

Vedanta

357 JANUARY - FEBRUARY 2011

What is Super Knowledge?

Swami Swahananda

God is also Mother

Hans Torwesten



Divine Wisdom

VIJAY: "How can one see God?"

MASTER: "One cannot see God without purity of heart. Through attachment to 'woman and gold' the mind has become stained-covered with dirt, as it were. A magnet cannot attract a needle if the needle is covered with mud. Wash away the mud and the magnet will draw it. Likewise, the dirt of the mind can be washed away with the tears of our eyes. This stain is removed if one sheds tears of repentance and says, 'O God, I shall never again do such a thing.' Thereupon God, who is like the magnet, draws to Himself the mind, which is like the needle. Then the devotee goes into samadhi and obtains the vision of God. God's grace is the ultimate help

"You may try thousands of times, but nothing can be achieved without God's grace. One cannot see God without His grace. Is it an easy thing to receive the grace of God? One must altogether renounce egotism; one cannot see God as long as one feels, 'I am the doer.' Suppose, in a family, a man has taken charge of the store-room; then if someone asks the master, 'Sir, will you yourself kindly give me something from the store-room?', the master says to him: 'There is already someone in the store-room. What can I do there?'

"God doesn't easily appear in the heart of a man who feels himself to be his own master. But God can be seen the moment His grace descends. He is the Sun of Knowledge. One single ray of His has illumined the world with the light of knowledge. That is how we are able to see one another and acquire varied knowledge. One can see God only if He turns His light toward His own face.

"The police sergeant goes his rounds in the dark of night with a lantern in his hand. No one sees his face; but

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Is Buddha Relevant for Us?

Buddha was an illumined soul. This is what Sri Ramakrishna says about him: “Do you know what a Buddha is? To become one with bodha (enlightenment) by continually meditating on it - to become transformed into Pure Intelligence Itself.”

Buddha’s answer to the cessation of all sufferings in the world is to follow the Noble Eight-fold way. Of these the first and foremost is to develop Right View or Right Understanding. This is known as *Viveka* in *Vedanta*.

What is Right View?

1. Right View is to distinguish between the real and the unreal, the right and the wrong, the good and the evil. Right View is not mere intellectual activity. It is to know that one is divine and strive to manifest it every moment of one’s life.

2. Right View is to understand and accept the four Noble Aryan Truths taught by Buddha: (a) Life in the world is full of suffering; (b) There is a cause of this suffering; (c) That it is possible to stop suffering; (d) That there is a path which leads to the cessation of suffering.

3. Right View is to know that the goal of life is to attain *Nirvana*, to manifest one’s Buddha nature.

4. Right View is to recognize the ephemeral, fleeting nature of *samsara* i.e., life in the world.

5. Right View is to understand the truth of suffering. Buddha taught us that life is full of suffering. He divides suffering into two types: existential and karmic. Existential suffering is common to every being and unavoidable. Existential suffering is inevitable, inescapable. Everything that is born must go through,

what the *Vedanta* calls, the six-fold change. Karmic suffering is the result of one's own evil deeds and can be avoided through right living.

6. Right View is to know that there is a way out and be free by treading it.

Most of us have a wrong view. The sad truth is, even though Buddha's teaching is available to all of us, we do not *wish* to have the Right View.

According to Buddha everything has a Buddha nature, all are potential Buddhas. Only few are aware of it.

Buddha says, "Verily, there is the unborn, the unarisen, the unmade, the uncomposed. Were it not for this unborn, unarisen, unmade, uncomposed, escape from this world of the born, the arisen, the made, the composed would not be possible."

Everyone is a future Buddha. Hence the goal of life can only be to manifest this Buddha nature and become free from *samsara*. Buddha called this attainment of the *unborn* and the *unarisen* as *Nirvana*.

Even after reading and hearing it is not easy to acquire Right View. It needs time, quietness and contemplation. Time and quietness is not what man has in today's world. A whirl of endless and mindless activity imposed by oneself as well as by the society in which one lives prevents one from developing Right View. Too much activity makes the mind even more restless; it creates endless desires; even worse it makes this world seem to be the only reality by preventing one from thinking of higher things.

Buddha taught *Nirvana* as the only way to put an end to all suffering. *Nirvana* involves contemplation accompanied by right living.

Karmic suffering rests solely on our shoulders. Each one must experience the results of one's actions. Though Buddha did

not speak of God, he, often, spoke of the law of Karma. He used to say that the results of one's actions follow one as the wheels of a cart follow the foot-steps of the bullock.

If individuals or nations are suffering they must accept their responsibility. Ignorance or disbelief cannot nullify the effect of the law of Karma. If man lives a moral and self-controlled life he will have some happiness in life but cannot escape old age, disease, and death. Some amount of suffering is inevitable even if one lives a noble life.

To cope with suffering one must have a higher vision. Dr. Jung discovered this truth many years ago. He said: "I have learned to see that the greatest and most important problems of life are all fundamentally insoluble. They must be so, because they express the necessary polarity inherent in every self-regulating system. They can never be solved but only outgrown."

(The Secret of the Golden Flower)

But for those who are sincere and willing to strive, Buddha has shown the way: *Nirovana*; there is no other way.

Nirvana

Nirovana is the *summum bonum* of Buddhism.

The literal meaning of the word *Nirovana* is 'total extinction.' Regarding *Nirovana* there is a great deal of ignorance. For many people *Nirovana* implies a state of nothingness, absolute annihilation.

Nirovana is beyond words and thought, beyond all description and expression. What is *Moksha* to the Hindu, the *Tao* to the Chinese mystic, Eternal Life to the followers of Jesus, that is *Nirovana* to the Buddhist. To attain to this *Nirovana* is the single thought that moves all Buddhists to follow the teachings of Buddha.

Nirvana is *Brahman*, the Ultimate Reality, the true nature of every being. This is what Buddhists call the Buddha Nature, inherent in every being.

Nirvana is the goal, the *summum bonum* of all Buddhists. *Nirvana* is one's true being, a state to be realized here and now; it is to go beyond all dualities.

The literal meaning of the word *Nirvana* is total extinction of *samsara*. To explain the suffering of *samsara* Buddha compares life in *samsara* to a flame:

"The whole world is in flames. "By what fire is it kindled? By the fire of lust, of resentment, of delusion; by the fire of birth, old age, death, pain, lamentation, sorrow, grief and despair it is kindled." This process of transmigration is *samsara*.

Nirvana is also explained as the extinction of the fire of lust, hatred, and delusion. As long as one is bound up by craving or attachment, this leads to the eternal cycle of birth and death. When all forms of craving are eradicated, Karmic forces cease to operate, and one attains *Nirvana*, escaping the cycle of birth and death. The Buddhist conception of *Nirvana* is overcoming the ever-recurring cycle of life and death and not merely an escape from sin and hell.

Buddha taught each to become what he really is down in his deepest being, what in moments of exaltation he discovers himself to be. All men want to get rid of suffering and want to be happy forever. Buddha said he would make them happy.

He said let men get rid of all hatred and malice, all indulgence in lower desires, all lying and evil thoughts. Let them substitute them for good thoughts and worthy desires, feelings of charity and compassion, and be serene and composed. Let men purify their thoughts and desires and so get in touch with that Universal which is everywhere in all things, and all the happiness they desire will be theirs.

The way to Nirvana

The way to *Nirvana* is the Noble Eightfold way. *Nirvana* alone can put an end to all suffering. Only a few people desire *Nirvana*. Even for those who wish to live happily in this world the noble eightfold path is the only way.

This Noble Eightfold Path is a practical guideline to ethical and spiritual development with the goal of freeing the individual from attachments and delusions; and it finally leads to understanding the truth about all things. Together with the Four Noble Truths it constitutes the gist of Buddhism.

Emphasis is put on the practical aspect, because it is only through practice that one can attain a higher level of existence and finally reach *Nirvana*.

Right View is the corner stone on which the whole edifice of spiritual life is built. Right View is the beginning and the end of the path, it simply means to see and to understand things as they really are and to realise the Four Noble Truths. As such, right view is the cognitive aspect of wisdom. It means to see things through, to grasp the impermanent and imperfect nature of worldly objects and ideas, and to understand the law of karma and karmic conditioning. Right View begins with the intuitive insight that all beings are subject to suffering and it ends with complete understanding of the true nature of all things. Since our view of the world forms our thoughts and our actions, right view yields right thoughts and right actions.

Right View should be followed by the practice of right determination and right living, etc., which we will discuss in the next issue.

(to be continued)

The Art and Science of Doing Work and Service

Sri Ramakrishna's devotee Sambhu Mallick once talked about establishing hospitals, dispensaries and schools, building roads, digging public reservoirs and so forth, for the poor. Sri Ramakrishna told him not to go out of the way to look for such works. Rather, "undertake only those works that present themselves to you and are of pressing necessity - and those also in a spirit of detachment."¹ He further told him that the realization of God was man's foremost duty. In fact, it was Sri Ramakrishna's constant refrain to tell his devotees to first realize God and then do all the service activities to their hearts' content.

Paradoxically, however, at many other times Sri Ramakrishna urged his devotees to engage in service activities for the support of holy people and also to help relieve the poverty and misery of their fellow men. For example, he was once discussing with devotees the cardinal tenets of the Vaishnava religion - a dominant sect in Hinduism - when Narendra, the future Vivekananda, was also present. The Master said that these were three: chanting the name of God, service of the devotees, and compassion towards all beings. As soon as the Master uttered the word 'compassion' as the third principle, he went into a spiritual trance. Regaining his outer consciousness a little, he said: "how can an *insignificant worm like man*, have compassion for others? It has to be *service*, not compassion, *recognizing every man as the manifestation of God* (italics added by this author)."²

¹ Swami Nikhilananda, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York, Ramakrishna Vivekananda Center), 142.

Thus, here we have two contradictory pieces of advice. On the one hand he discouraged Sambhu from establishing hospitals, etc. for the poor. On the other hand, while talking about the Vaishnava tenets, he also enjoined everyone to serve all beings, recognizing them as manifestation of God Himself. A careful reading into these two contradictory pieces of advice, 'chanting the name of God', which leads to God's realization, and Sri Ramakrishna telling Sambhu and others to first realize God, would dispel the seeming contradiction in his statements, for, both chanting the name of God and also realizing Him create a special state of mind and disposition whereby serving one's fellow beings becomes natural and spontaneous like breathing. The devotee does not even feel that he or she is doing any charitable work; it is the 'inaction in action' of the *Bhagavad Gita* (4.18). But without first realizing God, the doers of such activities are very likely to become egotistic. That is also why Sri Ramakrishna didn't like the word 'compassion' as being one of the tenets of the Vaishnava religion, because it often boosts the doer's ego, "an insignificant worm," as he called man. This was just to emphasize his point that one should be very humble, and not egotistic, in rendering any service. In his view, one established in the Self or God, is naturally humble, selfless, loving and helpful.

Sri Ramakrishna thus encouraged his householder devotees to undertake charitable activities, but only in the spirit of detachment and without expecting anything in return, name or fame. In Sri Ramakrishna's view a householder doing charitable work is actually doing good to himself or herself and not to others. "It is God alone that he serves - God, who dwells in all beings; and when he serves God, he is really doing good to

² *The Life of Swami Vivekananda By His Eastern and Western Disciples* (Kolkata, Ashrama), Volume 1, Fourth reprint, 2000, 138-39

himself and not to others.”³ This is the *Karma Yoga* of the *Bhagavad Gita*, which says: “Work you must, but without any thought of reaping any reward.” Work with detachment; work should be for work’s sake and not for what is in there for you, dedicating everything to God.

It is remarkable that many years later in his very illuminating lectures on *Karma Yoga* in the 1890s in America, Swami Vivekananda expounded the art and science of doing service on exactly the same lines as his Master. The title of one of the lectures was: We Help Ourselves, Not the World.⁴ Said he: “Our duty to others means helping others, doing good to the world. Why should we do good to the world? ... This world was not made that you or I should come and help it. ... Apparently, this is a very beautiful sentiment [because there is so much misery in the world], but is it not a blasphemy to say that the world needs our help? ... [For] in the long run, we shall find that helping others is only helping ourselves. ... The only help is that we get moral exercise [from doing so]. ... This world is neither good nor evil; each man manufactures a world for himself. ... We may all be perfectly sure that it will go on beautifully without us, and we need not bother our heads wishing to help it.”

“Yet we must do good; the desire to do good is the highest motive power we have, if we know all the time that it is a privilege to help others. Do not stand on a pedestal and take five cents in your hand and say, “Here, my poor man,” but be grateful that the poor man is there, so that by making a gift to him you are able to help yourself. It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. Be thankful that you are allowed to exercise your power of benevolence and mercy in the world, and thus become pure and perfect. ... Be grateful to the man you help, think of him as God.

³ *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 671

⁴ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata, Advaita Ashrama), 1, 72 – 80)

Is it not a great privilege to be allowed to worship God by helping your fellow men?"

How accurately the Swami captured the thoughts of his Master and laid before the world the art and science of work, which forms the underlying philosophy of *Karma Yoga*! His lectures on this subject are classic, which need to be read again and again to understand their full implications. Besides, these lectures provide a very good commentary on Sri Ramakrishna's teachings, making them clearly understandable to an average reader.

As a point of fact, nobody knew human nature as well as Sri Ramakrishna did. People often talk glibly about building hospitals and schools if they, like Sambhu Mallick, had had the money. But once they get money they forget about the misery of others altogether. Once when a devotee said that before seeking God one has to have enough money for his family and also to give in charity, the Master burst out: "What? Do you mean to say that one must save money and then seek God? And you talk about charity and kindness! A worldly man spends thousands of rupees for his daughter's marriage. Yet, all the while, his neighbours are dying of starvation; and he finds it hard to give them even two morsels of rice; he calculates a thousand times before giving them even that much. The people around him have nothing to eat; but what does he care about that? He says to himself: 'What can I do? Let the rascal live or die. All I care about is that the members of my family should live well.' And they talk about doing good to others!"⁵

However, Sri Ramakrishna also praised those people who undertook charitable activities. For example, when he visited Pundit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, a great scholar, writer, and philanthropist of the nineteenth century Bengal, he told him that

⁵ *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 757

he was glad to see that his activities of providing food and education to the poor were inspired by compassion. Sri Ramakrishna also said that if “these activities are done in a selfless spirit they lead to God. But most people work for fame or to acquire merit. Their activities are not selfless.”⁶ Here Sri Ramakrishna was also implying, which Swami Vivekananda too did in his lectures that charitable activities are the means to God realisation and not the end.

At any rate if one wants to do charitable work, it has to be selfless and without attachment, for, after all, all misery comes through attachment, not through work. As soon as we identify ourselves with the activity, we feel miserable. For example, if my neighbour’s beautiful Persian Vase worth a thousand dollars is stolen I will express my sympathy to him and there ends the matter. But if my own vase worth only fifty dollars slips from my hand and breaks I will feel miserable for the next two months. Why? It is because in the former case I do not identify myself with my neighbour’s vase, while in the other case I identify myself with it. This "I and mine" is the root of all misery.

The art and science of work that both Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have put forth before us are based on *Vedantic* scriptures and also on the *Bhagavad Gita*. According to these scriptures, God, or rather the *Atman* or the Self exists in all creatures; It pervades everything. The first verse of the *Isha Upanishad*, for instance, which Mahatma Gandhi thought to contain the essence of Hinduism, provides this very idea: “All this - whatsoever that moves on this earth and is changeable - should be covered by the Lord. Rejoice in Him through renunciation; covet nothing, for all belongs to the Lord.”

The Koran says that there is no God but Allah. *Vedanta* says that there is nothing that is not God, and all of us are God’s

⁶ *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 101

different expressions, and this universe is one big family of brothers and sisters all interconnected. The Master once said that there are three levels of devotees: superior, mediocre, and inferior. "The inferior devotee says 'God exists, but He is very far off, up there in some heaven.' The mediocre devotee says, 'God exists in all beings as life and consciousness.' The superior devotee says, 'It is God Himself who has become everything; whatever I see is only a form of God. It is He alone who has become *Maya*, the universe, and all living beings. Nothing exists but God.'"⁷ He also said that to attain such an understanding of God, one must reduce one's ego to zero.

Sri Ramakrishna illustrated this by the allegory of going up to the roof by negating each step of the staircase saying, 'this is not the roof, this is not the roof,' and by so doing one reaches the roof. After having reached there, one comes down, and finds that the substance which the roof is made of, is the same by which the steps and floor are made. There is thus, first negation, and then affirmation: first one negates the world to realize God, and having done so, one affirms the world and finds all its beings are nothing but the manifestation of God.

(to be continued)

The nature of the mind can be changed by chanting the name of the Lord. Gradually desires and doubts cease and the mind dissolves into its causality. Then there is none to think or imagine. Waves of desire in the mind show that the mind is active; the mind becomes pure only when it becomes waveless.

Swami Adbhutananda

⁷ *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 264-66

God is also Mother

Prologue

Man is only a bridge, a transition to something new, which he can only surmise. Never have we felt this more strongly than today, as we are in a distinctly transitional age. Much that is old is dying and new things are born. And many things are coming back – not as a simple repetition, but on a new, higher level of the spiral, on a higher level of becoming human, which is always at the same time also becoming God.

And we again make the discovery: God is also *Mother!* The divine also has a female dimension! Asia has always known this: in India the *Shakti*, the female creative energy, has always been assigned to a high level, and also the old cultures and religions of the Near East and the Mediterranean area worshipped the Great Mother. In our case also the umbilical cord to her has not been severed in the course of centuries, in spite of the patriarchal nature of society, in spite of the supremacy of the male-dominated prophetic-biblical religion of Jews and Christians. The vacuum was partly – but only partly! – filled by the rise of Mary, the Mother of God, who from scarce historical and biographical material slowly blossomed into the Queen of Heaven: for the iconoclast Puritans always a puzzle and an annoyance, for the human psyche a natural necessity. And what Mary was for the ordinary people and the saints, Sophia, the divine wisdom, which already occurs in the Old Testament, was for those mystical thinkers, for whom the too-masculine-evolving Christian Trinity could not embrace the female dimension of God.

A lot of this will be touched upon again in this book, memories of the past. But we do not want to pursue any religious

archaeology here, in order with scientific coolness and triumph to show the reader here the arm of a Demeter, there an already somewhat weathered breast of Ishtar or an “interesting” aspect of some Gnostic Sophia speculation. Let the scholars take the Mother to pieces, treat her as a mere object - in doing so they only remain in the old male delusion that one can *master* everything by dissection and analysis. Today we are standing before the ruins of this exclusively masculine world. Of course this too was and is the play of the Divine Mother, the dance of her creative and destructive energy, because as *Maya* (a word that is related to the English “mass” and “measure”) she is also the measuring out and dividing force, which makes the many out of the One. She is in no way just chaos, just a warm mother’s lap, just an amorphous sameness, which first has to be given form by the male spirit. In the Old Testament, concerning the feminine “Wisdom” it is written that she “arranged all things by measure and number and weight” (Wisdom 11,21), that she “drew a circle on the face of the deep,” that she “assigned to the sea its limits” (Proverbs 8, 27-29). One of the male prejudices is that only the male creator God is capable of this, who has to overcome the “female” deep. Dividing, retraining and mastering is indeed doubtless a male undertaking, but here the danger of one-sidedness for the male clearly emerges in this case: without the female “helper,” without the wisdom and *Shakti*, the creative activity of the man is often destructive. And the mother gets her revenge for being looked down upon as merely “Nature,” as “Mother Earth,” for being continually raped, discouraged and reduced to a mere object. If she today rises up, then it is no longer as an interesting “object,” *about* which one can write, but again as Thou, as a living force, with whom one can speak and communicate. One can also talk to her, just as generations of Christian have prayed to the Father.

Yes, God is also Mother, and as Mother especially near, a

nearness which is God's motherly dimension. But we have driven nothing away so much as this direct *nearness* of God, we have all too often made Him into a Prussian general, an unapproachable, naturally male Super-Ego, before whom we may appear only in our proper Sunday suit or in uniform. We have practised standing to attention before Him, we have always had to look up to Him, who is in any case invisible. The arrival of His Son has not essentially changed the matter for many, as the Son was at once raised up to become the Pantokrator, the King of Kings, indeed to become the stern Judge, often not to be distinguished any more from the Father God Jahwe. When, as an eight-year-old at the rehearsal for the first holy communion – we were standing arranged in two rows and moved slowly towards the communion rail – I inadvertently got out of step, I received a loud slap on the ear from the chaplain. The connection between this Church authority distributing slaps on the ear and the divine Father in Heaven was quickly produced for me as a child; only I thereafter had some difficulty of properly categorising the consumption of the sweet sacrificial lamb as a sign of immense divine love. It at least became clear to us children: one must never get out of line and begin to sing something, clap our hands or laugh with joy. Religion was a frightfully serious matter, and any false move was immediately punished. I know that fortunately today much has changed a little, but even today I would feel it to be necessary, to add to the old call of the Church, *Maranatha!* – Lord, come soon! - quietly or loudly to add the prayer: You too come, Mother, come soon and bring life again, real Life into this all too intellectual religion!

Nothing will be able to prevent the return of the Divine Mother, which is connected with the rise of the feminine. And we said already: it will not be a question of mere repetition. If it were only a matter of simply claims to domination, of a return of the

legendary matriarchate, the development would only be going round continually in a circle. Moreover *domination* actually begins with the man. One does not need to be clairvoyant to see the negative sides of the patriarchate, which has fixed its stamp on human history for a couple of thousand years already. But it would be blindness only to want to go back again to prehistoric times; back to an allegedly unhistorical mother's bosom. Only someone who believes in the *totality* of the creative energy, the *Shakti*, knows the joy of the World Mother has in dialectics. The male aspect could not have dominated without Her will, and the "male aspect" in this case means, from an archetypal point of view, especially: analytical thinking, consciousness as bright as day and mastery of nature. Anyone who is convinced that nothing happens without the Mother's will, also knows that this "male" urge to dominate is one of her steps in Her cosmic dance.

But it is only one of the many aspects of *Shakti*, and at each *part* of the whole the temptation arises to seek to become absolute. The male element probably needs some time, when it can rid itself of the feminine-motherly, in order to come to itself, and this almost never happens without a struggle. The male creator God must also leave the feminine "ground" in order to recognise Himself. Only through the opposite does he succeed in obtaining consciousness of his own existence. But no victor pose can be preserved for ever. Anyone who plunges deeper into reality, will soon encounter the relativity of and interaction between such archetypal forms: Kali, for instance, who stands on her divine husband Shiva and as *Shakti* dances the cosmic round dance of creation and destruction. The feminine is in no way just the one who in lying down, the horizontal one, the ever-enduring, the vessel, the only-natural, the chaos, the inert resistance of matter, the stool from which the masculine consciousness rises in triumph. When the French painter Delacroix represented in a

picture an allegory of the revolutionary force and freedom, he painted a woman. And when the gods of the Hindu pantheon were at a loss, because they were being attacked by demons, they finally gathered together all their strength and energy and from it produced the form of a divine woman, who as Durga-Kali defeated the demonic forces. If today we proceed to cross the threshold of a new age, we are not ill advised, if we let ourselves be led by the power and inspiration of the Divine Mother.

She has always been there, she does not have to be born: She is the unborn *per se*, the one who has given birth to everything, who by the *Maya* power has brought forth gods and worlds since all eternity and taken them back into herself. She must however be born *in us*, in our hearts. Her splendour must burst forth there.

In dense darkness, O Mother, Thy formless beauty sparkles;
Therefore the yogis meditate in a dark mountain cave.

In the lap of boundless dark, on *Mahanirvana's* waves up borne,

Peace flows serene and inexhaustible.

Taking the form of the Void, in the robe of darkness wrapped,

Who art Thou, Mother, seated alone in the shrine of *samadhi*?

From the Lotus of Thy fear-scattering Feet flash Thy love's lightnings;

Thy Spirit-Face shines forth with laughter terrible and loud!

Ramakrishna, one of her great sons, often sang this song of the Bengali poet Ramprasad and in doing so often went into ecstasy. One has to be a little mad in order to be able to understand Her completely, or more precisely: in order to be able to know that one can never grasp Her completely. "Who is there that can understand what Mother Kali is?" are the first words of

another Bengali song. "Even the six *darshanas* (the six systems of Indian philosophy) are powerless to reveal Her." The words of the Egyptian Isis also apply: "I am everything that was, that is and that will be ... And a mortal has not yet been able to reveal what is hidden under my veil." Even in the veneration of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, something still lingers from the atmosphere of questioning and wondering: "Tell me, who is this?" – an echo not least of the *Song of Songs* in the Old Testament and the question: "Who is this that looks forth like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army with banners?" (6,10).

The masculine will never come to rest in the face of the feminine secret, which for him is the "Other" and can therefore give him a taste of transcendence and the fathomable. It is true that we spoke of the *nearness* of the Divine Mother, we said that in this nearness the female dimension of the Godhead, her love and tenderness are expressed. Yet the more we draw near to the Mother, the more we soon have to admit that in her totality she is also always the opposite of everything. She is near to us, but she is also that which always escapes us - especially our conceptual "male" understanding, which would like to put everything into its pocket as a mental "possession," as an acquired object established for ever. The Mother does not let herself be acquired. She does not let herself be stowed away in any drawer. One of her many names is *Durga*, and that literally means: the *Unattainable*.

Of course I too am not free of this conceptual thinking, by means of which the Mother as *Maya* catches us in her net. We have this spider's web constantly before our eyes, which prevents us from seeing the simplest thing direct, as it is. No, *Maya* is in no way just the "female seductive" being that ensnares man - she blinds man with what he thinks is typically male. The net that he

lays over reality, his conceptual thinking and his value judgements, may have been important for many stages in human evolution, but reality itself is not caught in this net. *Maya* gives man weapons in his hand, with which he defends himself and with which he conquers the world. But in the end these weapons turn against him and prevent him from pushing forward to the heart of reality. And when he finally perceives the complete one-sidedness of his excessive rationality and intellectuality, he organises seminars on naturalness and attempts to learn spontaneity again in intense courses. I can hear the Mother laughing. She likes to give toys to her children, who consider themselves to be so terribly grown-up, and amuses herself with them.

She was also probably amused, when I started researching in the library about her – researching into the “Unattainable!” It is astonishing, Mother, how one has so nice and neatly distributed your divine omnipresence over so many card indexes: mythology, theology, comparative religion, psychology, sociology, etc. You probably looked at me laughing, as I ran around with a face as red as beetroot, busily seeking traces of you and lugged whole piles of books home. It is astonishing how much one has written about you! Or more precisely about the conceptions that people - especially men! - have formed about you. Well, I need hardly hide it: I too am a male being and will write this book as a man. But I am at least aware that Your *Maya* Power determines our thought and that all our male mental skill – whether we appear as philosophers, theologian or depth-psychologists – is nothing more than the slight ripple on the surface of your unfathomable sea. Everything, from our physical body to the highest intuitions of the mind, comes from *Shakti*, the Divine Mother. And when we offer Her something, we only offer what comes from Her. A poor Italian acrobat, who possessed nothing, once wanted to offer

something to the Holy Virgin Mary – not a little intimidated by the expensive presents, which others had laid at the feet of her picture. As however he possessed nothing except his acrobat's skill, he turned a summersault before her and made a grandiose headstand – and it is said that the Mother accepted the gift with a loving smile.

I am afraid that his book will be nothing more than a series of - successful and less successful - headstands, and I can only hope that the Mother will also accept them with a smile. We are all "Our Lady's acrobats," whether we are aware of it or not, we are all actors in her great game. She provides the masks, the numerous roles and disguises, which all come from the tailor's shop of her great *Maya*, from the crudest forms produced from an almost amorphous material to the great god-men, who show us the way back to the divine homeland. She is the eternal playful instinct of the Absolute, who plays out all the possibilities of Being, she is *Ananda*, God's joy, she is the *life* of the Ground resting in itself. She teaches us that God is not only strict and just, but also tender and playful, lively and effusive. "When he marked out the foundations of the earth, then I was beside him," says *Wisdom* in the Old Testament, in the Book of Proverbs, "and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always, rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race" (Proverbs 3, 22 ff). And in a Bengali song it sounds still more effusive: "Companion of the Absolute, O Mother, you are engrossed in the joy of play! You are drunk with the wine of joy, Your feet falter, but never lose their balance. The Absolute, your husband, lies at your side. You press him to your breast, you seem quite beside yourself. The universe trembled under your feet. Madness is in your eyes and in those of your husband. In truth, the world is joyful! ... Oh dark blue Mother!"

Yes, one has to be a bit mad in order even to come near

Her and feel her breath. And one must be naked, when one appears before the Mother. Did not Ramakrishna himself take off his Brahmin's sacred thread, which reminded him of his belonging to a caste, when he prayed to her? We have to go through the gates of the underworld and give up all clothing, just as the Mother herself did as Ishtar, when she wanted to release Tammuz from the underworld. She had to let the guards rob her of all her jewellery and clothing and appear before the goddess of death naked and unprotected. God himself shows us how one has to uncover oneself before God. "Before entering the Holy of Holies you must take off your shoes," Franz Kafka once wrote, "not only your shoes, but everything, travelling clothes and pack, and the core and the core of the core, then the rest and then the rest and then also the light of the eternal fire. First the fire will be sucked up from the holy of holies and lets itself by sucked up by it, neither can withstand it."

(to be continued)

This world is neither yours nor mine. It is God's creation. Those whom you think to be yours really belong to God. You have to live in this world with this belief as the background. Wife, son, daughter, relatives, friends all are but so many creatures of God. Whatever you have to do for them, do so with the idea that you are serving *Narayana* in those forms; then you won't get attached too much. And along with all this you must have your power of discrimination wide awake. The discrimination between the Real and the unreal gives rise to detachment.

Swami Shivananda

What is Super Knowledge?

Often there is much discussion about Sri Ramakrishna's idea of *vijnana* (Super Knowledge). The *Bhagavad Gita* mentions the combination of *jnana* and *vijnana* in two slokas, slightly differing in meaning. According to the commentators, in verse 6.8, *jnana vijnana tripta atma* has been interpreted as with knowledge of scriptures and with satisfied mind as a result of realizing the Truth of Reality. In verse 9.1, the expression *jnanam vijnana sahitam* is used and the meaning given is with experience of *Brahma-jnana*. *Jnana* here means the Supreme Truth because it is with realization. So in both places, *vijnana* is Experience but *jnana* is the theoretical knowledge in one and Knowledge of *Brahman* in another. Normally, *jnana* means theoretical knowledge as well as realization of it.

Sri Ramakrishna explains *jnana* and *vijnana* in his original way. *jnana* is a method of negation. His example is when a person goes to the roof, step by step, he negates the steps as 'not this.' At the end he reaches the roof, and realizes that both are made of the same substance. He sticks on to his realization achieved in *nirvikalpa samadhi*. But a few of such illumined persons can come down, they are called *Adhikarika Purusha*, a person with special commission. Swami Saradananda mentions this in his book, *Sri Ramakrishna the great Master*. Sri Ramakrishna says that Divine Mother keeps him alive for Her work. Why? Because if they don't live, who will teach the world? He also says that great souls like Shankara keep a little ego to remain for propagating knowledge. A little of ego-feeling helps the person to come out of *samadhi*. He himself used to say, "I shall smoke, I shall drink, also I shall enjoy

the *lila* of God." This may be coming out of ecstasy (*Bhava*) from a lower *samadhi*. But in the other *samadhi* the problem is how not to merge totality, in *Brahman*. It is done through retaining an ego-sense or through the Mother's Will. God is *Mahamaya*, but still Mother's Will is mentioned, because all manifestations are in Her domain.

In *Vedanta*, the continuation of the body of the realized soul, without dying after 21 days, is because they are in a stage called *jivan mukti*. An illumined soul continues because of his *prarabdha*, the results of action that gave birth to the body. It is inertia, as a dead star giving light even after a thousand years, or a water source though stopped gives water for some time.

Many of the philosophers believe in *Videha mukti*, or liberation at the fall of the body. Their argument is that a little ignorance is necessary for the continuance of the body. There is another explanation. That such illumined saints live in *sahaja samadhi*. That is, though they are in *samadhi*, they are aware of the relative world. *Sahaja* means natural, easy or part of the Real nature. In his book, *Sri Ramakrishna the great Master*, Swami Saradananda mentions that at the end of his *sadhanas*, Sri Ramakrishna was asked by Divine Mother to remain in *bhava mukha*, that is on the threshold. It is to remain between Reality and relative reality. If a person has one leg inside and another outside the door by which he can see both sides, that will be on the threshold. It is also called *Tatastha*, that is one leg on the bank of a water-shed, and another in the water.

Now the question is whether it is a higher stage or a lower. Sri Ramakrishna says, the saint comes a few steps down to be aware of the world and its needs. This he calls, expertness, who can go up and down at will. The Shankara vedantist's argument is, if we see the Spirit, we do not see the matter and vice-versa. But if the saint sees only pure consciousness, he will be oblivious

of sufferings in the world. If his mind is down, experiencing matter then he will be an average man. That is why he must be in *bhava samadhi*. Which evidently maybe considered a lower state than *nirvikalpa samadhi*. But it also shows the expertness of the saint who is equally skilful in both the states. Hence it should be a higher condition. Sri Ramakrishna called it *vijnana*.

Sri Ramakrishna in one place says, that to get the total weight of a bel fruit, both the kernel and shell must be weighed together. Then we get the full weight of the fruit. That is, we must accept both the Absolute or spiritual and the material manifestation. Because of this, many scholars think it is the *Vishishta Advaita* position of Ramanuja. But he and Swami Vivekananda and Holy Mother asserted that it is still *Advaita*, because the basis of the material world also is the same *Brahman*. The appearance of the Substance as appearance is false, temporary, behaviouristic, or relative. But in its Real nature it is *Brahman* Itself. When we stress the temporary aspect and negate it, we can call it *Mayavada*, but when we see the basic Reality of the manifestation, we call it *Brahmavada*. Both the positions have been covered by Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. The *Bhakti* dialecticians of early days stressed the *Mayavada* and charged the Advaitins as illusionists, like the Buddhists and Shunyavadins. Of course it is a one-sided view of the *Advaita* position. The saying “*Brahman* is the Reality, the universe is appearance, unreality, illusion, or temporary. The *jiva* is nothing but *Brahman*,” gives the idea of *Brahman* as the basic Reality.

Sri Ramakrishna told about two types of devotees, *jivakoti* and *iswarakoti*. When the *jivakoti* merges in the Totality, he does not come back. But the *iswarakoti* who is either an ever-perfect soul or avatar, can come back. Sri Ramakrishna includes all illumined souls as eligible for retaining their existence through the Will of God. They keep the Teaching alive. Swami

Brahmananda says the real spiritual life begins after *nirvikalpa samadhi*. That means, in that stage the saint, *jnani* or *bhakta*, enjoys the bliss of God. He often remains with devotion or knowledge in his daily life.

The expert man of illumination (*vijnani*) who cares for the world is mentioned in an anecdote of Sri Ramakrishna. In it he said three friends saw a walled garden. And when they went to enquire why so much mirth is going on there, two of them joined the mirth and did not come back. But the third one saw it but remembered the suffering humanity and came back with the message. Swami Vivekananda considers the first two to be of higher stage but the third one is worshipped by humanity because he felt for them and sacrificed his life for them. He said the greater men of experience have gone unknown, Buddhas and Christs are a second class, from that standpoint.

When both *jnana* and *ajnana*, the two thorns are thrown away, then it is called *vijnana*. When one realizes that God is there, it is *jnana*. But when it is known more thoroughly, it is called the *vijnana* stage. This is another analogy of Sri Ramakrishna.

There is another controversy about Sri Ramakrishna's simultaneously seeing the spirit and matter. It was shown when he saw the *puja* utensils, door, etc. as full of consciousness. The philosopher's position that both cannot be simultaneously experienced contradicts it. But in the subtle spiritual affairs the experience of the highest type of saints is the Truth. Philosophers will have to find out the explanation. That is how Sri Ramakrishna harmonizes the two positions. Genuine experience in these states are to be recognized. Swami Jagadananda, one of our great monks with scholarship and realization, used to tell that arguments go this far but the sayings of the great saints are the standard, that cannot be controverted. Swami Dhyanananda in his reminiscences, in *Prabuddha Bharata* (June 2010, Swami

Jagadananda in Vrindavan) notes, “Although a *jnani*, Swami Jagadananda was intensely devotional at heart. He used to say that those who come to Sri Ramakrishna will not be *janis*, merely, they will be what Sri Ramakrishna called *vijnanis*; they will have both *jnana* and *bhakti*.”

Swami Vivekananda said, in *Bhakti yoga*, to be cheerful always. You will be nearer to God by remaining cheerful always. When we are sorrowful, we have forgotten that God does what is best for us. In this context a question arises, did God create the world because of desiring something? If so, then he becomes defective. To save Him from that charge, Shankara says the world is a *vivarta* or positing the world on God. Ramanuja explained it as the *lila* or sport of the Lord, which does not show any feeling of lacking something. So both these positions satisfy this particular question. Sri Ramakrishna said God can be both with form and without form. He accepted both the Absolute and the Relative, water and the permanent ice in the highest region which never melts. He perceived it, and this perception is the ultimate proof. That is why one of the proofs is *apta-vakya* and *sastras*, the words of the great teachers and the scriptures, which are records of the experiences of saints. That is why we accept Sri Ramakrishna's opinion that *vijnana* is a higher stage being more proficient to deal with both the Real and its appearance, which is experienced as real.□

The Best Offering - Nivedita

Samuel Noble was a popular figure at Manchester. His extraordinary culture and religious bent of mind brought to him numerous visitors. One morning, while he was seated in his study, a missionary, who had spent many years in India went to see him and after having a hearty talk he was leaving when he noticed the young daughter of Samuel. Attracted by the bright features of this girl of ten he tenderly caressed her and said "Darling! The distant India is going in search of her God. It is quite possible that girls like you may also be called there to work. So get ready." These strange words of an unknown man about a foreign country and his suggestion to get ready to go there produced a thrilling effect in the young child. She rushed to her father's bookshelf and pulled out an Atlas to see the country spoken of. What impression the tiny red patch of the British possession in the map produced in her may be left to the imagination of the readers, but Margaret intuitively felt that she must go to that far off land and work there. All this happened about the year 1877.

Years rolled on. After finishing her education Margaret took up a teacher's job in London. But a born educationist like her could not rest content with a routine life of pushing the three Rs. into the heads of a number of unwilling children. She felt that her energies might be better spent in educating the poor and neglected children of the slums and turn them into useful citizens. It was a daring experiment, which called forth a lot of her energies and patience, and very little of material gain came in return. But Margaret was made of a sterner stuff, not to be shaken by

obstacles. She reduced herself to the level of the children and guided them step by step. And this work became an absorbing passion with her. Perhaps she would have lived and ended her life for those children, had it not been for a strange accident.

Novelty is the law of life. No one wants to have the same order of things always. Even in the field of religion, if it is a set of dogmas preached in the same way for centuries, many people get tired of it. They feel bored to death. Margaret and her friends were of this type. Though brought up in an orthodox atmosphere, she could not understand why God should be approached only as father. There were many such questions that these people discussed among themselves. When they came to know that an Indian monk was meeting some people in a friend's house, they felt curious. Why not go and see how this person would meet their questions? He had a successful lecturing tour in America and his abilities might be tested as to how he would solve their knotty problems. So Margaret went to see the person, who with his supreme power, at once opened up a new vista of life before her.

“The time was a cold Sunday afternoon in November, (1896) and the place, it is true, a West-end drawing room. But he was seated, facing a half-circle of listeners, with the fire on the hearth behind him, and as he answered question after question, breaking now and then into a chanting of some Sanskrit text in illustration of his reply, the scene must have appeared to him, while twilight passed into darkness, only as a curious variant upon the Indian garden, or on the group of hearers gathered at sundown round the *sadhu* who sits beside the well, or under the tree outside the village-bounds. There were about fifteen or sixteen guests, intimate friends, and he sat amongst them, in his crimson robe and girdle, bringing news from a far land, with a curious habit of saying now and again ‘Shiva! Shiva!’ and wearing

that look of mingled gentleness and loftiness, that one sees on the faces of those who live much in meditation, that look, perhaps, that Raphael has painted for us, on the brow of the Sistine Child.”

Thus she first met Swami Vivekananda and was charmed by his personality. There he was as a representative of India about which she heard even as a small girl. When he began to talk, she found that that country was not merely in search of God, but had found Him, and withal could show Him too! Otherwise, how could he talk and argue with them in such a convincing manner? While most of the listeners felt that the Swami was only presenting old truths in a new fashion Margaret thought differently. She had an inexhaustible stock of questions and she accepted him as her Master only after he stood the test. But the Swami did not stay there long. He soon left London on a tour in Europe to return after six months. During that period Margaret had her bookshelf filled with the scriptures of all religions, and made a comparative study and a deep one too. As if preparing for a war of words, when the Swami returned. But she had to lose the battle, since the Swami was always basing his arguments not on dogmas of any particular sect but on the core of all religious ideals, where he had direct access through personal experience. This had a marvellous effect on her. Margaret was also highly influenced by his rationalistic approach to all problems religious or otherwise. Besides that he had given vivid pictures of the rich culture of India, the land of sages and saints, the land which produce wonderful books on religion and possess famous pieces of architecture. Margaret was captivated and felt drawn toward India. But how to express the wish?

Soon came the opportunity. She wanted that the Swami should see the institution of her creation. The Swami accepted her invitation and she began to explain what a hard job it was to handle the little children entrusted to her care. Suddenly the

Swami remembered his own country and the miserable lot of thousands of children steeped in ignorance. So he sighed in deep anguish, "who will work for the numerous boys and girls of Mother India?" Yes. Who would identify oneself with the people, supposed to have no culture and civilisation? That task of training the mother, who will educate her children, has to be done only by a woman. It required a woman, intelligent, highly cultured, bubbling with energy and with a heroic temperament to face all difficulties. While listening to the words of the Swami, Margaret saw before her mind's eye the contrasting pictures of the glorious land of Sita and Savitri and the wretched millions of the modern times who had well nigh lost all their legacies. She, who had developed intense admiration for the land, felt that the opportunity had come to offer herself to serve there. This offering was not an impulsive reaction to his moving words but the genuine expression of her heart that really loved India.

The Swami began to unfold and explain to her his scheme for the regeneration of India; how he proposed to spread education in every nook and corner, this being an essential condition to make them understand the real plight. It was a very hard task and only people with exceptional abilities were suited for that. The Swami wanted to wait and see how far her enthusiasm would continue. So her departure to India was not immediate. But when the Swami saw she was determined to come, he wrote to her later on, "Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work of India. What was wanted, was not a man but a woman; a real lioness, to work for Indians, women especially.

"India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and above all the Celtic blood make you just the woman wanted."

The Swami explained to her the numerous hardships she was to encounter in India but she was not frightened by the difficulties mentioned by him. She left England, and on 28th January 1898 She touched the shores of the land which she adopted as hers. About that time some American friends of the Swami had also arrived and all of them stayed near the Belur monastery near Calcutta for some months. It was a memorable period for Margaret. The Swami began the task of enlightening his friends about the rich spiritual heritage of his motherland. As a brilliant conversationalist he could keep his audience spell-bound by his inexhaustible flow of "interpretation broken but rarely by question and answer in which he would reveal to them some of the deepest secrets of the Indian world." It was a marvel to the listeners and particularly to Margaret, "how such a harvest of thought and experience could possibly have been garnered, or how when once ingathered, could have come such energy of impulse for its giving forth." Day by day she got greater insight into the Indian life in which she was going to plunge herself later on. They were unforgettable days for her and she has left the record in her great book, *The Master as I saw Him*. Soon after, on the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna, Margaret joined the Order of Ramakrishna with the name of 'Nivedita,' the dedicated one. From that time onwards, a new chapter began in her life.

She had to become completely indianised, not only in the name, for shouldering the responsibility of the service of India. Indian dress, the Indian way of eating, sitting and sleeping on the floor and even ordinary manners of life had to be adopted, since the Master made her understand that a western worker for India should develop a deep Indian consciousness, which was absolutely necessary for meeting larger questions of the land. Nivedita gladly adjusted herself to all these. Born in a different country, accustomed to a different way of life and habituated to

a higher standard of life, it must have been a hard task for her. But to a person of such strong will like Nivedita, it was not so.

The training would be incomplete, if the disciple did not see for herself, how the spiritual life lay at the background of Indian life. So the Swami took her along with some other friends on a trip to some ancient places of pilgrimage, Amarnath, Kedarnath and Badri in the Himalayas. This pilgrimage was of a great educative value to Nivedita. She found that the people in spite of crushing poverty could face life cheerfully because they had not lost their faith in religion. Besides this, she saw her Master at close quarters and learnt many lessons. She began to imbibe his spirituality combined with deep reverence for his mother country. Every word he uttered and every action of his were of special import to her. Through him she came to know of his illustrious teacher Sri Ramakrishna. But she could not think of him as a separate person. To her they, the Master and the disciple were a single soul, each contributing to the other. So she used to call herself as ' Nivedita' of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Order.

Soon came the time, when Nivedita had to take up her task of serving Indian womanhood. In a most humble way a small school was started on the Kali Puja day of the year 1898, with prayerful blessings of Sri Sarada Devi, who is "Sri Ramakrishna's final word as to the ideal of Indian womanhood." Born educationist as she was, she easily won the affection of the pupils who attended the school. In her own characteristic way her method of instruction was often seasoned with delightful stories culled from the Indian epics and touching anecdotes from the history of India. Her purpose was to arouse a strong national consciousness. She wanted the lost India to come back and be again the same old land of glory. If her Master gave the vision of his Motherland regaining her lost throne, Nivedita took up the

task of working for that. The students who had the good fortune to study under her, were seeing before them a great marvel. To her the great nation with all its ancient traditions was a living reality. So whenever she began to speak of the heroic women of India, she used to be filled with admiration, that very soon she was silent, lost in the meditation of the heroine. The illustrious Swami had earned the name of 'the patriotic monk of India' and there appeared the true disciple of his, to whom even the adopted land was a blessed one. The very dust of this country was sacred to her. Even trifles of the ordinary Indian home opened to her new visions of the land and its immense potentialities for future greatness. She repeatedly told the students, "India should be your thought, your dream and your worship. She should be your holy mantram."

We are told that with these words she would actually take out her beads and make the Japa!! Her Identification with India was so complete that she never felt herself as a foreigner. It was always about "Our Land" and "Our People" that she spoke. The institution which has grown up since then stands as befitting memorial to the beloved daughter of India, with the name Sister Nivedita School, guiding the lives of hundreds of girls in a typical Indian setting with the best that could be had from the West.

But it was a time, when the awoken India wanted badly people who could infuse the national spirit in the young minds. Nivedita had all the necessary qualifications - genuine love for the land capacity to present before her listeners the ideals they had to adopt, the spirit of renunciation and service. Very quickly she was found associated with the struggle for freedom for India. She had very active life touring the length and breadth of India arousing the young minds by her lectures. This terrible strain on her, affected the already shattered health badly and in the year

1911 her earthly career came to a close, when she was just forty-four.

Worshippers of the Divine Mother gather rare flowers and fruits to offer at Her feet. These are collected with much care and dressed up with all love, for they stand as expressions of devotion. Swami Vivekananda loved India with all his heart. It was as if the personification of the Divine Mother to him. He gathered a very rare flower full of charm and fragrance in a distant land and left it as noble offering at the altar of Mother India. No better offering he could make than Nivedita, who possessed the rare combination of the heroic temper and motherly heart. □

Worldly desires have taken up permanent residence in the mind. Sometimes they float on the surface of the mind, and sometimes they are so hidden that it seems they do not even exist. But the closer you are to God, the more you will see the knots of desire hidden in the mind. The more our body and mind are purified, the more the dirt and dross which have accumulated during thousands of lives will be stirred up and will challenge your spirituality. The energy generated by spiritual disciplines forces the impurities to leave the mind, their fort. How can they cope against the power of the Lord's name? You see, the desires are very shrewd. They take possession not only of the mind of a person but his sense organs as well. As soon as desire is aroused in the mind, the sense organs are awakened. The eyes want to see, the ears want to hear, the tongue to taste and speak, the nose to smell, the body to feel. The hands want to work and the feet carry the person to where the object is

Swami Abhutananda

The Birth of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna (cont.)

The first part of this article appeared in issue 353

The Kathamrita takes shape

With all these developments in the background and having been encouraged by the letter of the Holy Mother of 26 November 1895, M. began to make serious efforts to give a living narrative form to his notes and, perhaps after several progressive attempts, succeeded in perfecting the methodology of presentation by early 1897. At this stage, it is evident that M. read out some portions to the Holy Mother, though with great hesitation, to get her blessings.

It may be noted that M. was initiated with a Mantra by the Holy Mother, as instructed by Sri Ramakrishna in a dream, and she had initiated his wife some time earlier. She wrote on July 4, 1897 in Bengali, a highly encouraging and reassuring great letter to a diffident M., which reads: "May you live long, dear son. Whatever you have heard from Him is nothing but the Truth. You need not feel any diffidence about it. At one time it was He who had placed those words in your custody. And it is He who is now bringing them to the light of the day according to the needs of the times. Know it for certain that unless those words are brought out, man will not have his consciousness awakened. All the words of His that you have with you - every one of them, is true. One day when you read them out to me, I felt as if it was He who was speaking.

The commencement of the English version first

Encouraged by this great and authoritative letter from the

Holy Mother, and also assured by Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother in dreams and visions, M. cast off most of his hesitancy and was determined to publish his narratives.

In Bengal, especially in Calcutta itself, there were, however, a few journals devoted to different sects and view points. They all did not look at Sri Ramakrishna in the same way. Only few were sympathetic. But probably none, except the *Tattvamanjari* edited by Ramachandra Datta since July 1885 to propagate the message of Sri Ramakrishna, would look upon him as an Avatara. That some hostile forces were gathering can be seen also from the fact that though Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was allowed to be celebrated on a grand scale in March 1897 on Vivekananda's return to Calcutta from the West, the authorities refused permission to hold the celebration in February 1898.

In a letter written from U.S.A. in 1895 to Swami Ramakrishnanandaji at Alambazar Math, Vivekananda wrote: "Did Sri Ramakrishna come for this or that particular individual, or for the world at large? If the latter, then you must present him in such a light that the whole world may understand him. You must not identify yourself with any Life of him written by anybody, nor give your sanction to any. There is no danger so long as they do not come out associated with our name... say yea, yea to all and stick to your own."

In the circumstances M., finally thought of making a trial by publishing the narratives in English first in the *Brahmavadin* at Madras to see the reactions of the people in general, though, perhaps, he had some ready material at hand in Bengali which he had read out to the Holy Mother. By March 1897 Swami Ramakrishnanandaji had gone to Madras to start a Ramakrishna Math there deputed by Swami Vivekananda on his return to Calcutta on 19 February 1897 from the West, as per his promise to the people of Madras on his way. So, M. decided to send the

matter to Ramakrishnanandaji, whom he knew very intimately, in instalments for publication in the *Brahmavadin*. He got the material ready directly rendering into English from his Bengali notes, and despatched the first instalment to him around September 1897 either in Ms. form or as a printed pamphlet/leaflet. If it was in Ms. form, he must have got a few early prints of it from Madras, before publication in the journal, for sending to Swami Vivekananda, and later for review in two journals in Calcutta.

The two pamphlets sent to Vivekananda

Anyway, M. sent a copy of the first leaflet to Swami Vivekananda who was on a tour in the northwest of India. Swamiji was very pleased to find that M. was making a stir. This was long after he had heard him in February 1889 at Antpur. Swamiji wrote to Swami Brahmananda from Murree on 10 October 1897: "I see that Master Mahashaya has buckled to work after such a long time. Give him my special love and greetings. To see him, with his feminine retiredness, stirred to work, my courage has gone up by leaps and bounds. I am writing to him tomorrow even."

When Swamiji reached Rawalpindi, he wrote to M. "Dear M - *C'est bon, mon ami* - now you are doing just the thing. Come out, man! No sleeping all life; time is flying. Bravo! That is the way.

"Many thanks for your publication - only I am afraid it will not pay its way in a pamphlet form.... Never mind, pay or no pay - let it see the blaze of daylight. You will have many blessings on you and many more curses - *vaisa hi sab kal banta hai saheb* (but that is how all things are accomplished, sir!)

"This is the time - yours in the Lord, Vivekananda."

The material of this pamphlet was published in the *Brahmavadin* in its issue for October 15, 1897. By then, M. had got ready his second pamphlet/leaflet or early prints of his second instalments from Madras, the material of which was published in the *Brahmavadin* in its issue of 16 November 1897.

From Dehradun Swamiji wrote his second famous letter to M., on 24 November 1897.

“My dear M - Many thanks for your second leaflet. It is indeed wonderful. The move is quite original, and never was the life of a great Teacher brought before the public untarnished by the writer's mind, as you are doing. The language also is beyond all praise, so fresh, so pointed and withal so plain and easy.

“I cannot express in adequate terms how I have enjoyed them (evidently Swamiji is referring to both the pamphlets or leaflets). I am really in a transport when I read them. Strange, isn't it? Our Teacher and Lord was so original and each one of us will have to be original or nothing. I now understand why none of us attempted his life before. It has been reserved for you, this great work. He is with you evidently.

With love and namaskar.

Vivekananda.

P.S. The Socratic dialogues are Plato all over; you are entirely hidden. Moreover, the dramatic part is infinitely beautiful. Everybody likes it, here and in the West.

The reviews and the identification of the pamphlets

Enthused and emboldened by Swamiji's and Swami Ramakrishnanandaji's. letters, appreciating and authenticating his work, M. sent the copies of his two pamphlets/leaflets together for opinion or review to Ramachandra Datta and Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyaya, who reviewed them in the December 1897 issue of their journals, *Tattvamanjari* (in Bengali), and *Dawn* (in English)

respectively. The *Tattvamanjari* hailed M. as Sri Mahendra Nath Gupta, worthy of sincere reverence, the recipient of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva's powers and his dearest servant. While introducing M., the review in Bengali says: "There is a saying that if burning coal is covered with a cloth, it will gradually burn up the cloth and manifest itself with its natural glow. Similarly is Gupta Mahashaya (M.). From the day the Lord (Sri Ramakrishna) left us winding up his divine sport, having been hidden by the veil of time for a dozen years, M. has just begun to shine forth. The Lord used to say that Gupta Mahashaya was a modest and shy devotee. He is a person of extremely peaceful nature. Though he is greatly learned in the modern Western knowledge,... nobody has seen him showing himself off eloquently. We have always known that he has a pure character. ...Twelve years ago what attitude he cherished in the presence of the Lord, seeing no change whatever in that altitude in him even today, we are indeed very happy." It also adds further that M., being a great scholar, could have made use of the material to serve his own ends; but instead, in keeping with his firm faith in the Lord, he has with unsparing effort brought out the teachings of the Lord in the form of these two booklets for the enlightenment of the general public. In the course of the review it was suggested: (1) It would be better and more appropriate to publish the material in original Bengali; and (2) Instead of publishing piecemeal in pamphlets, it should be published in volumes.

Fortunately, the review gives the contents of the two pamphlets, the first relating to the Master's conversation with Pratap Chandra Mazumdar at Surendra Nath Mitra's Garden-house at Kankurgachhi, and the second with Pundit Shashadhar Tarkachudamani at their first meeting, and refers also to some salient points in the conversations.

Now, since the place, persons, and contents of the first two instalments published in the *Brahmavadin*, and these two reviewed pamphlets are identical, we may safely conclude that the materials sent to the *Brahmavadin* were brought out in the form of pamphlets for personal circulation to elicit opinion, since it was M.'s first attempt to publish his diary-notes elaborating them into a live narrative.

We may also safely conclude from the dates of Vivekananda's letters to M.; 17 October (about the first pamphlet received by him in first week of October), and 24 November 1897 (regarding the second pamphlet received by him about the second week of November), that M. must have sent to Swamiji the same pamphlets at the time he sent them to the *Brahmavadin*, or a little earlier. The two instalments related to conversations of Sri Ramakrishna on Sunday 15 June 1884 with Pratap Chandra Mazumdar; and Wednesday 25 June 1884 (Ratha Jatra day) with Pundit Shashadhar Tarkachudamani, and were published in the *Brahmavadin* on 15 October 1897 and 16 November 1897 respectively. So though the original pamphlets sent to Swamiji are not now traceable, the material of the pamphlets is safely there in the *Brahmavadin* issues and the Gospel volume.

We may also note here that M. contributed two more instalments to *Brahmavadin*, which were not made into pamphlet form. They were published on 1 February 1898, and 16 May 1898, relating to the visit to Vidyasagar on Saturday, 5 August 1882, and the conversations with the Bauls from Shibpur and visitors from Bhavanipore at Dakshineswar on Sunday 3 August 1884. No more instalments appeared in the *Brahmavadin*. M. had written them in current English and the instalments were published under the title 'Leaves from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna - According to M., A Son of the Lord and Servant.' M. had no readymade material for a volume and sent the material in

instalments as and when ready. Hence, the title Leaves from the Gospel seems to be appropriate.

M. had also sent the pamphlets to Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyaya, the editor of *Dawn*. He published the first instalment of the Gospel in its December 1897 issue, and made these highly eulogistic comments: "We are extremely thankful to our friend M., whom we may introduce to the reader as an unassuming gentleman of high spiritual attainments, and a devoted Servant of his Lord and Master, Sri Ramakrishna, for having given us an opportunity to publish what we may call 'A Modern Gospel' - which breathes throughout a deep catholicity in reference to all forms of religious discipline and therefore at war with not one of them." Satish Babu also wrote in the same issue a long article entitled: 'On the Value of Sri Ramakrishna's Gospel.' Thereafter from 1898, both *Dawn* and *Light of the East* (another journal run by Satish Babu) published the Gospel instalments taking the material from the *Brahmavadin*. When the first volume of the Gospel in Bengali was published in February/March 1902, the *Light of the East* published a very appreciative review in its December 1902 issue under the title 'A Popular Exposition of the Fundamentals of Hindu Religion and Philosophy.' The review opined that the Gospel was faultless, popular, factual and attractive.

The commencement of the Bengali Gospel

After receiving the highly encouraging and authenticating letters from the Swamis Vivekananda and Ramakrishnananda, and seeing the highly appreciative reviews in the *Tattovamanjari* and the *Dawn* M. cast aside all hesitation and misgivings and jumped into the arena with full determination, never to look back. Now, from early 1898, he began to concentrate his efforts to give the narration in the original Bengali, keeping intact Sri

Ramakrishna's very words as far as possible. Not that there were no more adverse criticisms; there were from several quarters and from different angles. But the great assurance received from the Holy Mother, the authenticating letters of Vivekananda and Ramakrishnananda, the two eulogistic reviews, certainly some appreciations, orally, though not recorded, from the disciples and devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, his own deep convictions, and the supreme merit of the work itself far outweighed all adverse criticisms and M. took them in the stride.

So M. began to work on the Bengali version and contributed instalments from early 1898 onwards to various Bengali journals and they started appearing in about eighteen magazines, though not simultaneously. They are: *Tattvamanjari*, *Hindu Patrika*, *Punya*, *Navya Bharat*, *Bamabodhini*, *Sahitya*, *Rishi*, *Udbodhan*, *Arati*, *Prayas*, *Sahitya-Samhita*, *Alochana*, *Pradeep*, *Janmabhumi*, *Utsaha*, *Anusandhana*, *Pravasi*, and *Banga darshan*. Among these were those belonging to the Brahmos, Vaishnavas, and conservative Hindus.

We may note here that M. had no ready-made material, but prepared each instalment from time to time for publication, and when a number of instalments were published in the journals, they were gathered up into a volume. Thus the first volume in Bengali was published by Swami Trigunatitananda from the Udbodhan Office in February/ March 1902 (on Sri Ramakrishna's birthday) at the instance of M. under the title *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita*. In a similar manner the second volume followed in 1904. Whether the same methodology was applied further on, needs investigation. However, the third volume was published in 1908, the fourth in 1910 and the fifth and the last in 1932, a few months after M. passed away on 4 June at the age of 78, the proofs of which he had completed seeing just the previous day.

The first four volumes were dedicated to the Holy Mother, and from the second volume onwards M. himself published the volumes from *Thakur-bari* (the Lord's House) as M.'s house at 13/2 Gurupasad Chaudhuri Lane, Calcutta, became known after the installation of the *Mangal-ghata* of Sri Ramakrishna there for worship by the Holy Mother in 1887. This house is presently called the *Kathamrita-bhavan* (the Kathamrita House).

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Volumes

Though M. did not contribute any further instalments to the *Brahmavadin* in English, he had not given up the idea of publishing a volume, rendered directly into English from his notes (not translation of the Bengali volume). This is known by a footnotes in the Bengali journal *Navya Bharat* in its issue for February-March 1903. The note is given after publishing an instalment of the Kathamrita. It says that the first volume of the Kathamrita is available at 13/2 Guruprasad Chaudhuri Lane, from Sri Prabhas Chandra Gupta at Rs. 1/-, and then adds that the English rendering of the Kathamrita - Leaves from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna - will soon be published in book form. It also reproduces in full Vivekananda's letter to M. dated 24 November 1897, which not only serves to authenticate M.'s writings, but also indicates that Swami Vivekananda had seen two of those very instalments, in pamphlet form, which were published by the *Brahmavadin*.

However, the volume in English with the title *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* could be published only in 1907 through the *Brahmavadin* office, Madras. M. had no time to publish it then as he was concentrating on the Bengali rendering. He had also his duties in the schools as a teacher and a proprietor. Moreover he was particular that he himself should prepare the English version in order to bring out the spirit of the Master's ideas, and did not

like that it should be merely translated from the Bengali volume. To someone who translated portions of the Gospel in English, M. wrote, "The translation of Sri Kathamrita in the *Morning Star* (a journal run by Avyaktananda) is, I regret to say, not satisfactory to me. Being an eye-witness I naturally want the spirit to be kept up in the translation. Moreover the report of a meeting should not appear in a mutilated form."

When the second volume in Bengali had been published in 1904, M. found some leisure and began to prepare the manuscript for a volume in English version, probably at the proddings of Swami Ramakrishnanandaji who was in charge of the Ramakrishna Math at Madras and was associated with the *Brahmavadin* as well. He added the freshly prepared material to the already published four instalments in 1897-98, all rendered in English directly from his Bengali diary-notes, and sent it to Swami Ramakrishnanandaji for publication.

In the meanwhile, M. saw that Sri Ramakrishna was being accepted on a level with incarnations like Sri Krishna, Buddha, and Jesus Christ, One Reverend Fletcher Williams of the Unitarian Church had written to the *Indian Mirror*, Calcutta, on March 8, 1899, "I have no doubt whatever that he (Sri Ramakrishna) is possessed of the prophetic power, I should suppose that as in the case of other great souls, his influence proceeded rather from what he was than from what he said. There must have been a strangely magnetic charm about his personality, and in this respect he no doubt resembled Jesus of Nazareth." Max Muller and other savants from the West had also placed him on an equal footing with Christ. Romain Rolland also did it in 1928 in his biography of Sri Ramakrishna. Moreover Sri Ramakrishna himself had told that Christ had merged into him after he had a vision of him. So M. had given up all hesitation in presenting Sri Ramakrishna as the latest, if not the greatest, Avatara to humanity

for the present age. Hence, when he prepared the manuscript for the English version for publication in 1907 by the *Brahmavadin* Office, he adopted the biblical terms of expression for verbs such as - 'He saith,' 'talketh,' 'Verily, verily, I say unto you' etc. May be the very title, Gospel, was chosen by him for this reason in 1897 itself.

However, these expressions were changed in the second edition published in 1911 by the Ramakrishna Math, Madras, Swami Ramakrishnanandaji doing the revision at the request of M. himself.

Around 1907 when M. sent the manuscript to the *Brahmavadin* Office he had also sent a copy of it to Swami Abhedananda at New York, along with a copy of Vivekananda's famous letter of 24 November 1897, for publication there, authorizing him to edit it if and where necessary. Accordingly, editing the manuscript and changing the biblical terms of expression, and adding some more material taken from the first two volumes so far published in Bengali with his own translation, Swami Abhedananda published a volume of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* from New York Vedanta Society in 1907. It was republished by him later in 1939 in Calcutta, under the title *Memoirs of Sri Ramakrishna* from the Ramakrishna Vedanta Math.

In 1912, Swami Trigunatitananda published a reprint of the 2nd edition of M.'s own English version of the Gospel brought out by Madras Math in 1911. The Ramakrishna Math, Madras, again reprinted its 1911 edition under the title *The Condensed Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* at a highly subsidized price in 1978.

Swami Nikhilananda, head of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Centre, New York, translated all the five volumes of the Bengali *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* into English for the first time independently, and, arranging the material in a strictly chronological order, published it in one sumptuous volume in

1942 from the New York Centre entitled *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, with a Foreword by Aldous Huxley and a long introduction by himself on Sri Ramakrishna and other relevant matters. It was also brought out in its first Indian reprint by Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, in 1944, substituting a valuable introductory chapter on M., the author, for the Introduction by Nikhilananda. Both these have gone into several editions. Swami Nikhilananda also brought out two abridged editions, one of which was published by M/s Harper & Sons in New York and London in 1948 under the title *Ramakrishna - Prophet of New India*, and the other abridged edition was published by the New York Centre itself under the original title. The Gospel translated by Swami Nikhilananda received the acclamation of the entire scholarly world, of the devotees, and followers of Sri Ramakrishna all over the globe. □

(concluded)

You must serve all the members of your family, wife, children, and other relatives, but you must know in your innermost being that God alone is your nearest and dearest. Apart from Him there is none whom you can really call your own. That does not mean, however, that you must neglect your family; you must serve them to the best of your capacity, considering them to be the children of God, or to be so many parts of God Himself, entrusted to your care. You must talk with them about God and try to instil in their minds a true love for God.

Swami Shivananda

Book Review

W*ho are You? Really!* A travel-guide to life By Stuart Rose
Published by O Books, Winchester, UK and Washington,
USA

Readers of this magazine may remember a previous review of a book by Stuart Rose entitled *Sublime Love: Essay and Anthology*, which was reviewed in the July-August 2008 issued of *Vedanta*. Dr Stuart Rose has now had another book published with the intriguing title *Who are You? Really!* The impetus for compiling the book came from talks and guidance a learned Indian Swami gave at various times and places.

This book examines the question of lifestyle, how we can improve our way of life. First of all self-examination is necessary, then self-analysis and consideration of relationships with those around us. Then the writer sets out 112 pointers to a brighter lifestyle, ending with a discussion of the decision to make a change. *Who are you? Really!* is about becoming a happier person. It is a workbook of very deep self-analysis. Its whole purpose is to achieve greater well-being and happiness and to reduce or put an end to the miseries that plague many people's lives. It is a spiritual book without dogma, in ordinary non-technical language, but showing how everyone can find happiness within themselves. An interesting and thought-provoking book, well worth its price of £9.99. □

Programme for January & February 2011

Sunday discourses begin after a brief period of meditation.

At the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Tel: 01628 526464 - www.vedantauk.com

Jan	1	Holy Mother's Puja	
Jan	2	Selection from the Upanishads 8	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan	9	Selection from the Upanishads 9	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan	16	Selection from the Upanishads 10	Swami Dayatmananda
Jan	23	Swami Vivekananda's Puja	
Jan	30	Imitation of Christ 12	Swami Shivarupananda
Feb	6	Selection from the Upanishads 11	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	13	Selection from the Upanishads 12	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	20	Selection from the Upanishads 13	Swami Dayatmananda
Feb	27	Day Retreat	

Holy Mother's Puja

Saturday 1 January
at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

Swami Vivekananda's Puja

Sunday 23 January
at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

Day Retreat

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda at
the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 27 February
from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.
Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

continued from the front cover

with the help of that light the sergeant sees everybody's face, and others, too, can see one another. If you want to see the sergeant, however, you must pray to him: 'Sir, please turn the light on your own face. Let me see you.' In the same way one must pray to God: 'O Lord, be gracious and turn the light of knowledge on Thyself, that I may see Thy face.'

"A house without light indicates poverty. So one must light the lamp of Knowledge in one's heart. As it is said in a song: Lighting the lamp of Knowledge in the chamber of your heart, Behold the face of the Mother, Brahman's Embodiment."

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, December 14, 1882

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Religion can be realized. Are you ready? Do you want it? You will get the realization if you do, and then you will be truly religious. Until you have attained realization there is no difference between you and atheists. The atheists are sincere, but the man who says that he believes in religion and never attempts to realize it is not sincere.

Swami Vivekananda



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