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Peace

Swami Dayatmananda

Peace is the most important spiritual quality. It is impossible to make progress in any field of life, not to speak of spiritual life, without attaining some degree of peace. Peace and happiness are closely linked. Without peace one can never attain happiness. "Where is happiness for a peaceless man?" asks the Lord in the Gita.

Consciously or unconsciously everyone longs for peace and happiness. To be healthy, happy and peaceful is the natural state of all beings. At the lower level if an organism is ensured of survival and security it lives a contented and peaceful life, and this is true of the majority of human beings too. But man has higher needs, called values, and cannot be satisfied with biological needs only. He seeks higher values like truth, goodness and beauty. He won't have peace or rest until these values are realised.

What is peace? Peace is not a negative state of mere calm; it is a state where the mind is not agitated with desires, is full of contentment and happiness; it is a state where man feels fulfilled because he has found meaning in life. It is only when man realises God that he finds true meaning in life. Peace is that state of mind in which the potential divinity in us becomes manifest. Naturally very few experience real and abiding peace,

the "peace that passeth all understanding". It can be attained by everyone but it is a pearl of great price and few are prepared to pay the price.

There is a tradition in India of chanting thrice the word peace (Shantih) at the end of all sacred actions. There is a reason for this. Man is subject to various types of miseries. These are usually divided into three according to their source. They are Adhyatmika - those that are born of the ills and pains of the body and the mind, Adhibhautika - those that are caused by other creatures such as bugs, birds, bears, snakes, thieves, and also from floods, famines, droughts, earthquakes, etc., and Adhidaivika - those miseries that arise from the heavens such as wind, rain, heat, cold, or due to the displeasure of gods, demi-gods, etc. It is for the cessation of these three types of miseries that the threefold peace chant is usually done. Vedanta believes that these are the three areas in which we need to obtain peace.

Adhyatmika, Adhibhautika, Adhidaivika - these three words can also be translated in other ways such as physical, mental or spiritual; as individual, family and social; as gross, subtle and causal. Whatever be the interpretation, one point is clear: no man is an island; we live in the world, in a family and in a society. So if we are to obtain happiness there must be peace in the individual, in the family and in the society. Of these three areas, we have almost no control over the family or society. The only choice left is to deal with oneself. Happily there are shining examples of men and women who, in spite of adverse circumstances and almost insurmountable obstacles, rose above them and enjoyed abundant peace and happiness. The secret is self-control and spiritual life. Now we will discuss ways of attaining peace in the physical, mental and spiritual areas. Physical: The body is said to be the first instrument of peace. Hence it is to be kept healthy and strong through proper diet and exercise.

Mental: The mind is said to be the cause of both bondage and liberation. It is true that we experience both happiness and unhappiness according to the state of our mind. When our mind is agitated with uncontrolled thoughts we feel restless; and desires are the root cause of this restlessness. Therefore we have to try to gradually bring this turbulent mind under our control by controlling desires. Though difficult, the mind can be brought under control through dispassion, discrimination and daily practice of prayer, meditation, scriptural reading and keeping holy company.

Spiritual: Each soul is potentially divine. Spiritual life is the way of manifesting this potential divinity within. It is impossible to attain perfect peace without Self-knowledge, without realising our true nature. Therefore Sri Ramakrishna says that the goal of life is to attain God.

Says Sri Ramakrishna:

"You will get peace of mind only when you have seen God. You will enjoy bliss and gain strength only when you have talked to Him.

"Man attains his liberation, therefore, by piercing the veil of maya and rediscovering his total identity with Brahman. Knowing himself to be one with the Universal Spirit, he realizes ineffable peace.

"The nearer you come to God, the more you feel peace. Peace, peace, peace - Supreme peace! The nearer you come to the Ganges, the more you feel its coolness. You will feel completely soothed when you plunge into the river."

Echoing the words of the Upanishads Swami Vivekananda says:

"The nature of the soul is bliss and peace unchanging. We have not to get it; we have it; let us wash away the dross from our eyes and see it.

"In the midst of the manifold, he who sees that One; in the midst of this infinite death, he who sees that one life; in the midst of the manifold, he who sees that which never changes in his own soul - unto him belongs eternal peace. Unto none else, unto none else."

To realise God, to see the One amidst the manifold, to have this Self-knowledge is a

most difficult task. Super-human effort is required. Even then we may not be able to reach the goal. What then is the way? Surrender whole-heartedly to the Divine Mother, to God, says Swami Vivekananda:

"Eternal, unquestioning self-surrender to Mother alone can give us peace. Love Her for Herself, without fear or favour. Love Her because you are Her child. See Her in all, good and bad alike. Then alone will come 'Sameness and Bliss Eternal' that is Mother Herself when we realise Her thus. Until then, misery will pursue us. Only resting in Mother are we safe."

Sincere self-effort makes us realise that complete surrender to the Divine is the only way. With this understanding comes peace and happiness.

Swami Dayatmananda

How to Get Rid of Despondency

Swami Turiyananda

Self-praise is no doubt bad; none the less, continuous harping on depressing thoughts like, 'Our lives are in vain,' 'we are failures,' etc., are also not conducive to the best results. Our Master hated pride, but he also would not put up with despondent, self-deprecating, abject attitudes. Rather he would ask us to be proud of our relation with God and would say, 'I am His child, what fear can be mine?' He would ask us to summon great strength saying, 'I shall be easily delivered, thanks to His grace.' The following attitude is always there in the songs of Ramprasad too: 'Of whom is he, whose Mother is the Divine, afraid?' He is not even afraid of quarrelling with the Mother. There are many songs like, 'I shall no more call on the Mother', in which all kinds of sulks are being indulged in against the Mother. The Master also tried to drive home this idea into us. So you will have to reject this feeling of despondency. Are you nobody? Manage to find time for the contemplation of God even in the midst of this great activity. Spend all your leisure on it. Why only noons and twilights - all time is His. The whole life is His alone. Besides, it is necessary to have the faith that if one can take refuge in Him giving up everything else even for a moment, life becomes blessed and pure and all sins and suffering flee.

It is true that without love of God and Guru there can be no fitness for understanding the Divine, but God is nowhere but in the heart. If he is not there, there is no hope of ever finding Him anywhere. He, too, is the Guru. 'My Lord is the great Lord of the world, my Guru is the Guru of the world.' If this is not so what special need is there for such a God or Guru? If this was not so how could we live? Who is protecting us? Whose mercy is sustaining lives? He is merciful to all. Whoever seeks Him finds Him. The tame cat turns wild by living in the forest. This eye, this skin, and this arm turn supernatural and divine after finding Him. There is no use in merely learning words; it is because of His presence in the beginning, the middle, and the end that words are with meaning.

Shridhara Swami has told the greatest truth - the Master used to say that all jackals have the same cry: 'Those men who have known Brahman and are without attachment and who always remember N%o%r%o%yan, the Guru of the gods, have all their pain of sin allayed by meditation, and they do not any more have to be suckled by mothers.' (Prapanna Gita).

His feet are holy and extend everywhere. The universe is a quarter of Him. We are sheltering in those feet. Whom else shall we worship except those feet? He is the 'life of our life, the eye of our eyes.' There is not a shadow of doubt that He is our all in all whether we know it or not. May we, then, dedicate ourselves heart and soul to Him and depend on Him entirely. May we not see anything but Him.

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The Philosophy of George Berkeley (1685-1753)

Hans Heimer

This article has been written because important parts of Berkeley's philosophy resemble the Indian philosophy of Advaita Vedanta (Non-Duality). His methods of arriving at his philosophy are also very similar to the Self-Enquiry of Vedanta and Yoga.

Berkeley was an Irishman, educated at Trinity College, Dublin, who produced some of the most original ideas in Western philosophy. He was a devout Christian who eventually became a bishop in the Irish Protestant Church. After graduating in 1704, he embarked on an academic career, becoming a Fellow of Trinity College in 1707. During this period he intensively studied the contemporary philosophical literature; he put his own questions and conclusions into two notebooks during the years 1707-1708. His two major philosophical works were 'An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision', published in 1709, and 'A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge', published in 1710 when he was only 25 years old.

Berkeley's interest in vision, the process of seeing, was engendered by dissatisfaction with the then current theories of perception and optics. On the basis that our minds are located in our heads, how come that we can see objects at a distance, i.e. in external space apart from the mind? Is this external perception like a dream, which is acknowledged to be entirely in the mind? If the visual image in the retina of the eyes is two-dimensional, with no indication of a third dimension of depth, or distance from the object, as well as being inverted compared with the object, how is it that we see a three-dimensional, non-inverted, external world in space? When we see a two-dimensional painting, how come that we interpret it in three dimensions? Why is the sun larger when viewed near the horizon, than when it is observed high in the sky?

Berkeley looked at these problems and felt that many of them were caused by incorrect concepts, incorrect application of language and erroneous traditional ideas which had been implanted in us since infancy. He considered that other factors than purely visual ones, must play significant parts in our visual perception. The most important of these factors were the sense of touch and the sense of hearing, related to location but especially as expressed in speech and language.

Dealing first with the sense of touch or feel, the haptic sense. This encompasses far more than the initial concept of touching an object with our hands. Our haptic sense

organs are distributed all over the outside and inside of our body. They are therefore involved in every movement, however small, such as the flick of an eyelid, the movement of an eye, the flaring of nostrils, the grinding of teeth, the pronouncing of a word, the feeling of physical pain, heat and the removal thereof, the pull of gravity, the balance of the body etc. Our body is therefore involved in virtually every aspect of our vision, as for example the movement of the head, eyes and their pupils when we alter the direction or range of our vision.

Dealing secondly with our sense of hearing. The sense of location is involved as an accompaniment to our visual concept of distance and nearness. The pitch of sound is varied by rapid relative movement of the source of the sound and our body (the Doppler effect). Our hearing ability in terms of loudness, is affected by the distance of the source from our body.

With regard to speech, Berkeley places particular emphasis on the fact that we unconsciously use the same language terms for haptic and visual sensations. So for example, because of the overwhelming power of our visual sense, when we talk of an apple, we primarily think of it in terms of appearance, its form, colour etc. Strictly speaking our haptic experience of an apple is entirely different, but we do not give the object a different name. Our haptic experience may involve the bending of our grasping fingers, the pressure against the skin of our hand and our fingers, the roughness or smoothness of the apple surfaces, the separate indentations for stalk and faded bloom at opposite poles etc. Only if blind from birth would we have an adequate haptic language dealing with our experience of objects.

Berkeley maintained that objects are defined by their sensory perceptions, and as each sense gives different perceptions, they therefore strictly speaking, each refer to different objects. It is only because of the frequent incidence of similar and related sensations, that our language gives these objects one name, which we use when we see or think about that object. The essay contains Berkeley's suggested solutions to the problems in the then current theories. In the conclusion to his Essay, he believes that our vision of depth, extension and distance is the result of a learning process, which necessitates and involves the other senses. Therefore what we see, is the end-product of a learning process which starts in the womb. The proof of his views would come about if a blind mature person was given sight.

Berkeley's theories were proved correct by this very incident. In 1728 a report was published by the Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society about a 14-year-old boy whose sight was created by the surgical removal of congenital cataracts. On seeing for the first time, the boy thought that all objects touched his eyes or his skin, as he had no concepts of distance, extension or depth. Also he could not associate objects of touch with visual objects. It needed time for him to learn to make this association, but he could not tell 'which was the lying sense', the visual or the haptic. The few people who have learned after childhood to see, never accept the visual external three dimensional world as effortlessly as ordinary people who have learned to see from infancy.

After Berkeley had clarified his views on vision, this inevitably led him to the wider field of human knowledge. His method of arriving at his conclusions consisted of personal, i.e. first party intense introspection, observation or meditation. Frequently he invited his readers and critics to try his methods for themselves, instead of relying on second and third party verbal information. Berkeley believed in God and believed that God has given us the faculties to understand His and our true nature, without making unwarranted assumptions. Berkeley thought that much academic philosophy including science (then called 'Natural Philosophy') had departed from true knowledge because of their failure to stick to actual experience and instead to invent unnecessary theories.

Berkeley did not start his Treatise investigating human knowledge with the pre-assumption of the existence of individuals and an external world. He started by

examining knowledge and its components. This is our true and fundamental experience and it allowed him to reach conclusions without going up theoretical and unproven pathways. He defined human knowledge as consisting of three types of ideas:

i) Sensory ideas, the components of our sensations.

ii) Ideas perceived as emotions or other aspects of our psychic drives.

iii) Ideas conceived as memory or imagination and developed from types i) and ii).

Berkeley explained (on the basis of his sensory investigations) that 'things' or 'objects' are constituted by ideas. So for example a table is constituted of the pattern of its colours, shape, hardness, the sound and effort required to move it, possibly the smell of its materials, its name and of course the presence of its surroundings. Similar lists can be drawn up for all our perceptions and conceptions, all constituted of ideas. Berkeley named the perceiver of ideas as mind, spirit, soul or myself.

Then Berkeley comes to the essence of his philosophy by saying in Latin *Esse est percipi*, which translates as 'The being or existence of things or objects is their perception'. In other words, there is no 'external matter', which can exist independently of its perception. The concept of 'matter' existing outside perception is an unwarranted assumption. If there is no matter which is glimpsed when we open our eyes or touch an object, then where is the source of the continuity, regularity, incredible intelligence and power of what is perceived? Berkeley believed that these features are possible because of the ever-present mind of God and that we individuals are spirits that partake of that mind.

His favourite quotation from the Bible was "In Him (God) we live and move and have our being". (Acts 17/28)

Natural philosophy, particularly the materialism of Isaac Newton, was in the ascendancy during Berkeley's time. Berkeley's theories and philosophy therefore did not find many followers and his views were generally treated with incredulity. He did however influence other later great Western philosophers such as David Hume (1711-1776) and Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860). Advances in physiology especially by Hermann von Helmholtz (1821-1894) began to corroborate Berkeley's views on vision. Helmholtz described vision as a process of unconscious inference, which only becomes conscious after a very complex physical and mental process, which proceeds extremely fast. In modern times, with the advent of the computer and high speed recording equipment, enormous efforts have been made to understand the process of perception and its development from infancy to adulthood; also the source and operation of consciousness. Some of the leading scientists in this field have looked again at Berkeley's views and have found that much of what he said was correct. Perception is a construct which relies on all our physical and mental faculties. Our brains develop and are both cause and effect of our physical and mental development. Our nervous system and especially our brains are immensely complicated, with different brain centres for each of our faculties. All these centres are doing their own processing in parallel and in series, all being interconnected. This supports Berkeley's view on the dependency of the visual sense on the other senses, especially the haptic. There are also many scientists who support Berkeley's view that the perception of objects is their being, there is no 'independent from perception' existence of objects. Berkeley's views were therefore from 100-250 years ahead of his time.

If Ramakrishna Were Alive Today (continued)

Swami Chetanananda

The Golden Age Has Begun

As the moon waxes and wanes, so the ocean has a flood tide and an ebb tide. These tides are part of an ocean's life. Similarly, the rise and the fall of religion are an integral part of human existence. Hypocrites and cheats bring religion down, but avatars raise it up. In every age each religion flows like a wave in an up-and-down motion.

Ramakrishna's advent counteracted the evil tendencies of the Kaliyuga and started a new age. He demonstrated to the materialistic world how to move one's mind from a lower plane to a higher one. He said again and again: "The goal of human life is to realize God. God first, and then the world." Lust and gold cannot be the goals of human life.

In 1895 Swamiji wrote a letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda from America: "The Satyayuga [Golden Age] started the day Ramakrishna was born as an Incarnation." In another letter, to Alasinga Perumal in Madras, he wrote: "I believe that the Satyayuga will come when there will be one caste, one Veda, and peace and harmony. This idea of Satyayuga is what would revivify India. Believe it."

The Holy Mother concurred: "The Satyayuga has begun with the birth of the Master. Many luminaries have accompanied him.... Countless ordinary people take birth and die; but the foremost ones come with the avatar for the sake of his mission."

People expect peace and happiness in a golden age; but within sixty years of Ramakrishna's passing away, two world wars took place and millions of people were killed. When the Holy Mother was asked about this she answered that the storm comes before the rain. Storms obscure people's vision by blowing the dust, they break trees and plants, and destroy homes. After the rain comes and settles the dust, people can see clearly. Similarly, at the advent of an avatar terrible disasters happen in the world, clearing all unrighteousness, falsehood, hypocrisy, and evil from society. At that time the realm of dharma (righteousness) manifests; people's happiness and peace depend on that dharma.

As Swami Vivekananda stood in the courtyard of Belur Math a few days before his passing away, he said: "The spiritual current that has been released will run unimpeded for seven or eight centuries -- nobody will be able to stop it. This spiritual current of the age will flow on out of its own inner strength; it will not depend on any person. This has been ordained by the divine power. What can ordinary human beings do? But the man who plays a role in fulfilling the need of the age will be blessed."

While in San Francisco in 1900, Swami Vivekananda had a conversation with Mrs. Alice Hansbrough about Ramakrishna's return, which she recorded in her memoirs: "Swamiji longed to be free of the body. 'I have to come back once more,' he said. 'The Master said I am to come back once more with him.' 'You have to come back because Sri Ramakrishna says so?' I asked. 'Souls like that have great power, Madam,' he replied. It was probably during an after-lunch conversation [in Pasadena] when he was walking up and down the living room," Mrs. Hansbrough recalled, "that Swamiji told us, 'The Master said he would come again in about two hundred years - and I will come with him. When a Master comes, he brings his own people.'"

Where Will Ramakrishna Appear?

When we study the history of world religions, we find that there is no particular place for the advent of an avatar. Sometimes he is born in a king's palace, sometimes in a poor family's hut, sometimes in a prison or in a manger. But it is certain that the avatar takes birth in the house of virtuous parents. The parents of avatars are very special people, endowed with love, compassion, purity, detachment, devotion, simplicity, sincerity,

austerity, and truthfulness.

One of my friends used to tease me, saying: "Hinduism must be a weak religion because God incarnates there again and again. But in Christianity, Christ is the only Son of God." I jokingly replied: "God is afraid to be born in Christianity because He would be crucified again. So He goes to India and takes birth among the Hindus. The Hindus love God in many forms and they will not kill Him. Moreover, the Christians will not accept or recognize another incarnation or prophet. So God does not want to be born among them anymore."

However, many people are eager to see Ramakrishna. When we read The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play, we wish we could live with the Master. The Master's life was based on truth, and every word of his was true. He himself said that he would come again. Now three questions are in front of us: Where will he come? When will he come? And in what manner will he come?

In the Gospel, in some places Ramakrishna gave distinct hints about his reappearance, and in other places he is more indirect. He said: "What am I? It is all He. I am the machine and He is its Operator. It is God alone who exists in this [meaning his body]. That is why so many people are feeling more and more attracted to it. A mere touch is enough to awaken their spirituality. This attraction, this pull, is the attraction of God and none else. Tarak of Belgharia was going home from Dakshineswar. I clearly noticed that a flame-like thing came out of this [meaning his body] and followed him.

"Many troubles and worries follow in the wake of a birth in a physical body. One has to assume a human body if one cherishes the slightest desire."

A Devotee: "What are the desires of those who are Incarnations of God?"

Master (smiling): "I find that I have not got rid of all my desires. Once I saw a holy man with a shawl, and I too wanted to put on one like it. Even now I have that desire. I don't know whether I shall have to be born again for it."

Balaram (smiling): "Then will you be born again just for a shawl?"

Master (smiling): "One has to keep a good desire so that one may give up the body meditating on it."

On 24 December 1883, the Master told M.: "I shall have to be born once more. Therefore I am not giving all knowledge to my companions. (With a smile) Suppose I give you all knowledge; will you then come to me again so willingly? I recognized you on hearing you read the Chaitanya Bhagavata. You are my own. The same substance, like father and son. All of you are coming here again. When you pull one part of the kalmi creeper,⁵ all the branches come towards you."

On 9 August 1885, the Master said to Mahimacharan: "It will be sufficient for the youngsters who come here if they know only two things. If they know these, they will not have to practise much discipline and austerity. First, who I am, and second, who they are. Many of the youngsters belong to the inner circle.

"Those belonging to the inner circle will not attain liberation. I shall have to assume a human body again, in a northwesterly direction.

"I feel peace of mind when I see the youngsters. How could I live without seeing pure-souled persons?"

Ramakrishna himself said that he would be born again somewhere northwest of Dakshineswar. There has been much speculation about the exact place. A devotee once said to Swami Brahmananda: "I have heard that Sri Ramakrishna will soon reappear in the region of Burdwan [West Bengal]. Is this true?"

Brahmananda: "I have never heard that. I have only heard that he will come again in the region of the northwest."

Devotee: "Maharaj, some say the Master will come again after one hundred years, and some say after two hundred years."

Brahmananda: "I know nothing about the time of his coming, nor have I heard anything

about it."

Sharat Chandra Chakrabarty, a disciple of Vivekananda, wrote in his article on Avataravad (the doctrine of the avatar): "I heard from Swami Subodhananda that once the Master went into samadhi in the Panchavati of Dakshineswar. He was seated facing the northwest. After regaining his normal state, he said: 'Look, the Mother is saying that the more a person thinks of this [pointing to his body] the more that person will understand the highest truth of religion.' Pointing to the northwest with his finger, the Master said: 'I will come again in that direction; at that time many people will attain knowledge.'"

On 26 November 1935, Swami Vijnanananda said to the devotees in Barisal (which is now in Bangladesh): "This time the Master came secretly. He will come again after one hundred years in the northwest direction."

A Devotee: "Did the Master say that he would be born in the Punjab?"

Vijnanananda: "No, the Master did not say that he would be born in the Punjab."

Swami Abhedananda recalled: "One evening Sri Ramakrishna was attended by his faithful attendants Shashi [Ramakrishnananda] and Kali [Abhedananda], who were waiting upon him at Cossipore. The Master inspired them by saying: 'My Divine Mother has shown me that the photograph of this body will be kept upon altars and be worshipped in different houses as the pictures of other avatars are worshipped. My Divine Mother has also shown me that I shall have to come back again and that my next incarnation will be in the West.'"

When Is Ramakrishna Coming?

Waves rise and fall. The deeper a wave goes down, the higher it comes up. When we study history, we find that it takes three to five hundred years for a religion to decline, and it takes the same length of time to rise again. Swamiji once told his disciple Sharat Chandra Chakrabarty: "Ah, it is quite enough if one all-renouncing great soul like Sri Ramakrishna comes in a thousand years! For a thousand years after his advent, people may well guide themselves by those ideas and ideals he leaves behind."

Ramakrishna never directly stated when he would return, as far as the record shows. Some people say he will come one hundred years after his death, and some say two hundred years afterwards. It seems that he may return soon because at present the world is in deep turmoil and tyrannized by violence, hatred, and war. People are hungry for peace and joy. Ramakrishna said: "Wherever there is any trouble in the Divine Mother's empire, I shall have to rush there to stop it, like a government officer." So God must be born in every age to accomplish His mission - serving suffering humanity.

On different occasions the Holy Mother made various statements about the Master's return. Once she recalled: "The Master said he would come again after a hundred years. Meanwhile, for those hundred years he would live in the hearts of those who love him. Standing on the semicircular veranda of Dakshineswar, the Master said this, pointing towards the northwest. I told him I could not come again. Lakshmi also said she would not come again, even if she were chopped into shreds like tobacco leaves! The Master laughed and said: 'How can you avoid coming? Our roots are twined together like the kalmi plant. Pull one stem and the whole clump comes forward.'"

The Holy Mother also stated: "The Master said that he would dwell in the hearts of his devotees for a hundred years in his subtle body. He further said that he would have many devotees among the white people."

Swami Saradananda wrote on this subject in Sri Ramakrishna and His Divine Play: "The Master not only knew this about himself through his yogic insight, but he also told us many times, pointing to the northwest, that the next time he would reincarnate there. Some of us (Girish Chandra Ghosh and others) said that the Master even told them the time of his advent, stating: 'I shall have to be born in that direction after two hundred

years. Then many will be liberated, and those who fail at that time will have to wait a long time for liberation."

Once a devotee asked Swami Saradananda: "Does God really descend as an avatar?"

"Of course He does," replied Saradananda. "We have heard the Master say: 'He who was Rama and Krishna is now Ramakrishna.' In other words, the same power manifests according to the need of the age. He further said, 'I will be born again in the northwest after two hundred years.' You see, this universe and all beings are nothing but His manifestation. But at some times and in some places one can see His special manifestation according to need."

Another time, a devotee said to Saradananda: "Swami, it was expected that the Master's advent would virtually change the country, but observing the activities of the Ramakrishna Mission it seems that it will not happen."

Saradananda answered: "Now the activities of the Mission are going on in a certain way; but they will spread vigorously when the Master comes after 200 years. Just as 250 years after Buddha, the Emperor Ashoka spread Buddhism all over the world, so the Master's religious ideals will spread when he comes back again."

A devotee asked Swami Vijnanananda: "Swami, there is controversy about the Master's return. It is mentioned in one book that he will come back after 100 years and in another after 200 years." The swami said: "Whatever it may be, the Master will come back soon."

Ramakrishna's niece Lakshmi said: "The Master said, 'I shall come back after 100 years.' I can't definitely say whether that year should be counted from his birth, or death, or on the day when he said it."

Now there is a great dilemma in front of us: We have just started to build our lives and society according to the ideals of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, and the Master's message has begun to spread all over the world. If Ramakrishna were to appear now in a new name and in a new form, there might be terrible confusion and friction. Will the new avatar change the activities and ideals of the previous avatar and establish his own mission? It is natural for devotees to feel such apprehension; but I think this anxiety is groundless, for three reasons.

First, because the avatar "comes to fulfil and not to destroy." He nullifies falsehood and not truth. Ramakrishna preached the truth. If he comes again, he will teach the same truth. The Rig Veda says: "Truth is one; sages call it by various names."

Once an old monk tested a young monk, saying: "If Ramakrishna appeared before you and said, 'The goal of human life is to enjoy lust and gold,' what would you do?" The young monk replied: "I would say, 'O hypocrite Ramakrishna, you can go. I don't need you.'" Jesus cannot say, "Blessed are the impure in heart for they shall see God."

Second, whether the owner of a house comes home in Western attire, or Indian attire, or any other type of clothing, the dog easily recognizes its master. Similarly, in whatever form the avatar comes, a true devotee will definitely recognize him.

Third, Patanjali defined God in the Yoga Sutras (1:24): "Ishwara [God, the Supreme Ruler] is a special Purusha, untouched by misery, actions and their results, and desires."

The great sage Vyasa commented on this aphorism: "None can have power similar to God. Imagine that there are two gods with equal powers and they say they will change the same thing differently, such as, 'Let this one be new,' and 'Let this one be old.' If one's wish is thus fulfilled and the other's unfulfilled, one will lose his godhood. Both wishes cannot be fulfilled simultaneously. The same object cannot be new and old at the same time; that is contradictory. Therefore, the One whose power has no equal is God, and He is not separate from the Purusha." Swamiji said that the Master was sarvam swatantram ishwaram -- the Lord Shiva, ever-free God.

However, we learn from Vyasa's commentary that He who possesses supreme power is God, and He is one and not many. God never becomes old or new - He is eternal. The

same God comes again and again as an avatar to establish religion. As the Master used to say, "The same moon rises again and again." So if the new avatar comes, he will not nullify the mission of the old avatar. (to be continued)

Leaves of an Ashrama: 17.

Purpose of Life: to be Rendered Prasad

Swami Vidyatmananda

A question each of us has asked himself again and again is: What is the purpose of life? Or more precisely, What is the purpose of my life? For what we had once thought was its purpose - the attainment of peace, the gaining of happiness and enjoyment - didn't seem to materialize. These were replaced in large measure by anxieties and disappointments. What went wrong?

But suppose that the answer to the question What is the purpose of my life? were just the opposite? The purpose of my life is to give my life away, not to enjoy it - indeed to bring or to try to bring peace, happiness, and enjoyment for others instead of myself. If that were the definition of the purpose of life, perhaps existence would come up to our expectations. And if one could manage to conceive of life as a rite, a puja, and the purpose of life to make oneself a sacrifice to God - an oblation, so to say - offered up upon His altar, that would be the soundest definition of all.

It has long been understood that the offering most pleasing to God is the offering of oneself. My goods, or even my child - as in the case of Abraham's proposed sacrifice of his son - may be acceptable to the Lord, but I myself am the most pleasing present I can proffer. Jesus made himself the lamb of God both in his life and at his death. Offering myself represents the greatest gift to the Almighty, since it demonstrates perfect love, perfect trust, and perfect resignation.

But we will not do it. We prefer to remain our own master; hence our anxieties and disappointments.

When one uses the word 'sacrifice' one tends to think that making a sacrifice is a one-sided gesture. I give something away to the unilateral benefit of him to whom I give it. This is a mistaken view. Reference to the dictionary will show how far such is an erroneous view. The word 'sacrifice' comes from the Latin *sacrificare* - which means 'to make holy', 'to render sacred'. What is sacrificed becomes, by the act of sacrifice, divinised. A lamb, or a coconut, offered on the altar, is taken back sanctified - it has become spiritualised by the two-way intervention of my offer and God's acceptance. It is said that it has been transformed into prasad.

When I offer myself, thus, I do nothing particular for God. He possesses everything already. It is only I who benefits. Just possibly the sacrifice of myself pleases Him, because He likes to see us take actions which make us holy, for in that act it is I who has become 'prasaded'; my action in offering myself has sanctified me; I am the beneficiary. Seen from this point of view, sacrifice loses its negative aspect and becomes a positive, creative, and divinising act.

One of the most touching references to sacrifice I have ever read is to be found in a letter from Swami Vivekananda. It was written in January of 1900. His days of being a fiery preacher out to reform the world were over; he now reckoned himself only as a child at the disposal of the Divine Mother. Listen: "I am afraid that the rest and peace I

seek will never come. But Mother does good to others through me, at least some in my native land, and it is easier to be reconciled to one's fate as a sacrifice. We are all sacrifices - each in his own way. The great worship is going on - no one can see its meaning except that it is a great sacrifice. Those who are willing escape a lot of pain. Those who resist are broken into submission and suffer more. I am now determined to be a willing one."

Letter to a Devotee

Swami Turiyananda

Dear Sri - ,

I have received your letter of April 21. . . . It is good that you have decided to stay at the Yogashrama for a few days. But don't be restless; rather maintain a calm and composed attitude. Always cultivate the recollectedness of God within, although it is very difficult to do. Circumstances, no doubt, tend to cut off that flow of recollectedness; but even then don't neglect to strengthen your practice of remembrance. Rather, continue your practice wholeheartedly.

"The more a tree is shaken by the storm, the more its roots become firm" - keep this precept always in your mind. The greater the difficulties and obstacles, the greater the need for perseverance. Indeed, by God's grace everything becomes favourable. What is wanted is patience, steadiness, and unshakeable faith. Have no fear. Take refuge in God and spend your days in constant remembrance of him. All good will come; there is no doubt of it.

I shall stay here two or three months more. Don't worry. Wherever the Lord keeps you, that will be for your good. He knows best. Leave everything to him and don't forget him - that is your duty. It is his responsibility where and in what condition to keep you and what he will make you do. For your part, just see that you may not forget him. If you practise this continually for some time, everything will become easy. Pray wholeheartedly so that he may make you remember him constantly. He is omniscient. He answers the sincere prayers of our hearts.

Your well-wisher, Turiyananda

Reprinted from 'Spiritual Treasures' by Swami Turiyananda

Spiritual Discipline Swami Swahananda

All achievements are made through disciplines. When discussing spiritual discipline, sometimes the word spiritual practice is used, because modern man has a distaste for

the word discipline. Discipline implies a little compulsion; a methodology is followed day after day with a particular doggedness. We learn certain things, pass through rigorous practice for some time, and become adept. Spiritual practice? Whatever you do with the idea of pleasing the Lord is spiritual practice. But when the word discipline is used, it implies a conscious, methodical, purposeful reaching for a goal, using particular methods.

For example, if you think of God while sitting like a yogi, in a particular posture, at a particular time, with particular preparation, and you do it regularly, methodically, it will be called a discipline. But when you are doing garden work, or you are walking, or cooking, and in between you think of God, that may be called a spiritual practice. In this way I am making a little difference between the two, though they are used interchangeably.

There is a mystic tradition in every religion, which, as it were, jumps into realization. Mystics may not always follow normal methods, but intense desire, intense love for God somehow or other arises in them, and that gives them various types of spiritual experiences. In Vedanta it is recognized that if you want to achieve anything, strong desire is necessary. Mumuksha it is called - strong desire for liberation. When do you want to be liberated? When you feel that you are bound by the senses, bound by the world, bound by various things in life. When you feel the bondage, then only do you want to get out of it. If you don't feel the bondage, there is no question of getting out of it. So mumuksha, desire for liberation, comes to a person who feels that he is bound in every direction.

There are various theories of how religion originated. Some say it comes from man's sense of wonder, some say it is one's underlying nature that causes it, or a sort of a fear. But Swami Vivekananda described the origin of religion as the desire of man to transcend the limitations of the senses. I cannot see far, so I use scientific instruments to see far off. I cannot hear far, so science develops various instruments to enable me to hear more. This is more or less at the sense level. But religion of the unknown, of the beyond, comes in when I feel that I am bound by my senses. So trying to transcend the limitations of the senses is an important idea. Vedanta says transcendence occurs stage by stage. Every religion has some method for transcending thought, but Vedanta codifies it, systematizes it.

Every religion has got four parts, four aspects. One is a philosophy. That is the core of religion. Another is a body of rituals by the help of which you try to retain the ideas. Rituals have been described as concretized philosophy. Philosophy when put into practice, and in a more complete form-that will be ritual. Then, a body of mythology is spoken of, with tales of saints and sages, and the deities and others who give a sort of a support for the spiritual ideas that we uphold. There is also a body of conduct-how to behave in life, a body of moral principles. Most of the religions have a book also. All religions which originated later have a book for their propagation.

The body of practices may include forms of conduct for social needs, or rituals for bringing in feeling. For example, a mother loves her child, so naturally she goes on slaving for the child, feeding the child, and not merely saying, "I love you." She must work for the child also. So ritual is a way in which we give our feelings a sort of a physical expression or external expression. After some time these expressions become systematic, methodical, and often traditional. Say, for example, saluting or shaking hands. In India we salute. Here, you shake hands. In some places they show the tongue. These are all customs. A new custom is gradually systematized, or becomes normal. All disciplines start like a discipline but they become a part of one's nature. For example, if every day you had to think about how to dress, how much time would be wasted? So after some time you get used to dressing and then do it in a mechanical way. First you learn how to do it, but once you have learned, you do it more or less without thinking.

When I first came to this country, thirty-six years ago, I came to San Francisco. The head of the centre was Swami Ashokananda. He had already been there for thirty five years. I heard that he had once commented that after 20 years he knew which tie went with what type of suit. I then decided that I was not going to try to learn this, because I did not have twenty years of previous time here. Of course I had ladies around me - secretaries and so forth - and I would tell them, "Don't buy me anything which doesn't match, so that I need not think too much - and don't give me alternatives." That would involve too much thinking. Now much comes at the habit level, otherwise so much time would be wasted. It is so with everything in which you acquire efficiency; so much energy has gone behind in practising it.

So discipline leads to the formation of habit. Of course in this case the discipline is for a purpose, a spiritual goal, but discipline is useful, is necessary, in every walk of life.

Swami Vivekananda used to say that character is repeated habits. Daily you behave in a certain way; that is how your character is formed. If you are a nice person that means today you are nice, tomorrow nice, and the day after tomorrow also nice. If today you are nice, tomorrow violent, and the day after tomorrow angry, you will not be called a nice person. This means it is a question of day-to-day practice. Unconsciously you react to certain situations. Sometimes a distinction is made. What is moral or ethical action? The moral philosophers say that every decision must require a conflict: this is right; this is wrong; this is good; this is bad; and I choose the right. Their point is that unless there is a conflict involved, one's action is not a moral action, it is instinctive. But, some thinkers argue the other way - that discipline is a method of conscious action, it is not instinctive. When a discipline is consciously followed it becomes a habit, and then one's actions look instinctive, but they are the result of an ideal, and previous practice.

For spiritual realization, some disciplines are spoken of, but they all have ramifications in other areas of life. All religious principles have three dimensions. One is the usefulness for the person, for day-to-day life; second is the social benefit or social consideration; and third is the usefulness for higher spiritual realization - spiritual realization in the sense of realizing God can wait for some time; we are not in a hurry; but our day-to-day problems we shall have to face. So all this discipline will be useful in day-to-day life also.

Now when you turn to spiritual life, right and left you hear the teachers saying that you must meditate, you must think of God. To think, I must know what to think about. There is a technique of thinking; the source book which describes this technique, of getting the mastery of the mind, is Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. There are thousands of varieties of meditation now, but that is the source book. Of course, man consciously or unconsciously learns some type of concentration. When you are a child, you learn one type, then as you grow up, the span of attention increases, the capacity for concentration increases, and then you achieve many things in life. Meditation means trying to think of a thing for some time, but that involves two problems: to withdraw the mind, and to focus it. Our minds are roaming about in many things; if you try to sit quietly then you will see how the mind jumps from thing to thing. When you are able to collect a certain amount of energy, and focus the mind at a particular point, it acquires tremendous strength. An analogy is a convex lens. When a certain measure of solar light is collected together and passes through a focal point, it becomes so powerful that it can burn paper. So this is the idea of concentration. A devotee of God develops concentration so that he can think of God without disturbance.

Now what creates disturbance? First, man has a body. The body doesn't like to sit in one posture too long. Aches are there, pains are there, even if you are young. When you are old, of course, that is part of your life. So first the body must be trained, so that you are able to sit for half an hour, one hour, without moving. Second is the mind. These two things are effectively working in a person. We must learn how to control the mind to

keep it in one place. So postures, and quietening the mind are preliminaries for meditation. Yoga books speak about moral preparation, physical preparation, and then a little posture, so that in one posture you can sit straight. Swami Vivekananda says you should meditate with your spinal column straight, chest forward. Chest slumping is a moody pose. Sri Ramakrishna used to scold young people for stooping. When you have become old, if you have no more strength, what can you do? Then probably instead of being a raja yogi you will have to become a bhakti yogi. "O Lord, I have no more capacity. I shall lie down and meditate, walk and meditate, whatever I can do." Nobody loses the chance; scope is there for everyone. So first is the physical discipline. Another thing often recommended in the yogic system is breath control. It can cure many diseases, and wrongly done it may bring diseases also. Unless you know the remedies, it is not too safe to do for more than, say, 15 minutes. For those who do it for a long time, regular watching is necessary. But up to ten minutes is easy; there is no risk. It is like diving. In diving, you hold your breath. That is not going to do any harm unless it is done for too long a time. The yogis have prescribed deep breathing. Modern doctors have started advising deep breathing nowadays. By rhythmic breathing, if you can do it, the mind will become calm. If you observe your breathing when you are very calm and serene, you will find that your breathing has become slow and rhythmic. So the yogis say, reverse the process. If you reverse the process and make your breath slow and rhythmic, concentration will come.

The third stage is actual meditation. (I am not counting yama and niyama - physical cleanliness and mental cleanliness - they are of course the first things.) Actual meditation has got two parts: withdrawing and collecting the mind, pratyahara and dharana, gathering and fixing. This becomes easier if you focus the mind on something. By fixing, your mind acquires special power. If you are able to hold the mind in one thought for some time it is called dharana. So when we say, "I am meditating," we are really trying to bring the mind in. Loosely speaking, it is meditation, withdrawing the mind from surroundings. The practices that help in doing it are control of the posture, and the effort to focus the mind every day. If you practice irregularly, the result will be irregular. You see, if you eat every day at the same time, when that time comes you will feel hungry. Even if you have eaten one hour earlier false hunger will come. So that is the benefit of regularity of habits. You must practice regularly. Swami Vivekananda recommends that you train yourself - of course, it is best if it is done from childhood. When you were a child, too much conscious effort was not there - your parents wanted you to do something, so you did it. But when you are already grown up, then you will have to be convinced about it, that it is good to do it, and every day do it methodically. Thousands of people know that exercise is very good for health. But how many people do it? It is because there is no regularity of habits. Unless you are very fanatical about your health, you don't pursue it, but everybody knows it is good. Swamiji says, compel yourself to meditate, and don't rely on an outside agency. Don't eat without first practising meditation. He says that sheer hunger will drive off your laziness. Half the time we are lazy. Some days you have the mood and you are ready to meditate for three hours, and some days no mood; you don't want to sit. So you must bind yourself with a regular discipline.

The advantage of a habit is that your moods are controlled. We always pass through moods. Good moods are enjoyable - no discipline is necessary. But when a bad mood comes, how to get out of it? Worrying, grieving, feeling sorry for oneself - all these things are moods. Sometimes a mood is there, sometimes it is not there. So by practice I want to control the moods so that they don't last for too long a time. At one time I used to advise people - those who live an active life: try to withdraw yourself every three hours. You must find a way to do it, even in your office. Whether you go inside the bathroom, or open a book, the main purpose is meditation. If society accepts it, you can

suddenly close your eyes and do these things, if it doesn't look too odd. But every two or three hours, withdraw yourself from your surroundings, especially if you live a very hectic life, a busy life. The nerves will be soothed, the mind will be clearer, thinking will be clearer, and as a result the moods will be controlled. If some day you have moods, that is the time for taking a bath, or for thinking of God or reading something - the moods are controlled that way. A mother may have moods, but she cannot remain in an eccentric mood too long. The children are there and they will be pestering her. In half an hour or an hour she will have to conquer the mood and go ahead. That is the advantage of regularity of habits, and of spiritual habits definitely. (to be continued)

Freedom in Vedanta (continued) Stuart Rose

How can the obstacles to freedom be overcome?

We have found that it is the mind which is the primary obstacle to freedom. Once the mind - principally the ego-sense (ahamkara) - falls, much else also falls. This falling entails the dissolution of individuality, of separateness.

Although the problem and the solution sound simple and straightforward enough, in practice their resolution is not so easy to achieve. This is what the spiritual path is all about, and this is why we continually return to existence, never shedding samsara. Bhagavatpada states clearly in the Prasna-Uttara-Malika (A Garland of Questions and Answers) that the most difficult task a person can encounter in life is keeping the mind under constant control.

However, Vedanta provides the scientific means to achieve a successful conclusion to the spiritual path. Drawing from the teaching of the Upanisads, Bhagavatpada describes the means unambiguously. A person seeking freedom needs to gain four preliminary requisites or qualifications for the tasks involved. These four qualifications are called Sadhana-Catustaya, and include discrimination (viveka), detachment (vairagya), then follow six virtues (samadamati-sadhanas), and finally a burning desire for freedom (mumukshutva). These qualifications are not a progression to be completed in ascending order; on the contrary, they are completely integrated, each supporting the other and making the practice firm. Once qualified, in a similar way to the wood carver, practice can begin in earnest; although, again like the wood carver, practice starts long before graduation, else how can we learn.

The first qualification to be approached is discrimination (viveka). This is discrimination between the real and eternal against the unreal and transient, and is clearly epitomized in the way that milk is immediately understood to be different from water - once we have come to know what the real is, we will see that there is no question regarding which is which. When discrimination is fully achieved, then superimposition will not occur. The practice of viveka is not just a simple matter of establishing that everything is unreal and then moving on to the next qualification. It is much more of a continued process: when each object (person, thought, house, and so forth) is found to be impermanent and unreal, only then will it not be desired; and only when this is firmly established for each object is it possible to apply successfully the next qualification. Every aspect in each of the five sheaths (pancakoshas) needs to be seen through the 'eyes' of discrimination and negated. This is all-encompassing.

Next is detachment (vairagya). This pertains to a renunciation of what has been found to

be unreal through viveka. Detachment includes the qualities of self-denial, dispassion, and desirelessness. The person with this qualification needs to be revolted by the world outside comprised of sense objects, as well as his internal world, particularly the sense of I and mine: by all that is unreal.

While it is one thing to be revolted by that which is outside of oneself, it is quite a different thing to be revolted by oneself. How is it possible to remain living when we are revolted by our inner world? The answer is that my life goes on regardless of my I-ness. In my life, I believe that I have control over what happens, over what I do and think, but it is found (as described earlier) that in reality this is false, an illusion. The I-ness is found by discrimination to be revolting because it confuses, colours, and distracts; with this knowledge a detachment can be gained from it. What is left of life after detachment, we may ask? Experience shows us that it is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss - the most perfect state, more fulfilling by far than the puny, limited I-ness that we currently 'enjoy'.

Detachment can be helped to be made firm through the third Vedantic qualification, the six virtues:

Briefly, these are: sama - calmness, inner peace and mind control; dama - control of the sense organs, self control and restraint; uparati - self-withdrawal and mental poise; titiksa - endurance and forbearance; sraddha - faith in the truth of the teachings of the guru and Vedanta; and samadhana - tranquillity of mind, concentration, self-surrender, and fixing the buddhi (intellect) in the pure Brahman.

Once these qualifications have been fully understood, it can be seen what a great assistance they are in providing clarity to discrimination, and in solidifying detachment. Practice becomes a wonderful concert with all the instruments of the orchestra performing in a growing harmony, but yet with one final addition.

Extending from sincere samadhana is the completing qualification, the intense desire for freedom (mumukshutva). This qualification, too, is not as simple as it sounds, but it increases in intensity as the spiritual path develops. It is by no means a casual desire for freedom, but one which is deeply established in the utter worthlessness of the transient, and the understanding that all worth is concentrated wholly in Brahman, in permanence. It can start at a lowly level, and then proceed to become more established in stages. This desire may be thought of as the impetus or 'fuel' for such progression to freedom, the star of the concert, so to speak.

These four qualifications are the principal means that a person can employ to start his search for freedom. The deeper one goes into this process, the stronger can become the resolve for its conclusion, because the taste of freedom gets stronger and stronger.

Bhagavatpada tells us that it is possible to attain freedom in this lifetime - to become a jivanmukti - but the task is not easy. It requires a comprehensive dedication, and this is why the lifespan in Indian tradition includes, at the end, stages of becoming a vanaprasthya (withdrawing from society), and sannyasa (ascetic, complete withdrawal), where all responsibilities and the world can be let go. Of course, some individuals start the final stage much earlier in life.

So far in these questions we have seen that the concept of freedom equates with that of Brahman, the all-pervading unity and Oneness. As Brahman is all-pervading, it means that there is nowhere where Brahman is not: Brahman in its entirety is within each person - in reality, each person (or object) is Brahman. And Brahman is total joy; there are no divisions to Brahman. What I consider to be me and mine is an illusion, a superimposition, and is the greatest obstacle to freedom. This I-ness has to be overcome. The srutis reveal the means to remove it, but make no mistake, this I-ness is stuck fast and tremendously difficult and laborious to remove. The spiritual journey is a lifetime's endeavour, and enthusiasm for it needs to be strong enough for the course. This I-ness can be removed, freedom can be revealed, and the greatest happiness

possible can be enjoyed.

Does freedom exist?

The final question of the five is not so much a question, it is more of a conclusion. The question is: does freedom exist? Given what has already been said, this might seem a strange and contradictory question to ask. The answer, of course, is: no, freedom does not exist, and this needs some explanation.

If I look at the concept of freedom from a relative, dualistic position, then I can answer yes, freedom does exist. But when I apply discrimination, I find that neither concepts of freedom or bondage exist in reality. Both are transient and changing; only one can exist fully at any one time. What is more, when I am free, I will not experience bondage, freedom will be my normal state and, knowing no opposite, the meaning of it simply evaporates. If I am at peace, how can I be bound?

It is also the case that freedom (and Brahman) is not personal. Freedom is the end of I-ness and my-ness, the end of separation: individuality transforms into a oneness, an alone-ness (kaivalya). There is no bondage, all is freedom, all is existence, consciousness, and bliss absolute.

Their Power and Their Love (continued) **Swami Vijayananda**

I was once witness of a heavenly scene. In Maharaj's time, during a celebration of the Master's Birthday at Belur Math, I had been appointed to guard the passage to Maharaj's room. This sort of precaution was necessary because of the presence of a large crowd of persons of all sorts. All of a sudden there came up to me an old lady, well dressed, and attended by nine other women who followed behind. There was something about her bearing and manner which made me sit up and take notice. She spoke to me softly, saying, 'Well, my child, will you just tell your Rakhal that Annapurnama is here? Just tell him that.' Something made me feel I ought simply to stand aside; I said, 'Go, Mother, go...' but before she could get to the steps of Maharaj's room, he came rushing out to meet her. 'Have you got it? Have you got it? Have you got it?' he was crying. Impatiently he waited for her to lift the corner of her cloth and from it take some ordinary brown sugar candy made with coconut. Maharaj just began to eat it avidly. Then up came Swami Shivananda, seemingly from nowhere, and said, 'Don't eat it alone, please, Maharaj; let me have some too.' When they had finished it, the old lady went away, and the Swamis went back to their rooms.

Only the next day did I learn what it was all about. Maharaj said to me, 'You saw that yesterday?'

'Yes, Maharaj,' I answered.

'Why did you not ask what it means?'

'Well, Maharaj, I do not concern myself; I was content just to see.'

Then he told me that Annapurnama had been a devotee of Shri Ramakrishna, and she had now had a vision. The Master appeared to her and told her to make this sweet and take it to Maharaj. He showed the same vision to Maharaj, so he knew that she was coming and why. 'But how did Swami Shivananda come to know about it?' I asked. 'Well, Tarakda is a very great soul, perhaps he also had the vision,' was Maharaj's reply.

Swami Shivananda

The monks used to gather in Mahapurush Maharaj's room and soak up the blissful atmosphere of his presence. One day when we had been doing this for some time, and he had given the signal for dismissal, I happened to be the last to file out. He stopped me, saying, 'Where are you going?'

'Well, Maharaj, you gave the sign for everyone to go.' The Swami glared at me.

'Are you everyone?' Then he said, 'The Lord, in there (pointing to the temple) ... I am His dog. And you are my dog.' Then he went on to tell me how the dog behaves at his master's feet, about his faithfulness and so on. "We are all the Master's dogs. And one day he will come, and he will look into your eyes - and take away everything.'

It was Swami Shivananda that I knew first. But he had always told us that for initiation we must go to Swami Brahmananda. Before that took place, however, the time for taking the vows of brahmacharya was approaching fast. Swami Shivananda wrote to Maharaj, 'There are several young men here, waiting to be given their vows by you. When are you coming back to the Math?' Maharaj had written in reply, 'How long will you keep your hand closed? Why do you not give it to them yourself?'

Shortly thereafter I happened to be meditating in the outer part of the Math shrine-room. Then I noticed that Mahapurush Maharaj was there, in the inner enclosure; and what should he be doing, of all things, but cleaning a portion of the floor with a large handkerchief. As he cleaned, tears fell in torrents; they were running all down his face, his clothes, and onto the floor, as he tried to wipe them up. Then he got up like a drunken man and made ready to leave. I must have stirred, making a noise, for he called out gruffly, 'Who is there?' I answered him. 'Oh, all right. Just stay, stay,' said he. But as he started to walk out of the hall, I saw him rocking drunkenly, and, fearing he might fall, went up to him and walked along his side. He laughed a little, and said, 'Oh no, it is not so much as that...'

I followed him to his room, and by that time Mahapurush Maharaj was saying 'Yes... yes.' (He had this habit of saying 'yes... yes'). Now he said, 'Yes, I will do it.' Then he flung himself in his chair, and said to me, 'All right. You will have it. You will have what you want. You will all have what you want.' I could not think of anything I wanted, so I asked, 'What will I have?' 'Your brahmacharya and all that.' My eyes opened wide and I ran out to the other young monks to tell them the news.

Later, after meeting Swami Brahmananda, I approached him for my spiritual initiation. I was told, 'No, you go to Mahapurush for it. You love him much more than you do me.' 'Look, Maharaji,' I said, 'I do not carry a pair of scales around in my pocket. I cannot say whom I love more than whom. Nor do I care to know. I say to you only this one thing: if you do not initiate me, I go without initiation in this life - that is all.' So Maharaj did it. That is how, only after getting brahmacharya from Mahapurush Maharaj, did I get my initiation from Maharaj. By the time I was ready for sannyasa, that too came from Swami Shivananda, because Maharaj had gone.

After Mahapurush Maharaj had become the President of the Order, I was sent out on some relief work of the Mission. On the day I returned, I brought back with me several of the newer devotees who had become interested through this relief work. They were accompanying me to the President's room when we met Khoka Maharaj (Swami Subhodhananda), who told me, 'There is fire and brimstone waiting for you up there.' I wondered what he meant, but went on upstairs. Swami Shivananda immediately began upbraiding me for failing to date a cheque I had signed in connection with my financial administration. I turned to the persons who were with me and told them this was a private matter, and as it did not concern them, they might as well wait outside. Unfortunately they failed to take the hint, and sat down. For about twenty-five minutes Mahapurush Maharaj went on abusing me vehemently. I had never been scolded in such a manner before. Those Swamis knew words that are not to be found in any dictionary,

and terms of reproach which I had never heard.

Finally I was dismissed. Shortly I went to Swami Vivekananda's room, which was then a shrine, of course, and did japa for the remainder of the day - no food, no break.

Towards evening I heard the attendant of Mahapurush Maharaj calling my name in various places. But I did not answer. The attendant reported back to the Swami that I was not to be found. Swami Shivananda replied that he knew I was in Swamiji's room, and I was to be brought from there. The attendant, finding me, asked why I had not answered him; I said I hadn't felt like it, and even now did not want to face Mahapurush Maharaj. But I went. At once the Swami asked me for the Hindi equivalent of a Bengali word. I gave it.

'Are you sure?' he asked.

'Well, almost sure.'

'Hup! Almost sure!' He glared. Pointing to a huge book he said: 'Look it up in that dictionary.' I had been standing at a safe distance; now I had to approach and look up the word. I verified it. Swami Shivananda told me, 'Now put the dictionary on the floor.' Wonderingly I obeyed. 'Sit on the dictionary and close your eyes.' Then Mahapurush popped into my mouth a huge rasagolla¹; whereupon I burst into tears. He told me, 'You have not eaten all day; and I have not eaten all day... You see, my boy, the undated cheque was merely an excuse. I saw, materializing, a great disaster for you, and I had to head it off. By my doing what I had to do today, it will be prevented. Now go and eat a meal.'

I was overcome to think that the Swami had not eaten also. Later I came to realize what that disaster was: Vanity. 'I am a great worker etc.' - this could have taken possession of me.

Swami Adbhutananda

While living in Varanasi I used to go to see Lata Maharaj every day for an hour and a half. He would be lying there, in the room where he stayed, and, sitting up a little, would ask, 'Who has come? Ah, Pashupati.' Then he might say, 'Would you like to drink a little hemp?'

'No, thank you, Maharaj.' He would go on coaxing.

'I will fix it up, with almond flavour, sugar, and so on, and you can take just a little.' But I always politely refused. Finally he said, 'Well! You are not afraid of me?'

'No, Maharaj.'

'Why are you not afraid of me?'

'I am not afraid of you because I love you,' I replied.

He never fully swallowed the idea of monks living and working at the Varanasi Sevashrama. He called it the 'ospital'. 'Why did Naren start that?... But Naren did start it, so it is all right. But why did he start it?' In this way he would muse. To a friend of mine Lata Maharaj once said. 'Who sent you to that 'ospital?' On being told that Swami Brahmananda had, he said, 'Oh, Raja sent you... then it is all right.' One day he asked me, 'Do you have bath in the Ganga every day, and then go to the temple of Vishwanath?'

'No, Maharaj,' I answered; 'this is the rainy season and the Ganga is very dirty in the rainy season.' And Vishwanath? 'Well, Vishwanath to me is just a black stone.'

'Don't say that!' he cried, jumping up in vehement protest. Then eyeing me appraisingly he said, 'Well, you are strong, you are bold. You are simple. May Vishwanath be gracious to you.' So I went to the temple. Then some days later when I was sitting by the river on an embankment, with a friend, I saw... something... just walking there. Vishwanath was gracious to me.

Swami Adbhutananda's death was wonderful. We arrived an hour too late, but there was still about his face the greatest beauty. Not beauty in the ordinary physical sense - Lata

Maharaj was not beautiful - but some radiance, some kind of glory was evident there. Previously I had seen the hairs of the arm standing on end; but before that day I had never seen the beard and moustache standing out horizontal from the face in ecstasy. One of his devotees was sitting there just weeping and weeping. Hari Maharaj (Swami Turiyananda), who was present, said to him, 'Hush up. Stop weeping.' But as soon as he had said this, Hari Maharaj himself began weeping just unbelievably. How he wept! 'Ladu (so he pronounced it), why have you left us?' And he went on weeping. I, who had thought him the very image of jnana, was astounded to see him so moved. I knew I could not cry like that... Then they carried the body to Manikarnika Ghat.

Once Latu Maharaj asked me, 'Don't you know who I am? Do you know who Raja (Swami Brahmananda) is? Do you know who we all are?'

'No, Maharaj, I do not know and I do not want to know.'

'What! You are an upstart!' he shouted.

'No, I don't want to know,' I repeated; 'I have a yardstick just this long (showing a short length), and you want me to measure what you are, and what they are?'

Swami Turiyananda

I visited Hari Maharaj often, and always found him sitting bolt upright, with the greatest dignity. He could always see everything in me, just like looking in a glass, and he said so. So I thought that before going to him. I would do 10,000 repetitions of the Lord's name, just to 'coat the mind' against that experience. Then I went to him and prostrated. Raising me up he said, 'No, it is not enough; I still see right through you!' And both of us laughed.

Swami Abhedananda

Kali Maharaj treated me like his own son, I felt. It was he who told me how to throw my voice while lecturing, and never to become hoarse. 'Look at the persons in the very last row,' he said, 'and speak to them. Then everyone will hear. It is very simple.' Next to Swamiji, he was the greatest lecturer, the fieriest.

Once the Swami's attendant had taken the silver service (which Kali Maharaj used, after returning from America) for washing in the Ganges. When it was brought back, Swami Abhedananda found that one silver spoon was missing. I heard him muttering aloud in his room, 'These rascals! They are unfit for sannyasa. I will take away their gerrua2... kick them all out... etc.' But I did not know what it was all about. Later I heard that he had accused the attendant of stealing, and that all of them around him had suffered from his resentment and indictment. I took it upon myself to become spokesman for them, and went to the Swami's room. After prostrating, I took the bull by the horns and said, 'Maharaj, I have a charge to make against you. I am sorry, but as your own son, I speak it: that you have made a great mistake.'

'What, Pashupati! You don't say such a thing!'

'Yes, Maharaj, I say it. Just hear me. Every day I come; I write down in the ledger so much spent for this, so much for that, and you never question it. Here you have given me charge of the Math expenses and accounts, and have put so much trust in me. Not a word of doubt have you expressed. I take and leave the money, and you don't so much as look at it. And now, for a spoon, you are accusing us all. Perhaps he was careless, or has kept it somewhere forgetfully; the Ganga itself may give it back. Should you not wait to see?' Swami Abhedananda drew himself up to his full height and said shortly, 'You are right, Pashupati. I ask your pardon. Go now and tell them all, I ask them to forgive me.' The spoon was subsequently discovered on the river beach at low tide, in the sand of the ghat.

Once Swami Abhedananda had given a lecture in Rangoon on why Vedanta accepts Christ but not Christianity. After the lecture, two Fathers, Christian priests, came to the place

where he was staying and demanded of him, 'What right have you to preach about our Christ?' Quick as a flash, and with his immense dignity, the Swami replied, 'The right of having had direct vision of Him, through His grace.' Then I saw him turn on his heel and walk up the stairs, pausing to ask an attendant to give the Fathers some good tea and toast.

(to be continued)

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