandment: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

After her dream the idea of giving herself wholly and unconditionally to God alone had goaded her on to ask Him to release her from all worldly ties, including those of her family, and there is a passage in her works which gives us a glimpse of her state and the all-consuming fire of her dispassion, where she says: "It so happened that through the will of God my mother who had been a great obstacle in the way I had begun to follow, died. Shortly after that, death carried away my husband and all my children. But having asked God to liberate me from all obstacles when I began my penitence, I felt a great consolation at their death, although suffering very much in the flesh. From that time onwards, God having granted me His grace, my only thought was that my heart should always be one with the heart and will of God, and that the will of God and His heart would on their part be one with mine."

She knew that "all worldly love shall grow and perish as the flower of the field in summer, and shall be joying no more but as it were one day, so sickly shall it last a short while, but after that end in sorrow. And so doubtless it shall be bitter to fond lovers. Their pride and play in false beauty shall be cast into filth, that shall be with them endlessly when they are downcast into torments as the Hermit of Hampole has said. Knowing this, she consciously turned away from all time-bound emotions and gave herself to that one Love which alone knows no change and no fear.

Many critics, not understanding such depths of spiritual yearning, have severely condemned this attitude and found her heartless and self-centred to a degree, but when seen in the right light and perspective, sacrificing the lesser to the greater, sacrificing what, at least to some extent, is exclusive and belongs to the domain of "I" and "Mine," to the all-inclusive, can never be taken as a sign of heartlessness, but it is a sure indication of the dawn of the true spirit of brotherhood and detachment in a soul.

How could Christ have said to His mother: "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" How could He have answered those who came to tell Him that His mother and brothers were standing outside: "Who is my mother and who are my brethren? My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it." Or how could He have gone to the Samaritans if He recognized or approved of our narrow, exclusive feelings and pride of tribe and family, which are always apt to darken our horizon to the eternal truths of the Divine through attachments that are nothing but a form of expanded egoism as soon as all our relations with others are not seen against the unchanging background of the all-inclusive, who is eternally beyond our narrow conceptions of family and tribe, which in many cases are but attempts at and excuses for self-aggrandizement. So long as this is not clearly recognized in the life of the devotee, all his "solutions" of the spiritual problem and the love of God remain ideational only and bear no real and lasting fruits. So - there is the beautiful passage in the *Brihadhranyaka Upanishad*, which says: "It is not for the sake of the husband, my dear, that he is loved, but for the sake of the Self that he is loved. It is not for the sake of the wife, my dear, that the wife is loved, but for the sake of the Self that she is loved... It is not for the sake of all, my dear, that all is loved, but for the sake of the Self that it is loved. The Self,

my dear Maitreyi, should be realized, should be heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. By the realization of the Self, my dear, through hearing, reflection and meditation, all this is known."

Near Spello, on her way to the tomb of Saint Francis, Angela had her first vision, where the Spirit told her: "I am come to bring thee happiness. I shall accompany thee as far as Saint Francis, conversing with thee and making thee taste Divine pleasures. I am He Who spoke to the Apostles, I am the Spirit. Do not be afraid. I am thy Saviour. I have been crucified for thee. I suffered hunger and thirst, and loved thee so greatly that I shed my blood for thy sake. Ask any grace for thyself and for thy companions. It shall be granted thee."

Then the vision accompanied her up to the tomb of Saint Francis and stayed with her till she left the Church. When it left her, she fell down in a swoon on the threshold, crying: "Love, Love, having scarcely known Thee, Thou hast forsaken me again!"

After her return home she confided everything to her confessor, Brother Amaldo, who ordered her to reveal all the secrets of her soul, all the consolations showered on her by the Lord, he himself writing down under her dictation the account of everything she saw and heard. But when this was read to her later, she asked in great surprise: "But did I say this? Ah, words cannot render my thoughts. My secret will remain mine," for to her it seemed as if of the fire which was consuming her heart only a little ashes remained and only a few miserable sparks had been caught and preserved. But then what a warmth these "sparks" still emanate even today if carefully studied!

As in the lives of all mystics we find periods of great coldness and desolation sweeping over her, alternating with moments of great spiritual illumination and ardour - the dark

night of the soul. At such times terrible temptations assailed her, making her quail and implore death to liberate her from fleshly bonds, which "made Saint Francis of Sales say of her: "None after Job ever had to undergo harder tests than she." The Spirit returned to her sometimes only after weeks and weeks of agony, of coldness and desperation, consoling her and giving her unspeakable joy and bliss. And on such occasions her words would attain poetic heights and a clarity of expression which find but few parallels in the literature of her times, where she, the illiterate woman, rises, though without her knowing or even wishing it, to the very summits of eloquence and art.

But nobody who is consumed by the Divine Fire of Love can live long. Her body very soon began to give way under its onslaught, not being made to dwell in regions generally denied to embodied beings. About Christmas 1308, feeling her end approaching, Blessed Angela called her faithful companions round her bed and dictated them the following will: "Love one another, and let your humility be deep. I leave all I possess to you, all I had from Jesus Christ: poverty, the scorn of the world, pain. Those who will accept such a heritage will be my children indeed; they will be the children of God, destined for Life Eternal."

After a short silence she laid her hand on the head of each of her companions, saying: "Be blessed, my dear ones, blessed by the Lord and by me. Be blessed all, you who are present, and all those who will come in future. Christ gives you His blessings with His hand warm with blood as it was when He was crucified." After that there reigned deep silence. Her body that had been tortured by terrible pain for some time past seemed to find rest in a deep stillness. Only her face radiated superhuman joy and bliss. Thus she passed away in peace and blissful serenity on the 4th of January, 1309.

Few in number though they be, her works are splendid jewels of the religious literature of the Italian Trecento. Among much that is narrow and limited in outlook they contain treasures well worth preserving for all times, treasures which are a real joy for all those who appreciate true art and the deep consolations of Divine thought given through one of the innumerable instruments of the Divine for the awakening of the poor blind and greed-intoxicated humanity. Angela's words may be but a melody played on a single string, but their sweetness is such that they will find their way into many a heart, raising it to the Divine and helping it in transcending its lower nature.

The following passages are taken from the *Way of the Cross* (*La via della Croce*) and from Angela of Foligno's most famous work, *The Book of the Wonderful Visions, Consolations and Instructions* (*Il libro delle mirabili visioni, consolazioni e istruzioni*).

"The highest good of the soul is true and perfect peace, without which no other good satisfies the reasonable soul. So the soul should endeavour to gain true peace in itself, which peace cannot be had without perfect love of the Creator, rest being found in the perfect love of God. Thus whoever desires perfect rest should seek to love God with his whole heart, for in such a heart dwells God, Who alone gives and Who alone can give peace. Now, he who desires to love God perfectly must divest himself completely of the love of every creature, so that there be nothing between himself and God. And the number of things standing between is equal to that of those which man loves and can love excepting God. To put it shortly: Whoever desires to gain perfect peace should remove all other love and should not love anything but God or for God's sake, for then he will soon attain that true love which is so hard in the beginning. One must walk along the thorny path of the Cross of Christ, which is the only way that leads the soul to the peace which the world cannot give.

"Now if you wish to know the Way of the Cross and what it is like, learn what has been revealed about it to a saintly person, who, desiring to know and find anew the Way of the Cross, was inspired by the Lord that she must needs despoil herself in order that she might, naked and all the more lightly, pass on to the Cross, viz. that she must forgive all those who might have offended her, then divest herself of all earthly things and of the love of all men and all women, of friends and relations, of parents, and finally of all love for herself, thus giving her whole heart without anything standing between her and Blessed Christ. Now behold, my soul, how the Lord desires thee without any created love or any burden of worldly things standing between, and begin walking along the Way of the Cross."

Now we shall take up some passages from her best known work, *The Book of the wonderful Visions, Consolations and Instructions*, which has been translated into some of the most important European languages.

"I realized that if I desired to move towards Jesus Christ I had to divest myself of myself in order to be lighter and more free, i.e. I had to forgive all those who had offended me, to put away all earthly anxiety, to forget that I was living amidst men, to detach myself from all friends, from parents and from all persons I knew, to free myself from all my possessions and from myself, and to give my whole heart to Christ Who had shown me so much grace, and to walk along the narrow path, along the difficult path of tribulation."

"After having had the vision in which God showed Himself to me as Power and Will and Justice integrating and harmonizing themselves, I was elevated higher still. And then I did not behold either Power or Will or Justice in the manner I have told. I beheld something stable, united and evident, of which it is absolutely impossible for me to say anything except that I felt

in it every Good synthesized. But I did not even succeed in seeing all this Good as something separate from the rest. It was, in short, the unspeakable, the incomprehensible Whole."

"And at this sight my soul left the state in which it had been before and lost itself in an ineffable ecstasy; I do not know whether in the body or out of it. I only felt that for me, during this Divine Intoxication, nothing existed of my past life."

"This vision left in me the annihilation of vice and the certainty of virtue, so that from that time I love good and evil, guilt and virtue, because I feel that nothing can break the harmony of the Divine Law,"

"The true depth of this vision lies in that, that all is useful for the righteous man, good as well as evil, virtue as well as vice. And the soul which has this intelligence of the Divine decrees and of their profundity shall have its fruit in God."

"When returning from having tasted this Divine Love I feel wholly contented and angelic and I even love fools and murderers and the very demons. And while immersed in this ineffable fullness, I would not feel any pain if a dog were to bite me, nay, I should not be aware of it even. Then I have no painful memory of the Passion of Christ, nor could I have it, the very idea of tears being contradictory to this love. So the Passion of Christ has become nothing but a luminous way of life to me."

"Once I was lifted up in spirit and beheld God with a clearness and a fullness as never before. In this vision I no longer saw God as Love even, nay, I myself lost the love I was carrying in myself and became non-love. Then I beheld God as a Darkness. And if I say "darkness" I mean to indicate something so perfect in itself that It cannot but appear to us as a negation as It surpasses the limits of our thought and intelligence."

"As the Divine Whole is all darkness, I see It with greater certainty and greater superhuman power, the more It appears to

me in the darkness and silence of the ineffable. From the day on which I beheld this darkness which surpasses all perfection, darkness seems to me light, and all that is beauty and light of the spirit here below seems to me but true and blackest gloom."

"When I behold God in the most absolute darkness I feel neither joy nor fervour, nor devotion, nor love. My body does not tremble, is not agitated, is not moved; it is listless, rigid in absolute negation, in absolute silence which paralyzes the tongue in the mouth. Only the transhumanized soul beholds." □

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It is easy to do great deeds, the deeds that bring name and fame. But it is by his small, everyday actions that a man's character is known. The true *karma* yogi does not work to gain publicity. No matter how insignificant his work may be, he throws himself wholeheartedly into the task, because, for him, his work has become worship of God. Everyone wants to do the work he best likes to do, but that is not the secret of work. Whatever work you do, whether you like it or not, know that it is the Lord's work, and adjust yourself accordingly. Remember this, all work must be done as worship of God. Give three parts of your mind to God and apply the rest to your work. If you can do this, your work will indeed be worship and your heart will be filled with joy.

Swami Brahmananda

A Comparative Study on the Commentary on the Brahma Sutras (continued)

Bhaskara, who preceded Ramanuja, also interprets the Sutras referred to above from IV. ii. 12 more or less like him except the Sutra IV. iv. 4 which he interprets as follows: "The released soul attains identity with *Brahman* as is conveyed by texts like 'I am *Brahman*.' Just as when a pot is broken the space inside becomes one with the infinite space, - so also the soul becomes one with *Brahman*. By nature they are identical and it is the *Upadhis* that create the difference. So the *Upadhi* being destroyed the difference is destroyed and the soul becomes one with *Brahman*."

Nimbarka, who came after Ramanuja, follows him closely in these Sutras except in IV. iv. 4 where he states that the released soul experiences itself as both different and non-different from the *Brahman*.

In Sutras IV. ii. 7 - 14 Madhva does not find anything connected with the knower of *Brahman*, but finds quite a different topic, viz. whether Lakshmi (*Prakrti*) is also merged like the organs at death, and says that she is not merged in Visnu, but ever remains separate, In Sutras IV. iii. 7 - 14 he first gives the views of Badari and Jaimini, and says finally in *Sutra* 15 that of those who go by the path of the gods, only those who worship the Supreme *Brahman* as all-pervading attain It while those who see It in the symbol, i.e. in one's own body go to the Conditioned *Brahman*. In the last Section of the work Madhva discusses the enjoyment of the released soul. Those who have entered into the Lord (*Sayujya Mukti*) enjoy the same pleasures as the Lord, though not in the same degree and experience nothing but bliss (IV. iv. 1 - 4).

Jaimini thinks the released souls enjoy bliss through the Lord's body, as they themselves have no body, either gross or subtle (5).

Audulomi thinks that the released have a body of their own consisting of pure intelligence through which they enjoy pleasures. The casting of all material bodies and existing as pure intelligence is what is called the state of release (6).

Badarayana says it is both ways, for the Scriptures say that on release souls give up their material bodies and possess a form of the essence, of intelligence, with which they enter into the Lord and enjoy all bliss in and through Him (7). The released soul issues forth from the Lord and takes up either a form of intelligence or a material body according to its liking (12), and it then experiences only bliss and pleasure (15). The released attain all desires but they do not have the power of creation, etc. which belongs only to the Lord. They have no control over the world order (17 - 20). They do not return any more to this mundane world (22).

In Sutras IV. ii. 7 - 16 Vallabha describes the nature of souls that have attained release through the *Pusti Marga* or the path of divine grace, as contrasted with the *Maryada Marga* or the path of knowledge and meditation. The manifestation of the Lord as love and the experience of the highest bliss by attaining the Lord as the *Purushottama* (the Supreme Being) are possible only in *Gokula*. Souls that have reached this world and have become united with the *Purushottama* are never again separated from Him. The knower who goes by the path of the gods attains not the Conditioned *Brahman* but the Supreme *Brahman*. Those who understand all things to be nothing but *Brahman* go to the Supreme *Brahman*, while those who worship through symbols do not attain It (7 - 14). But the devotees of the *Purushottama* attain Him directly as soon as they have a desire for Him (15). There is

a difference between the two aspirants, and each goes to his object of worship (16).

The soul on attaining *Brahman*, gets a special kind (*Aprakrta*) of body, through which it enjoys pleasures (IV.i.i). Through this body the released enjoy pleasures with *Brahman*, says Jaimini, while Audulomi holds that they enjoy pleasures as pure intelligence; for to enjoy with *Brahman*, which is Pure Intelligence, they must also be of the same kind. Finally, however, Badarayana decides that the released have *Aprakrta* bodies which enable them all the same to enjoy with *Brahman*, which is Pure Intelligence (5 - 7). Only those whom the Lord elects attain Him (8). The enjoyment in the company of the Lord is free from the functions of the body, speech, etc. This meaning is quite different from what the other commentators attach to these terms. Those who attain release, whether through the *Pusti Miarga* or through the *Maryada Marga*, do not return to this mundane world any more (22).

From the previous sections we find that all the Vedantic Schools more or less agree on certain points, especially in their attacks against the non-Vedantic Schools. All agree that *Brahman*, the ultimate reality, is the cause of the world; that a knowledge of It leads to release, which is the *summum bonum* of life; that *Brahman* can be known only through the Scriptures and not through mere reasoning or other means of knowledge, the Scriptures being the sole authority with respect to It. But they differ among themselves as to the nature of *Brahman*, Its causality in respect of the world, the nature of the soul and its relation to *Brahman*, and the condition of the soul in release.

According to Shankara the ultimate reality is the one non-dual *Brahman*. It is Existence, Knowledge, Infinity. It is mere existence and Pure Consciousness, i.e. It is homogeneous, without attributes. Existence, etc. are not Its attributes but Its very essence,

and they are convertible terms. It is immutable and eternal. The one immutable *Brahman* appears as this diverse universe through *Maya* (ignorance), which is indefinable (*anirvacaniya*). It is formless; the various forms are but Its reflections, like the reflections of the one sun in sheets of water and are therefore unreal. Even *Ishvara* (the Conditioned *Brahman*) is in a way the product of this *Maya*, being the highest reading of the attributeless *Brahman* by the individualized soul - which serves the purpose of devotion and worship for man.

Brahman is both the efficient and the material cause of the world. The world is a *Vivarta*, an apparent - not real - modification of *Brahman* through *Maya*; even as a snake is seen in a rope, and therefore it is non-different from *Brahman*. *Brahman*, though immutable, yet produces this diverse universe. The Sruti declares it and it is not unreasonable either, for the soul in its dream state conjures up diverse creation without marring its individuality. The soul is in reality eternal, uncreated, all-pervading, and identical with *Brahman*, though as individualized by its *Upadhi*, the inner organ (*antah-karana*), it is an effect, atomic, an agent and part of *Brahman*.

The soul on release attains identity with *Brahman* and exists as Pure Consciousness, though from the relative standpoint attributes like omniscience are spoken of it. A knower of *Nirguna Brahman* attains It directly at death without having to go by the 'path of the gods', while a knower of *Saguna Brahman* goes by that path and attains *Brahmaloka*, whence he does not return to this mundane world, but attains the Supreme *Brahman* at the end of the cycle, along with *Brahma*, the ruler of *Brahmaloka*.

To Bhaskara and the other commentators *Brahman* is not attributeless, but an essentially Personal God possessing qualities. According to them personality need not necessarily be limited so as to contradict infinity. They do not accept the *Maya* doctrine,

for to them the universe of sentient and insentient beings is real and an effect of *Brahman* through *Parinama* or actual modification and not through *Vivarta*, as Shankara holds. *Brahman* manifests the world through Its powers (*Shakti*) and yet remains unchanged in Its true essence. The effect, the world, is non-different from the cause, *Brahman*, which is both the efficient and the material cause of the world. Madhva alone holds that it is only the efficient cause, while Prakriti, which is dependent on the Lord, is the material cause.

The soul according to them is really atomic, an agent and a part of *Brahman*. On release it attains its true nature which was obscured in the state of *Samsara* (bondage) by *Avidya* (ignorance) and *Karma*. The knower of *Brahman* goes by (the path of the gods, at the end of which he gets completely disembodied, attains *Brahman* and does no more return to the mortal world. They do not make any distinction of higher and lower knowledge like Shankara. According to them devotion (*Bhakti*) and divine grace are the chief means to release, and not knowledge (*Jnana*). Though these are some of the common features of their philosophies, yet there are subtle differences amongst them as we shall presently see.

According to Bhaskara, *Brahman* is differentiated and also non-differentiated. The non-differentiated, formless aspect, which is merely existence and consciousness, is the causal state, and *Brahman* manifested as the world is the differentiated state. The former aspect is Its true nature, while the latter is adventitious. *Brahman*, which is one, appears as many owing to *Upadhis*, like the reflections of the one sun in different sheets of water. *Brahman* and the world are both different and non-different, but for that reason the world is not unreal (*Mithya*). From the standpoint of the cause, *Brahman*, the reality is one, and the world is not experienced as anything different, while from another standpoint

it is experienced as distinct from It. Unity is the natural state; the distinctions are adventitious.

Brahman of Its own will actually transforms Itself and at the same time remains unchanged in Its essence, even as in the dream state there appears diversity in the indivisible soul. The soul in its true nature is identical with *Brahman*, but in the state of bondage, when it is limited by the *Upadhis*, it appears to be different. It is matter, which is also a power of *Brahman*, that brings about this difference between *Brahman* and souls. So the soul is non-different and different from *Brahman*. The *Upadhi* is not unreal, but real so long as it lasts. In the state of release, when the *Upadhi* is destroyed the soul attains its true nature, which is identity with *Brahman*. Thus *Brahman* actually experiences the sufferings and imperfections of the soul. It is *Brahman* which appears as the soul and finally attains release.

Ramanuja refutes Bhaskara's view of unity and variety, for the two, being contradictory, cannot exist in the same thing. Moreover, the difference is not experienced by itself, again if *Brahman* exists as the world, then It would be affected by its imperfections; so Ramanuja does not accept this view of Bhaskara. He also denies Bhaskara's formless, non-differentiated *Brahman*, which is mere existence and consciousness; for according to him *Brahman* has always auspicious qualities and is free at all times from all kinds of imperfections. He postulates a *Brahman* which is qualified by the world of sentient and insentient beings as Its body under all conditions, viz. in both the causal and effected states. At creation all the changes and imperfections are therefore limited to Its body alone, while It remains unchanged in Its true essence. At the time of creation It only takes on a new condition as the manifest world, but remains the same in substance; hence the world is non-different from its cause.

Souls are really effects of *Brahman* and form Its body, but they are said to be not created because at creation there is no essential change in them as in the elements. The soul is a knower, atomic, an agent and a part of *Brahman* in the sense that the body is a part of an embodied being, or a quality a part of the substance qualified. As qualities are not different from the substance, so also souls are not different from *Brahman*. The soul on release manifests its true nature, which consists in freedom from sin etc., which was obscured in the state of bondage by ignorance and Karma. It attains all the auspicious qualities of *Brahman*, but not identity with It, for It continues to have a separate existence. In the released state it experiences itself as non-different from *Brahman*, being but Its mode - that *Brahman* is its self, and that it is the body of *Brahman*.

Unlike Ramanuja, Nimbarka sees no need to regard matter and soul as the body of God and therefore as Its qualities. For qualities generally help us to distinguish a thing from others of its kind. But in this case, besides *Brahman* there is nothing else from which It requires to be distinguished. He does not also agree with Bhaskara when he says that the differences are due to *Upadhis* - that the souls are *Brahman* limited by *Upadhis* - as that would mean that the perfect *Brahman* actually gets limited which is inconceivable. Again soul's identity with *Brahman* on release would mean their destruction which is as good as accepting *Maya-vada*. On this view the world process would have no meaning for it is started by God in the interest of the souls, so that they may attain perfection. If souls are *Brahman* Itself, the world process would lose all significance. For all these reasons he differs from Bhaskara's *Bhedabheda-vada* or unity and difference, according to which the unity aspect is natural and the difference adventitious.

Though Ramanuja also recognizes difference and non-difference, yet he stresses non-difference. *Brahman* according to him is non-dual, but qualified by matter and souls, which are Its body. Nimbarka, however, proclaims that both unity and difference are natural and equally real and eternal. Matter and soul are different from *Brahman*, for they have different characteristics; and they are non-different as they are not experienced apart from *Brahman*. The relation is as between the snake and its coils or an orb and its luster. Both are equally real. In the state of release the soul realizes its non-difference from *Brahman*, which was not patent in the state of bondage, being obscured by ignorance and Karma, and so it had to suffer.

Vallabha holds that *Brahman* is attributeless and yet possesses all auspicious qualities which are non-material, for It is of a different category from this world. In It all contradictions are resolved. It is essentially Existence, Knowledge, and Bliss and has no connection with *Maya*. At creation it becomes an effect and is perceived and at dissolution it ceases to be such an object of perception and is absorbed. The world is therefore neither illusory nor different from It. It is real and hence its *Brahmatva*. The relation between the two, the world and *Brahman*, is one of identity and the text, 'All this is *Brahman*,' is literally true. Both sentient and insentient beings are in essence *Brahman* but in the former the bliss aspect is withheld and in the latter the knowledge and bliss aspects are withheld. The soul is identical with *Brahman*, as a part is with the whole. In the state of bondage the soul is under ignorance and is but a semblance of *Brahman*, but when it attains release it recovers its true nature, i.e. the bliss aspect also is manifested, and it becomes one with *Brahman*.

Though the world is real and is *Brahman* in truth, yet through ignorance we see diversity, which is the cause of our bondage. A man of realization sees the world as but *Brahman*; one

who has mere scriptural knowledge understands both Its aspects, i.e. as *Brahman* and *Maya* or as reality and unreality, and the ignorant mix up the two, *Brahman* and *Maya*, and regard both aspects as true. The world is not unreal, but what is unreal in it is our viewpoint of it, which is removed when, one attains realization and is released.

Madhva is a thorough-going dualist. He declares three eternally distinct and entirely separate entities, viz. *Brahman*, matter (*Prakriti*), and souls, though the last two are dependent on *Brahman*, who is their ruler. *Brahman* is the only absolute independent existence and everything else is finite, being conditioned by *Brahman*. It is essentially Knowledge and Bliss. When *Brahman* is said to be unknowable and indescribable, it only means that It cannot be known completely nor described fully, for otherwise It is known and also described by the Scriptures. Though its infinite personality is beyond our conception, yet out of grace for the devotee It takes on limited forms, which, however, are neither material nor finite.

Matter is also eternal, but dependent on *Brahman* and capable of undergoing modification. At creation it undergoes modification at the will of the Lord in accordance with the Karma of particular souls. Thus the Lord is only the efficient cause. It does not appeal to Madhva that an insentient world should be produced from the sentient *Brahman*. Souls, though eternal, are limited in intelligence, etc. and dependent on *Brahman*, which guides them to their goal. On release they are not only free from this bondage and suffering but also enjoy positive bliss. Release is not a mere negation of suffering, but a positive blissful state. In release the soul does not attain identity or even equality with *Brahman*, nor are the released souls all equal among themselves. There is a view current amongst scholars today that the *Vedanta-Sutras* propound a Theistic philosophy, whatever be

the exact nature of it, and never Shankara's rigid monism. Such a view we should think is not justified in the fact of very many Sutras in the work which clearly point to *Vivarta* as against *Parinama*. From the First Sutra of the work we find that *Brahman* is to be inquired into, for a knowledge of this *Brahman* that is aspired after, leads to non-return to this mundane existence as is declared by the last Sutra.

So it is the knowledge of *Brahman* that leads to release, and *Upasana*, *Bhakti*, grace, or Karma has no place in this except as an indirect means, by way of purification of the mind, to realization of knowledge. By knowledge is not meant mere intellectual grasp, for Shankara nowhere says that mere intellectual knowledge of *Brahman* leads to release, but it is intuitive knowledge attained through hearing (*sravana*), reasoning (*manana*) and meditation (*nididhyasana*) that leads to such knowledge as destroys ignorance about *Brahman*, resulting in release. So the importance given to *Bhakti* (devotion) and grace by the theistic commentators does not seem to be justified according to the author's views.

Sutras I.iv.23, H.i.14-20, 28, II.iii.50, and III.ii. 18, specially the last three, give us the framework, as it were, of the whole work. These Sutras, coupled with the fact that their author uses the word *Sat* only with respect to *Brahman* and nowhere with respect to the world or the soul show that he must have had *Vivarta* (apparent modification) and not *Parinama* (actual modification) in view. Though Sutras I.iv.26 and II.i.13 lean towards *Parinama*, yet the Sutras referred to above leave no room for doubt that this view is finally discarded by the author in favour of *Vivarta*. *Parinama* is accepted by him only as a workable basis to refute the

Sankhya's and others from their own standpoint. Sutras H.i. 14-20 give the author's view which is *Vivartavada* and this is confirmed by Sutras II.i. 28, II.iii.50 and III.ii.18. These three Sutras occur at significant places in the work, viz., in the sections dealing with the causality of *Brahman*, the nature of the soul and the nature of *Brahman* and all point towards the unreality of the world of sentient and insentient beings.

Sutra III.ii.18 gives an example as to how the formless *Brahman* appears to have forms. It says that these forms of *Brahman* are like the reflections of the one sun in different sheets of water, meaning thereby that they are unreal, being due only to the limiting conditions (*Upadhis*), even as the reflected images of the sun are unreal.

Again, Sutra II.i.28 explains the declaration of the *Sruti* that *Brahman* is changeless and yet produces the diverse universe. It shows that it is like the dream world created by the indivisible soul - which clearly points out that this creation from *Brahman* is also unreal from the standpoint of the transcendental reality, even as the dream world is unreal as compared with our waking state.

(to be continued)

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I will tell you a secret. You may not fully understand its meaning now, but in time its truth will dawn upon you. And this truth is that every man's will and mind lead him progressively toward good. Some are led along thorny paths and some are led along smooth paths, but all reach the same goal.

Swami Brahmananda

Leaves of an Ashrama: 40 Vijnana Self Taught

I have been rereading Charles Baudelaire. As usual I was attracted by *L'Etranger*, a poem about a peculiar man the poet encounters who, when questioned as to what he likes, replies that neither love of country nor woman nor gold attracts him. "Then what do you love, you extraordinary stranger?" "I love the clouds, the clouds that pass, yonder, yonder, the marvelous clouds."

This reminded me of a case mentioned by Sri Ramakrishna in the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*: "There is a sadhu in Hrishikesh who gets up early in the morning and stands near a great waterfall. He looks at it the whole day and says to God, 'Ah, you have done well! Well done! How amazing!' He doesn't practice any other form of *japam* or austerity. At night he returns to his hut." Which brought to mind other examples, such as the favorite subjects of writers identified with the Romantic Movement in England, which might be summarized in those familiar lines of Tennyson about the flower in the crannied wall: "Little flower - but if I could understand What you are, root and all, and all in all, I should know what God and man is." Or the Sufi mystic mentioned by Will Durant in his account of spiritual movements in Islam: "But many Sufis tried to reach God through external objects....'O God,' said one mystic, 'I never listen to the cry of animals, or the quivering of trees, or the murmur of water, or the song of birds, or the rustling wind or the crashing thunder, without feeling them to be an evidence of Thy unity, and a proof that there is nothing like unto Thee.'"

It is related that the writer Vladimir Nabokov spent blissful hours studying butterflies, marveling over a world beyond

common sense where "when a butterfly has to look like a leaf (for self-protection), not only are all the details of a leaf beautifully rendered (on it) but the markings mimicking grub-bored holes are generously supplied."

The jnani affirms and tries to feel that all he encounters here below is other than ordinary reality - this is not real, that is not real. The Real is above and beyond everyday experience. The *vijnani*, on the contrary, claims that all this is God. He revels in the manifestation, seeing it all as He - the symphony of nature understood as imminent Deity.

"Of course," I reasoned, "the genuine *vijnani* realizes this in a supernormal experience which transcends *maya*. That hasn't happened to me. What I am doing when I am admiring clouds or nature's diversity or the superlative plan that makes all things move in their sweet and orderly fashion is only a kind of play-acting *vijnana*. It is simply a reverent appreciation of *vidya maya* - that *maya* which helps one to move toward knowledge - the *maya* which assists one to transcend *maya*. Nevertheless, I believe that the continual admiration of the world as God's handiwork, in gratefully attributing it all to Him, is an exercise which I may consciously follow, which will lead to the real experience."

The beautiful world which man sees is Knowledge transmuted into clues the earthly eyes can see, which invite man to let the scales fall from those eyes if he but will. The American poet Robert Frost expressed the idea in an amusing way: "How many times it thundered before Franklin took the hint! How many apples fell on Newton's head before he took the hint! Nature is always hinting at us. It hints over and over again. And suddenly we take the hint." □

Programme for July - August 2012

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre

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There will be no discourses during the months of July
and August

Sri Krishna's Puja
12th August
at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

Ordinarily we know only the surface waves of our mind. But through Yoga practice we learn to go deeper. By watching and studying our own minds we dive below the surface consciousness, and observe what is going on there. Many *Samskaras* - latent desires and tendencies - are stored up there, waiting for an opportunity to express themselves. These we can discover before they rise to the surface. This is very important, for once a thought has come to the surface it is extremely difficult to control. But at an early stage, before it has fully developed and gathered strength, it is easy to manipulate. This is called 'seeing our thoughts in seed form.' The seed is easily destroyed, but when it has germinated and grown into a big strong tree, it requires great strength and effort to hew it down. So we must crush our desires in their early, undeveloped stages. Yogis can do this. They keep down undesirable thoughts in the germ state by smothering them beneath thoughts of an opposite nature. Thus they conquer all evil tendencies: hatred with love, anger with kindness and so on.

Swami Turiyananda

continued from the front cover

some put them away near the well, so that others may use them.

"Some eat mangoes secretly and remove all trace of them by wiping their mouths with a towel. But some share the fruit with others. There are sages who, even after attaining Knowledge, work to help others and also to enjoy the Bliss of God in the company of devotees. 'I want to eat sugar. I don't want to be sugar.'

"The gopis of Vrindavan, too, attained the Knowledge of Brahman; but they were not seeking It. They wanted to enjoy God, looking on themselves as His mother, His friend, His handmaid, or His lover."

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, August 3 1884

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Holy Scripture cries aloud for freedom from self. Self-free is self-controlled and self-controlled is self-possessed and self-possession is God-possession and possession of everything God ever made. This is known as self-mastery. He who for one instant wholly resigns self, unshaken and motionless in himself - that man is free.

Meister Eckhart



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