

# Vedanta

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370 MARCH - APRIL 2013

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**Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda**

*Marie Louise Burke*

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**Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna**

*Gour Das*

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## Divine Wisdom

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Maharaj, how did Sri Ramakrishna look upon mankind? Please tell us something about him.

Sri Ramakrishna saw God in all beings. Seeing his great love for his disciples, Swami Vivekananda once said to him: "You love us all so much. Is it not possible that, because of this love, you too may meet the same fate that Jada Bharat met?" The Master replied: "True, by thinking of matter one becomes like matter. But you must understand that it is the God within you that I love. If my mind should ever become attached to any one of you as man or woman, I would at once dismiss all thought of you from my mind."

Because Sri Ramakrishna taught the ideal of renunciation to his young disciples, he was often criticized by the worldly-minded, and to such criticism he would answer: "I have no objection to anyone living in the world. Neither do I teach that every man and woman should renounce lust and greed. I teach renunciation only to those in whom there is already some spiritual awakening. I want these young men to attain first knowledge and discrimination, and then, if they wish, they may enter into worldly life." Indeed, to many who came to him he would say: "First go out into the world. Gather your experiences, and then, when you have become sick of the world, come to me for the cure."

The Master said: "Give up lust? Why should you give up lust? Instead of trying to give up, you should increase your lust!" This advice amazed the young disciple, but he said nothing, and the Master continued: "Direct all your thoughts of lust and all your passions toward God." Often he would point to himself and say: "Everything will be achieved if you will love this. The more intensely you yearn for God, the greater will be your revelation of him."

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## Editorial

### A re religions declining?

Since quite some time now many people have been predicting (some hoping) the disappearance of religion. As education spreads and scientific knowledge increases, people are supposed to cast off their old superstitions and use more of reason. While the belief in religion has decreased somewhat in many places—for the most part religion has stubbornly persisted.

An interesting survey of religious belief in 30 countries from the University of Chicago shows overall religious belief is declining, but at a very slow rate. WIN-Gallup survey of 57 countries that showed a decline in religion worldwide and a rise in disbelief. (This information is taken from the net.)

The assumption that religion would decline comes from a misunderstanding of its true nature. If by religion is meant adherence to certain dogmas, rituals and external observances etc., then, it is true many people have lost and will continue to lose faith in such a form of religion. This type of religion has been both a blessing and a curse.

As Swami Vivekananda aptly remarks:

...we find that though there is nothing that has brought to man more blessings than religion, yet at the same time, there is nothing that has brought more horror than religion. Nothing has made more for peace and love than religion; nothing has engendered fiercer hatred than religion. Nothing has made the brotherhood of man more tangible than religion; nothing has bred more bitter enmity between man and man than religion. Nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for men, and even for animals, than religion; nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion.

Again he says:

It is sometimes said that religions are dying out, that spiritual ideas are dying out of the world. .... the power of religion has only just begun to manifest in the world. The power of religion, broadened and purified, is going to penetrate every part of human life.

What then is true religion?

Reason and experience tells us that life is short and is beset with misery. And yet man longs for eternal life. People may say they do not believe in God. But we will not find a single person who says I do not wish a long life and happiness. This longing for a life of immortality and eternal bliss is called religion. In Sanskrit the name for God is *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. It means Absolute Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. Every human being, in this sense, longs to become God . Life is an unremitting effort (known as *evolution*) to attain this Eternal, Immortal life. In other words man wants to advance in Being-Bliss-Knowledge; he wants to become divine, wants to become God.

And why is this urge so insistent? Vedanta says that is because we are divine. It says there is a teleological urge in every heart which propels every creature towards its real being. And until this goal is reached there is no stopping of this forward march. Because of ignorance we are unaware of our own true nature. It is for awakening us to the fact of our true being that God incarnates in every age.

Swami Vivekananda, the modern prophet summarised the entire essence of Vedanta in these few sentences :

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy - by one, or more, or all of these - and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

The end of all religions is the realising of God in the soul. That is the one universal religion. If there is one universal truth in all religions, I place it here - in realising God. Ideals and methods may differ, but that is the central point. There may be a thousand different radii, but they all converge to the one centre, and that is the realisation of God. Religion is the manifestation of divinity already existing in man.

## Will religions disappear?

Now we have the answer. So long as there is life this urge to manifest one's true nature cannot be stopped.

Says Swami Vivekananda:

Whatever may be the position of philosophy, whatever may be the position of metaphysics, so long as there is such a thing as death in the world, so long as there is such a thing as weakness in the human heart, so long as there is a cry going out of the heart of man in his very weakness, there shall be a faith in God.

## The future of religion

My idea, therefore, is that all these religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind; and that not one can become dead, not one can be killed. Just as you cannot kill any force in nature, so you cannot kill any one of these spiritual forces.

It is clear religions are not going to die out, that is not going to happen. It does not, however, mean that religion as it is understood at present can satisfy any rational being. So what form of religion is acceptable to all? What type of religion is worthy of propagation? We have to ask ourselves what should be the nature of religion in future.

Once again Swami Vivekananda comes to our aid. He says: ...but if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike; which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for every human being, from the lowest grovelling savage not far removed from the brute, to the highest man towering by the virtues of his head and heart almost above humanity, making society stand in awe of him and doubt his human nature. It will be a religion which will have no place for persecution or intolerance in its polity, which will recognise divinity in every man and woman, and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be created in aiding humanity to realise its own true, divine nature.

Offer such a religion, and all the nations will follow you.

# Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda

Marie Louise Burke

(Marie Louise Burke, who has made history in investigative hagiography by her massive volumes entitled *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, poses here a doubt that arises in the minds of many earnest students of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda: Does Swami Vivekananda deviate from his Great Master in presenting the philosophy suited to the modern age? Sri Ramakrishna emphasizes Bhakti Yoga as the best path for us of the Kali Yuga (iron age) whereas Swamiji is never tired of exhorting us to remember our divinity at all times.

The solution offered by Gargi, as Marie Louise Burke is fondly known in the Ramakrishna circles, is that Sri Ramakrishna was talking to the average men and women of his day, whereas Swamiji was speaking to an audience influenced by the western spirit of science and humanism marked by concern for individual freedom and dignity. But the essence of Swamiji's teachings is contained in Sri Ramakrishna's words. It is only a difference in the mode of presentation suitable to the audience addressed.)

No one questions nowadays that Swami Vivekananda was Sri Ramakrishna's single Apostle to the world at large. If doubt remains, we have only to remember that many of Swamiji's great monastic brothers made statements to the effect that it was not possible to truly understand Sri Ramakrishna without having first studied the teachings of Swami Vivekananda.

And yet a question does arise, for on reading the teachings of the Master as they are found in *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, as recorded by M, which invaluable book is generally accepted as representative of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings to the generality of people, and on reading almost simultaneously *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, one finds important differences in emphasis in these two great scriptural texts, and one cannot help but ask in what sense Vivekananda so certainly represents his Master. At least this question has occurred to me, and this paper is my attempt to understand it in some small degree.

One might say that the *Gospel* cannot be justly compared with the *Complete Works*, because the former is for the most part a teaching meant for householders. M, a householder and schoolteacher, was with the Master only on weekends and holidays or in the late afternoons, when other devotees similarly circumstanced were also present. He heard and recorded primarily those conversations, songs and ecstatic utterances that would be of the greatest benefit to the generality of devotees. This is not to say that the 'weekend-and-holiday' devotees were spiritually unexceptional. Surely no one with the immense good fortune and good sense (perhaps one should say good *Karma*) to sit reverently at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna was in any sense a run-of-the-mill person.

Nevertheless, compared to the group of young men whom the Master trained to become the living core of his mission — the first Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Order — the householder disciples represented the generality of sincere spiritual aspirants. In the *Complete Works*, on the other hand, Swami Vivekananda seems to have said everything for everyone. The fact is, however, that those who regularly attended Swami Vivekananda's lectures and classes in both East and West were, on the whole, also householders and workers in the world: except, again, for their good fortune and good sense, they were average seekers of truth. One can rightly say, therefore, that even as the *Gospel* represents on the whole Sri Ramakrishna's message to the average spiritual aspirant, so also do the lectures and classes that are found in Vivekananda's *Complete Works*. In short, both the *Gospel* and the *Complete Works* speak to the same level of spiritual need, and thus they can be compared and their differences wondered about.

Perhaps the teaching we most usually associate with Sri Ramakrishna is his oft-repeated declaration, made on the basis

of his own unprecedented experiences, that all religions followed sincerely will lead to the realisation of God, which is the goal of all human life. Each person has his own needs, taste, and capacity, and the great variety of religions in this world satisfies those diverse needs and tastes. Swami Vivekananda most certainly gave this same teaching. But while Sri Ramakrishna said that there are many, indeed innumerable, paths to God-realisation, he also again and again taught that the path of Bhakti Yoga was the easiest and best path for the Kali Yuga, particularly for householders or more broadly for those, whether householders or monastics, who in one way or another are conscious of their I, their ego. "If the 'I' must remain," he would say, "let the rascal remain as the 'servant I.' As long as you live you should say, "O God, Thou art the Master and I am Thy servant." The 'I' that feels 'I am the servant of God, I am His devotee' does not injure one." By Bhakti Yoga, Sri Ramakrishna meant Bhakti as taught by Narada—an intense yearning for God that culminates in the all consuming fire of divine love. Such Bhakti necessarily, almost automatically, easily, involves renunciation and discrimination, for the Bhakta longs only to love God and wants nothing that is not He.

As a corollary to this teaching Sri Ramakrishna again and again warned that Jnana Yoga as related to Advaita Vedanta is not for this age. "The path of knowledge is very difficult," he said. "One cannot attain Knowledge unless one gets rid of the feeling that one is the body. In the Kali Yuga the life of man is centered on food. He cannot get rid of the feeling that he is the body and the ego." Again, "The feeling 'I am He' is not wholesome. A man who entertains such an idea while looking on his body as the Self, causes himself great harm."

Let us now consider the main teachings of Swami Vivekananda—that is to say, the teachings that he most often emphasised during his mission. One can, of course, say that Swamiji (like his Master) was so vast and many-sided that he cannot be pinned down to any one ism or squeezed into any

particular pigeon-hole. Yes, in a sense that is true. But to say that he taught everything is in effect to say that he taught nothing, that he had no special message for mankind.

And I do not think one can say that of the Vivekananda whom Sri Ramakrishna brought to this earth and commissioned to teach. What, then, did he teach? In a nutshell, Swamiji taught that man (the human individual, male or female) is divine; that is, he taught the philosophy of Advaita or monistic Vedanta. Since one might say that the divinity of man is a teaching of qualified monism as well as that of monism, it is necessary here to add a little. We find by opening the *Complete Works* almost at random that Swamiji taught that man is not *partly* divine or, rather, not a part of the Divine Being, like a spark of fire or a leaf of a tree, but that he is wholly divine, identical in his true nature with the Divine Being Itself. For instance, in a lecture delivered in Brooklyn in 1896 he said: "You are the omniscient, omnipresent being of the universe.

But of such beings can there be many? Certainly not.... You are only One; there is only one such Self, and that One Self is you... Therefore know that thou art He; thou art the God of this universe. You are the One Being in the universe. Stand up then and be free." And in *Inspired Talks* we read: "Never forget the glory of human nature. We are the greatest God that ever was or ever will be. Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless ocean which *I am*. Bow down to nothing but your own higher Self. Until you know that you are that very God of gods, there will never be any freedom for you."

In one sense, it is true, Swami Vivekananda taught everything, for his teaching of Advaita Vedanta is infinite in dimension, and everything finds a home in its embrace. The Advaita that he emphasized is not the kind that makes a point of the unreality of the world; rather it is the Advaita that says the world exists because its basic, indeed its only, reality is Brahman.

There are so many statements in the *Complete Works* to this effect that, again, I shall quote one at random. In London Swamiji said: "All this manifoldness is the manifestation of that One. That One is manifesting Himself as many, as matter, spirit, mind, thought, and everything else." But Swami Vivekananda's main emphasis was on the manifestation of Brahman as Man, or, let us say, on the infinite glory and perfection of the Self. This teaching he gave quite deliberately to the general public, to audiences composed primarily of ordinary seekers of truth. And to such people he said: "You are the One Divine Being! Now! Here and now!!" In at least this respect Swamiji seems to have been in opposition to — or different from — his Master who, as we have seen, was careful not to give such teachings to his householder devotees, but, rather, to teach them qualified monism, which states that the individual is distinct from the God he adores and worships.

One of course finds many of Sri Ramakrishna's *Gospel* teachings also in the *Complete Works* of Swami Vivekananda. It could not be otherwise, for both Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji were speaking out of an infinite wealth of first-hand spiritual knowledge. For instance, both taught that religion was not a matter of doctrine but of realisation; both taught that all paths were valid; both taught the necessity in spiritual life for renunciation, detachment, purity, self-control, and intense yearning; both taught that true devotion is always selfless; both taught that the purpose of life is to know God and to be wholly, eternally free; both declared that this whole universe is a manifestation of God.

But despite these and other similarities, the fact remains that in the *Gospel* Sri Ramakrishna is recorded as specifically saying (at least nineteen times, one devotee counted) that Bhakti Yoga, the path of devotion to the Personal God, was the best and easiest; whereas Swamiji, though elucidating and prescribing all

paths — ("*Employ all powers philosophy, work, prayer, meditation — crowd all sail....*") — emphasised the practice of discrimination between the appearance of this world as matter and the reality of this world as pure infinite Spirit. He wanted everyone to renounce the appearance and embrace the Reality, to see this world as it really is. He wanted everyone to tell himself and to tell everybody else that we are all divine," and to worship the Self everywhere and in all beings— and this not in solitude, denying and shunning the world, but in the very heart of the fray.

There is a synthesis here of Bhakti and Jnana, for if one sees, or even tries to see, this whole universe and the beings in it as shining manifestations of Brahman Itself, then would not one respond with profound devotion to and reverence for everyone and everything? This certainly is not the "*dry*" Jnana Yoga that Sri Ramakrishna discouraged; still, one must admit that neither is it the path of devotion to the Personal God that he recommended. Swamiji's teachings amount to a new kind of Jnana Yoga and a new kind of Bhakti Yoga, and the practice of these two turns out to be a new kind of Karma Yoga—a Yoga that transforms all action into the worship of God in His guise of every human being on earth; each person is He.

So in what sense was Swami Vivekananda the Apostle of his great Master, as he himself certainly felt himself to be? How is one to explain the marked difference between the spiritual practices most often recommended in the Gospel and those emphasized in the Complete Works! I would say that Sri Ramakrishna himself gave the answer: spiritual truth is always the same, but the language of aspiring human beings differs from age to age; expressions and needs differ, and paths to God differ. Who were those for whose benefit Sri Ramakrishna lovingly talked, those men and women who generally came on weekends? By and large they were Bengali householders of what

Sri Ramakrishna referred to as the "Kali Yuga"— the "Iron Age" in the traditional, not the historical, sense.

And that age, according to Swami Vivekananda (as well as Sri Sarada Devi), ended with the birth of the Master, when the *Satya Yuga*, the "Golden Age" or the Age of Truth began. Even if we don't like these somewhat esoteric terms—"Kali Yuga" and "Satya Yuga" or, for that matter, "Golden Age"—we cannot argue with the fact that dating from around the middle of the last century a new age did begin, an age that is getting underway today and that (barring the unthinkable) will continue for many centuries in the future. It is this age for which Sri Ramakrishna came and for which he brought Swami Vivekananda down to earth to carry forward his mission, teaching him, training him, standing behind him, and, as Swamiji often assured his brothers, guiding him every step of the way.

But while Sri Ramakrishna came for the present age, such was his compassion and his grace that he spoke directly to those who were immediately present. And the majority of those householder devotees whom we meet in the *Gospel* were still living in the Kali Yuga—let us say, pre-industrial India.

Generally speaking, they were deeply devotional, apparently modern and sceptical in the then current fashion, but actually born into the intricate web of Hindu society and imbued from childhood with ageold traditions and beliefs. Theirs was a world and theirs a mental outlook so different from that of the twentieth century that (except for those of us uniquely attuned to the path of devotion) I do not think we and they could meaningfully converse. But Sri Ramakrishna could converse with them in their language, and certainly he could converse with us in our language, and I believe he would speak to us— I believe he does speak to us—in a language identical with that of Swami Vivekananda.

Yes, the Gospel as recorded by "M" is an unparalleled treasure trove of spiritual wisdom good for all time, but the path for those living in the ambience of the 1880s is not, surely, the same as for those living today or in the centuries that will follow. Swami Vivekananda carried Sri Ramakrishna's incomparable light (as the Master knew he would) to a different age. He spoke to a people who were, it is true, as egocentric and body-conscious as any people in any age, but whose object of interest and of love had switched from God to Man and whose essential characteristics were, and are, a passionate love for knowledge and for freedom. Almost innate in us today is a sense of individual independence, dignity, and worth, together with a sense of world unity and a deep and active concern for the well-being of others—characteristics that can find true and lasting expression only on the premise that the essential core, the Self of all men and women, is "the One Being in the Universe." In short, for his growth and his fulfillment, contemporary man requires to hear, to practise, and to realize the truth that all beings are wholly divine, that "every man and woman is the palpable, blissful, living God"—the highest and broadest truth that Sri Ramakrishna stood for and fully embodied.

When asked what the place of his Master was in his own teachings, which, he often declared, were of the Upanishads only, he replied "He is the method, that wonderful unconscious method!... He lived that great life; and I read the meaning." That, I think, is what Swamiji's brother disciples meant when they said one can know

Sri Ramakrishna only through Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji read the meaning—his was the voice that gave full expression to "the infinite knowledge, infinite love, infinite work, infinite compassion for all beings" that he saw in his Master, he the unflawed lens that sharply focused the limitless spiritual power that came to earth as Sri Ramakrishna for the good of all mankind.

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The Vedas say the whole world is a mixture of independence and dependence, of freedom and slavery, but through it all shines the soul independent, immortal, pure, perfect, holy. For if it is independent, it cannot perish, as death is but a change, and depends upon conditions; if independent, it must be perfect, for imperfection is again but a condition, and therefore dependent. And this immortal and perfect soul must be the same in the highest God as well as in the humblest man, the difference between them being only in the degree in which this soul manifests itself. It cannot be that the soul knows, but it is knowledge. It cannot be that the soul is happy, it is happiness itself. That which is happy, has borrowed its happiness; that which has knowledge, has received its knowledge; and that which has relative existence, has only a reflected existence. That very thing which we now see as the universe, will appear to us as God Absolute, and that very God who has so long been external will appear to be internal, as our own Self.

# Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna

Gour Das

In the history of India's religious tradition Sri Chaitanya Sri Chaitanya occupies a most important and unique place. Although the doctrine of Bhakti had been known and put into practice by hundreds of great saints from the Vedic period onwards, it was Sri Chaitanya who gave it the status of a completely independent, all-sufficient spiritual discipline. He separated pure love for God from the other aspects of Bhakti and converted it into an all-consuming passion of such magnitude and intensity that the superiority of Bhakti over all other approaches to God stood vindicated by its sheer power, without doctrinal disputations and dissertations. The world had never seen before such an awesome demonstration of the power and glory of Bhakti and, after Chaitanya, the world had to wait for nearly half a millennium for an equally superhuman demonstration in the person of Sri Ramakrishna.

This, however, is not the only point of similarity between the two great personalities. Sri Ramakrishna has been compared to the Hindu Avatars, as well as Buddha and Christ, but he bears the closest resemblance to Sri Chaitanya. Before attempting a brief comparative study of the lives and messages of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Chaitanya it is necessary to introduce the reader to the life of the latter.

Sri Chaitanya was born in Navadvip, a town on the bank of Ganges in West Bengal, on Dol Purnima day in A.D. 1486, as the youngest son of Jagannath Misra and Sachi Devi. The name given to him by his parents was Visvambhar but he came to be known as Nimai and, on account of his golden complexion, also as Gauranga. He had an elder brother by name Visvarupa who renounced the world in youth and was not heard of after that. Visvambhar mastered grammar and other branches of traditional knowledge and, when he was hardly out of his

adolescence, opened a Sanskrit school in Navadvip which was at that time the most famous centre of Sanskrit learning in Bengal. The fame of Nimai Pandit as a formidable disputant spread, and students flocked to him from far and wide. Early in his youth Nimai married Vishnupriya who, after her husband's renunciation, lived like a nun with her mother-in-law. At first Nimai showed little interest in spiritual life and led a happy-go-lucky life, proud of his scholarship.

Once Gauranga had to go to Gaya to offer libations for his departed father. After his bath as he stood before the deity, he felt a sudden upsurge of devotion in him and was about to lose consciousness when an ascetic hurriedly came forward and clasped him. The very touch of the saint, who was none other than Ishvara Puri, a close disciple of the famous Vaishnava saint Madhavendra Puri, brought about a great transformation in Gauranga. All his pride in scholarship and intellectual brilliance vanished for ever, and he entreated Ishvara Puri to show him the way to the realization of Krishna. A few days later, the saint initiated him into the Vaishnava cult with the ten-lettered Gopala Mantra. Gauranga returned to Navadvip a thoroughly transformed person.

He spent his time calling upon the Lord with his eyes filled with ceaseless tears and occasionally losing consciousness of the outer world. He disbanded his school and in the company of Advaita Gosvamin, and Nityananda, who were disciples of Madhavendra Puri, organized *nama-samkirtana*, congregational singing in the houses of devotees — chiefly in the courtyard of Srivas. About a year after his conversion Gauranga left his home and went to a place called Katwa where he earnestly pleaded for and was given initiation into sannyasa from Kesava Bharati. He was given the name Sri Krishna Chaitanya, and thenceforth came to be popularly known as Chaitanya. He was then just

twenty-four years of age.

At the suggestion of his mother, Chaitanya then went to Puri and spent his days in ecstatic contemplation on Lord Jagannath. He lived in a small room, now known as *gambhira*, and occasionally joined devotees, who included the great scholar Sarvabhauma, in samkirtana and discussions. After some months Chaitanya went on a long tour of South India, visiting Rameswaram, Andhra, Karnataka, Malabar and Maharashtra. It was at Rajamundry, on the bank of the Godavari that he met the great devotee Ramananda Ray who was then the governor of the place. The dialogue that took place between them, in which the main principles of devotion to Krishna are clearly formulated, is one of the important episodes in the biographical accounts of Sri Chaitanya.

Soon after his return to Puri, Sri Chaitanya set out for Vrindaban visiting on the way Bengal (where he first alighted at Panihati, made famous later on by Sri Ramakrishna's last participation in a public festival).

Vrindaban had been, before Chaitanya discovered the actual spot of Sri Krishna's *Lilas* (divine sports), an obscure village of cowherds. At his command two of his disciples, Rupa and Sanatana started living there, and later on four others (Jiva, Raghunatha Dasa, Raghunatha Bhatta and Gopala Bhatta) joined them. These six disciples, known as Vrindavana Gosvamins, laid the foundation of the Vaishnava philosophy of the cult of Chaitanya. One of the significant acts of Chaitanya during the period was the popularization of *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

After spending several days in ecstasies, congregational singing and dancing, Chaitanya went to Allahabad and Varanasi and returned to Puri which he never again left. The remaining eighteen years of his life were spent in a state of continual ecstasy. There is no authoritative record of how and where he

passed away, at the age of forty-eight, probably in the year A.D. 1533.

*Sri Ramakrishna's familiarity with Chaitanya's life and teachings*

That Sri Ramakrishna had an unusually wide and accurate knowledge of the *Lila* and teachings of Chaitanya is clear from M.'s *Kathamrita* (translated into English as *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*). There is hardly a chapter in that book in which Sri Ramakrishna does not refer to Sri Chaitanya or his teachings. He used to advise his disciples to read the traditional biographies of Sri Chaitanya such as *Chaitanya Charitamrita* and *Chaitanya Bhagavata*. All through his life Sri Ramakrishna showed great respect even to the descendants of the followers of Sri Chaitanya.

When a Vaishnava scholar by name Radhika Gosvami visited him, Sri Ramakrishna saluted him on hearing that the scholar was a descendant of Advaita Gosvami, a close associate of Sri Chaitanya.

The following quotations, taken at random from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* give an indication of Sri Ramakrishna's familiarity with Chaitanya's life and teachings:

*"Chaitanya once dressed an ass in religious garb and then prostrated himself before it. (p. 537).*

*To attract the wordly, Chaitanya and Nitai, after much deliberation, made an arrangement. They would say to such persons, "Come, repeat the name of Hari, and you shall have a delicious soup of magur fish and the embrace of a young woman." Many people, attracted by the fish and the woman, would chant the name of God. After tasting a little of the nectar of God's hallowed name, they would soon realize that the 'fish soup' really meant the tears they shed for love of God, while the 'young woman' signified the earth.*

*The embrace of the woman meant rolling on the ground in the rapture of divine ecstasy. (p. 146).*

*Chaitanya said: "The name of God has very great sanctity. It may not produce an immediate result, but one day it must bear fruit. It is like a seed that has been left on the cornice of a building. After many days the house crumbles, and the seed falls on the earth, germinates, and at last bears fruit." (P. 146).*

*Once a man said to Chaitanya: "You give the devotees so much instruction. Why don't they make much progress?" Chaitanya said: "They dissipate their powers in the company of women. That is why they cannot assimilate spiritual instruction. If one keeps water in a leaky jar, the water escapes little by little through the leak." (p. 414).*

*Once Chaitanyadeva was passing through a village. Someone told him that the body of the drum used in the kirtan was made from the earth of that village, and at once he went into ecstasy. (P. 547).*

*Chaitanya once said to Nityananda: 'Listen to me, brother. A man entangled in worldliness can never be free.' (p. 435).*

*The fire of Chaitanya's renunciation was so great that when Sarvabhauma poured sugar on his tongue, instead of melting, it evaporated into air. He was always absorbed in samadhi. How great was his conquest of lust! To compare him with a man! (p. 688).*

*Chaitanyadeva set out on a pilgrimage to southern India. One day he saw a man reading the Gita. Another man, seated at a distance, was listening and weeping. His eyes were swimming in tears. Chaitanyadeva asked him, "Do you understand all this?". The man said, "No, revered sir, I don't understand a word of the text." "Then why are you crying?" asked Chaitanya. The devotee said: "I see Arjuna's chariot before me. I see Lord Krishna and Arjuna seated in front of it, talking. I see this and I weep." (p. 105).*

*Chaitanya used to shed tears of joy at the very mention of Krishna's name....Chaitanya embraced all, including the outcastes. (p.157).*

*Chaitanya was intoxicated with the love of God. Still, before taking to monastic life, for how many days did he try to persuade his mother to give him her permission to become a monk! He said to her: 'Mother, don't worry. I shall visit you every now and then.' (p. 424).*

Sri Ramakrishna was fully conversant with the intricate doctrines of Gaudiya Vaishnavism. He might have learnt about them from such eminent adepts and scholars as Bhairavi Brahmani and Vaishnav Charan. But he tested those doctrines in his own life and therefore could speak about them with authority.

#### *Similarities between the personalities of Sri Chaitanya and Thakur*

No one who is familiar with the lives of Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna can fail to notice the remarkable similarities between these two great personalities. Several of the lay disciples of Sri Ramakrishna like Mahendra Nath Gupta, Balaram Bose and Ramchandra Datta recognized these similarities. Both Chaitanya and Ramakrishna were born in orthodox Brahmin families and retained their Brahmin identities all through their lives. If the birth of Sri Ramakrishna was preceded by the vision his father had had at the Vishnu temple in Gaya, Sri Chaitanya's conversion to spiritual life also took place at the same place. In their childhood both of them were fond of playing pranks, although it is true that Nimai was a brilliant student and became a great scholar whereas Gadadhar was indifferent to studies.

In their youth both mixed freely with the poor villagers, especially with the non-Brahmins. Gadadhar was worshipped by Srinivas, the conch-shell seller, and Nimai was adored by Sridhar, a poor vegetable seller.

In spite of their delicate appearance and graceful movements both Chaitanya and Ramakrishna were virile, dynamic and free personalities, unflattering and fearless in dealing with rich and influential people.

Chaitanya incited mob fury against the Muslim magistrate of Navadvip; Ramakrishna told a titled aristocrat that he couldn't call him a 'Raja'. Chaitanya once gave a thrashing to the venerable Advaita Gosvamin, who was old enough to be his father, while Ramakrishna slapped Rani Rasmani, who was old enough to be his mother, when he detected her mind had wandered from spiritual thoughts. At the same time, they had great compassion for hoodlums and fallen men and women.

Chaitanya's redemption of Jagai and Madhai compares well with Sri Ramakrishna's redemption of Manmatha, the ruffian engaged by Hira Lal, the brother of Yogin Ma, to frighten him away. Sri Chaitanya entreated even immoral people and untouchables to repeat the Lord's name; Sri Ramakrishna blessed and transformed drunkards like Surendra, actors like Girish, actresses like Vinodini and untouchables like Rasik, the sweeper of Dakshineswar temple. Both Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna attracted scholars and had similar ways of dealing with them. Chaitanya discomfited Digvijayi Pandit and Sri Ramakrishna silenced Gauri Pandit of Indes. Chaitanya converted the great scholar Vasudeva Sarvabhauma of Orissa into his follower; Sri Ramakrishna converted some of the most erudite scholars of his day like Narayan Sastri and Sashadhar Tarkachudamani. However, both avatars enjoyed talking with pious scholars and listening to spiritual discussions.

Both the personalities had extraordinary charisma. Sri Chaitanya attracted large crowds wherever he went. Sri Ramakrishna too had that power but he used it only occasionally, as for instance at Shyambazar, a village near

Kamarpukur. They inspired total and life-long loyalty in their followers, many of whom were men of high intellectual and spiritual attainments. Sri Chaitanya's relationship with Nityananda is almost like Sri Ramakrishna's relationship with Swami Vivekananda. Nityananda was originally an *avadhuta sannyasin* just as Swami Vivekananda was a *dasanami sannyasin*; both of them were extremely generous and threw caste restrictions to the winds while admitting people into their folds, both were able organizers since the formation of Gaudiya Vaishnava community was chiefly the work of Nityananda, and the organization of the Ramakrishna Sangha was chiefly the work of Vivekananda. Nityananda, although a disciple or follower of Chaitanya is regarded as an associate or inseparable spiritual counterpart of Chaitanya; almost similar is Swamiji's position vis-a-vis Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna were fond of congregational singing of divine names and songs and actively took part in them. Both of them had extraordinary devotion to Sri Krishna and, apart from frequently losing themselves in divine ecstasies, had attained the superhuman state of devotional fervour known as *mahabhava*.

Visvanath Cakravarti, the great Vaisnava philosopher of Bengal defines *mahabhava* thus: 'That state of Bhakti is called *mahabhava* in which a moment's separation from Krishna is unbearable. When the bliss of crores of worlds is nothing compared to the bliss of union with Krishna, when the separation from Krishna is much more painful than the bites of all the snakes, scorpions, etc. existing on earth, it is the state of *mahabhava*.' Under the influence of *mahabhava*, which ordinary mortals never attain, Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna used to rub their foreheads on the ground until blood came out. Both of them often regarded themselves as Radha, the spiritual consort

of Sri Krishna. When he was at Vrindaban, Chaitanya jumped into the Yamuna in a state of ecstasy. In the same place Sri Ramakrishna, overwhelmed by the memory of Krishna ran along the banks of the river crying aloud.

However, both were very liberal in their religious views. Chaitanya never allowed any of his followers to be disrespectful to other Avatars or gods and, although he held the supremacy of and independence of Bhakti, he was not an opponent of Advaita. He approved of and popularized the commentary on *Srimad Bhagavatam* written by Sridhara Svamin who was a monist. As regards Sri Ramakrishna, he was as perfectly at ease with Advaita as with dualistic Bhakti. Chaitanya might not have been a devotee of the Divine Mother (although on Sri Ramakrishna's own authority, he worshipped Shakti at least for some time) but the concept of Shakti forms an important feature of Chaitanyaite Vaishnava theology. Chaitanya had a Muslim disciple (the famous saint Haridas) and some of his later followers were Muslims. Sri Ramakrishna actually practised Islamic spirituality, even during his life-time he had a few Muslim admirers and, now after his passing away, his Muslim followers form quite a large number.

Both Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna were *sannyasins* (monks) and observed the vows of renunciation of wealth and lust with uncompromising steadfastness. Chaitanya prohibited his disciples from even looking at the face of a woman, and the rules he imposed on them in dealing with women were so strict that, it is said, 'they would not think of women even in dream'. Once his young disciple 'Chota' Haridas (to be distinguished from the famous Muslim disciple) begged for his master a little good quality rice from an old woman devotee by name Madhavi and, for this apparently harmless act, Chaitanya ordered that 'Chota' Haridas should never again come into his presence.

Even the intercession of some of his foremost disciples did not make him relent and, when after a year of agony Haridas committed suicide, Chaitanya remained unmoved. Sri Ramakrishna too took great care in protecting his young apostles from the snares of feminine charms. He never allowed them to sit in the company of women and himself set an example in this regard. Chaitanya lived in a bare room, sleeping on a mat (he was annoyed when somebody offered him a quilt) and owned nothing but a change of clothes. Sri Ramakrishna's living was equally austere except that he used a cot and mosquito-curtain and wore slippers. However, both of them were very careful regarding their food. Neither of them could take cooked rice from the hands of a non-brahmin. Chaitanya had a brahmin cook who accompanied him wherever he went. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother cooked his simple meals.

Both Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna were fully conscious of their true divine nature, inherent powers and mission on earth. Though they behaved like ordinary human beings most of the time and kept their superhuman nature hidden, on certain occasions they demonstrated miraculous powers (such as materialising at distant places and eating improbable quantities of food) which show striking parallels in the lives of both of them. Both of them became cult figures and were worshipped as deities even when they were alive. Their intimate disciples looked upon them not as ordinary teachers but as divine beings.

#### *Ramakrishna's identity with Chaitanya*

The similarities briefly mentioned above suggest the possibility of the identity of the two personalities. This identity was first recognized by Bhairavi Brahmani. Sri Ramakrishna himself had direct experience of this identity through mystic

visions. When he visited Navadvip (Nadia) in the company of Mathur he saw two boys of golden complexion racing towards him and merging into his own personality. Another day, he had the vision of Sri Chaitanya dancing in ecstasy in the company of his devotees near the Panchavati at Dakshineswar, and Sri Ramakrishna recognized some of his own disciples like Balaram and Mahendra Nath Gupta in Chaitanya's party.

In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* we find Sri Ramakrishna speaking of Chaitanya's experiences on several occasions:

*Chaitanyadeva used to experience three spiritual states: the innermost, the semi-conscious and the conscious. In the innermost state he would see God and go into samadhi; he would be in the state of jada samadhi. In the semi-conscious state he would be partially conscious of the outer world. In the conscious state he would sing the name and glories of God. (P. 478).*

*But the nature of a Vijnani is quite different, as was the case with Chaitanyadeva. He acts like a child or a madman or an inert thing or a ghou. While in the mood of a child, he sometimes shows childlike guilelessness, sometimes the frivolity of adolescence, and sometimes, while instructing others, the strength of a young man. (P. 493).*

*The other day... I saw Satcidananda come out of this sheath [i.e. his own body.] It said, 'I incarnate Myself in every age.' I thought that I myself was saying these words out of mere fancy. I kept quiet and watched. Again Satcidananda Itself spoke, saying 'Chaitanya too worshipped Shakti.' (P. 720).*

It is quite obvious that in making these statements Sri Ramakrishna was identifying himself with Sri Chaitanya. Finally, we may quote a statement made by Swami Vivekananda himself. While talking to M. at the Baranagore monastery after the passing away of his Master, Swamiji said, "But on innumerable occasions the Master said to me: In me alone are

embodied Advaita, Chaitanya and Nityananda. I am all these three."

*Teachings of Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna*

A good deal of similarity in the teachings of Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna may also be noticed. This is not surprising in view of the similarities between their personalities. Moreover, it should be remembered that the social conditions in which they lived were not very dissimilar, and the difference in time had not altered much their cultural backgrounds. It is beyond the scope of the present article to undertake a detailed comparative study of the teachings of the two great Masters. We can only point out some common grounds.

The central teaching of Sri Chaitanya was the supremacy and independence of Bhakti. He regarded it as superior even to *mukti* (liberation).

However, the Gaudiya Vaishnava school accepts Jnana Yoga and Karma Yoga also as means to salvation. Sri Ramakrishna too, while accepting all paths as valid means of attaining the Supreme Spirit, held Bhakti to be the best means in the present age of Kali. His conception of Vijnana (which means a constant oscillation between the *nitya* and the *Lila*) as the highest state of realization is quite similar to the Supreme Bhakti of the Gaudiya Vaishnavism. In his *Bhaktisandarbha* (section 48) Jiva Goswamin has said : '*By saying that of the two routes which lead to the same goal one is difficult, its (Bhakti's) primacy is established.*' Sri Ramakrishna says the same thing in the Gospel: '*Bhakti is the one essential thing. To know God through Jnana and reasoning is extremely difficult*' (P. 94). He compares Jnana to a male guest who can go only to the outer parlour of a house, and Bhakti to a woman guest who goes directly to the inner apartments. (P. 719). Jiva Goswamin begins his *Bhakti-sandarbha* by stating that

although the Ultimate Reality is known as Brahman, Paramatman and Bhagavan, Bhagavan represents the highest form. Sri Ramakrishna says, *'He who is Brahman is verily Atman, and again, He is the Bhagavan. He is Brahman to the followers of the path of knowledge, Paramatman to the Yogis, and Bhagavan to the lovers of God.'* (Gospel P. 134).

Another teaching common to Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna is about the power of the Divine Name and the importance of constantly chanting the names and glories of the Lord. According to both of them, there is no difference between nama and namin, the Name and the Named. Sri Chaitanya originated and Sri Ramakrishna rejuvenated the institution of *sankirtana*, congregational singing. Self-surrender to God and dependence on Him form the keynote of their teachings. Their endeavour was to evolve a form of religion which would meet the needs of common people.

Both Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna laid great emphasis on morality, renunciation and the strict observance of chastity. This point was mentioned earlier.

Another important teaching of theirs is about service to fellowmen. According to an oft-quoted saying attributed to Sri Chaitanya, the duties of a devotee are three: 'Delight in repeating the Name of God, compassion for creatures and service to devotees of God.' Sri Ramakrishna too approved of this scheme but enlarged its scope. 'Compassion for creatures' he changed to service of God in man. Compassion implies a certain degree of superiority which Sri Ramakrishna wanted to be replaced with service implying greater humility. Apart from this general humble attitude towards creation in general, he also encouraged the service of devotees. He himself often fed, with his own hands, pure-hearted devotees like Narendranath, Rakhal, Purna and Narayan. Both Chaitanya and Ramakrishna encouraged

brotherly love among the devotees and succeeded in bringing them together to form closely-knit religious communities.

The greatest teaching of Sri Chaitanya and Sri Ramakrishna, of course, is that God realization is the goal of life and all human thoughts and activities should be geared to this supreme end. It was in giving the assurance of God realization with incontrovertible authority, in demonstrating its possibility through their own endeavours, and in manifesting the glories of such realization in their own personalities that these two religious leaders made their greatest contribution to the spiritual heritage of humanity.

In conclusion we would like to state that even if the oneness of the two personalities might not be accepted by all, nobody can deny the fact that Sri Ramakrishna's life came as the greatest vindication of the *avatarhood* of Sri Chaitanya. By the same token, no one can deny that Sri Chaitanya's life provides an equally strong support for the avatarhood of Sri Ramakrishna.

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The Lord Jesus was one day walking along the seashore when a devotee approached him and asked him, "Lord, how can one attain God?" The Lord descended into the sea with the enquirer, whom he plunged under the water. After a short time he released him and raising him by the arm, asked him, "How didst thou feel?" The devotee replied, "I felt as though my last moment had come--the condition was desperate." Upon this the Lord said, "Thou shalt see the Father when thy yearning for Him will be as intense as thy yearning for a breath of air just now."

Sri Ramakrishna

# What is Bhavamukha?

**Swami Tapasyananda**

(Sri Ramakrishna, who represents the perfect harmony of all ideals, has contributed a very sublime concept to Vedantic thought — that of Bhavamukha, the 'Threshold of becoming'. According to the wish of the Divine Mother he remained on the Threshold between the Absolute and the Relative — the Nitya and the Lila. Stationed there, he could look within and without spontaneously and simultaneously. Swami Tapasyananda explains the implications of this concept of Bhavamukha in which the Jnani functions as the Vijnani by the Mother's will. He also points out that this is a very rare state in which only Incarnations can abide.)

At the close of his spiritual practices (spiritual practices) prescribed for the realisation of non-dual consciousness, Sri Ramakrishna remained in that state for about six months, during which he had no bodily consciousness. Towards the end of that period, several ailments induced a little of bodily consciousness in him. Just before this restoration of relative consciousness, the Master heard a Divine Voice calling upon him to remain thereafter in Bhavamukha.

This commandment to remain in Bhavamukha presents an important facet in the Master's life. Bhavamukha is a new expression unknown to religious texts in Sanskrit, and is for the first time given out by the Master himself, as he heard it from the commandment of the Divine Mother. Literally translated, it means 'The threshold or the gateway of Becoming i.e. the world of change.' The idea is that just as a person sitting at the gate or threshold of a building has access at will to both within and without, and is in close touch with the affairs on both sides, so there is a state of consciousness which is a sort of a junction between the Absolute and the Relative aspects of existence, between the Nirvikalpa and the Savikalpa states of consciousness.

The meaning and implication of the attainment of this state of Bhavamukha have to be explained in the light of the

Master's teachings, as the concept is very much new and forms a contribution of his to Vedantic thought. According to the Master, a Jiva (individual soul), if he really attains to the Nirvikalpa Samadhi, never returns to relative consciousness. His body remains alive for about twenty-one days in that state and then perishes. It is only the Adhikarikas (prophets with a divine mission) and Avataras (Incarnations of the Lord) that come back to the relative consciousness from the Nirvikalpa State. They are drawn to the relative consciousness by their love of Jivas grovelling in ignorance, and thus they are the expressions of God's redeeming love.

Sri Ramakrishna explains this by an analogy. Imagine a vast enclosure with high walls, from which very delightful sounds and fragrance are being wafted. There is a road around the enclosure, and there are a number of people going along the road round and round. Some of them are attracted by that delightful sound and with difficulty get upon the high wall and look at the overpoweringly charming sights within the enclosure. They are so much taken up with it that they jump within, forgetting everything else, and they never come out. But occasionally there will be a few among them who remember the tragic fate of the numerous heedless men going round and round and so climb down back to the road to give them the good tidings and to lead them to the higher destiny awaiting them within the enclosure. The divine Incarnations and Adhikarikas are such expressions of Divine mercy, and therefore form manifestations of His redeeming power. Such personages have no ends of their own to seek, not even salvation, and are entirely devoted to the welfare of all who are suffering in Samsara.

The occurrence of such spiritual type finds its explanation in the Master's doctrine that the ultimate Reality is Being-Will

and not mere Being, as maintained in the classical Vedanta. Unlike the Master's theory about Nirvikalpa Samadhi, the classical Vedanta maintains that there can be Jivas who attain the Nirvikalpa stage, but yet continue to retain the body. They are called Jivanmuktas or the free-in-life. Vedanta explains this by the doctrine of Prarabdha, the operative Karma or the quantum of Karma that has brought the present body into existence. While the Sanchita (stored up) Karma, and Agami (accumulating and inoperative) Karma are burnt up by Knowledge (Jnana), it is dogmatically maintained that the Prarabdha remains undissolved until its momentum is exhausted. No argument is advanced for this beyond the analogy of an arrow released from a bow which stops not till it has struck the target.

But the Master questions this doctrine. He contends that if Karma, be it Prarabdha, is real and operative even after Nirvikalpa Samadhi, then the Divine Mother or the Personal God, who even according to the Vedanta is required to make insentient Karma operative, must be accepted as a greater reality than Prarabdha. The classical Vedanta is very much loath to accept such a position, because according to its teaching, in Nirvikalpa Samadhi even God is sublated and non-dual Brahman alone is, and this non-dual Brahman, as expounded in the Vedanta, is pure Being and not Being-Will, as it would be if this theory of the Master is accepted. According to him, however, the Divine Mother is not sublated in Nirvikalpa Samadhi; what happens is that She reveals Herself as the Impersonal also, holding Personality in latency. Reality is Being-Will. When the creative process is on, Will is dominant, and Being is latent as the sutratum of change. When the creative process is withdrawn, Pure Being subsists, Will being latent but not sublated. The Master illustrates this by the example of the snake in motion and the snake at rest. The snake in motion and the snake at rest are

only two modes of the same snake. So the Personal and the Impersonal are the modes of the One Being-Will, and there is no question of sublating either.

The Impersonal aspect is realised only when the individual ego and the entire Karma sustaining it are dissolved. That is Nirvikalpa Samadhi. If the individuality is to be revived, it can be effected only by a factor outside the Karma theory which pre-supposes the chain of cause and effect. So the Master maintains that it is only by the will of the Divine Mother that one merged in Nirvikalpa Samadhi regains an individuality and not by Prarabdha.

This individuality is not the old one but a transformed one, God-centred and not body-centred. Emerging from Nirvikalpa Samadhi by the Mother's will, the transformed individuality recognises that the one Sat-Chid-Ananda is sportively manifesting as the Jivas (sentient beings) and the Jagat (insentient world). To the view of ignorance, the Jiva and the Jagat form a multiplicity different from the Spirit. But enlightenment reveals that without Himself undergoing any change, the Sat-Chid-Ananda, who is Being-Will, has manifested Himself into the Jiva-Jagat which continue to be one with Him. In the creative phase, He is God the Personal, the cause of the Jiva-Jagat, and when creation is withdrawn, He is the Impersonal Absolute. The Personal and the Impersonal are recognised as the obverse and the reverse of the same coin—a non-dual but coeval existence.

The Master illustrates this by the example of the terrace and the steps of the stairs leading to it. Until the terrace is reached, the steps of the stairs are considered as distinct and different from the terrace and are left behind as not the terrace. But when the height of the terrace is scaled, it is found that the steps too are made of the same stuff as the terrace.

## What is Bhavamukha?

The Master calls one established in this kind of perfect enlightenment as a Vijnani in contrast to the Jnani who rejects the world of Jiva and Jagat as an appearance and seeks the Brahman transcending them. The Vijnani rejects nothing. He perceives the whole universe not as a Maya, but as a Leela (sportive manifestation) of the Personal-Impersonal, the Being-Will Divine. He accepts both the terrace and the staircase as real. In analysing a fruit, he takes the whole of it into account—the seeds, the flesh, and the rind; for they all together constitute the whole, and a complete knowledge and acceptance of the fruit involves the acceptance of the whole. But this knowledge of the totality cannot be had by mere talking or philosophising, but can come to one only through the Mother's grace, for which one has to yearn and pant. This yearning and panting for the Divine is, according to him, the highest form of spiritual practice, and all the practices and disciplines given as spiritual practice in Yoga and Tantra are only the means for evoking and strengthening this yearning and panting for the Divine in the mind of the aspirant. For this feeling to mature, renunciation of all worldly attachments, or what the Master calls 'lust and gold', is needed. Then only the Mother's grace operates. The Master illustrates this by the parable of children being left to themselves by the mother in the nursery to play until they begin to cry out of hunger.

Now, it has been pointed out that the Vijnani gains back an ego when he emerges from the Nirvikalpa state. But this ego or individuality is entirely different in quality from that of the unenlightened man. To put it briefly, the ordinary man's ego is body-centred, while the Vijnani's is God-centred. The body-centred ego is based upon a sense of absolute reality of difference, and expresses itself in terms of 'I' and 'mine' with regard to all objects and individual and evaluates everything and every one as contributing to its pleasure and survival.

An ego-centred man may love others, but it is in terms of his narrow self, and the preservation of that narrow self and its interests is his primary concern in life. In contrast to this, the Vijnani's ego is entirely based on a sense of intimate relationship with God as His son, servant, comrade, sweetheart etc., and he looks upon all beings and objects, irrespective of their attitude towards him, as friend, foe or neutral, not as objects for his enjoyment and aggrandisement but as manifestations of the Lord to be loved and served.

Apart from these ethical implications, the state of Vijnana has its metaphysical and psychological significance. The state of mind of the Vijnani is what is called Bhavamukha. The mind of the ignorant man is circumscribed by his individuality and he sees everything else as discrete objects outside along with other individualities like himself, having their fixed contours. But the Vijnani is aware of a Cosmic Whole, a Cosmic Mind, from whom the ideation known as the universe radiates and in whom all beings and objects are like bubbles in a sheet of water, or like waves on the ocean's surface—a part and parcel of the Whole but with individualities that are of the stuff of ideas. He is not only aware of the Whole but feels as one with it either as a part of it, or as itself. So when it is said that Bhavamukha is the state of mind of the Vijnani, it means that the Vijnani is aware of his identity with the Cosmic Whole. As a consequence one in the state of Bhavamukha shares the knowledge and outlook of the Cosmic Whole. Just as a spider stationed in the centre of its web can go to any part of it, he could at will go on the wings of ecstasy to any dimension in the cosmos. He could attune himself to every state of Consciousness, from the crudest to the most evolved, and share their characteristic experiences at will. Thus a Vijnani's state of Bhavamukha enables him to be 'all things to all men.'

## What is Bhavamukha?

Being one with the Cosmic Whole in consciousness, he becomes the conduit for the expression of Its powers in the relative world. As the Vijnani can traverse the whole gamut of the manifestation of Consciousness, he may behave like the humblest of the humble when he is in the attitude of the devotee. But when his individuality gets attuned to a sense of identity with the Immense Cosmic 'I' his behaviour will be different. As a conduit of the will of that Universal 'I' he becomes a centre of immense spiritual energy capable of even making a sinner into a saint by an act of will.

In Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master, this alternation between the devotee mood and the Saviour-mood was veridically noted, because his life was recent and was subjected to study by men who closely observed and recorded it, unlike in the case of the past Incarnations whose lives are clothed, long after their passing away, in thundering miracles by poets and mythologists. This process of distortion was partly due to a studied effort on the part of their followers to hide their human side. For, they felt it detrimental to their glory as divinities if any humanity is allowed to percolate through their Divinity. But an Incarnation is man and God in one, and the concept loses all its significance, when the Incarnate is made into a mere Deity. The Master's life has enabled us to understand the significance of Incarnation in the proper perspective.

The Immense 'I' or the Cosmic Whole, of which we have been speaking till now, is the junction-point between the Absolute and the Relative, the Impersonal and the Personal, the Nirguna and the Saguna aspects of the Divine Mother—the universal Being-Will.

And to be established in that is to be in the Bhavamukha, the threshold of relative consciousness—a state in which the mind could ever dwell in the Divine in both His absolute and

relative aspects and yet without the least distraction to this union, apply itself actively to everyday concerns. Established in that, the Master was in touch with all aspects of the Mother's evolution as the world of manifestation, combined with a keen sense of their unity in Her. It must, however, be noted that the one in Bhavamukha is not in touch with the manifestation of the Whole alone, which the Master called Leela, but also with the unmanifested Absolute state of it, the Nirguna, for which he used the term Nitya. When he is in the awareness of the Leela, the knowledge of the non-separate or hypostatic nature of the Leela in relation to the Nitya, is fully present in his awareness. He is always in touch with the Nitya, even when he is in the Leela. That is the significance of being in the 'threshold state'. But he could also be in the Nirvikalpa state—that of full identity with the Nitya, the Infinite and the Absolute as Pure Being, with will, not sublated, according to the Master, but kept in abeyance.

This is a point on which the Master's doctrine differs from the traditional Advaitin's represented by Tota Puri, the point on which Tota Puri got corrected by the Master's company. The Immense 'I' whose play is the Leela, is not sublated but only held in abeyance or in latency in the Nirvikalpa state. The Vijnani, who is poised in the state of Bhava mukha, can at will be merged in the Nitya with no link with the Leela. This is the state of Nirvikalpa from which there is no return for the ordinary Jiva. It is only Incarnations, as the Master insists, who pass from the one state to the other, and who are in touch with both aspects. Hence their unique state, expressing itself simultaneously as knowledge and Bhakti of the highest order, which a Jiva cannot attain in one and the same state. It looks somewhat contradictory, but the supreme truth can be expressed, though inadequately, only in the language of paradoxes.

## What is Bhavamukha?

On this point the Master said, referring to his own instance, that the natural state of his mind was towards the Nirvikalpa, when there is the total obliteration of multiplicity and the I-sense. In that state one is lost to humanity at large, as any kind of communication is out of question.

But the Will of the Divine Mother, which is operative even in the Nirvikalpa state, unlike in the teaching of classical Vedanta, will not allow the Divine Incarnate to remain in that state. He is an expression of Divine grace, of His love for Jivas in Samsara. As such, in order to keep up his link with the external world, the Master used to create some small artificial desires in his mind, like: 'I want to go to such and such a place,' 'I want to meet such and such a one,' 'I want to eat such and such a thing' etc., and with the help of such created pulls, force the mind to remain at the threshold of relative consciousness, the Bhavamukha, from where he could communicate with the world without losing hold on the Nirvikalpa.

In the Bhavamukha, he had no will separate from the will of the Immense 'I' or the Universal Mother. As that Will directed, he could be in complete identification with the Will when he manifested the capacity to give enlightenment and liberation to Jivas, or at any lower levels of identification up to that of a humble devotee worshipping Her through images or participating in the weal and woe of fellow human beings.

It is said that in the days of his intense physical suffering Sri Ramakrishna expressed his willingness to take any number of such bodies and stand endless suffering, if he could bring illumination and put an end to the sufferings of even a single Jiva. This expression of all-consuming and universal love is the most significant implication of the Divine command to him to remain in Bhavamukha. For one whose natural state was the bliss of Nirvikalpa Samadhi, to come down, in order to serve

suffering humanity, to the level of body-consciousness and inhabit a limited human body subject to all kinds of ailments, trials and tribulations, is a far greater act of mercy than anything we can conceive of — say even that of an emperor abandoning his palace and living in a slum with all its filth and privations in order to serve the slum people. Yet this was what Ramakrishna, the greatest lover of mankind that the modern world has produced, did, when he held in abeyance the tendency of his mind to be merged perpetually in Nirvikalpa Samadhi and forced it to live in the state of Bhavamukha in order to save mankind. Thus he was a conspicuous expression of that redeeming power of God which appears age after age as the Saviour of the Jivas in bondage. This is the implication of calling him a Divine Incarnation as distinguished from a saint who attains to spiritual realisation, helps the few who come into contact with him, and finally attains Sayujya (Union with), the transcendental status.

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HOLD FAST to the lotus feet of the Lord. Remember him constantly; do not waste any more time in worldly thoughts. Struggle! Struggle hard to control the outgoing mind and fix it on God. When you can do this, you will realize what joy there is in spiritual life, what fun it is! Ignorance must be overcome in this very life. This will not be easy unless you can devote yourself wholeheartedly to the work of the spirit. Faith is the one thing needed, intense faith ! Let not doubts get hold of your mind.

# Sankaracharya: Life And Teachings

Swami Dayatmananda

Sankaracharya, along with Sureswara and other disciples started touring all over India. He met the leaders of numerous religious sects, showed them the defects in their beliefs thus helping them in their spiritual progress. Thus preaching and teaching, converting whomsoever he met, Sankaracharya also healed many sick people during his tours. It is said he even brought some of the dead back to life; many other miracles are ascribed to him.

## Encounter with Kapalikas

Kapalikas are practitioners of the perverse and dark side of Tantra. They worship Shiva and perform austerities in order to obtain special powers from him. Ugra Bhairava, at the time of Sankaracharya, was the leader of a large group of these Kapalikas. It is said that he performed severe austerities to please Shiva. Pleased with him Shiva granted him a boon. Ugra asked that it is his desire to go to the abode of Shiva with his human body. Shiva said his desire would be fulfilled if the head of either a great king or a great sage is offered in a fire-sacrifice.

Now Ugra Bhairava was unable to get a king but when he saw Sankaracharya a happy thought formed in his head; he thought that if he could somehow induce Sankaracharya to give up his body his desire would be fulfilled. So he hatched a plan. He approached Sankara as a humble disciple and served him with great devotion. Pleased with his service Sankaracharya asked Ugra what he wanted. Without any

fear or shame Ugra knelt before Sankara and expressed his wish. The Kapalika said, 'You are a man of renunciation, a knower of Brahman, you have no attachment to the body; you live only for the good of others. Be gracious enough to give me your head.' So saying the Kapalika prostrated. A knower of Brahman that he was, Sankaracharya without the least bit of hesitation, granted Ugra's wish.

Sankaracharya's compassion

Sri Shankara who was full of compassion said, 'I offer you my head gladly. This body is perishable. If it perishes for the good of another, what greater joy can there be? But, cautioned Sankara, you should take away my head in secrecy; for if my disciples come to know they may harm you. I shall sit in a lonely place. Come at midnight and take away my head.'

Accordingly, Ugra came at the fixed time and found Shankara in deep meditation, ready to give up his body. Madhava Vidyananda describes this scene:

*'Sri Shankara withdrew his senses into the mind and the mind into Brahman, the Supreme Reality. With his face calm, his eyes half open and fixed as though on the tip of his nose, he sat there in a state of the Supreme Bliss, oblivious of his surroundings.'*

Padmapada was one of the four chief disciples of Sankara. He was a worshipper of Lord Nrisimha. As the Kapalika was approaching Sankaracharya, Padmapada came to know of the plot. Immediately his whole personality changed, the consciousness of Nrisimha took possession of him and he became an embodiment of ferocity. He leapt into

the sky, came to the place where Sankaracharya was sitting wrapped up in Samadhi, caught hold of the Kapalika, and tore open his chest.

Sankara came out of Samadhi and saw before him the ferocious form of Nrisimha. He then sang hymns to pacify Him. Sri Sankaracharya mentions that the Kapalika had attained liberation (freedom from rebirths) by dying at the hands of Lord Nrisimha. This incident, once again, proves Padmapada's great devotion to his Guru.

Let no one think that these stories are manufactured by the votaries of Sankaracharya in order to glorify him. Many of these legends may or may not be true. But they illustrate the fact that the sages are full of compassion and are ever willing to lay down their lives for the good of the many. Let us remember what the great Swami Vivekananda said:

*"So long as even a single dog in my country is without food, my whole religion is to feed it and serve it. Anything excluding that, is un-religious.*

*"May I be born again and again," he exclaimed, ' and suffer a thousand miseries, if only I may worship the only God in whom I believe, the sum total of all souls, and above all, my God the wicked, my God the afflicted, my God the poor of all races!'"*

Sri Ramakrishna suffered because of taking up the sins of his disciples. Christ had suffered the agonies of crucifixion in order to atone for the sins of man.

### Meeting Hastamalaka

At Sreeveli lived a pundit by name Prabhakara. He had a son who was about thirteen years old. The child behaved like

an idiot and seemed a dumb fellow. He ate only when something was given and slept when he was laid down; he would do nothing by himself. The parents were very unhappy at this behaviour of their only son. When Prabhakara heard that Sankara had brought back to life a dead boy at Mookambika, he felt hopeful that the great monk might be able to help his son also.

One day, passing through Sreeveli, a small village, Sankaracharya heard of a boy, thirteen years old, who was behaving in an idiotic manner. From his infancy this boy, refused to speak. Nothing could induce him to utter a sound. His father tried many things to make him speak. But it was all in vain. So they thought him as born dumb.

When Sankara passed through the village, Prabhakara, the distressed father of the boy, thought, "This great monk is reputed to possess great powers. Perhaps he may do something for my child." So he took the boy to Sankara, said, "Revered Sir, my son is a good boy, gentle and obedient. But he does not speak. He never plays with the other boys; he sits quietly in a corner, indifferent to his surroundings. He neither laughs, nor cries. He expresses neither joy nor sorrow. Kindly have mercy on him and cure him."

Sankara looked at the boy. He took him by the hand, smiled at him, and softly stroking his head, asked very gently, "tell me, who are you? What is your name? Why do you not speak?" The boy looks up. He stares at Sankara for a moment. It is as if a thought entered his mind. An expression of reverence steals over his features. A new light shines in his eyes. He smiles; his whole attitude and bearing

changes. He seems suddenly filled with joy. Then, to everyone's surprise, with his face lifted to Sankara, he chants with a sweet voice :

I am not a man, nor an angel, nor a ghost.

I am not a Brahmin, nor a Sudra-beyond caste.

I am not a Brahmacharin, nor a householder, nor a Sanyasin.

I am the effulgent one, the blissful one, the Spirit Divine.

I am the shining one, I know no grief.

I am Brahman, I am all Being.

I am Existence, Knowledge and Bliss.

I am eternally free.

The father was amazed, tears trickle down his cheeks. He embraces his son, hugs him, and with his voice trembling with joy, he bows down to Sankara. "Sir, I can never repay you for this blessing! "

Sankara looked at the boy again intently. Then he looked at the father, and said with great tenderness, "this boy is a realized being. He will never be happy in your home. You are a pious, virtuous man, Therefore, this child was born in your home. But he has come to this world for a great purpose—to preach the truths of Vedanta to suffering humanity. If you wish to repay me then give me your son, that the boy's destiny may be fulfilled." The father, naturally is upset. His child, by regaining his speech, has, as it were, just been given a new lease of life. Now he is asked to offer him up to a monk, who will take him away for ever. What will the boy's mother say?

The following day, Sankara visits the parents at their home and then he assures them that soon another boy will

bless their home, and that boy will be to them a source of great happiness. With this assurance the parents at last consent. The boy is happy to become a monk, and to travel far and wide with his Guru, and, with Sankara's consent, he promises to see his parents again after some years.

Sankara blesses the parents. "No sacrifice," he tells them, "goes in vain. Great will be your reward. He who makes an offering to the Lord, receives in return a thousandfold." Then, taking the boy by the hand, he says, "Now let us go. You have realized the Truth. Henceforth your name will be Hasthamalaka i.e., one who possesses the Amalaka-fruit in the palm of his hand, one who possesses God in his heart."

Mother: "The world is the Lord's. He created it for His own play. We are mere pawns in His game. Wherever He keeps us and in whatever way He does so, we have to abide by it contentedly. We suffer as a result of our own actions; it is unfair to blame anybody for it. We have to surrender ourselves completely to the Lord with faith and devotion in Him, serve others to the best of our capacity, and never be a source of sorrow to anybody."

### 41. Articles of Faith Seen as Profoundest Homage

Swami Vidyatmananda

On August 15, 1983, millions of people watched on television as Pope John Paul II celebrated the feast of the Assumption at Lourdes. I had always wondered about the meaning of the Assumption, which holds that the Virgin Mary did not die but ascended to heaven in her physical body. This never seemed a credible idea, because it is difficult to conceive of heaven as a material locality "up there". And the laws of physics would surely preclude the upward movement into the up there of any ascending material form. As my guru once remarked when talking about the mystery: "Simply impossible. At a certain height it would explode." So John Paul's visit to Lourdes moved me to study this subject and to try to understand why the Church and its devotees throughout the world have made of the Assumption such an important article of faith.

This is what I have understood. Whereas the Divine Mother of the Universe, or Shakti, is an important reality in Hinduism, the concept of God as Mother seems not to have existed in Judaism. The God of the Jews was male and authoritarian. And because of Christianity's origin in Judaism, the idea of God as Mother did not at first exist in Christianity either. But the wish to adore a female divinity seems to be natural to man, for in time she emerged in the religion of Jesus also.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica says that since the Eighth Century the adoration of the Virgin Mary has assumed an important place in Christian worship. (One has only to visit the cathedral of Chartres to confirm how true this is.)

Although the divinity of Christ's mother is nowhere mentioned or even hinted at in the Bible, since early times it became accepted in Catholic belief that Mary was a being expressing the highest virtues. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception established the theory that, totally different from any other individual who lived before or since, Mary was born without stain, devoid of the natural depravity which characterizes all humanity. Mary is to be regarded as exempt from original sin. Other qualities attributed to her are Divine Maternity and Perpetual Virginity: she is referred to as Immaculate and Full of Grace.

As possessor, in the popular mind, of such qualities, the mother of Christ hence cannot be considered to have died the death of an ordinary mortal. If physical demise, as destruction or decomposition, is the "salary" of sin, Mary--who was devoid of sin--must hence escape death. Consequently the tradition established itself that Mary did not die, but ascended to heaven, body and soul intact. So widely held and deeply cherished was this belief that in 1950 Mary's physical ascension to heaven was established as a dogma by Pope Pius XII. Thus the important festival in Catholic countries of the Assumption, and the joyous celebrations in August 1983 at Mary's place in southern France.

Is there any reasonable means of considering positively such an unreasonable belief? Yes, I believe that there is. God as Mother seems to be one of those archetypes existent in the so-called collective unconscious of mankind. Or to put it in another way, God as Divine Mother, wishing

to be recognized in Christendom, wishing Christian bhaktas to be aware of Her existence and qualities, put into their minds the desire to think about Her, to revere Her, and to turn to Her for inspiration and grace. Having in Christianity no original place for the Divine Mother, Christian men and women were led as it were to invent a female deity according to their proper understanding. And this they did. If one loves the Divine it is natural to offer the Divine one's very best. The propositions of the Immaculate Conception and of the Assumption, absurd as they may appear to some, constitute on the part of a significant proportion of humanity just such an expression of their homage, their best.

This Atman is not to be reached by too much talking, nor is it to be reached by the power of the intellect, nor by much study of the scriptures. After long searches here and there, in temples and churches, in earths and in heavens, at last you come back, completing the circle from where you started, to your own soul and find that He, for whom you have been seeking all over the world, for whom you have been weeping and praying in churches and temples, on whom you were looking as the mystery of all mysteries shrouded in the clouds, is nearest of the near, is your own Self, the reality of your life, body, and soul.

## Inside The Cup

Yusuf-Ibu-Hussain was commanded in a dream to approach Du-ul-noon, a renowned Egyptian Sufi saint for spiritual initiation. Accordingly, Hussain went to Egypt to report to Du-ul-noon, but did not disclose his intention out of humility. Even after one year of stay, when asked, he said that he had come only to serve him and to have his holy company. After another year Du-ul-noon again asked whether he wanted anything. Hussain replied that he wished to be initiated into the mysteries of spiritual life. Du-ul-Noon kept quiet and did not say anything for another year. At the end of the third year, he gave a cup with a lid to Hussain and asked him to deliver it to a certain saint on the bank of the Nile. On the way, Hussain became inquisitive and removed the lid to see what was inside the cup. A mouse jumped out and ran away. Sorely embarrassed, Hussain nonetheless delivered the cup with the lid to the saint.

On finding the cup empty, the saint remarked, 'If you can't take care of a mouse, how will you be able to take care of the spiritual mysteries disclosed to you through initiation? If you are not careful in small matters, how will you be careful in spiritual matters?'

## **Programme for March - April 2013**

Sunday discourses begin

at the

**Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm**

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Mar	3	Facing Adversities	Swami Shivarupananda
Mar	10	Ramakrishna Puja	
Mar	17	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 19	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar	24	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 20	Swami Dayatmananda
Mar	31	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 21	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	7	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 22	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	14	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 23	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	21	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 24	Swami Dayatmananda
Apr	28	Day Retreat	

### **Sri Ramakrishna's Puja**

Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2013

at Bourne End at 4:00 pm

### **Day Retreat**

With Swami Dayatmananda and Swami Shivarupananda

at the Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, on 28 April

from 10:00 am until 7:00 pm

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

Sri Ramakrishna was many-sided. Whenever he talked about the intuitive knowledge of the Godhead, he would talk as one who was a pure jnani, a knower of God. And whenever he talked about love and devotion, he talked as a pure lover and devotee of God. He impressed upon us very clearly that mere secular knowledge is nothing but vanity, and that one should struggle hard to attain spiritual knowledge, and love, and devotion to God alone.

The one purpose of human life is to attain devotion to God and spiritual illumination; otherwise life is vain and meaningless. Eating, drinking, sleeping, and procreating are not the sole ends of human birth; these belong to the brutes. God is greatly manifest in the human body. Try to understand this truth. Ah! Swamiji gave his heart's blood to build this monastery so that you young men might have the opportunity to devote your lives to God and practice spiritual disciplines. In fact, in his effort to make your life easier he over-exerted himself and shortened his own life. What intense love he had toward all mankind ! Sri Ramakrishna was revealed to the world at large through Swamiji. Know that their words and teachings are not different.

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Know then, that thou art He, and model your whole life accordingly, and he who knows this and models his life accordingly, will no more grovel in darkness.

This truth about the soul is first to be heard. If you have heard, it, think about it. Once you have done that, meditate upon it. No more vain arguments! Satisfy yourself once that you are the infinite spirit. If that is true, it must be nonsense that you are the body. You are the Self, and that must be realised. Spirit must see itself as spirit. Now the spirit is seeing itself as the body. That must stop. The moment you begin to realise that, you are released.



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