

Vedanta

390 JULY - AUGUST 2016

Guru and God

Swami Ramakrishnananda

Swami Ramakrishnananda

Swami Yatiswarananda



Divine Wisdom

In criticizing another, we always foolishly take one especially brilliant point as the whole of our life and compare that with the dark ones in the life of another. Thus we make mistakes in judging individuals.

A yogi must not think of injuring anyone by thought, word, or deed. Mercy shall not be for men alone, but shall go beyond, and embrace the whole world.

Never talk about the faults of others, no matter how bad they may be. Nothing is ever gained by that. You never help one by talking about his fault; you do him an injury, and injure yourself as well.

Bless men when they revile you. Think how much good they are doing by helping to stamp out the false ego.

Hold fast to the real Self, think only pure thoughts, and you will accomplish more than a regiment of mere preachers. Out of purity and silence comes the word of power.

Blame neither man, nor God, nor anyone in the world. When you find yourselves suffering, blame yourselves, and try to do better.

You must not criticize others; you must criticize yourself. If you see a drunkard, do not criticize him; remember he is you in another shape. He who has not darkness sees no darkness in others. What you have inside you is that which you see in others.

This is the surest way of reform. If the would-be reformers who criticize and see evil would themselves stop creating evil, the world would be better. Beat this idea into yourself.

Whatever others think or do, lower not your standard of purity, morality, and love of God. Come to God any way you can; only come. But in coming do not push anyone down.

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Editorial

Worship of the Divine Mother-5 (Continued from the last issue)

Religious life starts with rituals and ceremonies which are said to be the Kindergarten of Spiritual Life. Religions without rituals stagnate and decay.

Rituals, mythology and philosophy are the three facets of religion. Rituals if performed, with devotion and faith lead to the purification of the mind, so essential for an aspirant.

In Hinduism the word for ritual worship of God is called *Puja*. Worship is a very effective method of communion with God. Numberless devotees worshipped God in various forms and became liberated. Sri Ramakrishna started his spiritual life with puja at the Dakshineswar Kali temple demonstrating that ritualistic worship is not only helpful but almost inevitable in the spiritual journey.

Behind every worship is a common motive—love of God. It is the nature of love to give something to the beloved. Devotees always want to offer everything to their beloved Lord. The devotee is keenly aware that he and all that he has really belongs to God. Hence the act of offering is only an expression of his gratitude and devotion. Any offering done with love and devotion mingled with *Shraddha* (intense faith) is worship.

For any worship to be fruitful these conditions are necessary: faith, devotion and sincerity.

1. A devotee must have intense faith. He believes that there is a loving God who accepts his worship and offering —however small it may be —and responds to his expression of love. Without this faith worship becomes mechanical and meaningless.

2. The second requirement is love. One needs to approach the Divine with an attitude of love, at the same time believing Him to be the most loving Being in the whole universe, who responds with love and without any judgement. In worship one does not so much

seek from God as one is eager to express one's love through offering of all that one has.

3. One also needs to be sincere. If we sincerely love any one then reason counts for little. This is much more true in the spiritual realm; if we are sincere our worship becomes fruitful, effective, and liberating.

Without love no offering is acceptable; with love anything is acceptable. Sri Krishna says in the Gita :

"Whoever offers me a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water with devotion, that I accept — the loving gift of the devoted"

Of course it is rare to find devotees who are totally selfless. Necessarily all of us start with some selfish desire or motive. But we should remember that God is the great purifier. Even worship done with a selfish motive, in time, leads to higher forms of worship. Gradually the devotee becomes purified, the element of selfishness disappears from the aspirant's heart and is replaced with deep devotion.

Sri Ramakrishna never condemned any form of spiritual practice. In fact he began his spiritual life with external worship but soon ascended to the highest peak of devotion.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna tells us that the best kind of worship, however, is that in which every act of ours is offered to God. Walking, eating, talking—every action is transformed into an offering of love to the Lord.

It is a mistake to think that worship is confined to external rituals only; *Puja* can take many different forms.

The Devi Bhagavatam says that worship is of two kinds: external and internal. The external worship is itself divided into three streams, Vedic, Tantric and Pauranic. In the comprehensive Indian spiritual structure, all the three streams—the Vedic, the Tantric and the Pauranic— are intermingled from very ancient times.

Apart from the general distinction, there are several other types of divisions among the *Pujas*—*Sadhara* (with a basis), *Niradhara* (without a basis), *Nitya* (performed daily), *Naimittika* (performed on special occasions), *Kamya* (performed with desires), *Sattvika*

(unostentatious, i.e., without much external paraphernalia), *Rajasika* (sophisticated and pompous), *Swabhavika* (natural) etc. (Even certain forms of *Tamasic* pujas are also accepted.)

External or internal, every aspect of worship is of equal value. External worship is considered in the *Mahanirvana Tantra* as belonging to a lower category:

'The highest spiritual discipline is the practice of Brahman-consciousness. The next is meditation. Chanting of hymns and Japa are lower disciplines, and lower than the lowest is external worship with the help of a symbol or an image.'

Hence some may think that mental worship is superior to external worship, and only the less qualified spiritual aspirants perform the external worship. This is a wrong notion.

Sri Ramakrishna says: *'People worship God according to their tastes and temperaments. The mother cooks the same fish differently for her children, that each one may have what suits his stomach.'*

Although the knowledge or attainment of Brahman is the Supreme goal, worship, *upasana* (Contemplation) etc. are enjoined in the scriptures as steps to the gradual attainment of the goal according to the differences in the qualification of the aspirants.

Men at the first stage of spiritual development have to make use of something external, and as and when the inner self becomes gradually purified they turn to more abstract conceptions. The impurity of the aspirant's mind gets eliminated to the extent he progresses in worship. Peace, devotion and bliss gradually fill his heart. He then attains the real fruit of worshipping the Supreme Lord, namely, *Moksha* or liberation.

When a Sadhaka reaches this stage no separate spiritual discipline called '*worship*' is needed. His whole life is then converted into an unceasing worship of the Divine. He, then, perceives God only everywhere. A devotee, then, feels :

'Whatever I do, O Lord, is nothing but Your worship.'

(To be continued)

Guru and God

Swami Ramakrishnananda

God being infinite, and infinity being absolutely one- without a second; there cannot be more than one God. The souls of all other living beings, *Jivatmas*, all throughout the creation must have to be finite and none of them, celestial, terrestrial or infernal, can have the power to know and explain God. How can the finite ever know the Infinite? The finite mind has no power to fathom the infinite mind. Thus, it is not possible for any created being to know the ways of God.

Compared to infinity the finite quantity, however big it may be, must be infinitesimally small or zero, as the former must be infinite times bigger than the latter. So compared to God, all souls: celestial, terrestrial or infernal, are perfectly insignificant and as such they are absolutely under His control.

Thus the souls, not being free and not knowing how to guide themselves because of the limited nature of their minds, should be guided by God. God is their omnipotent and omniscient Master. If the *Jivatmas* (bound souls) want to get rid of death and countless woes, their highest wisdom should allow themselves to be guided by God and not by themselves.

But how to know the mind of the Lord? The souls have no power to know it, as we have already seen. The God of infinite Love has revealed a part of Himself in the Vedas and the different Scriptures of the different nations of the world, such as the Bible, the Koran, the *Zend-Avesta*, etc. Obedience to the Vedas and the Scriptures constitutes the different Religions of the world. He who is obedient to God is thus called religious.

Since God must have to be His own interpreter, when men misunderstand the Scriptures and thus misbehave, He must have to incarnate Himself in order to establish religion.

These Incarnations are the true Teachers of the world, and being the manifested embodiments of God, by obeying and worshipping them, we obey and worship God Himself. The Scriptures can be rightly explained only by these *Gurus* or visible Gods. Thus only God can lead man to God and no one else.

When God feels the necessity to incarnate Himself, He comes down aka incarnates (*avatarana*) to our level to be accessible to us and hence an incarnation is called an *Avatara*. As long as He stays with us here on this earth, He conquers all the enemies of the good and right-minded people by the power of His irresistible personality and infinite wisdom, and establishes religion once again on the adamantine basis of truth. Before He leaves this earth and rises up to His own infinite glory, He imparts His Illuminating Power to His disciples wherewith they become the true *Gurus* or Teachers of humanity. These *Gurus* again in their turn impart their *guru-power* to their disciples who thus become the *Gurus* of humanity; and this imparting of the *guru-power* goes on from generation to generation until it becomes very much attenuated and is not able to cope with the rising powers of irreligion on all sides. Then God again incarnates to establish religion, and this goes on throughout eternity.

From what has been said above, it is clear that the *Guru* is the same as God; He is the visible and tangible God indispensably necessary for the salvation of man, as God only can lead a man to God and no one else. So *Gurus* must not be confounded with *mahatmas* who are but highly evolved souls and are as such, blind and imperfect. How can the blind ever lead the blind? *Guru* has been defined in the Scriptures not only to be the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the

universe but also the One Absolute Being beyond Space, Time and Causation. So by obeying and worshipping the *Guru*, we obey and worship God Himself. *Guru* is not an intermediate being, distinct and separate from God, but God Himself graciously assuming a human form for the salvation of man. Sri Ramakrishna Mission therefore teaches the indispensable necessity of a *Guru* on the part of one who wants salvation in this life, and in so doing it only confirms the truth, that God only can lead a man to God and no one else.

In India the followers of the Religion Eternal, (*Sanatana Dharma* or Hinduism) therefore invariably have *Gurus* to lead them to God. Every Hindu family has a *Guru* who imparts in secret the soul-saving instruction to each grown-up member of the family when he or she is found to be eligible for it. This instruction usually consists of one or more holy names of the Lord and is imparted with due religious ceremonies to make it more impressive to the disciple., The particular member who gets the instruction and thus becomes a disciple is enjoined to do *Japa*, repeat it within himself or herself with a whole-souled devotion in a solitary place every morning, noon, and evening, after having purified the body either by washing or bathing. If the disciple can afford to increase the number of repetitions, he or she will thereby approach the Ideal nearer and nearer and will thus be able to reach the Goal sooner.

When most of these *Gurus* of the various families misbehave and thereby loose the reverence of their disciples, the time, then, comes to usher into the world another Incarnation of God.

In this rationalistic age men of culture in every civilized community have grown less and less credulous, and hence they have begun to question the saving powers of these Teachers, most of whom have lost their spiritual nature and degenerated themselves into carnality and corruption. How can they who are too weak to stand

the onslaughts of sensuality themselves ever have any power to save others? Those who fall a prey to all sorts of temptations are too worthless and abominable to be of any help to others. Thus people looking down upon these fallen people who represent religion, begin to lose all faith in the religion itself. That is why we find amongst the educated population of the world, rank disbelief, and irreverence, nay, even atheism. These men are ready to obliterate even the least trace of religion which they regard as a bundle of superstitions and the sooner it is destroyed, the better for all humanity, they think.

In India, after the introduction of Western education, complaints were raised against the existing system of Hindu Religion. The so-called educated Hindus began to regard the various ceremonies in connection with their religion to be superstitious and they wanted to have a religion devoid of all these, and the result was various reform movements such as *Brahmoism*, *Arya Samaj*, etc.

The family preceptors lost their hold upon the educated, although a few of them and almost all illiterate men stuck to them. The few educated people who still entertained great reverence for the *Gurus* said, "What if the ways of our *Gurus* are bad? We do not want them, but the instructions of which they are the medium, these instructions flow directly from the throne of God and hence have the power to lead us to God." Such people were already infused with faith and reverence, and it is these faith and reverence that help them mostly in deriving the highest benefit from the teachings of such *Gurus*. This faith and reverence enables them to overlook all the shortcomings of the fallen *Gurus*. But such men are very few, and the generality of men nowadays demand purity and spirituality from a Teacher under whom they are to place themselves. Since these qualities are not found in most teachers, these people have been leading life without any

religion and instead of worshipping God, are worshipping themselves, and one another. Their motto is:

- “This world and this life are all in all. There is no after-life, no God to whom we are going to be responsible for what we do.
- Let us eat, drink and be merry as much as we can.
- We should treat others kindly as we want kindness from them.
- Society is our God, as we get all help from it and not from any invisible Deity.
- Faith in such an invisible Being is sheer nonsense and rank superstition. We shall have none of them.”

This is how they have disposed of God and religion, and hence according to His own promise, the Lord of the Universe has incarnated Himself as Sri Ramakrishna for all nations and all religions. The time needed Him and He could not remain indifferent to the call of His many children who ardently prayed to Him for help, not knowing what to accept and what to reject.

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Errata

(From our Vedanta Magazine, issue 389 we missed the last few lines from the article ‘What Yoga Is’, by Swami Brahmeshanandaji. Below we give the last missing paragraph.)

We can now safely conclude that physical well-being and relief from diseases is only one of the less important advantages of the practice of yoga. Far more important is to gain mastery over one’s mind—to be able to concentrate and to detach the mind at will from any subject. Further, if practiced with all its limbs, yoga transforms the character and builds a sane personality. And finally, by yoga one can achieve superlative bliss and absolute freedom.

Swami Ramakrishnananda:
(A Life of Supreme Dedication)
Swami Yatiswarananda

The fittest disciple to receive his Master's name.

Referred to those who used to come to him, Sri Ramakrishna would say: *"The devotees who come here may be divided into two groups. One group says—'O God, give me liberation. Another group, belonging to the inner circle, does not talk that way. They are satisfied if they can know two things; first who I am (referring to himself), and second who they are, and what their relationship to me is.'" Swami Ramakrishnananda belonged to this second group of souls who are born to fulfil the mission of the Divine Incarnations.*

He was, in fact, a perfect illustration, of devotion which he himself described: *"True devotion is selfless. Whether the Beloved is rich or poor, still the devotee's whole soul is for Him and no one else. He does not want anything from God. He always wants to give something to God. The true lover of God must be more than perfect. For, a perfect man may be self-contained and self-satisfied, but he may not have the power of satisfying others, just as a reservoir of water full to the brim, is self-contained and lives only in itself. Not so the perennial spring, which is not only full in itself but also springs out of itself with overflowing munificence for the sake of others. A true devotee is like that. He lives not so much for himself as for his Beloved and for those who belong to Him."*

He lived so much for his Master that speaking of his unique service to Sri Ramakrishna during his fatal illness, Dr. Ramachandra Dutta, a great householder devotee of the Master, wrote : *'Dear brother, born as a man, you have understood the duty of human life. That is why you are the object of the Master's special grace. By His grace you*

stand at the head of the circle of his attendants. You are His chosen son and servant and are second to none in service to Him.' In fact, the great Swami Vivekananda himself wished at first to take the name of *Ramakrishnananda* but he thought that his brother disciple Shashi had a better claim to it because of his unparalleled love and service to the Master. So, it was this Shashi who became Swami Ramakrishnananda, the founder of the Ramakrishna movement in South India.

The most suitable monk to take the Master's message to South India.

I had not the privilege of sitting at the feet of Swami Ramakrishnananda because he was staying in South India and I was then at Calcutta. When the Swami was taken to Calcutta during his fatal illness in 1911, I was fortunate in having just two glimpses of him. The first was on the roof of the Bagbazar Math, when he had gone up for breathing some fresh air. Next time, it was in what proved to be his death-bed. It was really not death but passing into immortality.

After the Swami's passing away in August 1911, when I joined the Order as a Brahmacharin, I was sent to the Madras Math for training. There one could tangibly feel the atmosphere, full of the Swami's spirit of renunciation and devotion. But I was surprised to find that there was not a single South Indian Brahmacharin in the Madras Math. However, I had the good fortune of meeting some householder devotees whose life had been transformed by his touch and inspired by his ideal of self-dedication.

The Swami's brother-disciples, each one of them a spiritual giant by himself, held a great opinion of Swami Ramakrishnananda.

Swami Brahmananda said: “*His influence is a living force in South India.*” Swami Premananda proclaimed that he was the founder of the original Ramakrishna monastery, not Rakhai, not Sharat, not even Swamiji (i.e. Swami Vivekananda).

From the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and also from the devotees in Madras I learnt of the wonderful life of renunciation, devotion and service, of the tremendous strength and transforming power of the Swami and made him my ideal in life. I did not know then that years later I would have to be the third president of the Madras Math and follow in the Swami’s footsteps in my own humble way.

During my stay in the Madras Math, from 1911 to 1917, I could definitely feel how the mental atmosphere was saturated with the spirit of *Tapasya*—moral and spiritual disciplines, renunciation and service—practised by the Swami for long fourteen years. In order to appreciate these illumined souls, it is necessary for us to have a little subtle perception. It is then that we discover how they fertilise the mental soil by their spiritualised presence and vibrations and thoughts. That many of us were greatly benefited by our stay in the Madras Math was due not only to the grace of the Master but also due to the living spiritual atmosphere there bequeathed by the Swami. But then, if we may say so, this also is an expression of the Master’s grace.

The Swami was the most suitable monk to bring the message of his Master to the South—the land of *Alwars* (Devotes of *Vishnu*) and the *Acharyas*. When Swami Vivekananda returned from the West, in 1897, he had told the people of Madras: “*I shall send you one who is more orthodox than your most orthodox men of the South and who is at*

the same time unique and unsurpassed in his scholarship, worship and meditation on God." The promise was indeed fulfilled to the letter.

His early life and living contact with his Master.

Shashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda's pre-monastic name), was born in July 1863. This was a unique year, for in January of the same year were born the foremost disciples of the Master — Swamis Vivekananda, Brahmananda and Turiyananda. He belonged to an orthodox family, the first child of a couple of whom the mother was a pious and simple-hearted lady and the father a devout worshipper of the Divine Mother. The child was a source of great joy and hope to the parents.

As a student, he was brilliant. In his college days, he came under the influence of Keshab Chandra Sen; he served for a time as a private tutor for his sons. Like Narendranath, Rakhal and his other brother-disciples, he became a member of the *Brahmo Samaj* and attended its services and religious functions. However, he did not get there the spiritual satisfaction his soul longed for. As he confessed later, Keshab's preaching whetted his hunger but could not appease it. Only after he met Sri Ramakrishna was it completely satisfied.

Even as a boy Shashi had picked up the daily habit of ritualistic worship. Before he came to Sri Ramakrishna, he had studied the *Bible*, *Chaitanya Charitamrita* and other sacred books and was taking part in the religious functions of the *Brahmo Samaj*.

It was in 1883 that he first came to *Dakshineswar*, in the company of his cousin Sarat, who became later on Swami Saradananda. During this meeting, the Master told them: "*Bricks and tiles, if burnt after the trade mark has been stamped on them, retain those marks for ever. Similarly you should be stamped with spirituality before entering the*

world. Then you will not become attached. But, nowadays, parents marry their boys too young. By the time they finish their education, they are already the fathers of children and have to run hither and thither in search of a job to maintain the family. They find it difficult to secure an appointment with sufficient salary to feed so many mouths. So they have little time to think of God."

One of the boys asked, 'Then, Sir, is it wrong to marry? Is it against the will of God'? Sri Ramakrishna asked him to take a book from the shelf and read aloud an extract from the Bible setting forth Christ's opinion on marriage, and that was: "For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb; there are some eunuchs who were made eunuchs of men; and there are eunuchs, who were made eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake. He that is able to receive 'let him receive.'"

And also St Paul's: "I say to the unmarried and widows — it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn." One among the audience interrupted him saying, "Do you mean to say, Sir, that marriage is against the will of God? And, how can His creation go on if people cease to marry?"

To him Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Don't worry about that. Those who like to marry are at perfect liberty to do so. What I said just now was between ourselves." Sri Ramakrishna also asked Shashi whether he believed in God with form or without form. The reply the boy gave and which pleased the Master very much reveals the characteristic frankness of the boy. He said, "I am not certain about the very existence of God; so I am not able to speak one way or the other!" In his vision, the Master had seen that Shashi and Sarat were followers of Jesus Christ in a previous incarnation.

The first interview with the Master left an indelible impression on the young mind of Shashi. He began visiting *Dakshineswar* frequently and sitting at the feet of the Master.

He became acquainted with Narendranath who told him of the beauty of Sufi poetry.

One day as Shashi was engaged in studying some Persian book, the Master called him. He had to do that thrice before he could attract the attention of Shashi who had become absorbed in the book. Then Sri Ramakrishna told him: *"If you forget your duties for the sake of study, you will lose all your devotion."* Shashi understood the implication of the Master's warning and then and there threw the books into the Ganges. From that day, books lost all importance for him. He got the glimpse of a higher life and made up his mind to dedicate himself to it.

His whole-hearted service to the Master

It was when the B.A, degree examination of Shashi was fast approaching that the Master was also lying seriously ill. But Shashi and the other young disciples of the Master unhesitatingly left their studies, even their homes, and banded themselves together to serve the Master. Shashi took the leading part in rendering personal service to the Master, which he did with unswerving devotion.

The Master too loved Shashi dearly. One midnight during winter, Shashi went out of the Master's room to cleanse the commode. On his return he was shocked to find the Master crawling on a stick and struggling to get at a wrapper from the cloth stand. Shashi thought that he must have forgotten to cover the Master sufficiently during that cold night and so the Master was himself trying to get a wrapper. In distress he asked the Master, *"Why didn't*

you ask me for the wrapper?" The answer was a startling one: *"I was feeling the cold as you went out almost bare-bodied in such a cold night. And so, I was getting a wrapper for you"* The Master's illness brought the disciples together and formed them into a brotherhood. One day he distributed ochre clothes among these young disciples and thus inaugurated the Ramakrishna Order.

The young disciples did their best for their ailing Master but nothing was of any avail. He entered *Mahasamadhi* in August 1886. Shashi who attended on the Master at the time of his passing, said later on that he never saw the Master more happy and cheerful than on the day of his final departure.

"When Sri Ramakrishna gave up his body I think it was the most blissful moment of his life. A thrill of joy ran through him. I saw all the hairs of his body stand on end."

The 'Main Pillar' of the first Ramakrishna Math

After the cremation, Shashi gathered the sacred relics of the Master, carried them to the Cossipore garden-house and later on to the Baranagore Monastery. There he instituted the regular worship of the Master. Using a portrait of Sri Ramakrishna as the symbol, Shashi served the Master with wholehearted devotion, just as he had done when he was in flesh and blood, and made everybody else also feel the living Presence of the Master in the monastery.

Not only that. Like a loving mother, he served the brother monks, who used to be lost in spiritual practices and devotional singing. Speaking of this aspect of Shashi, Swami Vivekananda said later on: *"He was the main pillar of the Math. Without him life in the monastery would have been impossible. Often the monks would be lost in prayer and meditation, without any thought of food; and*

Ramakrishnananda would wait with their meals, or sometimes even drag them out of their meditation.”

During a most trying period, when no funds were available to meet the barest needs of the monastery, the Swami served as a teacher for some months in the Baranagore High School, for two hours a day for the maintenance of the monastery. Later, when the other monks went on a wandering life, it was he who always stayed on in the monastery, serving the Master and his children with his one-pointed love and devotion. It is no wonder that Swami Premananda declared that Shashi was the real founder of the monastery.

Inaugurating the Ramakrishna Movement in South India

In the course of his wanderings, the leader of these monks, Swami Vivekananda, went to the West, guided by the Divine Spirit and preached the message of Vedanta with phenomenal success. He returned to India in 1897. When he proposed to Shashi to go to Madras to do preaching work, Shashi at once responded to the call. And, now began a new chapter in the Swami’s life.

First he was housed in a small building near the ‘Ice House.’ Later on he moved to some rooms in the Ice House itself—the building where Swami Vivekananda had earlier stayed for nine memorable days. From this place Swami Ramakrishnananda carried on his untiring service. Besides conducting regular worship of the Master in the monastery, doing his own cooking and offering food to the Master, he delivered lectures and held classes in various parts of the city. In course of time, his activities spread throughout the Presidency—nay, all over the South and even to Bombay and distant Rangoon.

On the death of the original owner, a devotee of Swami Vivekananda, the Ice House came up for auction. The devotees were anxious lest the house should pass into the hands of some stranger and necessitate the Swami's moving to a new place. But the Swami himself sat unconcerned. When a devotee went to report to him about the progress of the auction, the Swami said: *"Why do you worry about it? What do we care who buys and who sells? My wants are few. I need only a small room for Sri Guru Maharaj. I can stay anywhere and spend my time in speaking about him."* Since the house was bought by a new owner, the Swami had to shift to a small outhouse in the compound.

In 1907, he could move to the new monastery building in Mylapore, for which, however, he had to collect funds going from door to door, meeting with poor response.

To the great joy of the Swami, Swami Brahmananda visited Madras in 1908 and the Holy Mother in 1911. He accompanied them to Rameswaram and back.

He was not only the founder of the Ramakrishna Math in Madras but also of the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Bangalore, which was formally opened in 1909. He himself went to collect funds for the Ashrama building, sometimes in the company of Sister Devamata. Usually they met with friendly and generous response but had to face rebuffs also occasionally. Once they went to meet a high official of the Mysore Government. The man kept them waiting for some two hours. When at last the Sister met him and began to explain to him the object of their visit, he cut her short saying, *"I cannot understand why they make so much of this Ramakrishna!"* The Sister remained crest-fallen but the Swami turned to him with a glowing smile and said: *"Let me tell you of Sri Ramakrishna. I was his*

personal attendant." The Swami spoke with such fervour that the gentleman's interest was aroused, and he actually gave a contribution to the building fund of the Ashrama. The new Ashrama was opened in 1909 by Swami Brahmananda at the request of his brother-disciple.

In March 1911, he had the great satisfaction of bringing the Holy Mother and accommodating Her in the monastery building. The Holy Mother's visit and his offering himself to Her—body, mind and soul—was the final offering, (*Purnahuti*) of his dedicated life. After Her departure from Madras he became ill and went to Bangalore for a change, where the disease was diagnosed as galloping phthisis. Returning to Calcutta in June 1911, he passed away there in August of the same year. The end was glorious. His face became radiant. The hairs on his body and on his head stood on end. This ecstatic condition lasted in the body even for a long time after the soul had passed into immortality. This was indeed a case of *Mahasamadhi*—the superconscious state from which there is no return. What he had witnessed and described in the case of his Master he himself experienced during the last moments of his own life.

The lessons to be learnt from the Swami's unique life

Many are the lessons we can learn with great profit from the wonderful life of the Swami.

Foremost among these is his unique devotion to the Lord who manifested Himself to him through Sri Ramakrishna, his *Guru*. Service to the *Guru*, who was to him no other than *Parabrahman*, was his main *Sadhana* and it transformed him completely.

The Master was very fond of taking ice during summer. On a sultry day Shashi went on foot, even ran, from Calcutta to Dakshineswar and took with him a lump of ice wrapped in a paper and tied in a corner of his upper cloth. It is strange that the ice did not melt though he carried it for a distance of six miles from Calcutta. The Master was glad, like a child, to have the piece of ice from him and said: *"It is quite in keeping with your devotion."* Another day, at Dakshineswar, Shashi was quickly passing through the Master's room on an urgent errand. The Master called him and said, *"He whom you want is this, is this, is this!"* pointing to Himself. Shashi then truly understood who the real Ramakrishna was. The *Guru* and the *Chosen Deity* are the same; the Divine Incarnation was his *Guru*. It became clear to him what the Master used to say about Himself: *"When I try to find myself, I find it is all God"* When this became a settled conviction to Shashi, his surrender to the Master was complete.

His unbounded faith in his Master

The Master was a living Reality to him, even after he passed from the physical body. The Swami had to undergo severe financial hardships at times. One day he was heard calling in loud and angry tones: *"You have brought me here, Old Man, and left me helpless! Are you testing my powers of patience and endurance? I will not go and beg hereafter for my sake, or even for yours. If anything comes unasked, I will offer it to you and share it as prasadam. Otherwise, I will bring sea-sand for offering to you and I shall also live upon that!"* The Swami used to say, *"If we cannot get on altogether without help, then why not ask the Lord Himself for it? Why go to others?"* This was what he did also.

Once the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna was drawing near, but no money was as yet collected for the feeding of the poor *Narayanas* (God in human form), which formed a very important and the most expensive item of the celebration. A devotee who was sleeping in the Math suddenly awoke at midnight and found the Swami pacing to and fro like a lion in a cage, humming heavily at every breath. He was praying to the Lord for the feeding of the poor. The Lord sent him help the next morning. A large donation was received from the *Yuvaraja* (Crown Prince) of Mysore who had read the Swami's new book *Universe and Man* and begun to admire him.

One night there was nothing to offer to the Master and the Swami was lying in an easy-chair. This Brahmacharin with him asked him what was to be done. The Swami just replied, "*Let us wait and, see.*" At last, about nine in the night, a student of his own accord brought some flour, ghee, cocoanut and sugar for offering. Such was his trust in and dependence on the Master.

Speaking of the Master, the Swami would say :

"He had no egoism at all. He could seldom utter the two words 'I' and 'My'. In those cases where people use the two pronouns, he would place the palm on his chest and say, h e r e . A s His own ego was totally obliterated, the cosmic 'I' of God had taken hold of Him and manifested itself through Him. The Divine Mother Kali is incarnated in Sri Ramakrishna to grant knowledge and devotion to men and women of this age." And again : "When our religion lost its true spirit, the Lord incarnated Himself as Sri Ramakrishna who embodied the true spirit of Hinduism, and has clearly shown its universality and immortality".

His unique love and regard for his brother-disciples, particularly Swamis Vivekananda & Brahmananda

For his brother-disciples also the Swami possessed a unique love. He regarded Swami Vivekananda as the true representative of the Master, literally following the scriptural injunction that the brother-disciple should be looked upon as the *Guru*. Once he was seen praying, kneeling before a large picture of Swami Vivekananda in Madras, saying: *“O my beloved brother, thou art verily the true representative of the Master and it is thou who sent me over here to propagate His message. I am only carrying out thy commands. I beseech thee to see that no pride of self-esteem enters my heart or no thirst for name and fame peeps into my mind. All the burden and responsibility that thou hast placed on me are verily thine. Bless me that I may offer all the fruits of my work unto Him. Guide me always in the right path.”*

When the *Inspired Talks* of Swami Vivekananda was published, Swami Brahmananda, who possessed a keen practical sense, became interested in the publication, and gave suggestions as to how to push forward the circulation of the book. Besides other things, he suggested that a copy of the book be first sent to the “Hindu” of Madras, and after the publication of the review in that daily, another copy be sent to the “Bombay Chronicle”, with a copy of the “Hindu” review enclosed. Swami Ramakrishnananda differed on the point and said it was all unnecessary. As if to teach others a lesson, Swami Brahmananda suddenly withdrew his suggestion, saying, *“You are in charge of this Math and you are a scholar. It is all your business. I see it was wrong on my part to interfere in this matter.”* Saying this, Swami Brahmananda became apparently indifferent in this and other internal affairs of the Math. Swami Ramakrishnananda could not bear this. One morning, he approached Swami Brahmananda with

folded hands and kneeling before him said, “Maharaj, I have fallen from your grace. If you do not bestow your blessings upon me, who else will? What am I without your grace? Men like me may be created by the score out of mere dust by your wish. Will you not forgive me?” Then both the brothers became reconciled and everything went on happily as before.

The Ideal Monk fired by the Spirit of Renunciation & Service

To us, members of the Ramakrishna Order, he was the ideal monk who observed most thoroughly the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, both in letter and in spirit. He suffered continually from skin-eruptions of a dry eczematous type. No treatment was of much avail. Once an eminent physician following the *Ayurvedic* or Indian system of medicine, after examining him remarked, “Had he not been a strict *Brahmacharin*, the skin disease would have developed into *leprosy*”.

He was the embodiment of the spirit of renunciation and service. On a summer night he was sitting in silence on an open veranda facing the sea in front of the Ice House. The stillness of the hour, the music of the waves, the vastness of the ocean and the sky, raised his mind to a very high spiritual plane. Breaking his silence, he spoke to the *Brahmacharin* near him, “*My mind is soaring high. If I sit in meditation, it will merge into Samadhi immediately*”. He was one of those rare souls who gave up even the bliss of *Samadhi* for the sake of promoting the welfare of mankind. That is why Swami Vivekananda reminded him of his life’s mission, in his poem ‘To a friend’:

*Aye, born heir to the Infinite thou art,
Within the heart in the ocean of love,*

*'Give', 'Give away'—whoever asks in return,
His ocean dwindles down to a mere drop.
From highest Brahman to the yonder worm,
And to the very minutest atom,
Everywhere is the same God—the All-Love;
Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at their feet.*

This Swami Ramakrishnananda did fully. He used to say frequently: *"If we cannot love others, if we cannot serve others, what are we here for?"*

The Swami's inspiring writings and teachings

We are fortunate in having much of the Swami's writings, lectures and conversations in record. Having come to the land of *Sri Ramanuja*, he studied the life and teachings of the *Acharya* and the *Alwars* and wrote a classical work on the life of *Sri Ramanuja acharya* in Bengali. In his *Universe and Man*, *The soul of Man*, *Sri Krishna—the Pastoral and Kingmaker* and other works, he presents the ancient teachings in a deep and yet refreshing way.

Speaking of the goal of all religions viz. Self-realisation, the Swami observes: *"When man reaches the supreme state of Self-realisation and gains a permanence there, he is one with the eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient mind—the Universal Soul. That is, he finds himself to be Brahman. He is then above all troubles and turmoils of the world, free from all cares and anxieties, seeing himself in all, and all in himself, and feeling himself to be the one Soul of the entire creation."*

Like his Master, the Swami considered the path of *Bhakti* to be the easiest, best and most practical of all. But real *Bhakti*, is the essence of every religion: *"Throw away the idea of 'me' and 'mine' and give up all to God. This is what Christianity teaches, this is what*

Mohammedanism teaches, what Hinduism and Zoroastrianism teach, what every religious sect teaches.' 'All that takes man to God is morality. Whatever takes man away from God is immorality.' The essence of morality is elimination of selfishness.

"The mind is like a big mirror which gives perfect reflection but which has been so thickly covered with dust that nothing can be seen in it. The more you can rub off the dirt the more you will be able to see yourself in it. The more you can remove the least speck of dust the more you can get a perfect image of your true Self. What is that dirt which hides the image? Selfish desires." But realisation of God cannot be attained in a haphazard way.

"There is a regular method. First you must hear, then you must understand what you hear, and from understanding you go on to realisation. You must know where the light is; otherwise you may go in the opposite direction to it. Next, you must hear from a teacher how to go to it. Then you must understand clearly just what it is, and when you have understood, realisation will come. So long as it does not come, you must go on discriminating and trying to understand."

Describing the state of one who has realised his true Self, the Swami says: *"Nothing will ever be able to ruffle his mind. He may have to drudge under a hard taskmaster or he may be placed on a splendid throne, but he remains unmoved. Just as a farthing has no attraction for a millionaire, so the things of the world are as nothing to such a man; for he has found within himself an inexhaustible treasure, the treasure of eternal life, of infinite knowledge and unending bliss."* And this bliss he shares with his fellow beings.

Speaking of this great brother-disciple, Swami Shivananda said: *"He sacrificed himself on the altar of sacred duty—which was to worship the Master in all beings and help them to realise the Divine within. He was*

the staunchest, nay the most orthodox devotee of Sri Guru Maharaj. He knew nothing else. He was full of Him. His life, influence and wholehearted work in Southern India is the foundation on which all are building now. People will appreciate him more and more, day by day."

It was a source of regret to Swami Ramakrishnananda that he did not get a single Brahmacharin from South India. And once, he went so far as to say in this connection: *"All my work in South India was a failure. I was not able to attract a single young man there to take up the life of renunciation and service."* The fault did not lie with the Swami at all. Wherever it be, he was actually underestimating his work too much. Though from Madras proper the response in this regard was very poor, he had laid the spiritual foundation of the movement which with the help of householder devotees has been, since the Swami's passing, attaining phenomenal proportions—particularly in the field of education. Let us hope that the living ideal represented by the Swami will touch also the hearts of young bachelors in future.

May we all hold before us the noble example of Swami Ramakrishnananda and humbly follow in his footsteps, bringing greater and greater blessings to ourselves and to those who come in contact with us.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, July 1958-59)

Doing good to others is the one great, universal religion. It is only by doing good to others that one attains to one's own good. Our duty to others means helping others; doing good to the world. Why should we do good to the world? Apparently to help the world, but really to help ourselves.

Swami Vivekananda

God-Vision and Peace

Swami Vijnanananda

(Swami Vijnanananda was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He gave the following public discourse in Madras on 10th January, 1932, a few hours before leaving for Calcutta.)

Sri Ramakrishna said God-vision is the true aim of human life; for that alone can give us real and lasting satisfaction. Men hanker after the things of the world: wealth, sense enjoyments, honour, etc., in hope that these can give them happiness in life. But it is the experience of all that the pursuit of the worldly happiness has only a reverse effect on the mind. Not only do we fail to realise the desired end through them, but restlessness of the mind is increased, and we are rendered unhappier than what we were at the beginning. Through wealth and honour our egoism gets bloated up, and there is no greater obstacle in the spiritual path than egoism.

In fact, it is this egoism which is the product of ignorance that masks our vision of God. His glory is present everywhere, but we fail to see Him because we refuse to remove the veil of ignorance that obstructs our vision. Once Sri Ramakrishna was asked why is it that men do not see God. Thereupon He covered His face with a piece of cloth and said, *“Do you see me now? No, you cannot. Why? Because this cloth stands in the way, although I am present in front of you. Remove this veil of ignorance that stands between you and God, and He will become self-evident to you.”*

The supreme duty of man is to remember Him always, whether one is engaged in consciously repeating name or not. Every breath of ours should be associated with Him, in our mind. We should

feel that we breathe in God to make our inside pure, and we breathe out God to make our outside pure.

And the most appropriate moment to remember Him is the time of death, when we find ourselves deserted by everything that is near and dear to us in life. Due to the absence of holy thoughts in their mind, we often find people stricken with great fear in their death-bed. They visualise the messengers of *Yama*, the king of death, with horns, tails and frightening eyes, and cry out in great dread. But His name removes all such fears, and what is more, takes us forever beyond the pale of death.

At this point someone from the audience asked:

Question: “Was it for overcoming the fear of death that Sri Ramakrishna worshipped the Divine Mother”?

The Swami: “Well, you may put it in any way you please— to overcome the fear of death, or better, to realise the Supreme Truth. But really speaking, He had no need of all the Sadhanas he practised; for He was from the beginning perfect. A great soul like Him comes into this world, struggles and suffers only for our sake”.

Question: “What was your first impression of Sri Ramakrishna?”

The Swami: “He was like a child, simpler and purer than a child. He knew nothing, thought of nothing, except his Divine Mother. In His company one felt as if all the impurities of one’s mind were washed away.

Really, holy company purifies the mind. It is said that the great sage *Durvasa* once went to see hell where sinful souls were undergoing sufferings in atonement for their sins. As soon as the sage reached the place, all the suffering souls felt relieved and began to utter the names of the Lord. It seemed as if hell would be converted into heaven; for the holiness emanating from the sage was so potent that it consumed the sins of all those tortured souls. It is said that as the result of the sage’s visit *Yama* had to release all the occupants of hell and wait for fresh arrivals!

We should remember that everything has three aspects—name, form and essence. Until we go beyond name and form, we cannot reach the essence or the core of reality. And it is only when we reach the spirit, which is the underlying essence of everything, that we gain real peace."

Question: "But, Swamiji, we are wanting in faith, for our reason always seems to go against it. What do you say to that?"

The Swami: "You may say this in so many words, but in fact there is no one in this world who is absolutely lacking in faith. You cannot even take a single breath without faith."

Question: "Well, Swamiji, you were talking of peace and happiness resulting from the remembrance of God. But how can we have peace, seeing that there is so much conflict and suffering in the country due to trade depression and political struggles?"

The Swami: "Why do you make so much of these struggles that are going on in the outside world? They will continue always. Do you think that they will stop, after you gain your immediate end and the present phase of the struggle passes away? Certainly they will not. Restlessness arises not from these external struggles, but from our own internal hankering and our clinging to the things of the world. Even if God were to appear before us to bring peace unto our souls, we will refuse to recognise Him. For when He comes, He takes away our worldly possessions, and few of us are ready to make this sacrifice. Hence we prefer our wealth of the world to God's wealth of peace."

You speak of the political struggle. Look at Mahatma Gandhi who has thrown himself into the very midst of the fight. Do you mean to say that he does not cultivate peace of mind or remember God in the midst of all these external conflicts? Cultivate peace in the midst of struggle; that is the only course open in the world. It is better to recognise this aspect of Gandhiji's life."

Question: "Gandhiji's is an exceptional case. Can ordinary men be like him?"

The Swami: *"Why not? He is a man, and you too are one. Why can't you also be like him? If you are really feeling so very restless for the sufferings of the country, you will have joined Gandhiji's camp in search of mental peace. But then you will find what great sacrifices you are required to make. The truth is this: it is only by sacrifice that we can obtain peace. Whether it be in spiritual life or in political life, you cannot gain success without being prepared to make sacrifices. (Pausing a while he added in low tones) Indeed this world is built on sacrifice! "*

The Swami now wanted to conclude the talk, since he was to leave for Calcutta within a few hours. He was therefore asked to pronounce a benediction on the assembled devotees before he concluded.

He said, *"When a Sadhu meets a person he asks, 'Darsan saf hai? (Is your vision clear?)" The idea is that everything depends upon how one sees the world. Behind all the variety and multiplicity of the world one must be able to see the pure spirit of God. That is the true vision. People go to temples to have Darsan of God. That is only one form of it. We must be able to see Him even behind this, the mat lying on the floor. For underlying all names and forms is the all-pervading Spirit, brighter than gold, full of peace. May you all have this true vision, and the peace that accompanies it! "*

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, February, 1932)

Kannappa: The Devotee of Shiva

Swami Tanmayananda

(Swami Tanmayananda is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order.

In this short article '*Kannappa : The Devotee of Shiva*' the Swami recounts the story of Kannappa, the great Shaiva saint of Southern India.)

The devotee of God occupies a unique place in the world of religion and spirituality. By his intense and spontaneous love of God, he goes beyond all creeds of religion and radiates a blazing holiness. When this love dawns in him, he no more observes the formalities of worship. Scriptural injunctions can no more bind him. The power of his rapturous divine love is so great that the Lord remains seated in his heart by being bound by the chord of his love as it were. Sage *Narada* in the *Bhakti-Sutras* calls such devotees as '*primary devotees*' and their devotion as '*filled with God*'. So he states: 'In them there is no distinction based on caste or culture, beauty or birth, wealth or profession, and the like.'

With his love of God in heart, the bhakta says: 'What was the profession of *Vyadha* (hunter)? What was the age of *Dhruv*? What knowledge the elephant *Gajendra* had? What was the birth of *Vidura*? What valour did the *Yadava King Ugrasena* have? What beauty was there in *Kubja*? What was the wealth of *Sudama*?—All these devotees had the blessings of the Lord through their love. The Lord is satisfied with bhakti and never cares for any other qualifications.'

Saint Kannappa belongs to this class of devotees. Though he was born in a low caste and was illiterate, his extraordinary devotion to Lord *Shiva* makes him immortal in the realm of

Indian spiritual thought. He had demonstrated before the world that sincerity and complete dedication of self in thought, word and deed is the only way that can lead one to the feet of God and nothing else can stand in that way.

To tell the truth, Kannappa's worship of *Shiva* was, for all outward appearance, the most sacrilegious act which nobody could tolerate. But as it spontaneously flowed from the depth of his soul the Lord was greatly pleased with it. Today he is adored and revered as one of the sixty-three saints of *Shaivism* in Southern India. *Shiva* temples in Southern India contain Kannappa's images which are worshipped by millions. Though he was born sometime between the fifth and sixth century AD., the story of his hallowed life is quite fresh in the minds of men throughout the length and breadth of India.

The tradition goes that saint Kannappa was born to hunter parents in a place near the present *Kalahasti*, now a place of pilgrimage, in Andhra Pradesh. His father, who was the chief of a hunter community, commanded a high position among his men. The boyhood name of Kannappa was Tinnan, which means sturdy. As the boy grew up, he came to be a skilful archer and when he came of full age, he gave relief to his aged father by assuming his responsibilities as the chief of the hunter community.

One day, shortly after assuming his office, Tinnan went out for a shooting in the company of his two companions. While he was in the forest for hunt, he suddenly came across a wild boar. He chased it long and finally shot it dead. The fatigue of

hunting made him thirsty and to quench his thirst he was taken by his companions to a nearby stream.

There he came to know about a temple of *Shiva* in the adjacent hillock. The name of the Lord *Shiva* brought a thrill to the mind of Tinnan. It awakened the latent devotion of his heart. *“Let us go to the temple to worship”*, he told his companions who were astonished to see a sudden change that had come upon him. Tinnan proceeded to the temple with the wild boar on his shoulders. When he reached the temple, he ran mad and embracing the Lord addressed Him in endearing terms:

“O Lord, are you alone here? Is there no one to look after you? Do not the wild animals come and trouble you? Are you not hungry?”

He became very much concerned for the safety of the Lord and so he stood firm by His side with his bow and arrow in hand to protect Him. But the very next moment he thought of the hunger of the Lord. He was now in a serious dilemma. He could not decide whether he should stay there and protect Him from wild animals or go out to bring food for Him. He would go out a little; come back and stand by the side of *Shiva*; again proceed with anxiety to some distance; and again turn back and see whether somebody had done any harm to his Lord or not. Thus he went on for some time.

Finally he ran out to bring some food for the Lord and other materials for His worship. His companions were looking at his strange behaviour with awe and wonder. None of them could understand the divine madness that had taken hold of Tinnan.

Tinnan hurriedly roasted a few good pieces of the flesh cut out of the boar which he had carried, pressed the pieces closely between his teeth to make them soft, tasted them if they were good, and then kept them ready in a leaf plate for his hungry Lord. Having made the offering ready, he went to the river, filled his mouth with water for bathing the Lord, and brought some flowers collecting them in his matted hair for worship. With bow and arrow in one hand and the roasted flesh in the other, Tinnan hurried back to the temple. Then with his worn-out shoes he removed the old flowers and leaves from the body of *Shiva* and gave Him a bath with the water of the river brought in his mouth. He picked out the flowers from his matted hair and offered the same to the Lord. Finally he placed before the Lord the leaf plate containing the roasted flesh and started feeding *Shiva*. He was happy beyond measure for having satisfied the hunger of Lord *Shiva*. The day passed on and night set in. His companions were bewildered not knowing what to do. At last, they returned to their town to give the news of Tinnan to his father. Tinnan, on his part, stood by the side of the Lord *Shiva* with his bow and arrow in hand to protect Him from the evil spirits and the wild animals, and kept vigil throughout the night.

The second day, as it dawned, brought to the mind of Tinnan serious thought of the procurement of food to his beloved Lord. Just like the previous day, he went out to bring all necessary things for worship and offering. Meanwhile, the priest of the temple came as usual to offer his daily worship to Lord *Shiva*. What he saw in the temple horrified him greatly.

He was stunned to see the bones and pieces of flesh scattered here and there before the Lord. He grew angry and muttered: “*Who dared to do such wicked acts? How could one spoil the sanctity of the temple?*”, and so on.

Poor priest! How could he understand the ecstatic love and wonderful worship of Tinnan! He removed the bones and the pieces of flesh, cleansed the place, took his bath again and performed the worship with a disturbed heart and then returned home thinking all the while about the horrible scene that he had seen inside the temple.

Not knowing anything about the reactions of the priest, the hunter devotee, on the other side, went out for a hunt. He collected some good pieces of flesh, roasted the pieces as usual and pressed them between his teeth to make them soft, dipped them in honey and made them ready for his dear Lord. He now proceeded to the temple with water in the mouth, flowers in the matted hair, weapons in one hand and offerings in the other.

The same way of worship—removing the old flowers and leaves offered by the priest with his worn shoes, bathing the Lord with the water brought in his mouth, offering the flowers that were kept in his matted hair and finally feeding *Shiva* with the roasted flesh which was already tasted by him— was repeated again. In a sweet voice and with a fervent heart, he told Shiva,

“Today’s food is better than that of yesterday. O Lord! Please have it.” Tinnan observed no formalities, no rituals, no chanting of hymns. It was all love.

Meanwhile Tinnan's father, as he got all the news, came to the temple site, but he had to return home empty handed giving up all hopes of taking his beloved son back.

On the third day, the hunter devotee who kept his vigil over the Lord on the previous night repeated his wonderful worship and the priest, in his turn, noted all with greater surprise than before. The fourth day, too, went off thus. On the fifth day, the priest grew impatient. He could no more bear the sacrilegious acts done to Lord Shiva. He completely broke down. The devoted priest addressed the Lord in a choked voice: *"My Lord! I do not know the mischievous person who does all these unholy acts here before your very presence. You must put an end to this by your divine power."* Praying so, the priest returned home with a heavy heart.

The enactment of the divine drama was now nearing its climax. On the night of the fifth day of worship by the hunter devotee, *Shiva* appeared before the priest in dream and told him:

"My child! Don't be worried at heart. Don't look down upon the hunter who worships me and makes the place dirty. Hear from me his wonderful deeds. He is completely in love with me. His every action is full of love for me. All his deeds give me much satisfaction. Do you know how he worships me? He removes the flowers you offer with his worn-out shoes; but that touch is much more pleasing than that of the flowers; the water he spits from his mouth on me is more sacred than the waters of Ganga; the flowers he offers are far superior to those offered by the devas; and the roasted flesh which he offers me as food after softening it between his teeth is more delicious than the food

offered in Vedic sacrifices. The mantras and hymns of the rishis lose all importance before the sweet words he utters by way of conversation with me. I shall show you how he worships me with deep love. Regard not his behaviour, regard his motive alone. Tomorrow hide yourself behind me and watch the whole thing that will happen. Now give up your sorrow and be quiet." So saying Shiva disappeared.

The blessed day, the sixth day of Tinnan's divine worship, dawned. The priest who had kept himself hidden in the temple after finishing the usual worship was now anxiously waiting for the great moment when the Lord would show him, how His hunter devotee performed the worship. Tinnan was approaching the Lord with all the materials for worship. But what a strange sight! His appearance changed, his joyful countenance turned pale and marks of surprise and wonder were on his face. He saw the left eye of Shiva bleeding. All the things he brought for worship fell down from his hand. He turned into an image of sorrow. He fell down unconscious.

After a short time, he came back to his senses for a while but fell down again wailing and sobbing. He tried in many ways to stop the bleeding from the eye of the Lord, but failed miserably. He caught hold of the feet of the Lord and wept bitterly cursing himself all the while for his carelessness which had resulted in such a great calamity. For had he been present all the while by the side of Shiva, who could have dared to do this harm to the eye of the Lord? He was experiencing an unspeakable agony. Not knowing what would be the remedy, he was simply looking on! Then all of a sudden it flashed in his mind, 'eye in place of eye'. I shall give my eye to the Lord and stop the

bleeding. He became mad with joy for the discovery of the proper cure by which he would set the eye of the Lord right. Without a moment's hesitation he took the sharp arrow, plucked his eye and placed it on the left eye of the Lord which was bleeding—Wonder of wonders — at once the bleeding stopped. Tinnan jumped in ecstasy. But alas! the right one too started oozing blood. But now Tinnan knew the remedy. He had his other eye, which he could give to his Lord. Why should he worry about it! So he placed one of his legs on the bleeding eye of the Lord so that he might not miss the place later on when the plucking of his second eye was to leave him blind. But no sooner had he embarked on the act of supreme sacrifice than the Lord spoke out to His dear devotee:

“Stop Kannappa, my dear Kannappa, stop! Your devotion has gone deep into my heart Come, remain in my right side. You will always stay by my side.”

The hunter devotee's divine eyes opened. He then saw his dear Lord and was overwhelmed. His unparalleled devotion brought him the vision of Shiva in six days! Not only that, he obtained the rarest privilege of staying by the side of Shiva. The priest, who was witnessing the wonderful divine drama, felt himself blessed and praised the soul-stirring bhakti of the hunter. From that day, the hunter Tinnan came to be known as saint Kannappa.

(Kannappa in Tamil, means one who fixes the eye. Kannappa's unique devotion to Lord Shiva is an unforgettable saga of Indian religious lore. Saint Manikkavacakar yearned for Kannappa's devotion.)

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, August 1968)

The Story of Padmavinode

Ashutosh Mitra

M. [Mahendranath Gupta] had taken his pupil, the young Vinod Vihari Som, to Sri Ramakrishna. To devotees he was known as 'Padmavinode', and he used to live on Ramkanta Bose Street in Baghbazar. In his youth he had been a reputed stage actor, but like most actors, he had acquired many vices. Years later when I saw him, he had been almost ruined by his addiction to alcohol. He was said to have visited Balaram Babu's house from time to time to meet Sharat Maharaj whom he called 'Dost' (friend).

Once, around midnight, while we were all asleep, he knocked on the shutters of the closed windows at the Baghbazar Street house, calling out 'Dost! Dost!' We all woke up. Sharat Maharaj, guessing it was Padmavinode, warned us in an undertone not to answer or open the door, fearing that the racket he would create in a drunken state would wake up Mother. After calling out repeatedly, Padmavinode finally left complaining:

"Here I've come to you in the dead of night and you, my pal, neither got up nor responded." The next time he came, it was long past midnight. When we did not respond to his calls this time too, he stood in the street calling out to Mother, *"Mother, it's your son here, wake up Mother!"* Immediately after, he broke into a song in a melodious voice:

"O compassionate one!

Do arise, open your cottage door.

Here I stand blinded by the darkness, my heart trembling.

While happily you dwell indoors,

Leaving your son standing outside.

I'm calling out to you, Mother, does it not awaken you?"

As soon as the first line was sung, we heard the sound of a part of the closed shutters of the window in Mother's room upstairs being raised. Sharat Maharaj commented, "*Good heavens! He's awakened Mother*". As the fourth line was being sung, Mother's window was wide open. Curious, I raised slightly a part of the shutters of the window downstairs and watched what went on under the gaslight. At the sound of Mother's window being opened, Padmavinode rolled about on the street crying, "*Are you awake Mother? Have your son's cries reached your ears? Well, if you are up, here—receive my pranams.*" Then he got up, and gathering a little dust from that place, he put it on his head and went away, but not in silence. From afar the strains of his song flowed back to us:

"Cherish my precious Mother Shyama

Tenderly within, O mind.

May you and I alone behold Her,

Letting no one else intrude!

Let no one behold her except me,

No, not even my pal, (Sarat)."

Mother's shutters were downed. I too lay down with Padmavinode in my thoughts. Next morning Mother enquired, "*Who is this devotee?*" Having heard all, she remarked, "*But see, how keenly conscious he is!*"

On another occasion too Padmavinode came in the dead of night when we were fast asleep. His singing has awakened us.

I peeped out through the shutters and saw him standing in the street and gazing at Mother's room as before while he sang:

*“As burning grounds are so loved by you
I have reduced this heart to a burning ground;
So that, you, Shyama, denizen of burning grounds
May dance there eternally. ..”*

As before, Mother's shutters were heard to open at the sound of the song. Having obtained Mother's darshan, Padmavinode rolled on the street, as on the previous occasion, and then went away singing without creating any further disturbance.

Mother said next morning, *“Have you seen how keenly conscious he is (of me)?”* I protested, *“But he disturbs your sleep!”* Mother said, *“Never mind that my child. I just can't remain calm when he calls (me), hence I let him see me”*

Time passed. Padmavinode did not come again to disturb Mother's sleep. After quite a long interval, his young son came one morning to fetch Sharat Maharaj. On returning, he directed me to get ready for nursing, as Padmavinode was down with a severe attack of dropsy. Dr. Kanjilal, who was present, immediately managed to have the patient tapped and Padmavinode recovered then, but due to his addiction to alcohol soon there was a relapse. Again he was 'tapped' and this went on till surgery became inevitable.

An eminent British surgeon operated on Padmavinode most reluctantly but upon the patient's insistence, knowing that he would not survive. After the operation, I was permitted to attend on the patient on condition that he should not be given a grain of food. Padmavinode begged piteously for just one grape, which

I firmly denied him. Today, in my twilight years, his plaintive appeals are still fresh in my memory, and how bitterly I regret not having given him just one grape!

That terrible day passed. Someone had given me a copy of *'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'* to help me keep myself occupied—I could not leave the patient even to go and have my food.

Around one o'clock in the morning the patient announced, *"I shall not live any longer. You denied me just one grape that I asked for. Well, you've done what you thought fit, and now, friend, do just this for me—read to me about the Master. My end is near."*

As I read out to him from the Gospel, two drops of tears stood in the corners of the eyes, and uttering *'Ramakrishna'* just once, he passed away.

After the cremation in the morning, I returned to Mother's house at noon. I gave her a detailed account of the events.

She commented, *"That is as it should be—after all he's the Master's son. So what if he covered himself with mud? He has attained the lap of the One whose son he is."*

I remarked, *"I don't accept what I don't know"*.

Mother, smiling, asked, *"What is your opinion?"*

I replied, *"I believe only what I have seen, that of which I have knowledge. I know he obtained your darshan; also that you accepted his offering, his pranams. It is that which brought about this transformation in him, and for being a witness to it, I consider myself blessed."*

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, August, 2008)

Ten Commandments of Bhagavan Sri Krishna

Swami Vimalananda

In the Gita there are some passages which are directly addressed to the *Jiva* (a bound soul) in the second person singular number of the imperative mood, as *Vidhi*. Ten of these collected passages may be considered as the ten commandments of Sri Krishna. The last passage, though not in the imperative mood, forms a fitting conclusion and the first one, though the word of Arjuna, is necessary as a fit opening of this Decalogue. For, all commandments become effective only when the listener has a teachable attitude.

'O Krishna I am at Thy command. I have surrendered myself at Thy feet. Teach me and mould me.'

When the above attitude becomes genuine and firm in us, we shall distinctly hear the following 'ten commandments' addressed to us directly and individually.

1. Learn fully from Me.

'In this life you should work after acquiring a proper knowledge of the commands and rules of the Scriptures, through which I speak.'

We are told here that we should try to seek guidance directly from God through our purified minds and till we attain to that state we should seek it from the scriptures which represent God's perpetual revelation.

2. *'On no account you should grieve over anything whatsoever. No, you must not lament.'*

This is the second commandment of Bhagavan enjoining on us to be cheerful and to be equal to all situations. How are we to acquire

3. *'Strive always to remove sin and evil.'*

But we have no strength for it. What shall we do? The next commandment shows a way.

4. *'Shake off this mean spirit and arise.'*

The Lord is all-powerful. He is *satya sankalpah* (*resolved in Truth*). He has commanded us to shed all weakness and to exert manfully. Do we listen to His words? If we do, then certainly we shall have the strength to overcome sin and evil. Still we may say we have no method to shake off this 'weakness'. Answer to this is in the fifth commandment.

5. *'Resolve yourself to practise yoga. Yearn to get Me.'*

The Lord has commanded us to arise, and we shall arise. But we have to practise the method of union; and the root of this practice is to hunger and thirst after Him as He Himself has taught it. But usually we have not even the desire to seek Him. What shall we do?

6. *'This life and world of yours is impermanent and is joyless. So the way open to you here is to resort to Me.'*

The desire to realize God can come only when we are convinced that our life and its environments are impermanent and infested with misery. When we start to cultivate discrimination we will be becoming more and more aware of these defects of mundane existence. Then, of course, we should know what real discrimination is. The seventh commandment instructs about real devotion.

7. *'You must understand that all beings have their cause and seed in Me. You must endeavour to see all this as My form. You must fix once for all in mind that all creatures have their residence in Me.'*

Here the Lord has commanded us to despise nothing, as the Lord is the seed of everything. We are ordered to see in our relatives, neighbours and all living beings and in the whole of nature the underlying beauty of God, and to adopt an attitude of love and service in and through God. Here we may misunderstand meditation merely

as loving contemplation. So we have the eighth commandment which states that Love is not idleness.

8. *'You must do the allotted work always. You must correctly, thoroughly and joyfully do the appointed duty. Do it without any narrow selfish attachments. Do it as My work dedicating it to Me. Consider yourself a mere occasion of your work.'*

These commands will apply to anyone in any position and one may find it hard for practice. But a clue for its easy accomplishment is given in the next commandment.

9. *'Take for your support buddhi yoga and always give your mind to Me. Bring back and place all your running thoughts in Me and push your thinking faculty into My focus.'*

This may be taken almost as the final commandment and Karma Yoga can bear fruit only when we constantly endeavour to remain with God. Hence we get this stress on placing buddhi and mind always in God, with repeated endeavour whenever it strays away. After scanning these commandments it is natural that the jiva still feels diffident. The Lord who is in the innermost heart of all detects this and gives the greatest and the last commandment.

10. *'I promise, you are dear to Me.'*

We have no loss greater than losing faith in this commandment. Let us feel at every moment that we are dear and precious to the Lord, however unclean we may be. When this faith is strong, when we have the sincere conviction that the Lord in His infinite mercy and affection is ever watching us, seeking only for a moment when we whole-heartedly turn towards Him, with the earnest longing that He should receive us and hug us to His bosom, then—at that very moment—we are on the path to liberation and blessedness.

May these commandments make an appeal directly to us and render us strong, illumined and peaceful.

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, August 1953-54)

Leaves from an Ashrama
On Changing One's Commitment
Swami Vidyatmananda

To mark the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's birth, a parliament of religions was held in Calcutta during the closing days of 1963 and the first week of 1964. One of the presidential addresses was given by the writer Christopher Isherwood, who concluded with these words:

"At one of the Vedanta centers in the United States there used to be a number of old ladies who were quite remarkable for their gossiping, scandal mongering, and general malevolence, and somebody said to the swami in charge of the center: 'Swami, you are such a great soul and we believe in the power of Sri Ramakrishna. How is it possible that these ladies are such awful people?'

Thereupon the swami retorted, *'If they had not come to Sri Ramakrishna they would all have been murderesses!'*

I often think the same thing about myself. When I get discouraged with my slow progress or depressed by periodic descents into old habits of acting and thinking, there follows the thought, *'Yes, but I am better than before. I'm not at all what I was. I have escaped calamity. Perhaps I wouldn't have become a murderer, but I could easily have ended up an alcoholic, a psychiatric case, or a suicide.'*

I recall clearly when and how I shifted over. It was a New Year's Eve. As midnight sounded I was in a Vedanta chapel, before a glowing altar, in the company of good people, repeating God's name and wanting to start a new life. Outside

could be heard the noise of autos, the firing off of guns, the cries and the music—in short, the world. And I thought, *'I'm no longer with you. I have shifted over. I have made the break. I'm on this side now.'*

Of course, many times since then I have asked myself, *'What am I doing here? Have I really changed? Can one change? Trying to realize God seems so unrealistic and vague. Am I just wasting my time?'* Then I look at what I was and what I have escaped; and the proverb flashes through my mind, *'Just because one hasn't succeeded in getting nectar to drink, must one then resort to taking sewer water?'*

I know of course that being 'better' is not the goal. Improving is not at all the same thing as knowing. But on the other hand, neither is it nothing. I am thankful that I have changed sides; that I am and will remain a convinced searcher.

Once when I was wavering, thinking I'd have to go back, the *guru* declared almost fiercely: *'It works. I tell you, it really does work.'* In my moments of clear thinking I see that this is true. I have escaped disaster, am going in the right direction, and happily I don't have to be at all what I was before, ever again. What can that mean except that it really does work?

And there is an added benefit. Needless to say, being aware of one's own struggles and seeing how hard it is to fulfil one's own ideals, one becomes cautious about criticizing the *'lack of progress'* in others; for—as it should do—charity always begins at home.

Programme for July- August 2016

Sunday discourses begin
at the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Tel: 01628 526464 - www.vedantauk.com

There will be no discourses
During the months of July and August.

Manifest the divinity within you, and everything will be harmoniously arranged around it. By being nervous and fearful we injure others. By being so fearful to hurt we hurt more. By trying so much to avoid evil we fall into; its jaws.

Get the mercy of God and of His greatest children; these are the two chief ways to God. The company of these children of light is very hard to get; five minutes in their company will change a whole life; and if you really want it enough, one will come to you. The presence of those who love God makes a place holy, *"such is the glory of the children of the Lord."*

They are He; and when they speak, their words are scriptures. The place where they have been becomes filled with their vibrations, and those going there feel them and have a tendency to become holy also.

Swami Vivekananda

The world has its code of judgment which, alas, is very different from that of truth's.

Though all believe in immortality, they do not know that immortality is not gained by dying and going to heaven, but by giving up this piggish individuality, by not tying ourselves down to one little body. Immortality, is knowing ourselves as one with all, living in all bodies, perceiving through all minds. We are bound to feel in other bodies than this one. What is sympathy? Is there any limit to this sympathy, this feeling in our bodies? It is quite possible that the time will come when I shall feel through the whole universe.

Securing One's Own Good I can secure my own good only by doing you good. There is no other way, none whatsoever.... You are God, I am God, and man is God. It is this God manifested through humanity who is doing everything in this world. Is there a different God sitting high up somewhere? To work, therefore!

Swami Vivekananda

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The disciple must have faith in the guru teacher. The relationship with the teacher is the greatest in life. My dearest and nearest relative in life is my guru; next, my mother; then my father.

My first reverence is to the guru. If my father says, "Do this," and my guru says, "Do not do this," I do not do it. The guru frees my soul. The father and mother give me this body; but the guru gives me rebirth in the soul.

When through the guru's instructions and your own conviction you will see, not this world of name and form, but the essence which lies as its substratum, then only you will realize your identity with the whole universe from the Creator down to a clump of grass, then only you will get the state in which *"the knots of the heart are cut asunder and all doubts are dispelled."*

Swami Vivekananda

