

Vedanta

392 NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2016

Nag Mahashay: A Householder Saint

Culbreth Sudler

Jalaluddin Rumi

Aga Syed Ibrahim Dara



Divine Wisdom

Teachings of Swami Akhandananda

The talk veered round to principle—the topic of the previous day. Baba began:

“Some of them (Inmates of the Ashrama) have lived with me for eight or ten years. Still they cease to follow my principles when I am not here for some time. You can easily understand what will happen when I am no more. The same story everywhere. Is it so easy to hold on to a principle? That requires a lot of suffering and sacrifice. It is not for the idle and the pleasure-seeking.

“They call Swamiji the ‘Patriot-Saint of India.’ Is it easy to be a patriot? A patriot feels for the country as if it were his own Self. I have not found anyone else who feels like this, and is able to transmit this feeling to others. We are the workers built by Swamiji. We learnt by obeying.

“Is it easy to work in the true spirit? A mistake committed is not very often admitted by the worker, even if it is pointed out by another.

“Is it easy to become a real Sannyasin? How much we have struggled to become such! We had to face the extremes of summer and winter, of hunger and thirst, and over and above that, to maintain the feeling of sameness when praised or blamed. Are all these so easy?

“Once I was deeply thinking, sitting quietly alone, as if in meditation, thus: Someone is praising me, another comes and blames me. Someone is putting a garland on me, another is insulting me. Someone is putting sandal-paste on my face, another filth. Someone is welcoming me, another driving me out. Yet I am unperturbed in the midst of all these.

Vedanta

392 NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2016

Contents

- 242 **Editorial**
Worship of the Divine Mother - 7
-
- 245 **Nag Mahashay: A Householder Saint**
Culbreth Sudler
-
- 254 **Jalaluddin Rumi**
Aga Syed Ibrahim Dara
-
- 265 **Sadhana of Surrender**
Ramakrishnan. R
-
- 272 **With My Master, Swamiji, and Maharaj**
Swami Vijnanananda
-
- 280 **An Eckhartian Dialogue**
Philip L. Griggs
-
- 284 **Leaves from an Ashrama: 55**
What Transcends the Ticking Clock
Swami Vidyatmananda
-
- 286 **Annual Index**
-
- 288 **Programme**
-

ISSN 1355 - 6436

Editorial

Worship of the Divine Mother - 7 (Continued from the last issue)

“God is not only inside us. He is both inside and outside. The Divine Mother showed me in the Kali temple that everything is Chinmaya, the Embodiment of Spirit’, that it is She who has become all this, the image, myself, the utensils of worship, the door-sill, the marble floor. Everything is indeed Chinmaya. The aim of prayer, of spiritual discipline, of chanting the name and glories of God, is to realize just that. For that alone a devotee loves God.”

The goal of spiritual practice is to realize God. This should be done by the cultivation of moral and spiritual virtues leading to purity of mind. As the Bhagavad Gita declares, ‘He who sees his own Divine Self in all beings and sees all beings in God, he is the best of all devotees’.

Worship done rightly helps us become a true devotee of God. *Puja* or ritualistic worship, forms a part of the process called *Upasana*. The literal meaning of the word ‘*upasana*’ is to sit near. It is the process of practising the presence of God till one merges in Him. *Puja* is of enormous help in this respect.

Every devotee of God believes that God :

listens and answers every sincere prayer.

Can be invoked in an image.

Through the act of devout worship helps the worshipper becomes divinized.

Accepts the loving service and blesses him.

Helps him in totally surrendering to Him.

Accepts the offering of devotees given with love, devotion and faith.

(Sri Krishna says in the Gita: ‘Whatever a pure-hearted devotee offers with devotion – a leaf, a flower, a fruit or water, I accept that loving offering.’)

Four varieties of worship

The worship of God can be done in four different ways: ritualistic, vocal, mental and manual.

The repetition of a mantras (*japa*), the chanting of hymns (*stotras*) and singing of devotional songs (*bhajans*) fall under Vocal worship.

Meditation, and all the external rituals done mentally falls under mental worship (*Manasika Puja*).

Any service done with devotion to God (popularly known as *kainkaryya*) is also *Puja*. In the Gita, Sri Krishna advises Arjuna to do all work as worship : '*O son of Kunti, whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer as oblation, whatever you give in charity, whatever austerity you practise – do all that as an offering to Me.*'

If one has to derive the full benefit of the formal worship with rituals, one must have *Shraddha*, deep faith and *Nishta*, steady practice. Puja done with faith and understanding produces a state of mind in which the presence of the Divine is felt by the worshipper. Regular and devout worship of the Divine helps one abide in the presence of God. In addition if we know the meaning of the mantras and other ritualistic actions involved at different stages of worship it helps us even more.

Before we go into the details of the actual puja it would be good to bear these points in mind.

The main objectives of any puja are :

To feel the presence of God more and more and ultimately to realize Him.

To achieve concentration of mind.

To bring about gradual transformation in our character and consciousness.

Puja also helps us :

Establish a closer and deeper relationship with God;

Reduce selfishness and egotism.

Lessen our attachment to the world.

Shift our dependence from the world to God.

Feel our inner divinity and finally

Surrender totally to God.

In every Puja there are 7 important stages. These are:

1. Purification
2. Divinization
3. Consecration
4. Invocation of the Lord
5. Mental worship,
6. External worship
7. Self-surrender

The worship of the Deity can be done with five, ten, sixteen, or more articles like water, flowers, leaves, incense, light, food, clothes etc. Ritual worship may be performed to an earthen, wooden or metal image of a deity, to a picture, symbol or an idol, representing some aspect of Godhead.

Preparations

Before the worship begins some preparations must be made. The worshipper must take bath and put on clean dress. Where possible he must observe fasting until the worship is over. He should enter the shrine room with a prayerful attitude and must take care not to cherish worldly thoughts. He must enter the room with mental poise and equanimity, and sit erect as the *Gita* exhorts, with the trunk, neck and head erect on the designed seat.

Before the commencement of actual Puja he has to pass through a series of preliminary preparations for the sanctification of one's own body, place, Mantra, materials (*Pujadravya*) and the Devata. The aim of such preparatory practices is to realise the worshipper's identity with the deity and then adore Him ; for as the Upanishad says, one must transform oneself into God before one can worship God.

Before the worship begins all the objects connected with worship must be washed and made clean. The place, the seat, the utensils etc., are washed and wiped clean; the altar is decorated with beautiful flowers, the deity is to be garlanded whenever possible.

All the articles of worship like water, sandal paste, flowers, offering etc., are to be kept ready near the worshipper who sits on a cushion facing east or north.

(To be continued)

Nag Mahashay: A Householder Saint

Culbreth Sudler

Every saint represents a unique victory. To Sri Ramakrishna, Nag Mahashay was the 'ideal' householder devotee, one who successfully combined work in the world with recollectedness of God and spiritual striving. His life from boyhood was a model of austerity, so much so that among the *swamis* and *brahmacharis* of the Ramakrishna Order he was referred to as the 'revered Nag.' Nag Mahashay is a saint who belongs to our time. It is as if we had seen him last week or the week before moving along in the Calcutta crowds, a pencil-slim figure in white, head down, medical satchel in hand, radiating the love and humility for which he will be forever remembered, ready at a moment's notice to give aid if anyone needed him and then to rejoin the crowd in complete anonymity. St. Francis of Assisi was so gentle, it is said, that birds came to him without fear. Durgacharan Nag, (Nag Mahashay is his more popular name), experienced the feelings of others so keenly that he couldn't bear to have a boatman row him across the Ganges. After paying his fare, the saint regularly took the oars and did the rowing himself. A workman who came on a very hot day to repair his roof was fanned by the saint as he worked. Toward the end of his life, the fame of this great-hearted, humble, inflexible spirit had spread so widely that travellers and pilgrims from all over Bengal stopped off at his native village to have his *darshan* and be near him.

Before he met Sri Ramakrishna, Nag Mahashay practised medicine for fifteen years. He was an excellent doctor, although in the opinion of his family, much too charitable with his patients. A biography written by a friend of his later years, Sarat Chandra Chakravarty (which has been translated into English), describes how Nag Mahashay kept himself a poor man throughout his medical career by treating needy patients without charge, at the

same time refusing fees from grateful wealthy patients if he felt these fees were excessive. It was known that on occasions he gave away his own cloth or the blanket from his bed if they were needed by others.

There are so many stories of Nag Mahashay's kindness that they tend to obscure his great inner strength. The dramatist and great householder devotee, Girish Chandra Ghosh, once remarked: "*Swami Vivekananda became so big that Maya's net could not hold him; Nag Mahashay made himself so small he slipped right through.*" In fact, the subordination of the ego came to be a kind of symbol of the saint's personality.

At meal time Nag Mahashay would see to it that others present were served first. Afterwards, like the child of God and true servant he wished to be, he would go about collecting the used leaf plates and other vessels. In *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, Nag Mahashay never speaks. When walking with others, he always took a position in the rear. We must understand, of course, that it was not false modesty or weakness, but the strength of an overpowering love that prompted such conduct.

Was there no detail of the saint's life which a western householder might question? Perhaps there is one point—a major one. Before he was twenty, Durgacharan Nag had been twice persuaded by his elders into marriage. In both cases, and for his entire life, he refused to become a complete husband. Some may feel that since he had given in to his elders, it would have been better for the saint to sacrifice himself here, too; others, however, might well say that there is no room for compromise in spiritual life.

In any case, none of the problems of householder living were unknown to the saint. His father did everything possible to discourage his spiritual nature and mould him into a typical worldly-minded youth. As long as they lived, the high-minded

Durgacharan suffered from family friction and the thought that he was ungracious to his elders—particularly his aunt, whom he loved.

Sometime after Sri Ramakrishna's passing, after much soul-searching, Nag Mahashay abandoned his medical practice entirely. In a dramatic gesture, he threw his medical kit into the Ganges! Only by devoting himself to a better ideal, he resolved, could he hope to lift the general level of mankind. He knew that by medicine alone he could not relieve the suffering of man. The last fourteen years of the saint's life were devoted to preserving the memory of Sri Ramakrishna. It was a wonderful time—in spite of his poverty! Many records speak of Nag Mahashay's having become a 'living reminder' of the Master. One of Swami Brahmananda's favourite recollections had to do with an afternoon at the home of Balaram Bose where a large number of devotees were gathered. Nag Mahashay arrived late. "*The minute Nag Mahashay entered the room,*" Maharaj recalled, "*all conversation stopped. It was impossible to keep from thinking and speaking of Sri Ramakrishna.*" And then he added, "*It is through such great souls that spirituality has been kept alive in India.*"

One shining incident in Nag Mahashay's relation with the Master will always stand out. During the Master's last illness at Cossipore, Nag Mahashay was one of the few visitors who was permitted to see him. As a physician, he quickly recognized that the Master's condition had gone beyond the help of medicine. Then in a flash the thought occurred to him that his own austerities had developed a power—the one remaining means—to heal the Master's illness. Nag Mahashay leaned over with the intention of transferring the Master's fatal condition to himself. But Sri Ramakrishna read his thought.

"*Yes, Durgacharan, you could do that. But I won't let you.*" Nag Mahashay's devotion to the Master was faithfully transferred to his treasured disciple, Swami Vivekananda. When Swamiji was formulating the policies for the Ramakrishna Math and Mission

which at that time some considered radical, Nag Mahashay, a traditionalist and usually retiring and self-effacing, was outspoken in support of the young leader.

In turn, Swamiji was once moved to declare: *"I have travelled in many parts of the world and never have I met a greater soul than Nag Mahashay."*

Durgacharan Nag was born in Eastern Bengal in 1846. This was a time when a number of great souls were being born all over greater Calcutta—members of the 'inner circle' who would later make up the Master's family. As we know, Sri Ramakrishna's period of teaching was very short. Nag Mahashay didn't meet the Master until 1880, and Sri Ramakrishna was to live only six years more. But when Nag Mahashay paid a second visit to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna assured the anxious Durgacharan: *"You have done well to come here. I wait for you all."*

Although coming from a poor family, Durgacharan from early boyhood, we are told, tried to relieve the suffering of the poor of the village. Among boys of his own age he was a leader, serious-minded and respected. When he was eleven or twelve, the only school that offered the instruction he sought was ten miles distant. Over the pleadings of his father and aunt, Durgacharan made the daily twenty-mile hike for two years.

Perhaps realizing that they had best get this unusual youth settled quickly, Durgacharan's elders began making plans, according to Hindu custom, for his marriage and future career. As we know, English influence was very strong in mid-nineteenth century India. The elders hoped that their young student, brilliant as he was, would develop into a prominent doctor. Despite his objections, Durgacharan was entered in medical school and shortly afterwards led into marriage. He had, however, taken a vow of lifelong celibacy.

In the course of a few years the young bride died, leaving Durgacharan again free. As he was starting medical practice, he

met a young man much like himself, intellectual and spiritually minded. Suresh Datta came of a good family, and now for the first time Durgacharan had someone to whom he could express all his spiritual doubts, questions, and hopes. Durgacharan Nag was an orthodox Hindu of Hindus; Suresh was an emancipated member of the Westernized Brahma Samaj. So much the better. Religious discussions and struggles kept their bond of friendship stimulating and fresh. And, each evening when the day's work was over, the two young men would spend an hour or two in meditation on the bank of the Ganges.

This was the start of the long middle portion of the saint's life, a period of intense spiritual quest, overwork, family problems and conflicts, money worries, dissatisfaction with the world, and continual frustration from not being able to achieve his goal.

In time Durgacharan and Suresh became accepted as sincere seekers of God by the *sadhus* who meditated along the banks of the Ganges, and from some of those older *sadhus*, Durgacharan received helpful guidance. One night after many months of *japa* and meditation it is said that he felt himself '*bathed in a white effulgence.*' This certain sign of spiritual growth, coming early in his struggle, indicated that it was no ordinary soul who had come to the meditation grounds.

Concerned at the young doctor's growing interest in religious life, Durgacharan's father, Dindayal Nag, and aunt began negotiations for an immediate second marriage. At this, the loving but strong-minded Durgacharan balked. A tremendous family upset, lasting several days and exhausting both father and son, ensued. In the end, Dindayal Nag, devoted parent that he was, gave in; at which the no-less sincere and devoted son reversed himself and agreed to go through with the marriage. It was to remain all his life, however, a marriage in name only.

For the next seven years, family responsibilities now added to his life. Durgacharan threw himself into his profession. He became

widely known and respected; still he was not satisfied. He felt his spiritual progress was unsatisfactory. Then another period of crisis—and renewed determination—came with the death of his aunt. This was the person Durgacharan had loved and admired most. Yet it was undeniable that she had died without knowing why she had lived. Was this, then, the entire human drama—to live, struggle, and die? Was there no other plan or explanation?

With his father pressing him to be realistic and practical, the only solace the deeply troubled doctor could find was to be more generous in caring for his patients. His office became virtually a free clinic. Since it seemed that his efforts to serve God were unacceptable, he would at least serve his patients. Eventually, even his father came to recognize that this noble son would never become a selfish and compromising man of the world. He saw that nothing but the search for God, nothing but complete spiritual fulfilment would ever satisfy such unrest.

Nightly, Nag Mahashay visited the meditation ground on the Ganges. On one occasion his absorption became so great that the incoming tide swept him out into the river. Then, one day, a sadhu advised him that for real advancement, it is necessary to have initiation from a qualified *guru*. Another obstacle! Where was such a teacher to be found? However, as is often true in such matters, in just a few days Nag's family guru was seen coming up the bank of the Ganges where Durgacharan was meditating. He had been sent by the Divine Mother, the family guru said, to initiate both Durgacharan and his father.

All of Nag Mahashay's thought and energies were now pointed toward one goal. He spent whole nights in meditation. His professional practice was attended to as best he could, but each day Nag Mahashay waited only for nightfall when he could resume his struggle.

One evening, his friend Suresh remarked that at a recent Brahma Samaj meeting there had been talk about a real

paramahansa who was supposed to be living at a nearby temple garden. Would Durgacharan like to visit him? It was early the next morning when the two friends set out to find Sri Ramakrishna.

In the Bengali life of Nag Mahashay, a deeply touching picture is given of this meeting between the passionate seeker, Durgacharan Nag, and the Master. At this time Rani Rasmani's temple at Dakshineswar was one of the most beautiful sights along the Ganges. Its flower-bordered walks, golden spires, and regimented white-walled shrines made the entire compound resemble an 'abode of the gods.' In their excitement, the two pilgrims took some wrong turnings, had to go back, finally arrived at the temple garden about two o'clock of a very hot April afternoon. The eccentric Hazra tried to put them off by saying that Sri Ramakrishna was away for the day, but from within, 'a smiling figure beckoned.'

As they entered his room, Sri Ramakrishna was half-reclining on the smaller of his two cots, his legs stretched out in front of him. From a distance, the Westernized Suresh bowed respectfully. Overcome at being at last in the presence of a realized soul—a teacher who might hold the key to his whole future life and hopes—Durgacharan stepped forward and, prostrating beside the cot, reached up to take the dust of the Master's feet. But as was sometimes his way with strangers, Sri Ramakrishna quickly withdrew his feet. It was a crushing moment for Durgacharan.

In the conversation that followed, Sri Ramakrishna inquired about the background of his visitors, and as the minutes passed, Durgacharan Nag's spirits flagged. "*There is nothing at all wrong with being a householder,*" the Master said. "*You should live in the world as the mud fish does. The mud fish lives in the mud, but it doesn't stick to him. Similarly, you should stay in the world, being careful that its dirt does not stain you.*"

The yearning of Durgacharan's heart for a life of renunciation apart from the world and in the company of realized souls and

aspirants was suddenly quashed by this teacher who spoke with such authority. Was this to be the ultimate outcome, then, after all this struggle? Rejection of his fondest hopes? We read that following this visit Durgacharan Nag 'became almost mad with desire.' Losing interest in food and sleep, 'he would talk only of Sri Ramakrishna and that only with his friend, Suresh.'

A few days later both pilgrims returned to Dakshineswar. As soon as he saw Durgacharan, the Master was impressed with his spiritual condition. Telling Durgacharan not to worry ("*You are in a very exalted state*"), he asked him to sit near him. Later the two aspirants were sent to the *panchavati* to meditate, and shortly after, Sri Ramakrishna joined them.

Now the Master began to show Durgacharan exceptional favours, asking him for a number of very personal services. . . . "*I've forgotten my spice bag—would you fetch it?*" . . . "*I need a towel.*" . . . "*This jar should be filled with water.*" . . . "*Would you please prepare me a smoke?*" . . . During an interval when Durgacharan was absent, Sri Ramakrishna remarked to Suresh: "*Your friend is truly a fire of renunciation!*"

But in spite of these favours, Durgacharan could not forget his disappointment and rejection. Even if he could not be a full-fledged monk, was he accepted as a disciple? Was he worthy? A few days later Durgacharan was drawn irresistibly back to the temple garden, this time alone. As he entered the Master's room, the latter went into *samadhi* and standing up, began to mutter something to himself. Then Durgacharan was suddenly surprised to hear the Master saying: "*Well, you're a medical man. Examine my legs!*"

Bending over, Durgacharan began a careful visual examination of the Master's legs. There was nothing at all wrong, nothing unusual with his legs or feet.

"*Look more carefully! Examine them. Touch them!*" With a pang of understanding and tears of joy in his eyes, Durgacharan dropped to his knees, we are told, and with all caution gone, seized the

blessed lotus feet in a strong embrace. Did Nag Mahashay fully comprehend that in having his legs examined the Master was not only compensating him for his earlier 'rejection,' but was actually transmitting to him some of his own priceless power?

Only one portrait of Nag Mahashay remains. Characteristically, it was painted after the saint's death. The complexion is a light honey-brown. The thick, pure white hair is combed forward as in the busts of Roman senators, and this is balanced by a full white beard. The cheekbones are high and prominent, the straight aquiline nose extremely thin. The wide-set eyes reflect the all-renouncing humility and recollectedness which became the saint's second nature.

Following Nag Mahashay's death in 1900 at the relatively young age of fifty-four, Swami Saradananda, who was present, wrote to Swami Turiyananda:

'Nag Mahashay was greater than any of us. I saw him go into nirvikalpa samadhi again and again. Signs of ecstasy were visible on his body. He came back from the nirvikalpa state to normal consciousness, and then gave up his body in samadhi.'

At the end, we see that notwithstanding his humility, his kindness, and his filial devotion, the beauty of this saint's life was its strength. Nothing calls for greater strength or evokes our admiration more than that renunciation and daily recollectedness practiced by a holy man or woman. Like all saints, Nag Mahashay attributed his entire attainment to 'grace,' and constantly predicted Sri Ramakrishna's grace would fall upon anyone who seek it. When he was dying he said to his grieving friend and biographer :

"When you have taken refuge at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna, be assured he will shower his grace on you. One who wants him will realize him."

(Reprinted from Vedanta for the West, Mar-April 1968)

Jalaluddin Rumi

Aga Syed Ibrahim Dara

I

Let us describe the life of a Sufi who was neither only a simple lover like Rabia nor so much of an austere ascetic as the great Bayazid, but one gifted with many shades and colours that added to the charm of his personality. Jalaluddin Rumi combined in his being the wisdom and realization of a sage and also the expression of it as a brilliant poet; he was an exquisite singer and a passionate lover. He filled the whole country with the sweetness of his songs, woke up and inspired the slumbering and the indifferent to the great wonders of the Spiritual Existence. The incidents and the miracles of his early life are so many that it would fill volumes to write all of them, and there are stories in legion of his doings and miracles even as a child which we have no place to describe here. At the age of six he taught his playmates philosophy and saw visions, and it is said that he even brought the dead to life.

Jalaluddin Rumi was born on the 30th September of 1207 A.D. in the holy province of Balk which has been the birth-place of so many Sufis, including the famous king Ibrahim Adam who renounced the kingdom like Buddha and went in search of spiritual knowledge. Rumi's father was a very influential man but he was exiled from the kingdom by the jealousy of the king and took refuge in Nishapur. Here the famous Sufi poet Fariduddin Attar blessed the boy and predicted that he would soon be a great sage and attain realization and become world famous. He presented him with his books, *The Israrnama* and *The book of Mystics*.

After this initiation Jalaluddin made rapid progress. He began to be considered a prodigy, and when the family went to Quonia, an old Roman Province, he got the name of Rumi—the Roman.

His father was considered a religious head, and was a religious teacher. Jalaluddin was still young when his father died, and he took his place. He met with very little opposition. He was supported by many and had a great number of followers from the very beginning.

The most fascinating thing about Jalaluddin was his passionate and pure love. He drew people to him and made them close and loving friends. He was like a fountain of Divine Love which flowed ceaselessly from his being and found expression in various ways. He used to get into ecstasy while reciting his own poems, and it created such a strong spiritual atmosphere that many who witnessed it got greatly inspired and often had a spiritual experience. It led to the conversion of many people. It is a fact that wherever there is pure Divine Love it cannot but express itself in some form or other, and by its own law and nature it finds its way into other hearts that are pure and ready to receive it. Love has no dwelling-place. It is an illusive wanderer running from heart to heart. The only way to draw and keep it is by loving more constantly and with great purity and passion. This is the reason why so many Sufi teachers advised us to cast aside all deliberations and scriptures and get into and remain in an inspired condition of love.

II

The message that Jalaluddin Rumi delivered was also similar. He used to get into an inspired condition and dictate his world famous classical *Masnavi*, and one of his faithful friends patiently copied down every word of it. At times the whole night passed in doing so. Rumi used to be in a condition half conscious and

half inspired. Others too found themselves thrown into an ocean of love and bliss and freely laughed, wept, danced, praised or went into an ecstasy. It reminds one of the dances of Chaitanya in his closed room.

It is said that there was a pillar in the courtyard of Rumi's house, and in his ecstasy he often used to catch hold of it with one hand and go round and round it rapidly like a child at play but when he got into trance he continued doing so for hours without stopping. It is while turning round the pillar that Rumi very often dictated his poetry. We can judge his condition and feelings by these lines:—

*"Come! Come! Thou Art the Soul, the Soul so dear, revolving!
Come! Come! Thou art the Cedar, the Cedar's Spear, revolving!
Oh, come! The well of Life bubbling springs;
And Morning Stars exult, in gladness sheer, revolving!"*

The great Masnavi of Jalaluddin Rumi which took forty-three years to finish is a memorable work. It is an attempt at the synthesis of the entire Sufi teachings and doctrines and truths which accumulated without any organized synthesis or scientific treatment of the subject. It is a great work. It is more scientific than creative, but the poetic genius of Rumi shines more brilliant in it than anywhere else. In a chaste inspiring poetry he sums up all the great wisdom of Sufi masters and their various philosophies and doctrines. Besides this, it gives in the superb poetry, the message of Rumi himself. Parts of this book are very deep and profound while at other places he is very inspiring.

Let us quote a passage from Professor Hadland Davis who writing about his poem in the 'Wisdom of the East Series' says, 'He (Rumi) carries us along a torrent of heavenly music. The rhythmic swing of his wonderful dance is soul-stirring. We seem to move exultantly, ecstatically, to the sound of the poet's singing, far behind the silver stars into the Presence of the Beloved. With

what reverence, with what a glow of simile and subtle suggestion he describes the Beauty of the Beloved! With what exquisite passion he foretells the Eternal Union! Then there is a lull in this fierce and spiritual song, and Jalal sings, ever so gently and with an infinite tenderness, about human tears being turned into 'rain-clouds'. Rumi's simple advice to a seeker in the 'Complaint of the reed' is to make himself like a reed in the hands of a musician who plucks it out from all its associates, cuts it to pieces and turns it into a flute to play the Divine Music. "*Become a flute, give up your self, and like it surrender fully ; then alone you will get the touch of the Lover's lip and He will blow through you His Divine Music*" — this he has untiringly said over and over again.

III

To Rumi all religions were alike. He saw no difference among them. To him they were like so many different clothes in which the soul aspires to come to the Beloved. After a short time the clothes are flung aside, and the naked purity of the soul comes to the forefront. Then there is no difference between man and man. All become one, and all are lovers of the same Beloved. Nay, there is no difference even between the Lover and the Beloved.

Eloquently he says :—

*"Lovers and Beloved have both perished
And not themselves only but their love as well.
Sense of separating duality is drowned in an Ocean of oneness
Where God alone exists eternally."*

The sayings of Rumi are sincere, passionate and inspiring. The following are nice examples:—

*"O Obscurity of obscurity, O Soul of soul
Thou art more than all. Thou art before all.
All is seen in Thee. Thou art seen in all..... ."*

"Lose Thyself in Him to penetrate this mystery and everything else is superfluous."

"In each atom thou shalt see the All; thou shalt contemplate millions of secrets as luminous as the sun."

His ideal was to get Union with God and to see, merge himself in His consciousness, *"To see all in God and God in all and all as God and God as all."* He writes :

"I, All in all, becoming now clear see God in all."

Everywhere he realized the One.

He says :

*"I looked above and in all the spaces I saw That which is One,
I looked below and in all the waters I beheld That which is One.
I looked into the heart; it had space for many worlds, all peopled
with dreams;*

In all those dreams I saw That which is One."

Rumi did not preach a religion but emphatically urged all the necessity of realization of the Divine. Eloquently he asks,

"Look for the moon in the sky; not in the water!

Become pure from all the attributes of Self

That you may see your own bright essence.

You see in your own heart the knowledge of the prophet !

Without book, without tutor, without preceptor."

It is possible, says Rumi, for a sincere soul to attain Divine nature, the qualities of the Beloved which he explains thus :

'The motion of every atom is towards its origin. A man becomes the thing on which he is bent. Through constant remembrance and eager longing one assumes the qualities of the Beloved, who is the Soul of souls.'

He emphasized also work and 'loving sacrifice' in the path of God to get Realization.

"Put away the tale of love that travellers tell;

Do thou serve God with all thy might."

This is his emphatic advice.

He founded a sect of Dervishes called the '*Moulavites*.' It is the most important and the most influential order of Dervishes existing up to this day and is the most broad-minded of all. He introduced into Sufism music and dancing. The Dervishes sing and dance till they get inspired and pass into a condition of ecstasy. The dances are called '*Raza Kulli*'—utter dependence on the will of God. In his lifetime Jalaluddin often got into conditions not far removed from insanity, during dances. Jalaluddin had himself authorized music and dancing even at the time of funeral, to rejoice at the freedom of the spirit from the bondage of the body. Rumi's religion was devotion, and he got the realization of love. Though it found in the beginning such passionate and noisy expressions, he discovered in the end that the greatest love is '*still and silent*.' His expression reminds one of the similar saying in the Upanishad : '*Beyond relation, featureless, unattainable in which all is still*.'

Though Rumi himself did not claim godhead as did Mansoor and Bayazid, yet he supported their doctrines and in his Masnavi gives incidents from the life of Bayazid and others to explain the same. He considered his own poetry to be Divinely-inspired and therefore allowed nothing to be omitted from it. On one occasion when, after receiving his instruction to do something, a disciple said 'God willing,' he flew into a rage.

IV

Jalaluddin was married at Lerenda in 1226 A.D. to a lady named Gevher (pearl). She bore him two sons and died a premature death. He married again. He has in many places written profound and true things about woman and her true relationship with man. His conception of woman can be seen from the following lines:

*"Woman is a ray of God, not a mere mistress,
The Creator's Self, as it were, not a mere creature!"*

Jalaluddin had also a friend Shamsuddin Tabriz with whom he entered into very deep and passionate bonds of love and friendship which he believed to have some spiritual relationship. He left the company of others and went to solitary places with Shams to meditate and to discuss profound mysteries. This enraged the disciples, and they created so much row about it that Shams fled away to Tabriz. Jalal could hardly bear the separation.

He wept, lamented and wrote poems on Shams, and soon he too went after him and brought him back. Another disturbance led to Shams flying away to Damascus where, it is said, he died a violent death. Rumi has written a lot in his Masnavi as well as in his lighter poems about Shams with so much praise that it is believed that he was not an actual person but a mythical creation of Rumi. This theory is not correct. Shams, it is said, was a man of strong dogmatic and forceful character. The mystical way in which Rumi sings the praise of Shams can be seen from the following couplets like which there are many in his work.

*"The face of Shamsuddin Tabriz's glory, is the sun
In whose track the cloud-like hearts are moving.
O Shamsi Tabriz, beauty and glory of the horizons,
What king is but a beggar of thee with heart and soul?"*

Rumi was also a believer in the transmigration of soul and its through rebirths. He seems to have got the experience of it clearly at times. The following lines of his have become famous.

*"I died as mineral and became a plant,
I died a plant and rose to animal,
I died as animal and I was man!
Why should I fear? When was I less by dying?
Yet once more I shall die to soar*

*With angel's blest, but even from this state
I must pass on: 'All except God doth perish.'
When I have sacrificed my angel soul
I shall become what no man ever conceived.
Oh, let me not exist, for non-existence
Proclaims in organ voice: 'To Him we shall return.'*"

Jalaluddin Rumi died in the year 1273 A.D. He was in an exultant mood at the time of his death and praised God. He left many wise instructions to his son Bahauddin Valad. The whole country mourned over the great loss. His funeral was attended by people of all religions and creeds; and there is a story that a Christian, when asked why he was mourning in such a manner over a Muslim grave, replied emphatically, "We esteem him as Moses, the David and Jesus of our time; and we are his disciples, his adherents." This fact is a good illustration of the love and unity with which Rumi inspired everybody irrespective of external differences of caste, creed or religion.

The work of Rumi brought into Sufism untold wealth and riches. His poetry is such as any literature of the world might well be proud to possess.* His books have been a source of knowledge and guidance for the innumerable seekers that came after him. One cannot help observing in writing about Persian poets that their inner aspiration as well as the mode of expression resemble so much to that of an Indian devotee, that at times they seem to belong to the same country.

** From the literary point of view all the poetry of Rumi is not as perfect or polished as that of Hafiz or Jami; and some minor defects too can be pointed out. But it is because he wrote too much of it and had no time for revision. As we have seen, much was written in trance while dancing or revolving in which such errors can easily creep in.*

V

Let us now give some selections from his poetry which in spite of losing most of the original native charm in translation are beautiful and inspiring.

THIS IS LOVE

*This is Love: to fly heavenward,
To rend, every instant, a hundred veils.
The first moment, to renounce Life:
The last step, to feel without feet.
To regard this world as invisible,
Not to see what appears to one's self.
"O heart," I said, "may it bless thee
To have entered the circle of lovers,
To look beyond the range of the eye,
To penetrate the windings of the bosom !
Whence did this breath come to thee, O my soul,
Whence this throbbing, O my heart?"*

THE KINGLY SOUL

*The kingly soul lays waste the body,
And after its destruction he builds it anew.
Happy the soul who for love of God
Has renounced family, wealth, and goods !
Has destroyed its house to find the Hidden Treasure,
And with that Treasure has built in fairer sort;
Has dammed up the stream and cleansed the channel,
And then turned a fresh stream into the channel.*

THE DIVINE ABSORPTION

*Do me justice, O Thou who art the glory of the just,
Who art the throne, and I the lintel of Thy door!
But, in sober truth, where are throne and doorway?
Where are "We" and "I?" There where our Beloved is!
O Thou, who art exempt from "Us" and "Me,"
Who pervadest the spirits of all men and women;
When man and woman become one, Thou art that One!
When their union is dissolved, lo! Thou abidest!
Thou hast made these "Us" and "Me" for this purpose,
To wit, to play chess with them by Thyself.
When Thou shalt become one entity with "Us" and "You,"
Then wilt Thou show true affection for these lovers.
When these "We" and "Ye" shall all become One Soul,
Then they will be lost and absorbed in the "Beloved."*

BEHOLD THE WATER OF WATERS

*The sea itself is one thing, the foam another;
Neglect the foam, and regard the sea with your eyes.
Waves of foam rise from the sea night and day.
You look at the foamy ripples and not at the mighty sea.
We, like boats, are tossed hither and thither,
We are blind though we are on the bright ocean.
Ah! you are asleep in the boat of the body.
You see the water; behold the Water of waters!
Under the water you see there is another Water moving it.
Within the spirit is a Spirit that calls it.
When you have accepted the Light, O Beloved,
When you behold what is veiled without a veil,
Like a star you will walk upon the heavens.*

I WILL CHERISH THE SOUL

*Lo! I will cherish the soul, because it has a perfume of Thee.
Every drop of blood which proceeds from me is saying to Thee:
"I am one colour with Thy love, I am a partner of Thy affection."
In the house of water and clay this heart is desolate without
Thee;
O Beloved, enter the house, or I will leave it.*

THE RELIGION OF LOVE

*The sect of lovers is distinct from all others,
Lovers have a religion and a faith of their own.
Though the ruby has no stamp, what matters it?
Love is fearless in the midst of the sea of fear.*

THERE IS A PLACE OF REFUGE

*Yes, O sleeping heart, know the kingdom that endures not,
But ever and ever is only a mere dream.
I marvel how long you will indulge in vain illusion,
Which has seized you by the throat like a headsman.
Know that even in this world there is a place of refuge;
Hearken not to the unbeliever who denies it.
His argument is this : he says again and again,
"If there were aught beyond this life we should see it."
But if the child see not the state of reason,
Does the man of reason therefore forsake reason?
And if the man of reason sees not the state of Love,
Is the blessed moon of Love thereby eclipsed?*

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, December 1933)

The Sadhana of Surrender

Ramakrishnan. R

I

An innocent infant smilingly and joyfully lying on the lap of its affection-filled mother, in perfect composure and care-free calm, with no sign of any felt want, with no apprehension of any sort, is the very picture of fulfilment, and of peace. A philosopher looking at the baby in this state may well be reminded of a few epithets found in Chapter XII (Bhakti Yoga) of the Bhagavad Gita, epithets like renouncer of every undertaking, one devoid of egoism, one who is unconcerned, one who is rid of attachment, etc. The child's enviable condition is to be traced to its having surrendered itself — wholly and unreservedly — to a very dependable and supremely efficient care-taker and guardian which the mother is. The little one is as it were, one who has surrendered oneself to a Saviour. The child has a great lesson for the spiritual aspirant.

People do not realize sufficiently well the supreme effectiveness of the discipline of self-surrender to God. Indeed it is the greatest act of which a soul struggling for liberation is capable. It is seemingly an easy operation to do self-surrender, but as a matter of fact it is the culminating point in the steeply ascending path of spiritual striving and is the outcome of one's possessing many noble traits and many rare graces. Of course there are shining examples in the world's history of total self-dedication to the Divine, and they are a source of encouragement to the pilgrims wending their way up on the path of sadhana. The practice of self-surrender to the Deity is not the privilege of a few, but is the prerogative of one and all.

Aspirants on the soul-plane may ultimately reach the same goal which is God, but they initially differ—and very

much —in respect of attitude, belief, mode of effort, speed of progress and other factors of the kind. They may broadly be divided into two major groups and be designated as the advocates of self-effort and the yearners for grace.

The place of self-effort, of initiative on the part of the individual, in any field of life's activity can never be overstated. The Gita pointedly counsels : '*one must raise oneself by one's effort*'. Indeed from the sustenance of the physical body to the attainment of the highest illumination everything worthwhile is the fruit of self-effort. No deed however small goes to waste and success in any undertaking is commensurate with the magnitude of the effort put forth. Man is truly the maker of his destiny.

However man must not imagine that he can be so much a master that he can do things unaided, and compel the forces operating in the cosmos to bow to his will and that he can easily hew out a way for himself in the thorny jungle of life. While self-confidence is a commendable virtue, a sense of realism alone can save one from delusion. The giants like *Hiranyakasipu* and *Ravana*, as we read in the stories, fancied that by virtue of what they had made of themselves they were invincible, but we know what end they came to. The simple but profound truth about nature and mankind is that they function in a God-governed realm, and this God-governance encompasses not only the big motions in the universe, but also the tiniest happenings. Human effort is, not merely very much, but wholly, conditioned by Divine Will. God is the one Doer, and we, men and women, are but His tools. This knowledge of the relationship between God and man as that of the engineer and engine will help us to maintain the right balance in life and work. It should not be felt that this position of tool-hood for man is derogatory to his importance in the cosmic order and

arrangement, or that it robs him of his sense of personality or takes away from him his zest for initiative and exertion. Any alliance or linking with God can only enhance man's glory and can never belittle him. If a sailing vessel depends on the wind and takes advantage of its blowing in the desired direction, is that vessel to be pitied? Again, to be resigned to God, to be dedicated to Him, to be dependent on Him, to see in Him the main-spring of our functioning and the basis of our being — all this is not an easy, passive position which anyone can effortlessly take to at the merest wish; that position can be attained only as the result of the soul's Herculean endeavour for ages upon ages. It is not he who asserts his ego, but he who surrenders it to the Most High that is the hero. The river's grandest achievement is not its upper flow as a lone water-course, but its utter and total giving itself over at its mouth to the Ocean's immensity.

God is a magnet ever attracting our '*iron*' to Him. The process is slower than it need be because of our refusing to divest ourselves of the clay in which the iron is shrouded. God who is Love and Compassion embodied is ceaselessly making overtures to us. But we with our petty ideas of our own importance and ability would not respond to His beckoning. We would rather try to pit our small intelligence against His Omniscience and challenge with our feeble power His Omnipotence. The sun does pour down unstintedly and ceaselessly his rays of glory, but we would erect walls and roofs and deny ourselves the sun's warming influence.

There is no limit to God's power. In His release of grace He is not influenced by our shortsighted conceptions of worth and unworth. His sportive will is ununderstandable to us. He whom the world has judged to be a sinner may in an instant be uplifted by Him. But His *Lila* (sport) is not caprice. He sees

deeper than men see and apportions merit and demerit from a deeper knowledge than man's. You cannot with your limited knowledge attribute a cause and a reason for it. And He does not stand on prestige. If only the earnest aspirant takes one step towards Him, He takes ten towards him.

Human effort has its efficacy, and Divine Grace is an ever operative force. And it is in becoming the recipient of Divine Grace that the glory, the consummation, of human effort lies.

The significance of Krishna's sage counsel to Arjuna : Therefore at all times '*Remember Me and fight*', too must never be lost sight of. The Lord wants us to constantly keep Him in mind (this is the sovereign way to earning Divine Grace) and to carry on the fight with vigour (this is symbolic of human effort).

And His giving the first place to the remembrance of the Divine and the second place to the fighting is not also without point. The sequence is not a chance suggestion, but deliberately stresses the right scale of values. Priority must go to the remembrance of God as a condition for the onset of Grace, with manly endeavour taking its due second place.

II

Man's approach to God is of differing kinds. Many are the persons who thirst for the satisfaction of their manifold desires. But they also realize their powerlessness to have all their wishes fulfilled. They learn that God is all-powerful and like to make use of Him for fulfilling their aspirations and realizing their ambitions. Distressed folk, seekers for knowledge, seekers for wealth and enjoyment naturally turn to God for help and relief. They are quite unlike the *Jnanis* who yearn for God only, forsaking all desires, but the Lord in His graciousness speaks of even them as virtuous and noble

though, of course, the *Jnanis* (Men of wisdom) are a class apart and are very rare great souls.

The three types that approach God quite unlike the *Jnanis* are unfortunately prone to using God as a means to minor ends like freedom from distress, acquisition of ordinary knowledge and accumulation of wealth and pleasure. But God being such a supremely auspicious entity, any contact with Him, from whatever motive, is bound to have only healthy result. So the three types of men that seek God's help just for personal advantage soon realize the pettiness of their efforts and understanding that God is the only supreme good to be sought take to practising *Bhakti* or *Jnana* or *Karma Yoga* with perseverance and earnestness.

When they advance further it dawns on them that the Supreme being an infinite, limitless, transcendent Truth can never be capable of attainment by any amount of high endeavour in the relative, finite, conditioned plane. If God is the goal God alone is the means too — this equation strikes them. It is only God's grace that makes any worship of God possible. Spirit can be adored only by spirit and never by matter however much that matter is chastened, purified, heightened. When the aspirant has a firm grasp of this basic fact in spiritual effort he understands fully the import of Sri Krishna's final counsel to Arjuna : '*Abandoning all Dharmas seek refuge in Me alone. I shall then free you from all sins. Grieve not.*' He comes to know that the soul's mightiest effort, its supremest sadhana, is in a total sacrifice of self in the Plenum.

The Upanishad categorically proclaims : *This Atman is not attainable by much study, nor by the intellect, nor by much hearing. It can be known only through the Atman which the aspirant prays to. This Atman of that seeker reveals Its true nature.* So he sees God, whom God chooses. None else beholds Him.

III

Sri Ramakrishna's life is a vast laboratory of the spiritual pursuit. It has useful lessons for the amateurs and enlightening vistas for advanced adepts. The doings of the all-knowing and all-competent Paramahansa Deva vis-a-vis his revered preceptor, Totapuri and his redeemed-sinner-devotee Girish throw a lot of light on the great discipline of self-surrender. Totapuri and Girish were at the opposite poles to each other in respect of very many characteristics, but both were treated by the expert soul-physician which Sri Ramakrishna was and evolved into shining examples of total and unreserved self-surrender.

Their story is a long one, and only the briefest narration is possible here. Totapuri was a stern monist by conviction and by experience, and having scaled the heights of self-realization through his own unaided effort did not very much care to supplicate and adore and pray to a Personal God or Sakti — whose absolute sway over embodied souls he did not recognize and grant. He thought he was the sole master of himself and could order his affairs as he liked. He did not feel that his high realizations had become possible for him only because of abundant Divine Grace. Sri Ramakrishna, though he was but a disciple of Totapuri, saw more of Truth than his Acharya did. One night Totapuri, disgusted with a bodily ailment which would not let him meditate as he liked, decided to do away with his physical frame by drowning it in the Ganges. He knew that he was not at all the body which was but an exterior fleshy covering, as easily disposable as a shirt or coat is. So he walked into the Ganges. But he found the Ganges too shallow to drown his body! He was not free even to commit suicide!

Then the scales dropped from his eyes and he understood how the world was the Divine Mother's *lila* or sport

and he consciously surrendered himself to Her sway and governance. It was evidently Sri Ramakrishna who planned and executed this imparting of a last lesson — the lesson of the mergence of even the enlightened ego in the immensity of the Cosmic Will, the Universal Purpose, the *Parashakti*, to the austere master of *Advaita*, Totapuri.

The case of Girish is of equal significance. Girish was one for whom no hope of redemption could be entertained. But he caught the compassionate eye of Sri Ramakrishna and turned over a new leaf. He pleaded his utter inability to put forth the least effort towards self-uplift and was in consequence asked to make himself over, to give his power of attorney, to his Guru, which he did to such completeness that he became a wonder of a *saranagata*, a dedicated, surrendered aspirant. And he reached a state where the once sinner could share the company of born-perfects which Sri Ramakrishna's monastic disciples were.

Divine Grace is a cure-all. Sri Ramakrishna says : '*There are some fish which have many sets of bones, but others have only one set. Fish-eaters, however, remove all of them, whether many or few. In the same way some men have many sins and others have a few, but the saving grace of God purifies them all alike in time.*'

We cannot better conclude this editorial than with quoting the last portion of a letter of Swami Vivekananda, which contains a moving prayer:

'Come, Lord, Thou Great Teacher, who hast taught us that the soldier is only to obey and speak not. Come, Lord, come Arjuna's Charioteer, and teach me as Thou once taughtest him, that resignation in Thyself is the highest end and aim of this life, so that with those great ones of old, I may also firmly and resignedly say, Om Sri Krishnarpanamastu.'

(Let Thy will be done)

(Reprinted from Vedanta Kesari, May 1973-74)

With My Master, Swamiji, and Maharaj

Swami Vijnanananda

I was a mere boy, fourteen or fifteen years old, when I first met Sri Ramakrishna. It came about this way.

One day I was playing a game with another boy in his home when a mutual friend of ours came and asked, "*Would you like to visit a paramahamsa?*"

"*Where is he?*" we inquired.

"*At the Dewan's house, nearby.*"

We had no idea what a paramahamsa was. Anyway, we all went to meet him.

As we entered the hall of the Dewan's house, we heard a chorus of melodious voices. We encountered a strange scene. A group of devotees were singing. Sri Ramakrishna was standing in the center completely oblivious of his surroundings. A disciple was holding him so he would not fall. His face shone with a heavenly luster and a smile played over his lips. His eyes seemed to be gazing at something and he appeared as it were, immersed in an ocean of bliss. After a while he sang a song in praise of the Divine Mother. He was still in an ecstatic mood. It seemed to me that he was having a direct vision of the Mother and was singing to her. After the music, Sri Ramakrishna and his companions were led upstairs by the host, and we returned home. I met Sri Ramakrishna another time in Mani Mallick's house. I went there with Sarat, who was my classmate.

Several years passed. I was then about seventeen or, eighteen years old and a student at St. Xavier's College in Calcutta. One day I went to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. It was in the afternoon. Many devotees were seated in his room. I went in, prostrated before him, and then sat quietly in a corner. Seated on the small cot, Sri Ramakrishna was conversing with the devotees. In physical appearance he was like any other man, but his smile

was something divine. When he smiled, a wave of joy played, not merely over his eyes and face, but over his whole body. And his blissful smile would wipe out the worries and troubles of those who looked at him. His voice was so sweet and melodious that one never tired of hearing it. His eyes were keen and bright, and his look was tender and affectionate.

I felt Sri Ramakrishna's room vibrating with a tangible atmosphere of peace. The devotees present seemed to be listening in blissful absorption to the words which poured from the Master's lips. I don't recall what he said, but I still remember the transport of delight I experienced then as if it had been yesterday. For a long time I sat there, beside myself with joy, and my whole attention was concentrated on Sri Ramakrishna. He did not say anything to me, nor did I ask him anything. One by one the devotees took their leave, and suddenly I found myself alone with him. Sri Ramakrishna was looking at me intently. I thought it was time for me to depart, so I prostrated before him. As I stood up to go, he asked, "*Can you wrestle? Come, let me see how well you wrestle!*" With these words he stood up ready to grapple with me. I was very much surprised at this kind of challenge. I thought to myself, "*What kind of a holy man is this?*" Anyhow, I replied, "*Yes, of course I can wrestle.*"

Sri Ramakrishna came closer, with a smile on his lips. He caught hold of my arms and began to shove me. But I was a strong, muscular young man, and pushed him back to the wall. He was still smiling and holding me with a strong grip. Gradually I felt a sort of electric current coming out of his hands and entering into me. That touch made me completely helpless; I lost all my physical strength. I went into ecstasy, and the hair of my body stood on end. Then Sri Ramakrishna let me go. He said, smiling, "*Well, you are the victor.*" With these words he sat down on his cot again. I was speechless. Wave after wave of bliss was engulfing my whole being. After a while, Sri Ramakrishna got up from his seat. Patting

me gently on the back, he said, "*Come here often.*" Then he offered me some sweets as prasad, and I returned to Calcutta. For days the spell of the intoxicating joy lingered, and I realized that he had transmitted spiritual power to me.

Sri Ramakrishna was forever concerned about our welfare. If any one of his disciples did not visit him for a while, he would ask someone to inquire about him. Once I absented myself for a long time and so he sent for me. As I entered his room, he asked in a complaining but affectionate tone, "*Hello, how are you? What is the matter? Why haven't I seen you for so long?*"

Truthfully I replied, "*I did not feel like coming.*"

"*That's all right,*" Sri Ramakrishna said smilingly. "*But I hope you continue in your practice of meditation.*"

I remarked, "*I try to meditate, sir, but I find I can't.*"

The Master seemed surprised at my reply and exclaimed, "*What do you say? You cannot meditate? Surely you can!*" He remained silent for a few moments. I was looking at him, waiting for him to say something more. Soon I noticed a change come over his face and eyes. He was looking at me intently. After a little while he said, "*Come near me.*" As I approached Sri Ramakrishna, he asked me to put out my tongue and then drew a figure on it with his finger. My whole body began to shake, and I felt an unspeakable bliss within. Then the Master said, "*Go to the Panchavati and meditate there.*"

Following his advice, I slowly moved toward the Panchavati. I walked with difficulty, intoxicated with joy after that touch from the Master. Somehow I reached the Panchavati and sat for meditation. Then I lost all outward consciousness. When I regained my ordinary state of mind, I saw Sri Ramakrishna seated by me, rubbing my body with his palms. His face shone with a heavenly smile. I was still a little tipsy.

He asked me, "*Well, how was your meditation?*"

"*It was very good, sir,*" I replied.

Then Sri Ramakrishna said, "*From now on you will always have deep meditations. Did you have any vision?*" he inquired.

I reported the experience to the Master as faithfully as I could. Then I followed him to his room. I was alone with him. That day he talked to me for a long time and imparted many spiritual instructions.

Unbounded was Sri Ramakrishna's grace! There is none equal to it. He made us his very own by his unparalleled love.

I left for Bankipur, Patna, after some time. One night I saw Sri Ramakrishna standing before me in vision. I did not know why I saw him in that manner. The next morning I received the news of his passing away.

Once Sri Ramakrishna gave me a book in English. He asked me to read a certain page and explain to him what it said. I read: "*Speak the truth. Do not covet. Gain control over the senses.*" As I read these sentences, the Master expressed great satisfaction. Without saying a word, he gave me to understand that if one observes these three maxims, he can realize God.

Sri Ramakrishna did not have much use for book learning. He wanted us to acquire the wisdom that comes from the direct vision of God.

The Master was the living embodiment of purity, and he had the simplicity of a child. It seemed strange to him that anyone would wish to lose himself in the ephemeral pleasures of the world when there is eternal happiness within his reach. To Sri Ramakrishna, the only purpose of human life is to realize God and to attain unending joy in him.

If man can detach his mind from the objects of the sense world, he will have the vision of the Reality. He will see Brahman and the light of Brahman everywhere in the universe. Man burns in the fire of worldliness, forgetting the peace that is in God because of his inordinate craving for material objects. Sri Ramakrishna lived continuously immersed in the consciousness of the Blissful

Mother, and so the fire of worldliness never touched him. His heart was filled with the joy of Brahman; he lived intoxicated by that joy; and his only sorrow was that he could not give it to all mankind, although he was always eager to share his bliss with each and everyone. Compared to the wisdom and bliss that result from the vision of Brahman, all secular knowledge and worldly pleasures are like dust. Sri Ramakrishna saw Brahman everywhere; we, on the other hand, sense and experience only the world appearance.

Once I asked the Master if God was with or without form.

Sri Ramakrishna replied, "*He is with as well as without form. And he is beyond both form and formlessness.*"

I inquired again, "*If God is all, is this cot also God?*"

He answered emphatically, "*Yes, this cot is God, this glass, this utensil, this wall—everything is God.*" As he spoke, I experienced an inner transformation and was lifted beyond the mundane consciousness. My heart was illumined, and I saw the light of Brahman everywhere.

Sri Ramakrishna was unique in every way. His photograph symbolizes the awakening of the kundalini. It shows him immersed in the ocean of bliss. When I look at his photograph, many spiritual visions come to me. Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda) and Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) also used to have many visions through his image, but they did not divulge their experiences. One day the Master showed me his photograph and said, "*Meditate on this image. I am living there.*"

Those who have taken refuge in Sri Ramakrishna's name will be looked after by him. He will do everything for them.

On one occasion I was massaging the Master's feet, when a gentleman came to visit him from Konnagar. After he left, Sri Ramakrishna said, "*You know, I can see the inside of a man's mind just like objects in a glass case.*" I thought to myself, "*Well, then he can also see everything in me. What a dangerous man he is!*" But he

would only speak of the goodness in others, not of their evil deeds or tendencies.

In Sri Ramakrishna we found manifest the aspects of other divine incarnations of the past. When I first heard him say, "*He who was Rama, he who was Krishna, is born as Ramakrishna,*" I did not believe him. I thought to myself, "*He may be talking nonsense, but anyway, he is a holy man and very sincere.*" Much later, during my college days, the Master once again remarked in a very serious mood, "*In my incarnation as Krishna I played with the shepherds and shepherdesses at Vrindaban.*" This time I did not accept his words either. He knew my doubts and so began to talk of the deep love of the shepherdesses for Sri Krishna. He explained how they had surrendered their all- mind, body, and soul to their beloved. While talking about this divine attraction, Sri Ramakrishna suddenly became speechless and lost all outward consciousness. He was deeply absorbed in samadhi. I also experienced an ecstatic joy and felt a dense atmosphere of divine love in the orbit of his power. For the first time I realized the true significance of Sri Krishna's divine play with the shepherds and shepherdesses, and my doubt that the Master was a reincarnation of Sri Krishna was completely removed. When Sri Ramakrishna returned to normal consciousness, he laughed like a little boy. I kept silent.

Wherever great souls live, they create a spiritual atmosphere around themselves. Whoever comes within their orbit is elevated to a higher consciousness. One can feel a spiritual power like an electric current emanating from these great souls and entering into himself. It is a strange phenomenon. One has to experience it to know what it is. One time, when I touched the feet of Swamiji (Swami Vivekananda), I felt a shock like that of an electric current from him. Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda) also had great power to transmit spirituality to others. One day he was deeply absorbed in meditation. I was seated near him. I began to feel a nerve current within me and also became absorbed. To transmit such

spiritual power to another, even without the knowledge of the recipient, is the manifestation of the greatest spirituality. Maharaj was a spiritual dynamo, and at the same time he was full of fun. What compelling attraction those two great souls, Swamiji and Maharaj, possessed! They drew others to themselves by their magnetic power of love. Whoever came within their orbit was gradually freed from evil tendencies, and the veil of ignorance was lifted. Swamiji and Maharaj could not be compared. Each was unsurpassed in his own way. Each was complementary to the other. Swamiji's ideals were given the practical shape by Maharaj.

Swamiji preached knowledge and action, but inwardly he was a great devotee. His heart was tender and affectionate. What deep love he had for all of us, his brother-disciples, and especially for Maharaj! His attitude toward Maharaj was: "*The son of the guru is to be regarded as the guru himself.*" Yet he would not spare us, not even Maharaj, if we made any mistakes. . . .

One day I was supervising the building of the embankment of the Ganges in front of the Belur monastery. The sun was hot, and I felt very thirsty. I noticed Swamiji seated on the veranda on the second floor, drinking lemonade. I was wishing I too had a cool drink. No sooner did this thought come to mind than an attendant brought me a glass with the message that Swamiji had sent this drink for me. I was very happy and put the glass to my lips. But what a disappointment! It was empty excepting a few drops. I felt rather hurt that Swamiji would play such a practical joke on me. However, I thought that as long as a holy man had sent me his prasada, I should accept it. To my great surprise, as soon as I had finished those few drops, I was satisfied. Later in the day, when I met Swamiji, he teased me, "*Did you drink the lemonade?*" I said, "*Yes, I did, and my thirst was quenched.*" Swamiji was pleased.

At one time a doubt arose in my mind. Sri Ramakrishna had taught that a monk must not even look at pictures of women, not

to speak of associating with them. He had also told me particularly to be careful and not to look at any woman, even if she was deeply devoted to God. Yet Swamiji travelled all over the world, delivered lectures everywhere, and associated freely with women in the West. For this reason I wondered if Swamiji was really following Sri Ramakrishna's teachings in spirit. One day, finding Swamiji alone in his room, I brought up the topic and mentioned what the Master had taught us. As Swamiji was listening, he became very serious. After a little while he said :

"Peshan, it is not as easy to understand Sri Ramakrishna as you think. Do you know, he obliterated from my consciousness all distinction between man and woman. Through his grace I have realized that there is no sex in the Atman. Furthermore, Sri Ramakrishna came for the good of all. Do you think he came only to save the men? His grace makes no distinction between races and sexes. Of course, you must follow his instructions to you, but he taught me differently. Not only that he taught me, but now as ever he is holding me by the hand and guiding me, and I do as he makes me do."

I was sorry that I had ever doubted Swamiji and kept silent. Then Swamiji smiled at me and continued :

"The mother power, the source of all divine energy, needs to be awakened in all women, whether of the East or of the West. Don't you realize that our Holy Mother was born to kindle this power in all women? Only the beginning has been made. A great spiritual awakening will come in women all over the world."

At the Belur monastery I slept in the little room opening onto the veranda. Swamiji often walked there. I recall one night when he was pacing up and down the veranda, singing to himself, "*Thou art the Saviour, Mother.*" He repeated this line over and over again. At times I could see him standing motionless in ecstasy, with tears of joy running down his cheeks. And so he continued until dawn.

(Reprinted from Vedanta and the West, issue 112)

An Eckhartian Dialogue

Philip L. Griggs

(Continued from the last issue)

Q. Is there a distinction between "soul" and "spirit"?

A. In her higher powers the soul is spirit, and in her lower, soul; and between soul and spirit is the bond of one common being. You must know how the philosophers say the soul is double-faced—her upper face gazes at God all the time and her lower face looks somewhat down, informing the senses; and the upper face, which is the summit of the soul, is in eternity and has nothing to do with time; it knows nothing of time or of body. There is that something in the soul which is uncreated and uncreatable. It is flowing from the Spirit and is altogether spiritual, and in this power God comes out in the full flower of his joy and glory, as he is in himself. Such intense delight, such supreme exaltation as no mind can conceive nor tongue express. If a man catches one fleeting glance of the joy and bliss therein, it would make it up to him for having to suffer everything he could ever suffer.

Q. You say the spirit knows not of the body. But what then is the relationship between soul and body?

A. The soul has no natural concern with the things of this world any more than the ear has with colour or the eye has with song. Our natural philosophers teach that the body is rather in the soul than the soul in the body. Even as the cask contains the wine and not the wine the cask, so does the soul keep the body in her, rather than the body, the soul.

Q. A very old question, sir: is God one, or is he many?

A. Look you. The narrowest of the powers of my soul is more than heaven-wide, to say nothing of the intellect, wherein there

is measureless space, wherein I am as near a place a thousand miles away as the spot I am standing on this moment. Theologians teach that the angel hosts are countless. But to one who sees distinctions as something different from multiplicity, to him, I say, a hundred is as one. If there were a hundred Persons in the Godhead, he would still perceive them as one God.

Q. If God became man in the person of Jesus Christ, how does that help me?

A. God not only became man; he assumed human nature. I make bold to say that every good thing possessed by the saints, and by Mary, and Christ in his human nature, is also mine in this same nature.

Q. But if I already possess in this nature all that Christ does in his humanity, why do we set Christ so high and honour him as our Lord and God?

A. Because he was a messenger from God to us, bringing us our own happiness. The happiness Christ brought us was our own. But I will give you a harder saying: to subsist immediately in this pure nature, a man must be so wholly dead to person that he wills as well to one across the seas whom he has never seen, as to his own present and familiar friend. So long as you still wish better to yourself than to one whom you have never seen, you are beside the mark, nor have you even for an instant seen into this simple ground. Again, the eternal Word did not take upon itself this man or that; it took upon itself one indivisible free nature, human nature, bare and formless, for the indivisible form of manhood is wholly without form. Here it is just as true to say that man became God as that God became man. You are, with Christ, the Son of the eternal Father, because you have the same nature which was there made God.

Q. You have spoken often to us of this Word, the Logos, which is being born eternally in the ground of our soul; but how are we to hear this Word, Meister Eckhart?

A. Actually, God never spoke but one word, and that is still unspoken. But he begets in the soul his child, his Word, and the soul conceiving it passes it on to its powers in varied guise—now as desire, now as good intent, now as charity; it is his, not yours at all. He prays in us, not we ourselves. So lay no claim to anything. Let go yourself and let God act for you and in you as he pleases. This work is his, this birth is his, and all you are, to boot. God installs himself in your nature and powers, when self-bereft of all belongings; you take to the desert, as it is written: "*A voice crying in the wilderness.*" Let this eternal voice cry on in you at its sweet will, and do you be a desert in respect to self and creatures.

Q. How is it that God can flow out, becoming all the creatures he has begotten, and still he remains within himself?

A. I can only give you an analogy: It is like what I am now saying; it springs up within me, then I pause in the idea, and thirdly I speak it out, and all of you receive it; but really it is in me all the time.

Q. Sir, why is it said that God is light, considering that he is incomprehensible?

A. Ah! Just because he is incomprehensible, therefore he is light! Don't you see that God's incomprehensibility comes from his being unending? But his unendingness is due to his being simple; simplicity is the same as purity, and purity is light. So it is well said that God is light, and when the divine light is flooding the soul, soul becomes merged into God like a light into light. Anything approaching this light, the light consumes and turns to its own divine nature.

Q. One book says that God is beyond virtue; this is difficult to understand.

A. It means that the vision of God transcends virtues. Virtue is in the middle, between vice and perfection, and the fruit of virtue—the end and object of virtue—will never be obtained until the soul is caught up above the virtues. Be sure that as long as a man holds fast as slave to virtue, he will never taste the fruit of virtue, which is to see the God of Gods. Be sure of it, mere virtue has never seen this sight.

Q. Surely this does not mean that we are to abandon virtue?

A. No, we are to practice virtue, not to possess it. Not by fasting and good works can we gauge our progress in the spiritual life, but a sure sign of growth is a waxing love for the eternal, and a waning interest in temporal things. The man who owns a hundred thousand dollars and gives them all in the name of God to found a monastery is doing a good work. Yet I say it would be better for him to despise and empty himself for love of God.

Q. In your sermon last Sunday you said that we cannot say what God is; why can we not say that he is being?

A. I hold that it is as wrong for me to say that God is being as to say the sun is black or white. God is neither this nor that. But when I say God is not being, is superior to being, I do not thereby deny him being; I dignify and exalt it in him. But, being is God's idiosyncrasy. Our whole life ought to be being, for so far as it is, it is in God. The most trivial thing perceived in God, a flower for example, as seen in God, would be a thing more perfect than the universe.

(Reprinted from *Vedanta and the West*, issue 115)

Leaves from an Ashrama: 55

What Transcends the Ticking Clock

Swami Vidyatmananda

It was a sad afternoon in November. I was standing by a fire, feeding into it a mass of papers left by an old member who had died. Here was a thick bundle of letters secured with faded ribbon, identified by a slip of paper in the hand of the deceased: 'Mama'. I put the packet into the flames, musing: 'So many events described, so many joys and sorrows expressed, so many cautions and endearments extended years and years ago by a departed mother to a now departed daughter. As soon as the record has been consumed, surely the events described cease anywhere to exist. Indeed, if they can be obliterated so easily, did they ever exist at all? Copies of articles and speeches by the deceased, on now insignificant topics like 'Lacemaking in Scandinavia' and 'Worker Housing in Poland'. Into the flames! Who cares now about the efforts that went into preparing those? Gone, all gone. Ship menus from transatlantic crossings. Those gala dinners, good food eaten, excellent conversations carried on, promises to keep in touch--now totally obliterated. Photos, so many photos, of a young face, a hopeful face, taken sixty, seventy years ago. Others of a severe looking old woman in a somber dress, decorated with jet; this must have been Mama. Into the fire. Gone. Perhaps they managed a sort of staying power by way of the letters and photos. Now even that partial existence has been terminated.

'I feel like an executioner,' I kept thinking, slightly sick. 'Yet it will be the same for me. Ten years from now, or a year; perhaps day after tomorrow. I too preserve souvenirs like these--documents,

collections, an album of photos arranged in careful chronological order. They seem to give structure to my life, define who I am. And when I close my eyes for the last time, another will be standing by another fire, carrying out the same task of extinction. A cremation of all I did and meant, as real as the cremation of my body.

'What, if anything, is real? What transcends the ticking clock?' Our passage here, is it nothing more than 'a vapor that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away'? What lasts, what counts? The good we do for others? But Swami Vivekananda said no. Humanitarian activities are only gymnastic exercises designed to benefit the doer. The works I left behind which others may enjoy: a garden planted, a poem written, an organization founded, a son or daughter produced? There is, agreed, a shred of immortality here, but how do such legacies help me when I am gone?

'What lasts, what remains?' And I could think of nothing except the impressions made on one's own subtle body by thoughts of God. Solely the effects of devotion remain! These are the only goods that one can keep against the ravages of time; thoughts of God only will remain with one, bringing one to a higher birth in the following life, or possibly qualifying one to abrogate all future lives in becoming what one truly is.

As I stirred the now dimming fire, so that all should be consumed, there passed before my eyes the well-remembered verse from the Gita: *'I come as time, the waster of the peoples.'* Too true. But hadn't that same Voice said something else? Happily, yes:

'You find yourself in this transient, joyless world. Turn from it and take your delight in Me....If you set your heart upon Me....you will come into my Being.'

JANUARY – DECEMBER 2016

Annual Index

A French Pilgrim's Offering To Sri Ramakrishna	Romain Rolland	76
A Ramakrishna Symbol	Swami Swahananda	54
An Eckhartian Dialogue	Philip L. Griggs	234, 278
An Introduction to Hindu Theology-7, 8	Swami Sunirmalananda	33, 80
Bayazid a Great Sufi Saint	Aga Syed Ibrahim Dara	197
Book Review	Elsie Mack	45
Boredom	Joan Rayne	61
Buddha and Buddhism	Swami Tapasyananda	117
Editorials: Worship of the Divine Mother 2—7	Swami Dayatmananda	2, 50, 98, 146, 194, 242
God-Vision and Peace	Swami Vijnanananda	171
Guru and God	Swami Ramakrishnananda	149
How to Practise Yoga Actually?	Swami Yatiswarananda	106
Index of Articles for January-December 2016		286
Jalaluddin Rumi	Aga Syed Ibrahim Dara	254
Kannappa: A Devotee of Shiva	Swami Tanmayananda	175
Knowledge and Devotion	Swami Gambhirananda	219
Leaves from an Ashrama :	Swami Vidyatmananda	
51-Principle of Alert Surrender		43
52-Yoga of Work as beneficial to the worker		94

53-The Way of Guru-Bhakti		142
54-On Changing One's Commitment		190
55-What Transcends the Ticking Clock		286
Nag Mahashay: A Householder Saint	Culbreth Sudler	245
On Maya, Yoga, and Service	Swami Saradananda	230
Sadhana of Surrender	Ramakrishnan .R	263
Spiritual Precepts of Swami Saradananda	Swam Asehananda	13
Sri Andal - The Divine Bride	Swami Ritajananda	130
Swami Ramakrishnananda	Swami Yatiswarananda	154
Swami Visuddhananda : An Apostle of God	Swami Lokeswarananda	85
Techniques of Prayer	Swami Pavitrananda	223
Ten Commandments of Bhagavan Sri Krishna	Swami Vimalananda	187
The God of the Hindus is a God of Love	Umesh Gulati	67
The Hindu Tradition of Paradoxes	Umesh Gulati	206
The Story of Padmavinode	Ashutosh Mitra	183
Three Types of Disciples	Swami Gnaneswarananda	23
What Christ Means To Me	Swami Prabhavananda	5
What is Yoga?	Swami Brahmeshananda	101
With My Master, Swamiji, and Maharaj	Swami Vijnanananda	270

Programme for November - December 2016

Sunday discourses begin

at the

Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End at 4:30 pm

Tel: 01628 526464 - www.vedantauk.com

Nov	6	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 106	Swami Dayatmananda
Nov	13	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 107	Swami Dayatmananda
Nov	20	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 108	Swami Dayatmananda
Nov	27	Day Retreat	
Dec	4	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 109	Swami Dayatmananda
Dec	11	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 110	Swami Dayatmananda
Dec	18	Patanjali Yoga Sutras 111	Swami Dayatmananda
Dec	24	Christmas Eve	

Day Retreat

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

Note: Children are not allowed at the Retreat.

Please bring (vegetarian) lunch to share.

Christmas Eve Celebration

Saturday 24th December
at Bourne End at 5:00 p.m.

Holy Mother's Puja

Sunday 1st January 2017
at Bourne End at 4:30 p.m.

“Now I am going through the desert, next moment I start climbing a snowy peak. These were the subjects of our meditation. But to whom am I speaking? And who is there to hear all this? Everybody wants to finish his job without doing anything. As much as one does himself, so much alone is his. You cannot make any progress this way.

“Everyday when you go to bed, you should think, ‘What exactly have I done today, how much? Have I called on God? Have I inflicted any wound on anybody’s heart? Did I return a harsh word for sweet ones from superiors?’ Raise these and other such questions in the mind, and try to answer them.

“You have to be very prayerful. Pray along with repetition of the name of the Lord. Meditation is a long way off! ‘Those who sit down to meditate just to avoid work, should be yoked to the plough!’ said Swamiji. But I give them a spade and ask them only to dig the earth.

Swami Akhandananda

Vedanta

is a bi-monthly magazine published, since 1951, by the
Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, Bourne End, Buckinghamshire
SL8 5LF, U.K.

Phone: (01628) 526464

www.vedantauk.com

Subscription rate for 6 issues: £9 or \$17.50 post free.

Editor: Swami Dayatmananda

“Always resort to prayer and repetition of the Name—this is Sadhana. Pray: ‘Give me devotion, give me faith, appear before me.’ Mere repetition of God’s name—how far can it lead? Well has it been said: ‘He who moves the rosary is the lowest; higher is the man who counts the Name with the hand; but the highest is he who repeats the Name in the mind.’

“Do the worship as if you were attending to a dear and venerable person. Offer him flowers, then food and water as quickly as you can. Worship includes everything—beginning from cleaning the temple and washing utensils, to picking flowers, cutting fruits, arranging them in trays. Everything should be done with a spirit of worship. If you are uttering your Isha-Mantra always and thinking on the Deity, then you are worshipping.”

Swami Akhandananda

