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Editorial

Be Blessed with Spiritual Awakening

1st January , 1886. Cossipore garden house.

Sri Ramakrishna blessed all his devotees with these words:

"May all of you be blessed with spiritual awakening."

A messenger of God has only one message: how to awaken people to God. He is like the good shepherd leading all his sheep home, to safety. The words of an Incarnation of God are potent, unfailing and universal. They are applicable to all men all over the world. His blessings are not confined to any race, country, religion, or gender; an Incarnation of God does not come for the benefit of merely a few people. His power and message will help innumerable aspirants for a long time to come. Whoever sincerely calls on God, wherever, and in whatever form, is sure to receive his infallible blessing.

This blessing is an act of grace. Grace comes in the form of a human birth, a longing for

God, and a favourable environment.

Our part in this cosmic drama is to use this invaluable opportunity. Many of us are aware of this and would like to use it, yet something seems to hold us back. Sometimes we might feel discouraged. At such times the blessing of Sri Ramakrishna strengthens our faith and gives a new impetus, an inspiration for further striving.

It is the belief of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna that he is still showering his blessings; he is ready to come to the help of any aspirant at any time. Those who strive sincerely need no proof; they experience this directly, every time.

May the New Year strengthen our spiritual resolve and take us nearer to God.

Swami Dayatmananda

The Philosophy of Ernst Mach

By Hans Heimer

1. Mach's Background

The Mach Number is the ratio of the speed of a body divided by the speed of sound and is commonly used in describing the speed of supersonic aircraft. For most people, apart from a popular razor blade named Mach 3, this is the only knowledge they associate with the name Mach. The Mach Number is named after the Austrian physicist and philosopher Ernst Mach. The purpose of this article is to draw attention to the proximity of Mach's philosophy to Advaita Vedanta, the non-dualist philosophy of India, as well as the uniqueness of Mach's means of expression and demonstration of his views.

Mach was born in 1838 in Moravia, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Central European empire. He had a secluded childhood until he entered a secondary school (named a

gymnasium) when he was 15 years old. In later years he remembered a number of significant childhood experiences which contributed to his adult philosophy:

a) The representation of 3 dimensional perspectives on 2 dimensional surfaces.

At the age of three he was plagued by perception problems. He had trouble grasping both perspective and shading. He could not understand why tables in pictures had the near end wider than the far end, when in real life, opposite ends of tables were the same length. Apparently, regardless of how far away an object was, he "saw" it as the same size as when it was close. He also had difficulty understanding the purpose of pictures. Mach wrote: "But that the picture of a table on a plain surface was not to be conceived as a plain painted surface, but stood for a table and so was to be seen with all the attributes of extension, was a joke I did not understand." Nor did Mach even in later years fully abandon his resistance to perspective art. He still tended to consider it misleading and unnatural.

Also the relation between shadows on sensory objects and shading in pictures completely escaped him. He considered shading a pointless distortion and much preferred mere outline abstraction.

b) The realisation of mechanical interconnectedness.

Mach wrote: "There was a turning point in my understanding of causality in my fifth year. Up to that time I represented to myself everything I did not understand - a pianoforte for instance - as simply a motley assemblage of the most wonderful things, to which I ascribed the sound of the notes. That the pressed key struck the chord with the hammer, did not occur to me. Then one day I saw a windmill. Upon our arrival, the mill had just begun to work. The terrible noise frightened me, but did not hinder me from watching the teeth of the shaft which meshed with the gear of the grinding mechanism and moved on one tooth after another. This sight remained until I reached a more mature level, and in my opinion, raised my childlike thinking from the level of the wonder-believing savage to causal thinking; from now on, in order to understand the unintelligible, I no longer imagined magic things in the background but traced in a broken toy the cord or lever which had caused the effect."

c) The awareness of the interconnectedness of our body with the objects we fashion or observe.

At the age of thirteen Mach asked his father to have him apprenticed to a cabinet maker for two years. His father acquiesced, so that for two full days every week, Ernst learned cabinet making from a skilled master in a neighbouring village. Mach remembered this time with pleasure. He came to enjoy working with his hands, often coupled with visions of flying machines and other future inventions. It helped him later to become one of the leading experimental physicists of his day.

d) The influence of Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) philosophy.

Mach wrote: "I have always felt it as a stroke of special good fortune, that early in life, at about the age of 15, I lighted in the library of my father, on a copy of Kant's Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics. The book made at the time a powerful and ineffable impression on me, the like of which I never afterwards experienced in any of my philosophical reading."

For those not familiar with Kant's philosophy, it is necessary to add some explanation. The Prolegomena is an abbreviated version of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, written for non-specialists. In it Kant stated that whatever there was 'out there' in an external world, it could only be perceived by the human sensory apparatus whose centre was the mind. This shifted the attention of his philosophy to the mind, instead of concentrating on the world, i.e. the attention moved from the object to the subject. This was similar to the shift in astronomy from being earth-centred to sun-centred, initiated by Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543). Kant therefore called his philosophical revolution 'Copernican'.

In his analysis of experience, Kant demonstrated that all aspects of objects, of the world, were related to our sensations. When we attempted to go beyond these sensations by abstracting from the object the sensory qualities like shape, appearance etc, to the substratum of our sensations, which he called 'the-thing-in-itself', we could make no valid positive statements as to what this was. Our minds, our concepts, our language, were tied to our experience, our sensations. He concluded by naming all experience the 'Phenomenon'. This left the-thing-in-itself beyond our understanding and expressive ability, though he did not doubt its real existence, and this he named the 'Noumenon'. Included in the noumenon or substratum was existence, being and the infinite, such as God.

An essential part of Kant's philosophy is the concept of 'a priori' or presupposition. Our

concepts of space, time and causality are mental presuppositions which enter into science, mathematics and philosophy etc. They are basic ways in which our minds work and they precede an explanation based on sensations. They are in fact ideas which we begin to absorb from our culture and with our learning of language, in infancy.

e) A unitive experience, aged 17/18. Mach wrote: "The superfluity of the role played by 'the-thing-in-itself' abruptly dawned upon me. On a bright summer day, in the open air, the world with my ego suddenly appeared to me as one coherent mass of sensations, only more strongly coherent in the ego. Although the actual working out of this thought did not occur until a later period, yet this moment was decisive for my whole view."

In 1860 Mach graduated in mathematics and physics at the University of Vienna and lectured there till 1864. He then became a professor of mathematics and physics at the University of Graz. In 1867 he became professor of experimental physics at the University of Prague and later became its rector. In 1886 he succeeded in producing the first photograph of projectile shock waves (it was for this work that the Mach Number was named after him). In 1895 he became professor of philosophy at the University of Vienna. In 1898 a stroke permanently paralysed the right half of his body and he had to retire. With his son Ludwig he continued with his experimental work until his death in 1916.

All his life Mach was a profound thinker, a publisher of many books and scientific papers, a brilliant lecturer and a contributor to private and public discussions on scientific and philosophical topics. Because he considered the ego to be a passing appearance, he refused to authorise a biography of himself. Only in 1913 he wrote (with one finger of his left hand) a typewritten 13 page autobiographical document, but this was not published at the time because it was considered too brief to do justice to the subject. Mach intended at that stage to amplify it when his health had improved. Unfortunately it was too late, his intentions were not fulfilled. However, throughout his writings, there are short autobiographical references to explain why and how he had reached his conclusions.

2. The Philosophy of Mach

Mach was a pioneer and a contributor in many fields, especially physics, physiology, psychology and cognition theory, as well as philosophy. Science of course has moved on

since his day, but Mach's book that is still influential and occasionally quoted is "The Analysis of the Sensations and the Relationship of the Physical to the Psychological", (herein referred to as 'The Analysis'). It was first published in 1886, and edited and republished to the 9th edition in 1922; its latest reprint taking place in 1991. It has been translated from the original German into English, Italian, Japanese, Spanish and Hungarian.

The book expounds Mach's basic philosophical position. This is that in the final analysis, all our knowledge of the world and ourselves is basically awareness of the contents of consciousness. He reached this profound conclusion when he was 30 years old, after a fifteen year struggle to free himself from the greatest intellectual discomfort of his life. In order to explain this basic position, he makes use of the concepts of experiences, complexes and elements.

We experience colours, sounds, warmth and coolness, scents, tastes, pressures and pains. Related to these sensations are our memories, our concepts expressed in language, our moods, feelings, desires and aversions. These experiences are never single, but always severally related and these relationships Mach called 'Complexes'. All objects or bodies, whether material (e.g. a table), or immaterial (e.g. mathematics), are complexes and together they constitute the totality of the world and ourselves. When by means of observation and reflection, we analyse these complexes, we can separate these into their constituent sensations and perceptions, but we cannot separate them further than the abovementioned constituents, and Mach therefore called these basics 'Elements'. Instead of the physicists's molecules, atoms and atomic particles being considered as elements, Mach insisted that perceptions are the elements out of which everything is fashioned. This of course is also the Advaita Vedanta viewpoint.

In the first chapter of The Analysis, Mach then goes on in his unique way, using letters of the alphabet in the algebraic way of a mathematician, to further examine these elements and their relationships. For the sake of simplicity, let the elements be labelled A B C....K L M....p q r.... Each letter represents an element, the dots represent an indefinite number of further elements, and each group represents a complex. (Instead of p, q, and r, Mach uses the Greek letters alpha, beta and gamma). The complexes of colour, sound etc, which we usually call 'external objects' (e.g. a violin, or a bird) we will for the sake of clarity call A B C.... The complex which we designate as our body, which because of its unique features is a special part of the first complexes, we call K L

M.... The complexes of will, memory images etc., loosely referred to as 'the mind', we represent by p q r.... Now usually the complex K L M.... p q r.... is called 'I' and is differentiated from the complex A B C.... which is called 'the world of objects'. However sometimes the division consists of p q r.... as 'I', differentiated from A B C....K L M.... as 'the world of objects'.

At first it appears that A B C.... is independent of the 'I' and to stand self-sufficiently facing the 'I'. This independence is however only relative and cannot stand up to a more detailed examination. On the other hand, many things can change in the complex p q r.... without noticing any difference in A B C.... and the reverse is also true. But many changes in p q r...., by means of changes in K L M.... are transferred to A B C...., or vice versa. An example of this is if powerful images or expectations result in physical actions, or when the conditions of our body cause significant changes; such as feelings of pain causing us to lie down and go to sleep. In these instances, K L M.... seems to be more strongly connected with p q r.... and also with A B C...., than the complexes A B C.... are interconnected with each other.

More exactly speaking, it appears that A B C.... is always determined by K L M.... A cube is large when it is near, is small when it is distant, is of different appearance when viewed with the right eye alone than with the left eye alone, under some circumstances is seen doubled and is not seen at all when the eyes are closed. The properties of the one and the same object therefore appear to be changed via our body, they appear to be determined by our body. Where then is the same object, which appears so differently under the various circumstances? The only thing we can say with certainty, is that various A B C.... are tied to various K L M.... This analysis is similar to Kant's basic proposition that an object is an integration of its various sensory qualities; but Mach rejects Kant's notion of the-thing-in-itself; Mach considers this as a mere metaphysical concept which has no basis in fact.

Mach then describes in *The Analysis*, in greater detail, the process of experience. If we see an object with a sharp point, e.g. a needle, and then touch it, we experience a prick on our skin. Frequently repeated similar experiences leave us with a strong core knowledge of associating a visual sharp point with a bodily sensation, eventually leading to the dichotomy of ego (internal) and world (external). Later on, in the infinite multiplicity of experiences as adults, we forget the sources of these concepts and they

become mere word-symbols of our language.

Mach points out that we are capable of examining the same object from different points of view. A colour is a physical object when we consider its presence under different lighting conditions, a psychic object when we view it as a sensation and a physiological object when we examine the process of seeing. The processes of physics, psychology and physiology are therefore not contradictory, but rather different ways of dealing with related circumstances, depending on our viewpoint. When we truly understand this, we can see that all viewpoints are related and relative to the circumstances. Then we can dispense with the erroneous dichotomies of 'I' and 'Not-I', subject and object, mind and matter. These distinctions are relevant for the practical purposes of living, but incorrect from a philosophical standpoint.

The rest of *The Analysis* is devoted to detailed exploration of the physics (A B C....), the physiology (K L M....) and the psychology (a b c....) of sensation; with descriptions of experiments and their conclusions, carried out by Mach and his son Ludwig. All these are examined and interpreted in the light of the basic philosophy described above.

Although Mach was a professor of philosophy and his views had a considerable influence on many eminent people, including Einstein, Mach never considered himself a philosopher. He claimed to be a scientist who needed philosophy to put science on a sound basis and therefore his published philosophical views were restricted to that end. He considered people like Descartes, Kant and Schopenhauer as philosophers, because their aim was to create an all-encompassing system. Mach's life was dedicated to scientific investigation and education; this was his genius and he was a humble man, not anxious to claim credit where it was not his due. He was recommended for a Nobel prize in physics, but he never received it, partly because his illness cut his career short, partly because of the circumstances of the First World War and perhaps partly because his views made him many powerful enemies. William James (1842-1910), the famous American philosopher and psychologist, in the autumn of 1882, went to visit Mach in Prague. In a letter to a friend, James wrote: "Meanwhile Mach came to my hotel and I spent four hours walking and and supping with him at his club, an unforgettable conversation. I don't think anyone ever gave me so strong an impression of pure intellectual genius. He apparently has read everything, and has an absolute simplicity of manner and winningness of smile when his face lights up, that are charming".

Towards the end of his life, Mach took a keen interest in Buddhist philosophy. He was amazed and gratified to find that many of the Buddha's teachings on the impermanence of the world and our ego, as well as the unity of all experience, coincided with the views he had reached and expressed as a result of his own investigations and his lifestyle. There is no record of whether Mach had any knowledge of Vedanta, although Swami Vivekananda paid a short visit to Vienna in 1900, where Mach was resident at the time. But in most aspects, Buddhism and Vedanta use a different language for historical reasons, to express the same viewpoint. Therefore Mach's views in many aspects, are also the views of Advaita Vedanta.

3. Acknowledgments

The information on Mach in this article is based on the following sources:

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Nature's Evolutionary Impulse (continued)

By Sampooran Singh

Psychosocial Evolution

a) **Observation of Two Thoughts:** As we 'think' - in any sequence of thoughts - there is often a sudden, discontinuous jump from one thought to the next. We are not aware at all of any intermediate stages. If we were so aware, no thinking would be possible. There would be an almost infinite sequence of 'sub-thoughts' between two thoughts, like an infinity of points between the two ends of a line. Quantum jumps for thought appear to be as much a necessity for the conscious self as these are for the atom.

Life appears to be a dance between the manifest (successive consciousness, individual consciousness, called Atman) and the Unmanifest (the Absolute, the Life Field, Universal Consciousness, Brahman), the limited and the limitless, that which is measurable and that which is immeasurable. Atman is at the immanent quantum energy potential, and Brahman is the ultimate quantum energy potential, or in other words Atman is the lowest frequency expression of consciousness, and Brahman is the highest frequency expression of Universal Consciousness. Atman is the individual conditioned mind, and Brahman is the Universal Mind. In the manifest state, Atman expresses itself as space-time-causation matrices, while Brahman is hidden as unmanifest, so Atman equals Brahman. Atman is a flowing web of lowest frequencies of consciousness (manifest), and Brahman is a web of highest frequency of Consciousness (Unmanifest).

Kothari said that, "Firstly, the role of consciousness in atomic physics is a reflection of the intervention of Brahman in the projection of an unmanifest into a manifest state of being. Secondly, the role of the individual consciousness in atomic physics has a metaphysical parallel in the creation through an act of Will of Brahman of the manifest universe from an unmanifest state beyond space-time and causality". Prigogine wrote, "Herein lies the tragedy of modern spirit which resolved the riddle of the universe, but only by replacing it by another, the enigma of himself.

A depth of understanding of Unmanifest to manifest breaks down the ego barrier completely, which implies that thought-time has ended. The mind transcends the symbolic-dualistic frame of reference and duality, and makes a quantum jump to a non-dual frame of reference.

b) **The Art of Seeing and Hearing:** If you suddenly see a danger - say, a fast-approaching car on the road, or your house on fire - at the physical level, you take

instantaneous action to jump to a place of safety, and there is no thought between the seeing and the action. The first stage prior to recognition and naming is a state of non-verbal or thought-free perception (nirvikalpa jnana, or pure perception, or the fact). From this pure perception, you proceed to thought, recognition and naming (savikalpa jnana, mutilated perception, non-fact).¹⁰ The fact is a happening in the non-dual realm, or an expression of the Unmanifest, or Reality, or timelessness, or it does not have any memory or identification. The moment there is coherent superimposition of different webs of past memory or identification with past experience, the fact becomes non-fact, false, the past, the what should be! It is summed up as under:

In the art of seeing there is the Unmanifest.

In the art of hearing there is the Unmanifest.

In the art of breathing there is the Unmanifest.

In the art of sensual perceptions there is the Unmanifest.

The same is true about the art of hearing. We first hear a word, and then we interpret it, translate it to a synonym to understand it. The listening to a word is a fact, interpretation transforms a fact to non-fact. The non-fact results in losing its equanimity and responds by resistance or identification, and psychological pleasure and pain come into operation. This disturbance distorts listening. The occurrence of seeing or hearing, smelling or breathing is movement in the realm of non-duality. Similarly intuition, learning, spontaneity and right action are in the realm of non-duality. The dimension of Awareness, which is an energy born of the emptiness of silence, is in the realm of non-causality and non-duality.

To sum up, the occurrence of seeing or hearing, smelling or breathing is a movement in the sphere of non-duality. There is grafting of the past (recalled memory) on non-duality thus modifying it to duality.

c) **Psychological Imbalances (Anger, Violence)**: Let us say that something irritates my nerves and "I am angry". A second later, I say, "I have been angry". J. Krishnamurti wrote, "At the moment of anger you do not recognise it, only later do you do that... I am angry, but I realise I am angry a moment later. The realisation is the recognition that I have been angry, it is taking place after I have been angry - otherwise I do not know it

as anger. The recognition interferes with the actuality. I am always translating the present actuality in terms of the past". The anger is the fact, a timeless perception, of which I am not aware. There is recall of the past memory which I superimpose on the fact and this transforms the fact to non-fact, and non-fact is the recognition of anger. The same is true regarding violence and other psychological imbalances. Krishnamurti adds, "Every form of escape, distraction, of movement away sustains violence. If one realises this, then the mind is confronted with the fact of what is and nothing else... So inattention breeds images; attention frees the mind from the image... It is the inattention which allows the past to come in and interfere with the actual perception of anger at the moment".¹¹

d) *Nature's Response*: It appears that the first step in nature's response is that nature transcends the time process, the psychological time, and the Life Field expresses itself as its mirror image. This was recognised by Erwin Schrodinger in words:

"The world is given to me only once, not one existing and one perceived. Subject and object are only one. The barrier between them cannot be said to have broken down as a result of recent experience in the physical sciences, for this barrier does not exist.

"The world is given but once. Nothing is reflected. The original and the mirror-image are identical. The world extended in space and time is but our representation."

The original (Life Field) is the true subject and mirror-image is the 'fact', the 'true', the present, the what is, the object. The fact is the true perception. Perception is experiencing, where there is neither the experiencer (subject) nor the experienced (object). Perception is in the non-dual realm, so there is no language and it is without idea or thought. It is called nature's fundamental response. To bring about a fundamental revolution in oneself, one must "understand the whole process of thought and feeling in relationship".

In the next split second, there is recall of corresponding memory, the mind cuts itself into subject and object, both get deformed; we give it a term, naming, idea and recording it. Every cell in the human brain holds the memory of the millions of years of man. This gives continuity to becoming. This is called the derived response.

Nature's response that the subject and object are one, clearly confirms Voltaire's words:

"... everything is governed by immutable laws... everything is prearranged... everything is a necessary effect... (We are) both toys in the hands of destiny."

We are like puppets where something else (Life Field) pulls the strings, and we dance to its tune. This dance is ever repeatable and it is called perfect Silence.

Intuition (insight) is pure perception - it is devoid of content, dimensionless, wherein knower (subject) and known (object) are one process. Insight has nothing to do with the act of volition; it has nothing to do with conscious mental activity. It is trans-sensual, so it does not originate in the intellectual activity of the brain. It is called "intimate knowledge" by Arthur Eddington, and "understanding of life directly, instead of in the abstract, linear terms of representational thinking" by Alan W. Watts. Wisdom is insight or pure perception.

Insight flows when restructured science watches a thought without interfering in its flow. It is perception of the subjective dimension of life. It is insight alone that can decondition the brain. Insight is complete and from that completeness there can be logical, sane, rational action. Only then there can be the flowering of the brain. Only then can you have a complete relationship with the mind. Only then is there a new instrument which is not put together by time or thought, totally unrelated to knowledge. It is always fresh, because it has no past, no remembrance, it is intelligence born of compassion. That compassion brings about a deep mutation in the very brain cells themselves and its action is always the right action, clear, precise, without the shadow of the past and time. Pure clear insight is perception without doubt. Wisdom or Intelligence is insight or pure perception.

Spiritual Evolution

Spirituality is understanding the conditioned mind, the matter content of consciousness, and also perceiving the Unconditioned Energy; so it is the science of the wholeness of life. It aims at self-actualisation of the hidden human potential. Spirituality is fundamental; objective science is a derivative. An integration of science and spirituality is the key to the survival of mankind. It jettisons all pain, misery and travails, and ushers in a new era of freedom, peace and bliss. This is the only vocation of the human race.

In spirituality, the act of investigation and exploration is conducted on behalf of the whole human race. Spirituality explores what the truth is, what the fact is, and what the

Reality is behind the truth. Spirituality teaches us to live with the fact and transcend the non-fact.

It is the integral dimension of Consciousness that can resolve the challenges facing mankind, and heal the mind-brain-body system. This is the only guarantee for human survival and excellence.

Evolutionary transformation of this magnitude - the transformation from psychosocial to spiritual evolution - cannot be prevented by short-term socio-political-economic activity, and this provides the strongest security and faith for the future.

The whole cosmos is pulsating with an eternal, infinite, immutable, beginningless and endless Universal Consciousness, the Unmanifest, the highest frequency Conscious Energy. Every existence (physical, biological and psychological) - atom, event, happening - is a cosmic dance of the play of the manifest and the Unmanifest, the limited and the Limitless, the measurable and the Immeasurable. Only homo sapiens - man - is endowed with the capacity to perceive the Unmanifest, the highest expression of Consciousness, and to live in the light of Divine Energy. This is the only vocation of man. This is the consummation of human life.

The Joy of God-Union

By Meister Eckhart

There was a learned scholar who eight long years desired that God would show him a man who would teach him the Truth. Once when he felt a very great yearning, a voice from God came to him and said: "Go to the church and there shalt thou find a man who will show thee the way to blessedness." He went and found a poor man whose feet were torn and covered with dust and dirt; and all his clothes were hardly worth three farthings; and he greeted him, saying:

"God give you good day!"

He answered: "I have never had a bad day."

"God give you good luck."

"I have never had ill luck."

"May you be happy! But why do you answer me thus?"

"I have never been unhappy."

"Pray explain this to me, for I cannot understand it."

The poor man answered: "Willingly. You wished me good day. I never had a bad day; for if I am hungry, I praise God; if it freezes, hails, snows, rains, if the weather is fair or foul, still I praise God; am I wretched and despised, I praise God; and so I have never had an evil day. You wished that God would send me luck. But I never had ill luck, for I know how to live with God, and I know that what He does is best; and what God gives me or ordains for me, be it good or ill, I take it cheerfully from God as the best that can be, and so I never have had ill luck. You wished that God would make me happy. I never was unhappy; for my only desire is to live in God's will, and I have so entirely yielded my will to God's will that what God wills, I will."

"But if God should will to cast you into hell," said the learned man, "what would you do then?"

"Cast me into hell? His Goodness forbids! But if He did cast me into hell, I should have two arms to embrace Him. One arm is true humility; that I should lay beneath Him and be thereby united to His holy humanity. With the right arm of love, which is united with His holy Divinity, I should so embrace Him that He would have to go to hell with me. I would rather be in hell and have God, than in Heaven and not have God."

Then the master understood that true abandonment with utter humility is the nearest way to God.

The master asked further: "Whence are you come?"

"From God."

"When did you find God?"

"When I forsook all creatures."

"Where have you left God?"

"In pure hearts and in men of good will."

The master asked: "What sort of man are you?"

"I am a king."

"Where is your kingdom?"

"My Soul is my kingdom, for I can so rule my senses, inward and outward, that all the desires and powers of my Soul are in subjection; and this kingdom is greater than a kingdom on earth."

"What brought you to this perfection?"

"My silence, my high thoughts, and my union with God. For I could not rest in anything that was less than God. Now I have found God, and in God have eternal rest and peace."

Reprinted from *The Message of the East*, 1917. Saint Meinrad

Saint Meinrad

By Wolfram H. Koch

Not far from the Lake of Zurich, in a beautiful secluded valley there lies the famous Abbey and Shrine of Our Lady of Hermits at Einsiedeln. It is surrounded by charming flower-painted meadows and silent, austere woods, the trees of which seem to climb in endless but self-assured procession up the slopes of the hills encircling the little town and the Benedictine monastery. It is a place of deep spiritual enchantment where nature

sensibly calls man to modes of recollectedness and inner peace, and almost involuntarily his soul is lifted up beyond the ephemeral trifles and petty problems of his limited everyday life into the surety and stableness of the Unchanging. On days of approaching storm and rain, when the clouds begin to trail their fluid garments across the summits and the lake of Einsiedeln, shrouding the blue of its vast expanse in a mantle of silver, this feeling is enhanced, for then the encircling hills and the snow-clad peaks at the back of them radiate an intensity of emotion which strongly affects the casual visitor and the pilgrim. Their hearts become filled with unconscious adoration, making them receptive to the higher influences which have been guarding the place through the centuries. Still it is shielded against the all too materialising effects of outward show and against the empty, shallow curiosity of pleasure-seeking crowds which mar such sanctuaries the world over.

Within the church there is the Chapel of Our Lady of Hermits, erected on the spot where hundreds of years ago, St. Meinrad, the spiritual founder of Einsiedeln, spent years of intense spiritual struggle in his little cell, hidden by the trees of the mighty forest which at that time covered the whole country. Below the beautiful carved figure of Our Lady, there stands a tabernacle containing the skull of the Saint. It is here that thousands of pilgrims come and seek to obtain the spark of holiness and illumination to light their little lamps of spirituality and higher aspiration. When the visitor enters the Chapel towards evening after the shadows have begun to gather in the vastness of the mighty church, the golden flames of the candles burning on the altar peacefully enwrap him in the mellow radiance of their light, soothing the daily pain and frustration of his life and giving him, at least for the time being, a wonderful feeling of liberation. Almost imperceptibly he gathers himself in and is borne aloft by the spiritual forces ruling over the sanctuary.

Who was the man who, through his renunciation and untiring spiritual striving, created a centre of such intense spiritual influence with the help of the Divine, that even today, after centuries of strife and wave upon wave of materialism and worldliness, it still remains what it ever was to all who are receptive to higher ideals of life and truth? While kingdoms and empires have passed away, peoples risen to power and again disappeared into insignificance, the atmosphere he created through his sacrifice and love still works miracles in the hearts of many men, and still has the power to infuse others with his ideal of life and his call to the highest human fulfilment.

Meginrad, which means "powerful counsellor" and was later abbreviated to Meinrad, is said to have belonged to a branch of the House of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. He was born in 797 A.D. of a noble family in Suabia, the Counts of Sulchen. Not much is known of his early childhood, except that he was very soon confided to the care of the Benedictine monks of the Island of Reichenau on Lake Constance where his uncle Erlebald, one of the most learned men of his day, was attached to the monastery. After Hatto, Abbot of Reichenau, relinquished his office to dedicate his life exclusively to God in solitude and strenuous spiritual practices, Erlebald succeeded him and thus was able to give special attention to the training of his nephew. In those times, in the reign of Charlemagne, the sons of nobles were sent in great numbers to the leading monasteries to be instructed in reading and writing and different other sciences, as the emperor, far-seeing as he was, wished to have educated servants who not only knew how to wield the sword and the spear, but also how to serve him and the empire with their intellect and the weapons of their mind. Such a monastic training, however, did not mean that they would later on take up a religious life or in any way be specially religious.

Meinrad's character excelled in modesty, a deep hunger for learning and an exceptionally strong longing for God, so that his parents finally had to consent to their son's dedicating his whole life to God as a monk, and giving up all his bright prospects in the world.

Both Abbot Hatto and Abbot Erlebald had a great share in the formation of their pupil, for they were both very saintly men and conceived greatness and glory only in terms of true sanctity, consecration and purity of life. They very early realized that the highly gifted boy could easily become one of the mainstays of the monastic schools which were the source whence flowed not only religious teaching and disciplines and the monastic training of that day, but also worldly learning, the arts, agriculture and industry, which the monks taught the laymen.

Thus after some years as a pupil in the monastic school of Reichenau, Meinrad decided to enter the monastery and was clothed in the habit of St. Benedict. Very soon his superior entrusted him with the guidance of the small monastery of Benken on Lake Zurich where he proved himself an excellent worker in the training of his fellow-monks. All the time his soul yearned for absolute dedication to God, without any distraction or interference, far away from the high-roads of the world. For a long time he struggled with his sense of duty and service towards his monastery and companions and with a

deep inner urge to absolute consecration in solitude. Finally the call became so irresistible that his superior gave him permission to withdraw from his work to a hermitage which he was allowed to have built for himself. From this day onward the true mission of his life began to show itself and to bear marvellous fruit, for in spite of all his learning Meinrad could find satisfaction only in the company of the Divine, unhampered by companions and outward duties which, to him were all nothing but obstacles and allurements to divert his soul from its true and only goal.

Many a time from his little monastery of Benken he had watched the hills and the deep woods which covered their flanks with an impenetrable many-patterned carpet and which seemed to call out to him to come and hide himself away from the world under the dome of their mighty trees. In his day there were no roads and no footpaths which penetrated into the deep gloom of what was called the 'Black Woods'. People feared attacks of wild animals, bears and boars, which defended their realm against human intruders. Thus he knew that few could come and disturb him in his contemplation and prayer, and that there was scarcely any place where he could be hidden from the world as absolutely as in those forests. Besides, the snowy peaks, steep precipices, unapproachable chasms and beautiful soft curves of the hills serving as footstools to the lofty rocks and glaciers, brought him an ever clearer message of greater and more lasting values than human life generally represented, caught up and crippled as it was in the self-centred duties of a petty existence. To Meinrad, even a life spent in the apparent service of the Divine in the monastery among his fellow-monks would in the end have meant nothing but utter frustration of all his higher aims and all he was able to give to others through the unstinted sacrifice of even the least germ of worldliness and worldly ambitions in his soul. Both the dark recesses of the woods singing their hymns to the accompaniment of the uncurbed might of the storms sweeping down from the heights, and the shimmering light of the snow-clad summits greeting him from a distance, bore him the message of the Eternal and of the need to base his life on foundations which ever remain unassailable to flimsy human emotions and the attacks of the worldly-minded. They stood out in all their majesty and grandeur as mighty symbols of transcendent unchanging beauty which, if their call was followed by man, could bring plenitude and harmony for all suffering hearts and thereby renew them and make them true tabernacles of the Divine.

After his decision was taken, a pious lady, the wife of the Lord of the manor of

Altendorf, ordered some carpenters to follow him and to build him a chapel and a cell at the spot he would choose. Meinrad climbed Mount Etzel, and there between the summit and a lower elevation of the hill, he found a spot which attracted him so much that he knew it would perfectly serve his ends. Both the chapel and the cell were finished in a short time, and Meinrad was for the first time in his life left there in absolute solitude, alone with himself, his yearning and God. No one knows how he spent his days and nights up there, nor what marvellous realizations of Divine Grace came to him during his desert life which lasted for seven years from 828 onwards. His fame spread farther and farther into the surrounding villages and towns, and people of all stations came to him for enlightenment and consulted him as one inspired. Although during all these years he never left Mount Etzel, this kind of solitude did not fully satisfy him. Again the call went out to him to withdraw into a still higher life of perfect renunciation, and he was possessed with the longing for greater solitude. Again he began to look about him for a spot the seclusion of which would be so great that no-one would disturb him in his prayers and contemplation, so that by chastening his body and his emotions still more, he might, in the end, be a greater help to others than he had been up to that day. In the very depths of the Black Woods he came to a spot which was far less accessible to men, and that was the site where the Abbey of Einsiedeln stands today. There, with the help of some fellow-monks and through the generosity of the Abbess Heilwige, he constructed a hut and a small oratory near a crystalline rushing streamlet.

During the years spent in the whirlpool of God-consciousness and utter absorption in Divine truths, life rolled by and brought him ever greater realizations and ever greater love for God. Twenty five years passed in this way. Then came the end. Two criminals, attracted by the great fame of his charitableness, seeking treasure, penetrated into the Black Woods and were hospitably received by Meinrad. While the saint was entertaining them with the best he had in his little hut, they suddenly attacked him and smote him down with a bludgeon. This happened on January 21st, 861.

There is a beautiful legend which has woven golden threads of love round the crime committed by men. It says that Meinrad had always shared his scanty meals with two ravens who kept him company in his solitude. When these two birds saw what had happened, they pursued the murderers as far as Zurich and there by their incessant and woeful croaking attracted the attention of the magistrates, so that the murder was found out, and the criminals had to expiate their crime at the stake. When the saint's

love was betrayed by man, the dumb creatures repaid his trust and love with this last service.

From that day two ravens figure in the coat-of-arms of the Benedictine monastery of Einsiedeln. The heart and viscera of the saint were buried on Mount Etzel where he had spent seven years in intense spiritual practices, but his body was interned at Reichenau where it was allowed to rest for the next 178 years. During this period Meinrad's little hut and chapel developed into the monastery of Our Lady of Hermits.

In 1039 Meinrad's body was transported to Einsiedeln where it has been venerated for centuries. His skull still bears the mark of the treacherous blow with which his love was requited, and is kept, as has been said, in the Chapel of Our Lady in a tabernacle at the foot of her carved figure. It is exposed every year during the octave of the feast of the saint for the veneration of pilgrims and all those who love him.

Although in his life-time Meinrad had been a kindly and experienced devotee for the many souls who eagerly sought his assistance and counsel, after his passing away he became the guide who having trodden the road to the Divine himself was able to show it to other souls who had need of a director and friend. The memory of his life, spent in intense self-denial and austere practices, has ever remained a powerful inspiration which draws hearts to him and to the goal of his life and all true human endeavour.

As one quietly and reverently passes before the Chapel and is enveloped by the golden radiance of the candles on the altar, strong spiritual influences seem to penetrate one's heart and to call one to that Life which fulfils and yet transcends ordinary human life for ever.

Standing before the beautiful carved figure of Our Lady of Hermits one is reminded of the words of Thomas a Kempis: 'Gather some profit to thy soul wheresoever thou art; so that if thou seest or hearest of any good examples, thou stir up thyself to the imitation thereof'.

The present-day world stands sorely in need of such imitation.

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The Blessed Ekaterina (continued)

By John Phillips

5. In search of the old calendar

On 5th April 1956 the monastery novice Ekaterina Malkov-Panina was made a nun, retaining her former name, by the Archbishop of Tallinn and Estonia Alexis, privately, in the Mother Superior's room.

Mother Ekaterina asked the archbishop to make an exception for her: to exchange the leather belt, which is normally given on taking the vows for one made of cloth. The request was granted.

After taking the vows Mother Ekaterina was entrusted with the reception of visitors. For a long time she lived in the Mother Superior's house, not wishing to return to the alms-house: and when she had to go there, she asked the Mother Superior to restrict access by visitors to her.

Often Katya disappeared from the house and sometimes did not return for a long time. No one could restrict her activities. When she was once going to the monastery from the Hermitage, one novice began to ask to go with her, but Ekaterina told her to ask the blessing of the Mother Superior:

- "But do you ask, when you go away?"

- It is possible for me, but not for you", Katya calmly answered.

Once, when she came to the monastery, Sister Ekaterina went to a nun in her cell and asked: "Are you living alone? Well then, I shall live with you." And she stayed with her for seven days; during that time she did not eat or drink anything, and when she went away, she said: "And yet the Lord did not humiliate me ..."

Once Katya went out to gather mushrooms and did not return for some days, which caused concern to all the sisters. Another time she went away, taking a blanket, an axe,

a knife, a pot and a mug, and said that she was going to the Red Mountain to listen to the nightingales singing. There was no sign of Ekaterina on the first day and the second; the sisters, especially the Mother Superior, became concerned. A week passed - she still did not appear. Mother Paraskeva sent two sisters to look for her. Where were they to go? The forest is large ... But they remembered: Katya had said that she was going to the Red Mountain (this was what a raised area in the forest was called, located three kilometres from the village of Yaama). They set out towards it. On the way they met cowherds with a herd of Yaama cattle.

"Have you seen Katya?" - the sisters asked. "How should we not see her?" replied the cowherds. "She has several times come to us and asked for bread". And they showed them the way to the Red Mountain. The rejoicing sisters went on boldly and trustfully. They arrived at the Red Mountain - Katya was there. When she saw them, she was glad. "How good that you have come," she said, "You can help me take my things home, as I do not have the strength for it." And they saw among the trees a cabin built of branches, into which one could only crawl; inside was a bed made of grass, many mushrooms gathered and some woven baskets. Unfortunately it was necessary not only to carry Katya's things, but also to carry her, because she had got very weak during these days of fasting and solitary asceticism.

There were also more serious incidents with her. She disappeared once again, only saying: "I am going to look for the old calendar". At that time the Church in Estonia had gone over to the new calendar. And that was still before the union of Estonia with the Soviet Union, and between them there was the State frontier. So she went away in search of the old calendar and disappeared for six weeks. Suddenly a soldier from the frontier zone appeared, bringing her to the monastery hermitage as a criminal, because she had dared to cross the frontier and was arrested in Soviet territory. They demanded that a fine of two thousand Roubles be paid. Otherwise Ekaterina was threatened with prison. Mother Paraskeva did not have such a large sum of money and wrote to Katrina's relations, asking them to send the sum. Her elder brother George sent her the money.

Subsequently Mother Ekaterina laughingly recounted that at the frontier she was searched and in her pocket were found notes of those for whom prayers were to be said for their health and the rest of the souls of the departed; they took them from her and subjected them to a thorough investigation, fearing that these were notes in code. While the investigations were taking place, they kept Ekaterina in custody. For this

escapade, the traveller asked forgiveness from Mother Paraskeva and all the sisters. In answer to the question as to why Katya went away without a blessing, she answered: "I did not want to commit two offences. You would not have blessed me, but I would have gone away all the same."

Katya's parents often came to Pyukhtitsa. At the beginning of the Second World War the Gethsemane hermitage was closed. All the hermitage residents returned to the monastery, but Mother Ekaterina was sent away home in 1942 to look after her sick elderly parents, who lived in Tallinn-Nymm. In that same year she buried her mother and stayed to live with her father, whom she ardently loved. In Tallinn Mother Ekaterina visited the town house of the Pyukhtitski monastery and foretold its closure (almost 20 years before it happened).

6. Successor to the Blessed Elena

In 1948 Mother Ekaterina buried her father and returned to the monastery. In that same year the Mother Superior of the Pyukhtitski Monastery, the Blessed Elena, passed away. Mother Ekaterina became her successor, taking on the most difficult spiritual feat, she began openly to be a fool for Christ.

She loved to work, did the tasks assigned to her, but everything took place in an unusual way with her. When the sisters' working day in the kitchen garden or in the field came to an end, they would go to the pond to wash their feet, but Katya would go into the water full clothed, rinse herself, and, not wringing out her clothes, proceed into the monastery, watering the path behind her.

Already during the first period of her open spiritual feat, Mother Ekaterina paid dearly for the craziness she had taken on. In January 1951 she even found herself in the Psychiatric Hospital of the city of Tallinn. There she had to suffer a lot from the violent patients; besides this Mother Ekaterina continually attracted misfortune to herself by attempts to run away from the hospital. Conducting investigations and not finding any kind of psychic disorder, the doctors admitted that she was healthy and discharged her to go home.

When she returned to her own monastery, Mother Ekaterina began to live in the almshouse, acting as a fool for Christ as previously. Continually well-disciplined and serious, often strict, she had the appearance of an alert warrior. Her small light dried-up figure

was always darting about somewhere. Her walk was fast, but measured, she just flew. Her remarkable large eyes - sometimes pure like a child's, tranquil, affectionate, smiling, sometimes serious, severe, at other times sad, concerned, and sometimes even angry, those eyes burrowed into the very depths of human souls and read there, as though it were a chronicle of the past, the present and the future. Incidentally Mother Ekaterina strictly forbade anyone to look her straight in the eyes.

She dressed in her own way: in summer she wore a black tunic and a white veil, over which she wore a black hat or a black head-scarf. In winter she wore some kind of short light top coat over the tunic, sometimes girding herself with a white scarf. She did not wear warm clothes (winter coat and scarves).

She contented herself with the refectory food. She never used sugar, she usually drank hot water without brewing tea, or water from the spring. She sometimes imposed special fasts on herself, explaining that she was preparing for death, and usually this was for the death of one of the sisters. If she said she was fasting because she was preparing to take orders - this meant that she had to prepare to admit someone as a nun.

She often took communion, sometimes going up without confession, in such cases the priest did not administer the sacrament to her; she, just as though she had taken communion, reverently bowed low before the cup and with her hands placed across her chest went to take the warming drink provided after communion.

It was possible to see during the service in the church a small slim human figure, with noiseless steps, moving as though through the air between the rows of those praying; then stand near one sister, afterwards go to another. This behaviour of hers did not cause displeasure, on the contrary, they wanted her to come and stand nearby. The souls of those standing in the church were open to her, and she went to the one who needed it.

"Once I came to the church with great sorrow in my heart", Sister L. remembers. "During the service my soul was torn to pieces in grief, and a stream of tears flowed down my cheeks. `As the Cherubim...' sounded, the tender, moving notes of the Cherubic Hymn, behind me I heard footsteps, then nearby - breathing. I turned my head - Mother Ekaterina... She was praying along with me, sharing my grief with me ... Under the

vaults of the church the notes were dying away: 'Today we put off worldly cares...' And there was no feeling in my heart of there being no way out, it changed into tears of joy in the hope of God's mercy and the pacification of my sorrowful soul."

This same Sister L. recounted that on meeting Mother Ekaterina she almost always shed tears of repentance. Then the eldress would say to her severely: "One must weep in front of the icons!"

Mother Ekaterina was continually vigilant, and only for a short time did she sink into a light sleep, often even in the middle of the night it was possible to meet her in the monastery territory, going about the yard preoccupied or sometimes, in winter, clearing the snow from the cathedral porch. The nuns in their cells were sleeping, but the eldress, was, like a warrior, awake.

The nun F., who entered the monastery in 1934, recounts that the blessed eldress acted a great deal as a fool for Christ: "In the severe frost, she would run through the snow with nothing on her feet except for socks. It was painful to watch! One day I could not stand it and said: "Mother Ekaterina, what are you doing barefoot?" - and she almost threw herself on me: "What, are you sorry for me?!"

"During one fast she drank and ate only holy water and pieces of prosphora," the nun G. recounts. "And on Good Friday she drank an egg before the whole people. After that who would think that she was fasting? So she acted in such a way that people did not notice her spiritual feats and simply thought her to be stupid. Mother Ekaterina in general ate little - she came to us at the town house in Tallinn, took a little plate of food from the cat - we had a cat there - and ate it all up. In this way she humiliated and tormented herself. She was not the kind of person to come and dine with the sisters - she collected food from the waste bin or ate the cat's food. And in the alms-house, where she lived in her last years, she also never ate with the sisters."

"When I deputised for the mother superior in the alms-house, Mother Kapitolina, I often saw that Mother Ekaterina went out at night to pray in the fields" - one of the oldest inhabitants of the monastery, the nun N., remembers - "She came in all wet in the morning. She almost never slept at night; she prayed. Or she rose at midnight, prayed in a corner, and then went up to each bed and sang: 'With the bridegroom he approaches at midnight' - she sang so softly, in a whisper."

Once the monastery night guard, novice A., said that she saw Mother Ekaterina coming at night to the last grey building, put a blanket in the snow - this was in January - and stood in prayer. In this way she prayed all night. The dog Druzhok, who guarded the monastery at night, ran up to her, barked, but did not come close.

7. Nun - Comforter

People came to her in an endless flow. Many came to the monastery especially to see Mother Ekaterina. Every year the number of those coming increased. Many letters came to the Prioress of the monastery with questions for Mother Ekaterina, with requests for assistance.

She behaved in different ways towards those coming to her: with one she spoke allegorically, and with someone else simply; with some she talked for a long time, and others she saw out angrily. She could look into people's souls, as in a mirror.

To some visitors Mother Ekaterina read from the works of the Fathers, to others from the Bible, and to some she recounted from memory individual incidents from the life of our Lord Jesus Christ: His healing of the sick, the blind and others. She at once distributed what had been brought to her by her devotees. She did not keep a penny of her own money. It is true that she distributed it with great consideration. She would eat a little of the food, saying: "This I must eat myself." Some she distributed, and some she had thrown away and even buried in the ground. All her actions and words, which seemed strange and incomprehensible, subsequently revealed themselves to have a deep meaning.

Just as a stream coming from the mountain rushes to the river, people's misfortunes and sorrows flowed in a continuous stream to Mother Ekaterina. She loved people, was sorry for them. And this love was unselfish, freely given. How hard it was, with so much love and pity for people, to see and get to know all their defects and deeply felt sufferings!

Mother Ekaterina loved her devotees in the same way as those who wished ill of her, those who were on bad terms with her and thought badly of her.

A nun who was still young was in hospital dying of festering appendicitis. The doctors gave up hope for her life. The patient asked the Mother Superior to go to her for her to

say goodbye and receive her last blessing.

Mother Ekaterina ran excitedly across the monastery yard into the guest house (the place where the patient worked), and literally ordered: "Pray! Pray! M.N. is dying! She is not yet ready! Pray!" They prayed earnestly. It must be supposed that Mother Ekaterina prayed especially for the nun, although the latter was not well disposed towards her. And the nun survived.

It was not everyone who cherished a liking for Mother Ekaterina. Her light hurt the eyes. They avoided exposure to it. Many did not come to see her. Truly a prophet has no honour in his own country.

It was about midnight. Sister N. woke up and noticed that there was light coming from Mother Ekaterina's cell. She went there and saw Mother praying before a big lighted candle. "Why are you not sleeping at such a late hour?" she asked. "M. F. is seriously ill, we must pray for her," came the answer. And M.F. recovered.

"I had just entered the monastery," Sister S. remembers, - "I was assigned to live in the alms-house, attend to general duties and assist the sister in the house serving the aged nuns. At that time I did not yet know Mother Ekaterina at all and heard nothing about her. I was going through a great emotional experience and I wanted to be alone and weep. But wherever I tried to obtain solitude, she came near me. To begin with I did not pay any attention to her continually acting as though she were talking to herself, but only tried to hide myself from her, although I could not do so. Then I involuntarily paid attention to what she was saying, as I heard in her words remembrances of my past life. I understood that she knew everything: both the past and my present experience, was sympathising with me and experiencing what I was experiencing. From that time on I have cherished a sense of gratitude and reverence towards her."

8. Healings through the prayers of the eldress

Sister M. went into hospital for a long time with a serious illness. There she dreamed that Mother Ekaterina, who came to her in the hospital, blessed her with the cross and said: "I know that it is hard for you." Sister M. awoke and felt in her heart a blessed peace. At the conclusion of the treatment Sister M. returned home in a good state of health. After a while Sister G. told her: "I once came to Mother Ekaterina, and she began to speak to me so severely and demandingly: Pray for M., she is seriously ill in hospital.

You must pray for her!" In the meantime Mother Ekaterina did not permit her to return to the doctors.

Maria from Kronstadt related: "I had a bad leg, there were scabs, rash and abscesses on it - a kind of eczema. I went to Mother Ekaterina. She asked me to take off my stockings, looked at the leg and said: "God will be merciful and it will go!" She took her scarf off her head and wrapped my leg in it. When I arrived home, my legs were healed.

"My husband for a long time had trouble with his throat. They treated him in Kronstadt, then the doctors sent him to St. Petersburg, to the Ear, Nose and Throat Institute, but there also they could not help him. I went to Pyukhtitsa. I went to Mother Ekaterina, I hardly had time to say anything, when she asked: `How is your Ivan there? Is he sick?' - `He has trouble with his throat,' I replied. `Is he going for treatment by electricity?' - `Yes', I said. Then Mother Ekaterina sent to Father Peter for him to conduct a prayer service for the sick. I returned home and said: `Mother Ekaterina will not permit you to have treatment by electricity', and he answered: `I have nothing wrong with me, everything has already passed off.' And he had been ill for a long time, even falling into despair. And then by the prayers of Mother Ekaterina, he was cured."

One woman was very devoted to Mother Ekaterina, trusted her very much, but lived a long way away and it was rarely possible for her to come to Pyukhtitsa. Once her son fell from the fifth floor. The boy was still breathing, but it was painful to look at him. His injuries were so severe that the doctors were doubtful as to whether he would survive. Overcome with grief, his mother cried out: "Mother Ekaterina, help! Help, Mother Ekaterina!" - and the boy did not die, but in a month was completely well again, so that the doctors were amazed as to how this could have happened.

9. Preceptress of nuns

"As a very young novice", the nun G. remembers, "I was serving in the alms-house, where Mother Ekaterina then lived. Once I had a conversation with Mother - she was lying down, and I was sitting by her and asked her a question: "How can one save one's soul and how can I save my soul?" Mother Ekaterina answered: "Live simply. Try not to see the faults of others". Then she said to me: "The reason why one judges others is because of an inattentive life." That was in 1958.

Mother Ekaterina often said: "Do not be proud, but humble yourself, humble yourself."

She said that pride ate up all good deeds.

I was upset with something in my duties, I told her, and she said to me: "A novice must not have her own will, but God's will. And you are a novice!" I also remember that she said to me: "Keep yourself clear of anger and tension. Learn to forgive the sisters for offences."

I often came to her and confessed my thoughts. Once I came frowning and she at once said to me: "You are unhappy again! So quickly your mood changes, but you must keep firm and work on yourself, so that your spiritual practices may lead to salvation." That was also in 1958.

I had many occasions then to be with the blessed eldress. She had the Jesus prayer. I came to her, brought her dinner and was going to ask something, but she was lying down and very quietly, almost to herself, she was repeating: "Lord Jesus Christ ..." How many times did I find her like that! Or I heard her voice repeating: "Lord, forgive me - forgive me!" She said this with much feeling and in this way taught me. The Epistles, Gospel and Psalter were always by her side and she often read them. If someone came - she read out loud, and when she was alone - she read to herself.

Once I came to her, and I was so depressed. I said: "Mother, I am so depressed in my heart". - "Then repeat", she said, "Lord, save me, I am dying! Lord, save me, I am dying!" I was six years serving in the alms-house. And as soon as I came to the monastery, Mother Superior Angelina put me in the guest house. I soon came to Mother Ekaterina and said: "Mother, I am getting irritated again with the pilgrims!" And she said in answer to this: "Treat your neighbours kindly, cheerfully and with love! Serve them: they are like wandering pilgrims - they came to the Mother of God! Serve them with love, gentleness and love." So she called those coming "pilgrims of God - coming to the Mother of God!" I often heard from Mother for my edification: "That was what my heart was like - I comforted everyone, and did not pity myself!"

Once I came to her and said: "Mother Ekaterina, my heart is like this - everything is empty, quite empty and my soul is empty. I do not know what to do." She thereupon answered: "Your heart is inconsiderate, but the Lord is concerned for you. Thank God that you live in the monastery - under the protecting veil of the Mother of God. You will live for a long time in the monastery, but you will go to prison." I had already been in

the monastery for 35 years. "You came to the monastery", she said, "and entered the holy convent and will end up with the imperishable crown!"

On another occasion I put on a check patterned tunic, and she came up and said: "Iron bars, prison, iron bars, prison!" and passed her fingers over the check pattern. She predicted three years for me. I said: "Mother Ekaterina, I am afraid of prison, very much afraid!" And she answered: "It is also possible not to go to prison, but God decrees that it is prison!"

10. Gift of prediction

I lived in the monastery for two years, Sister L. remembers. There were many difficulties to begin with; I got depressed, everything was hard, not understood; sometimes it seemed to me that life in the monastery was beyond my strength. "I so want to see Mother Ekaterina," I thought, one day as I went to my duties, "There is no time to go to the alms-house, and it is still early in the day." I went outside the gates, and coming towards me from the direction of the cemetery was Mother Ekaterina. Seeing her, I was very astonished and at the same time glad to fulfil my wish. As I came towards her, she began to speak to me: "Three years have passed - you will take the veil and in seven years you will be in the choir." At that time I did not attach much significance to Mother Ekaterina's words, as I had no hope that I would one day dress in the veil or I would be a singer. But these things were fulfilled in exactly the times that Mother Ekaterina had said.

The blessed eldress once came to Sister N., gave her a "Belochka" sweet and said: "Give this to Mother M. And tell her that this "Belochka" has a bitter nut." It soon happened that Sister M. experienced a bitter cup of sorrow.

On another occasion Mother Ekaterina came to Sister N., gave her three apples and asked her to take them to Sister M., who at that time lived on the farm, her work being to herd the cattle. Sister M. had never in her life encountered such sour apples as Mother Ekaterina sent her, but all the same she ate them - knew that the Blessed Mother was indicating new impending sorrows.

A few days later Sister M. came to Mother V., gave her a rouble coin and said: "The Blessed Eldress sent this rouble for you and asked for it to be handed over, as it will

come in useful to you."

The feast arrived of the Protecting Veil of the Mother of God, which is solemnly celebrated in the Pyukhtitski Monastery, with special traditional customs. All the sisters prayed at the divine liturgy, except the herdswomen - they carried out their work without any change.

It was ten o'clock in the morning, the cows had been fed and, choosing a suitable place for themselves on the hillock by the stream, they lay down to rest. Sister M., losing no time, took out of the bag she was carrying on her shoulder a little psalter and plunged into the psalms of King David. The rock on which she had sat let her down ... The next day, when she got up out of bed, M. could not walk on her right leg, she had had a sprain. Overcoming the pain, with great difficulty the herdswoman for two days went to the field, but on the third day she was powerless to move from the spot, and sobbing she confessed to her senior that she could not go to work.

With great difficulty she somehow limped to the monastery, came to her cell and lay down on the bed. No one met her on the way or in the monastery yard, so that no one yet knew what had happened to her. Suddenly there was knock at the window. "Does Mother M. live here?" the voice of the Blessed Eldress sounded from the street. (Incidentally, Mother Ekaterina always called Sister M. "mother", although she was only a novice). She quietly entered the cell, went up to the bed and gave Sister M. dark stockings; then sat down on a chair and for a long time recounted something allegorical, her voice was kind and full of feeling. How much peace she brought with her...

A week later Sister M. had to go to hospital for treatment. The "Belochka" sweet, three sour apples and a rouble coin remained in her memory all her life.

Sister T. came to Narva. At the station in Yikhvi one had to change to another local train, which left in an hour. In the waiting room T. met a close acquaintance; P.D. sat waiting for a train to St. Petersburg. The intimate conversation went on so long that they did not notice that the time was approaching for the arrival of the train. They went out on to the platform and sat on a bench. Their friendly chat was interrupted by the locomotive whistle and the sound of the wheels of the approaching train. "Is this for St. Petersburg?" asked P.D. - "No, for Tallinn", Sister T. calmly answered. (It must be stated that these trains go at almost the same time in the opposite direction). The train

departed. P.D. began to get worried and asked a passing railway employee on the station: "Where was that train going?" - "To St. Petersburg", was the answer. The two friends were taken aback, not knowing what to do. P.D. was upset and began to say that she was to be met in St. Petersburg, she sent a telegram to her sister. "Poor thing, she will be looking for me there ..." Sister T. suggested taking a taxi. This is what they did. In the same taxi Sister T. went on to Narva.

The next year P.D. came to Pyukhtitsa to pray and, meeting Sister T., this is what she told her: "Just think, last year Mother Ekaterina predicted that I would not catch the train. I went to her in the morning to say goodbye, and she met me with a laugh: "But the train departed! ..." And she herself laughed heartily. And again she said: "But the train departed! ..." At that time I listened in surprise and did not understand to what she was referring, and only at home did I remember this."

A.A., on her departure to St. Petersburg, went to the alms-house to say goodbye to the blessed eldress. Mother Ekaterina, with anxious concern, strictly instructed A.A. to call on A.V. (the eldress particularly loved A.V.) as soon as she arrived home. A.A. carried out Mother Ekaterina's instructions. It turned out that A.V. was seriously ill and there was no one to look after her.

"I did not know Mother Ekaterina very well, never went to see her at the alms-house, did not ask her advice, but I felt that she was very good," Z. L. recalls. "I remember that on some very big feast-day they cooked pies in the monastery. I lived outside the monastery with an acquaintance, and although I like pies very much, I was not able to cook them, and also money was tight. I could scarcely make ends meet. In the evening of the feast-day, when they rang the church bells for the evening service, I went to the monastery and saw Mother Ekaterina walking in the yard and eating pie. It was a large rosy-coloured piece, and she was eating it with relish, such that my mouth watered. We came to Mother Ekaterina, and I bowed to her. She looked at me and asked: "Would you like some pie?" I did not hide my feelings and answered: "I would indeed." She broke off a big piece of pie and handed it to me. "Eat it, it's tasty, with fish," she said and smiled. Her smile was kind and tender, like that of a child. I took the pie, and standing side by side, we each ate our halves. (To be concluded)

Leaves of an Ashrama

By Swami Vidyatmananda

(Swami Vidyatmananda was well known in the Ramakrishna Order as a good writer and researcher. The Swami was American, but spent the last thirty years of his life at the Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in France.)

No Logic in Maya

To someone like myself, born and brought up in an orthodox Christian tradition, Vedanta brings some arresting new ideas. One of the most useful of these is the notion that all events in our lives - indeed, all happenings in the entire universe - add up to nothing but divine sport. Once accepted, this view is enormously useful as an aid to spiritual development and serene living.

Christianity has emphasized the concept that human life is deadly serious; and Western science has attempted to establish the idea that life proceeds according to lawful principles. Vedanta accepts neither of these positions. Rather, the usual groping lifetime is seen as fairly insignificant, and the usual human personal struggle as leading to uncertain results. I asked my guru once if enlightenment revealed the universe as lawful; in fact, I had thought that that was what, in a sense, enlightenment was - perception of the order behind the visible disorder. His answer was that to the person of realization the cosmos is even more capricious, whimsical, amusing.

Really, the setting up of human life as of deep moment is nothing but egotism, and attempting to discover lawfulness in human processes, and so to gain mastery over them, is only a disguised way of trying to make ourselves co-equal with God. If the object of life is to learn to subordinate the phenomenal self, then it is good that the universe should be illogical. This keeps us perpetually off balance, humble, rodeo riders endlessly being thrown by mounts we can never break.

Another advantage is that an unpredictable universe is a more interesting one. How we long for security, yet how the attainment of any measure of unassailability bores us! As soon as we absolutely possess something, then we lose interest in it; yet we are still unwilling to let it go. No one is more unhappy, or duller, than a person who, by luck or hard work, has managed to gain a certain dominance over his domain.

The religious aspirant is certainly the most daring of persons. I suspect that his progress is probably proportional to the level of his boldness. Here I am with this life before me. I can follow the common tendency and try to gain mastery over externals. I may be somewhat successful, or I may not be; in either case I shall drop into the grave feeling ultimately that I have been cheated. On the other hand, I can accept events as whimsical, and people as unpredictable, and life as the Lord's play. This latter attitude will keep me flexible, fresh, more interesting to others and to myself, most capable of growth, and - a very practical consideration - less likely to be hurt by whatever may happen.

But mainly, of course, maintenance of the position of the rather merry pawn gives continual practice in that attitude which is apparently the main requisite for liberation - self-surrender, the constant understanding that we are nothing and that He is all.

Songs of Kabir Translated by Rabindranath Tagore

I.

Between the poles of the conscious and the unconscious,

there has the mind made a swing;

Thereon hang all beings and all worlds, and that swing

never ceases its sway.

Millions of beings are there; the sun and the moon in their

courses are there;

Millions of ages pass, and the swing goes on.

All swing! The sky and the earth and the air and the water;

and the Lord Himself taking form;

And the sight of this has made Kabir a servant.

II.

O servant, where dost thou seek Me?

Lo! I am beside thee.

I am neither in temple nor in mosque;

I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash;

Neither am I in rites and ceremonies,

nor in Yoga and renunciation.

If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me;

Thou shalt meet Me in a moment of time.

Kabir says, "O Sadhu! God is the breath of all breath."

Saint Bulla Shah

By Swami Jagadiswarananda

Sufism is the essence of Islam. It has the same philosophical foundation as the Vedanta. Sri Ramakrishna was initiated into Sufistic sadhanas by the great Sufi, Gobinda Rai, and was blessed with the same spiritual realisations as those of Vedanta. Sufism has

produced a multitude of saints in many provinces, particularly in the Punjab and Sind. Bulla Shah is one of the greatest Sufi saints ever born. The name of Bulla Shah is widely known in the Punjab. There the illiterate Jat peasant with a turban on the head and a stick in hand is walking the roads or working in the fields singing melodiously the kafis (verses) of Bulla Shah. Even the Hindu monks of Uttara Khanda memorise and recite the teachings of this Muslim saint as they are pregnant with the truths of Advaita Vedanta.

Bulla Shah was one of the disciples of the celebrated Sufi saint, Miyamir, who lived about three miles to the east of Lahore. Even to this day, this village is called Miyamirki Chhauni. (Chhauni means cantonment, and there is a government cantonment in the village.) As a house-holder Bulla had plenty of wealth, honour and other assets for worldly enjoyment. He was the Badshah (Nawab, Raja, King) of the town of Bulkh near Bukhara. But soon earthly pleasures lost all charm for him. He found them empty. They brought in their wake sorrow and pain. To him came the call of renunciation; he hungered for the contact and company of holy men. He heard from his ministers the sacred name of the saint Miyamir whose fame had then spread far and wide. He was anxious to meet the saint and have his blessings, so Bulla installed his young son on the throne and in the company of a faithful minister and about a hundred attendants left for Lahore. After a tedious journey for two long months he reached the cottage of Miyamir in a jungle in the village already mentioned. Through the fakir at the cottage door a request was sent to the saint praying for his darsan. The saint sent word that he could not grant an interview then. The Badshah was mortified at this but became more determined to meet the saint. He said to his retinue: 'Return home. I shall not enter into worldly life again. I am bent upon having eternal union with my heavenly Beloved. I shall surrender myself at the feet of this saint and follow the path of illumination according to his guidance.' So saying the Badshah distributed his wealth and all he had brought from his kingdom keeping only a blanket to warm his body in the ensuing severe winter. The Badshah of the palace became a beggar of the street; the prince turned a pauper. The minister and the attendants reluctantly wended their steps towards Bulkh. Now Bulla in the guise of a homeless and penniless fakir approached Miyamir for his darsan but the latter still refused saying: 'Badshah, time is not yet opportune for our meeting. Go to another fakir who lives twenty miles away from here on the banks of the Ravi. Practise yogic penance under his gracious guidance for twelve years and then come to me.' Bulla obeyed the words of the master Miyamir willingly and found out the cottage of the fakir on the river banks. The fakir seeing Bulla from a distance recognised

him and said: 'You are Badshah of Bulkh. Is it not?' Bullah said most respectfully, 'Yes; but how could you know and recognise me?' The fakir replied: 'The other day Miyamir Sahib told me that you would come to me on such a date and practice yoga here.'

Delighted at the true prediction of Miyamir, Bulla prayed to the fakir with folded hands thus: 'Yes, I have been sent by Miyamir. Kindly accept me as your disciple and initiate me into yogic practices.' Bulla practised yoga for twelve long years under the direction of the fakir, living on fruits, roots and milk. His body became emaciated; his physical grace disappeared and his hair and nails grew long and were uncared for. When twelve years were completed, the fakir asked Bulla to go to Miyamir for final initiation. When Bulla came to the cottage of Miyamir and asked for the interview, the doors were flung open and Miyamir smilingly received his disciple and talked to him kindly and cordially. Though Bulla's dress was dirty and his body unclean, his face shone with serenity and sanctity. The guru was then very glad to have his worthy disciple by his side, as he could hand over his spiritual wealth to him for the good of humanity. Spirituality is not airy nothing; it is something tangible and can be given by the illumined guru to the competent disciple like a flower. After Bulla's initiation and ordination were over his guru said: 'You are now reborn. Hence you are renamed as Bulla Shah. Forget all your former name, position and family connections.' Bulla was blessed with the realisations of his illumined guru. He became a saint in possession of the highest spiritual wisdom. His countenance now beamed with the lustre of divine light. His very presence now radiated peace and purity. His personality was grave but gracious to all. When the flowers bloom, the bees gather round for greed of nectar instinctively. The blossomed flower of Bulla's realisations attracted devout men and women of different religions from far and near. His teachings, full of fervour and flavour of Atmajnana spread throughout the province of the Punjab and became very popular. Since then for about three hundred years Bulla Shah's teachings have captured the imagination of the Punjabis and inspired them in their quest for truth. Bulla Shah is regarded today as one of the greatest saints of the Punjab by both Hindus and Muslims alike.

One day the Maulavis, the fanatic Muslim divines, approached Bulla Shah and asked 'Who are you?' The Sufi saint replied spontaneously in conformity with his highest realisation of 'Aual Haq': 'I am Khoda the great God (Reality).' The religious scruples of the Maulavis who were ignorant of spiritual experiences received a rude shock by the reply of this wandering saint. They arrested him and took him to the Muslim Nawab for trial and punishment for this unpardonable offence. The Nawab asked Bulla Shah the

same question, 'Who are you?' The Sufi saint said, 'I am a servant of God (Allah).' The Nawab finding no fault in the reply of the saint set him free. Bulla as before wandered from place to place enjoying the illusory fun of this world. But the anger of the Maulavis was not abated. On another occasion they put him the same question, 'Who are you?' and Bulla said in reply as before 'I am none other than Khoda.' He was again caught for his offensive reply and taken to the Nawab. The Nawab asked him again 'Who are you?' The saint Bulla replied, 'I am a servant of God.' The Nawab was a bit surprised at this reply; for the allegation against him was just the opposite. So he said to the saint thus: 'How is it that on the roads you say that you are Khoda Himself but before me you say that you are a devotee of Allah. Is it not falsehood? But a saint like you should not tell lies.' Bulla Shah replied: 'Nawab, I do not tell lies. When I am as free as air on the streets, scriptural injunctions have no hold on me as they cannot bind Khoda. So on the roads I look upon myself as Khoda, as experiencing the highest ecstasy. But when I appear before you, like a criminal caught and condemned, I have no longer any freedom. I am no better than a servant. Hence before you I call myself a servant of Khoda.' This bold reply of Bulla Shah touched the heart of the Nawab who then with a respectful heart bowed to the saint and released him.

Bulla now began to proclaim himself as the Badshah. The Maulavis were again enraged and took Bulla to the Nawab with this complaint that this fakir used to call himself Khoda before but now he calls himself a Badshah (emperor). So he must be penalised. The Nawab interrogated Bulla Shah, 'If you are an emperor, where are your treasures?' Bulla said, 'The Badshah who has profuse expenditure must amass wealth. But I have no expense at all. The merciful Lord provides me with all my requirements even without my asking for them. Why should I then store wealth?' The Nawab again asked, 'If you are a Badshah where is your army?' Bulla Shah said, 'I have no enemy to fight with. Why should I then keep an army for nothing. Those who have enemies should maintain an army. My empire of the Self is absolutely free from evils and enemies. He who rules as the all-powerful Emperor, the knower of Atman (self) and realises the cosmic phenomena as illusion is the real Badshah. Hence my emperorship is everlasting. It is never lost. But the emperorship of this earth is temporary and may go to-morrow.' The Nawab understood that this saint was above the dual throng of mundane existence. Hence he could not be judged by earthly laws. Rules and regulations of human society could no longer bind him. Therefore he was set free with this public declaration: 'None should obstruct the aimless wandering of this man of god from today. He who dares do

so will be prosecuted and punished.'

The kafis (verses) composed by Bulla Shah are in the Punjabi language. The most popular of his verses is "Ciharfi" or thirty-lettered garland of verses. There are thirty letters in the Punjabi alphabet. The thirty verses each begin with a letter in order. We give below the English rendering of a selected number of verses from the Garland.

1. My dear, first know thyself. First realise the true nature of your Self. As you are ignorant of your own Self you are drowned in the ocean of sorrows. Nothing short of the knowledge of Self can make you happy. None can ever be happy by a million other means. Having learnt the mystery from all clever scholars of the earth, Bulla Shah addresses every man thus: 'My dear, the four Vedas and the Koran all declare that you are the embodiment of absolute bliss and knowledge.'

2. Closing your eyes and nose (i.e. all sense-organs) be seated in solitude and meditate on Absolute Reality. Give up desires as they make the mind outward. Realise the emptiness and illusoriness of this world. Conquest of mind is possible only by desirelessness. The intellect is the knower of the external world. But Atman illumines the intellect. That Atman is the immortal part of your being. Bulla Shah says: 'My friend, realise this mystery and pass time in peace.'

3. In your all-pervasive being there is not even the least perforation through which a blade of grass can enter. As one in sleep sees various dreams, so we see this cosmos on account of nescience though it has never been created. Bulla Shah says: 'In the world within or without there is nothing other than your own being. Your self-imposed ignorance has kept you ignorant of this great secret.'

4. Meditate in your heart of hearts and experience that your being is the substratum of the cosmic illusion. It is through your being which is consciousness itself that others can know objects; otherwise no knowledge of objects is possible. As a boy is afraid of his own shadow, so you are bound by the phenomena which are nothing but the creations of your own desires. Bulla Shah says: 'Who binds the spider? It weaves a net and gets entangled in it. We create our own bondage and cry for release!'

5. It is a wonder that life is a pleasure to you and death a terror. But in fact life and death belong to the gross body, the mortal part of your being. But the immortal part of your being does not undergo any change by life or death. Your being is the life of all

creatures. As the sky pervades all objects but remains unattached, so you, being the life of the universe, never depart from your nature in the least. There is nothing second or equal to or greater than you. You have neither origin nor end. You are Bliss absolute. Bulla Shah says: `Mortality cannot touch your being. You are beyond time and space. Your being is ever immortal.'

6. Your desires are harassing you incessantly and have made you oblivious of your real being. You were the owner of your Atman empire but your desires have deprived you of your empire and made you a beggar. Your treasury is now empty. Your benign being is enchained by the slender thread of desires. Bulla Shah says: `See the fun! The ocean has been compressed in a small earthenpot! The sun of awareness of your eternal being will reveal its dazzling lustre as soon as the cloud of desires subsides.'

7. You are ignorant of the affairs of your own home. Being connected with desires, you have been transformed into them. Shake off the desires like dirt and dust and be desireless. When desirelessness is established, the seer within is revealed in its effulgent glory. A grassy field cannot conceal a lion long. Bulla Shah says: `Sometimes it happens that having had the missing necklace on the neck, we search for it madly in the nooks and corners of our house, though it is never lost. You have simply forgotten your real being and consequently have been dropped in a well of miseries out of ignorance.'

8. Your luminous being is the revealer of the visible phenomena. Your being resides in all eyes as the seer. You are the witness of the three-fold states of waking, dream and sleep. But you are beyond these states. Bulla Shah says: `Your being is ever-luminous and does not undergo any change in any place or time.'

9. Do not harbour any doubt regarding your Self. There is nothing other than your Self in the universe. Know this for certain and be free. Accept a knower of reality as your guide and in no time you will be blessed with illumination. Walk steadily on the spiritual path in strict accordance with the teachings of the guru. Your eye of wisdom is covered with a cataract. The eye will be cleansed by the remedy of the guru's teachings. Bulla Shah says: `Ascertain your own being as ever free, pure and awakened and meditate on it.'

10. Cherish not even the slightest doubt that you are the owner of the universe. As a lion forgetting its own prowess keeps company with goats and like them eats grass and bleats, so you have forgotten your real nature and are weeping like a helpless child. But

as soon as the self-forgetful lion remembers its nature, it jumps out, roars and devours the goats. Bulla Shah says: If you want to end your sufferings remember your infinite being.'

11. Alas! how ignorance has created this beautiful mirage of name and form. Dear friend, be the unattached witness of this cosmic sport and enjoy it. As the bubbles with variegated colours rise from water and are dissolved in it in a few moments, so the sky, earth, water, air and other elements are projected. They are momentary and will disappear soon. Bulla Shah says: `Clearly discriminate - to whom do the sorrows and happiness of life belong - to mind or to Atman?'

12. As the mountain is not moved by storm, so is your Self not moved by the stream of transmigration. Boys ignorantly imagine the moon to be moving along with the moving clouds. Your Self appears to be active being identified with the active sense organs, body, mind, vital force, etc. Your being is the unmoved and unchanged witness of all movements. Bulla Shah says: `By knowing your true Self, attain undiluted bliss. Know that this is the highest teaching illumined teachers will give to the worthy disciple.'

13. Liberation in life is attained by the grace of the Guru. All my actions are over. I am above joy and grief. All my ignorance has been dispelled. I have realised the supreme Self. Fear of death and the bond of the opposite pairs have left me. I have been saved and liberated by holy association. My being has transcended all conditions and limitations. I exist as joy in all creatures. Bulla Shah says: `By means of discrimination I have become what I was originally.'

14. Dearest one, I have sold my little self and in exchange have got back my great Self. I have dropped all worldly knowledge and learning. I have burned to ashes all ideas of duality in the blazing fire of the knowledge of non-duality or oneness. No duty awaits me any more. I am the whole, the Infinite, the Absolute. I have got eternal rest and eternal leave. Bulla Shah says: `I have put on the garland of everlasting peace and blessedness and am blessing myself.'

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Ramakrishna's Prayer

By Thomas Dorsett

(The author is a paediatrician and poet from the U.S.A.)

In the summer of 2002, I read a prayer written by Ramakrishna - a prayer so profound that it sent a shock through body and spirit as I read it. It has remained part of my consciousness ever since.

I read the prayer during a bicycle trip through Provence. The day before, my wife, Nirmala, and my friend, Cartan, and I had been huffing and puffing uphill until we reached the mediaeval town of Gordes, splendidly situated on top of a mountain of solid rock, overlooking a valley checkered with orchards, vineyards and clumps of trees. We were very tired. The following morning my wife opted to stay by the pool and read. My friend chose a rather long bicycle trip that entailed an arduous climb; having had enough of negotiating hills for a while, I opted for a shorter, flatter ride. We agreed to meet five hours later in front of the church in the town of Lumiere.

After a few hours I arrived at the centre of the town. With much time to kill, I decided to visit the church. The entire wall of the back of this rococo church was filled with hundreds of little votive paintings. My guidebook informed me that almost a century ago, a priest encouraged the townspeople to paint on wooden placards, each about eighteen inches long and ten inches wide, a depiction of their most fervent prayer, to be granted, it was hoped, by God. It was affecting to view these amateur paintings of people rising from sickbeds, crutches being thrown away, etc. Most of the placards were too high up on the wall to see clearly. Many of those I was able to see were incomprehensible to me. The message of one was clear, it depicted a man being pulled by a devil on one side and by an angel on the other. In the corner was a boy - the man's son, perhaps - praying. Here was a classic, if primitive, portayal of the struggle of Good and Evil for a man's soul. I stared at the boy, convinced that he was praying that God

give his poor father the strength to escape his demon; as a boy, I prayed the same prayer myself. Was his prayer answered? Were any of the prayers answered? It seemed not to matter anymore; all the paintings were faded, their forgotten creators in the local cemetery, the once brightly coloured images of their passions ignored except for the occasional tourist.

Thoughts of mortality - theirs and my own - put me in a pensive mood. My inner gloom was only partly dispersed when I left the dark church and was again bathed in the brilliant sunlight of Provence. The church was located on the western side of a courtyard, with church buildings on the northern and eastern sides; the southern side was open to the main street of the village. Finding a shady spot on the steps of the building opposite the church, I sat down to read. The little book which I had brought along fitted neatly into my shirt pocket. It was one of those marvellous editions of the Thus Spake series, published by the Ramakrishna Math in Madras, India. The one I had was entitled *Thus Spake Ramakrishna*.

I read through the volume's many sections. Impressed by its wisdom and devotion, I lost all sense of time. As clouds passed overhead, my spirit was lulled by Ramakrishna's words into a state as pleasant as my surroundings. Then, lightning: I was woken up by a passage that struck the very centre of my being. Here was the very secret of life!

The passage came from the section entitled "Prayers" and reads as follows: "Mother, here is Thy virtue, and here is Thy vice. Take them both and grant me only pure love for Thee. Here is Thy purity, here is Thy impurity. Take them both, Mother, and grant me only pure love of Thee. Here is Thy *dharma*, righteousness, and here is Thy *adharma*, unrighteousness. Take them both and grant me only pure love of Thee."

Where can one find truth more profoundly stated? Here *bhakti*, devotion, and *jnana*, wisdom, are beautifully united; it is an invitation to a world obsessed with good and evil to go beyond good and evil and find peace and love.

Ramakrishna's prayer is the essence of Vedanta, the most profound tradition of the world, equalled, perhaps, but not surpassed, by the great Sufi masters. Everything belongs to God, *everything is God*. The good that I do comes from God - most religious traditions accept that - but the evil I do? What was behind the angel in the placard, the forces of Good, and what was behind the devil in the placard, are they both from God?

Although the townspeople of Lumiere would be shocked at his answer, Ramakrishna is clear on this issue. "This is Thy vice. etc." Good and Evil are ultimately one. How can this be true? And if it is true, won't this lead to the annihilation of morality? We shall answer these questions in turn.

First, let us contrast the Vedantic view with that of orthodox Christianity. There is a passage in Mark which describes an encounter that most scholars think actually took place. Someone, kneeling before Jesus, addresses Him as "Good Master." To this Jesus replies, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God" (Mark, 10,18). If this had been an interpolation of the early Church, which emphasized the unity of Jesus and God, Jesus - Good - would not have objected. But the historical Jesus, knowing that he was nothing as an individual, realized that all good things came from God. Most traditions, Vedanta included, would agree. But Vedanta goes further: what if an enemy addressed Jesus as "Bad Master?" We could not imagine Jesus replying, "Why callest thou me bad? There is none bad but one, that is, God." Although even Vedanta would hesitate to make the latter statement, for reasons we will explain later, both replies, from an absolute perspective, are true. Wouldn't this perspective lead to moral relativism and the breakdown of society.

Before discussing why this isn't so, let us consider the example of sages who actually went beyond good and evil. In a recent issue of Vedanta (March-April 2003) O.P. Sharma describes an incident during which Ramakrishna evinced disappointment with his chief disciple, Vivekananda. The latter was at first only interested in the bliss of his own liberation. Ramakrishna criticized him with the following words: "I had hoped that like a big banyan tree, you would one day provide much-needed shade to weary wayfarers and here you are just thinking of your own liberation!" (O.P.Sharma, *The Relevance of the Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna Today*, Vedanta, March-April 2003, p. 80.) Having gone beyond good and evil obviously did not stop Ramakrishna from partiality for the greater Good! This example from the greatest sage of the nineteenth century was followed by the example of the greatest sage of the twentieth century: Ramana Maharshi frequently encouraged his followers to be involved in good works. So let us be clear on this: those beyond good and evil still choose the Good. This is the answer to our second question: if we are to accept the examples of great sages, the perspective that on the absolute level good and evil are one does not lead to the annihilation of morality. Now let's return to the first: how can this perspective be valid?

We will attempt to explain this conundrum by discussing two concepts, freedom and *lila*, play. First, freedom, without which we can neither choose good nor evil. If, in a flash of cosmic consciousness, our insight reveals that our bondage is illusory, we feel a great relief, as if we were Atlas putting down the burden of the world. But this relief - except in the case of a great sage - is temporary. Since we remain certain that we exist on the relative plane, we again feel the pain of our chains. Does free will really exist? Much great - and mostly useless - philosophy has been written on the subject; I am in no position to add to it. Yet from an absolute, that is, from an Advaita Vedanta point of view, the answer is clear: God is the sole doer, human free will does not exist. Does this mean we shouldn't make plans for tomorrow? Of course not. Why?

On the relative plane, freedom is very apparently real. And although the more spiritual of us have moments that transcend relativity, we must never forget that we live most of our lives on the relative plane. Each generation produces only a handful of sages - perhaps only one - who leave duality permanently during life. Free will is as real as we are, and we take ourselves very seriously indeed. To the degree that we identify with our phenomenal selves, freedom is to be taken seriously, as are, therefore, good and evil to be taken seriously.

It is an apparent paradox that freedom and determination seem both to be true. Our insight transcends duality and gives us a sense of an unchangeable centre; however, since we believe that insight occurs to us as individuals, we look at the centre of the circle from the periphery where good and evil seem so real that we do not doubt their existence - we would have to doubt ours first! Therefore, we believe that both nonduality and duality form one and the same circle and exist at the same time. This is an illusion, but one so powerful that we accept it readily.

When all illusions are cast aside, as is the case of Ramakrishna, one realizes that only God is the doer. Another apparent paradox: wisdom, which at the highest level realizes that free will is illusory, does not lead to indifference, since at the highest level, bhakti and jnana are one and the same. *Bhakti* has no choice: it must issue forth in good works. As Swami Swahananda pointed out in the March-April 2003 issue of Vedanta, on page 66: "No religion will say that bad things are good, and that God makes you do them, but the saints give their testimony that from the person who takes the attitude that everything is done by God, gradually all the dross falls away." Religion must address the relative plane, since that is where we mostly live, and therefore cannot in general equate the

bad with the good; yet the highest form of religion must also address the absolute plane, to which we can aspire and which some have realized; at this level, religion insists that all things are done by God. When all the dross falls away, one is left with the perfect union of *bhakti* and *jnana*.

Ramakrishna's prayer is a perfect balance of these two forms of *yoga*. The first parts of each of the three sections, which consist of two sentences each, unite opposites (virtue/vice; purity/impurity/ *dharma/adharma*). (One is reminded here of the mediaeval German mystic, Nicholas von Cusa, who wrote of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, the unity of opposites; it is inspiring to know that mystics have been saying the same thing the world over for thousands of years.) This is *jnana*, wisdom. But each of these sentences is followed by one of pure *bhakti*: e.g. "Take them both and grant me only pure love of Thee." This love is reciprocal. Ramakrishna, having shed all ignorance and thus become one with God, is a manifestation of God's wisdom and God's love. This is why, although having gone beyond good and evil, he nevertheless exhorts Vivekananda to give up selfishness and to dedicate himself to the awakening of all.

Yet if we are all ultimately manifestations of God, why does He allow evil in the world? This is of course a profound mystery and can only be partially explained by words. The answer is to be found in deep meditation, beyond all words. But an indication of that answer can be given in prose. The answer is indicated by the concept of *lila*. The universe as consisting of apparent separate entities is a manifestation of God's play or *lila*. God forgets Himself; the one seems to have become two. Without God's forgetting Himself, there would be only the state of bliss, *satchitananda* - there would be no dynamism; the ups and downs, joys and sorrows of individual existence would not come into play. That God does forget Himself - sometimes very thoroughly indeed - is proof that He sees beauty in the great illusion of individual existence. Without sleep there is no awakening: just as our identification with ourselves brings enormous suffering, our eventual realization that God alone is real brings great joy. We return to our native state, bliss, and, perhaps when all return to this state, the great cycle begins again. With ecstasy the final realization occurs: everything was and is really God all the time: just as *bhakti* and *jnana* are one, God and the world - or, as a Buddhist would say, *nirvana* and *samsara*, are one and the same. It is a joy to know that God sometimes remembers Himself completely in this life. One thinks of Ramakrishna. Conversely, it is a horror to know that God sometimes forgets Himself completely in this life. One thinks of

Hitler.

When God awakes, wisdom becomes manifest, e.g., Ramakrishna; conversely, when God is asleep, ignorance and evil appear, e.g. Hitler. In the rest of us, between these two extremes, God is alternately asleep and awake. In the great activity of lila, we can glean the purpose of life. To the degree that God is asleep, one identifies with one's ego and is without compassion. In an infant this is natural; in an adult it is the source of most of the world's suffering. We can see a progression of the awakening Self: first the identification with one's ego, subsequently one adds the identification with one's family, with one's neighbours, with one's nation, etc., until one identifies at last with the whole universe, at which state God is fully awake. One can view this progression from the sensibility of an infant to that of a sage. Most of us get stuck on one level or the other or keep changing levels. Joy and harmony increase as we progress; it is disastrous, however, when an adult remains stuck on the infant level - identification with one's ego only - and attains power over others. As in the case of Hitler, one would then not stop even from genocide to accomplish one's selfish, twisted ends.

That God forgets Himself so completely as to somehow become radical evil is a great mystery. The answer is not readily accessible to us since we largely identify with ourselves and God is thus mostly far away from our understanding. But to great sages - and in flashes of insight during deep meditation - it is no longer a mystery. Yet even sages cannot put this mystery into words; they convey the answer, as Dakshinamurthi did, through eloquent silence. This silence is a perfect unity of wisdom and compassion. It is a state of great joy.

After reading Ramakrishna's prayer and meditating over it, I felt this joy. Feeling very good indeed, I left the church courtyard to meet my friend. As I walked up the main street of Lumi 7 re, my friend Cartan soon pedalled into view. We went to an inn located opposite the church and had lunch. While we ate, however far our conversations strayed, my spirit remained anchored in Ramakrishna's words. At one point Cartan asked me why I seemed so happy? I smiled. The food might not have been good; the service might not have been good; clouds gathered - no matter - Ramakrishna's Sun was shining; inside, the weather was perfect.

Nature's Evolutionary Impulse

By Sampooran Singh

The cosmic drama that is unfolding in the chemical laboratories, and through the astro-bio-physical researches in the field and observatory, incites renewed curiosity in the dynamics of human mind and in man, who is a rational practitioner of life and tentative interpreter of his external world, the "without", and his internal world, the "within". Cosmology leads us to times of the order of 10^{14} years, the "age of the universe".

Teilhard de Chardin divided evolution into four stages - geosphere (inorganic or physical evolution) biosphere (biological evolution), noosphere (psychosocial evolution) and christosphere (spiritual evolution). The spiritual transformation is the flight of the alone (conditioned conscious energy) to the Alone (unconditioned conscious energy). A spiritual state is an awareness of the relationship between the Infinite and the finite, between the Timeless and time.

The human mind, engaged in its own psychosocial evolution, makes a quantum jump and perceives the unconditioned vibrating (active) conscious energy - the highest frequency, or the highest quantum energy potential of vibrating conscious energy. This is called the Atman, or the individualised conscious energy. The unconditioned non-vibrating (passive) conscious energy is called Brahman, or universal conscious energy, or the one Self of all.

This article explores the nature of consciousness and life - the truth behind the fact - at different epochs of Nature's evolutionary impulse. It posits that each event or happening in the cosmic drama is a play of the Unmanifest towards the manifest. Nature's evolutionary impulse is invariably governed by a flow of spiritual energy from the Unmanifest to the manifest, and some typical examples are discussed, as well as the immutable laws of nature which are eternal. This understanding, and living in its light, bestows harmony, order, freedom, non-violence, peace and bliss; the consummation of

human life. It leads to the survival and excellence of man.

Inorganic or Physical Evolution

a) ***A Critique on Atomic Structure:*** In 1913, Niels Bohr showed that there exists a discrete sequence of electron orbits. When an atom is excited, the electron jumps from one orbit to another. At this very instant, the atom emits or absorbs a photon, the frequency of which corresponds to the difference between the energies characterising the electron's motion in each of the two orbits. When an atom makes a transition, or a 'jump', from one stationary state to another, the actual process cannot be visualised or even imagined. There are no intermediate stages. We cannot break down the process into its components. The entire process of transition from one state to another is a non-visualisable, unanalysable, unity. It is indivisible. Its parts cannot even be imagined. It is a 'quantum jump' as we call it.¹ As an analogy, we say that there is unmanifest mathematical space between any two consecutive orbits, and further, there is energy interaction - via photon exchange - between the unmanifest and the manifest.

A trapped ion blinks on and off and each blink is a quantum jump. It is a striking illustration that things occur discontinuously in nature. I.I. Rabi wrote, "The atom is in one state and moves to another, and you can't picture what it is in between, so you call it a quantum jump."²

b) ***Observation of Atomic Phenomena:*** In dealing with atomic phenomena we have to recognise that the act of observation is accompanied by an inevitable disturbance which alters the state of the observed system in an unpredictable manner. What is observed is different from what it was before the act of observation. This is inherent in the nature of things. It cannot be eliminated.

In its attempt to understand the mystery of the world of atoms, quantum physics is forced to the view that the act of observation projects, as it were, the atomic object from an "unmanifest" mathematical space into the "manifest" physical space of our experience. Between two successive acts of observation the atomic object follows its course in the unmanifest space, called Hilbert space (after the mathematician D. Hilbert).

An explicit involvement of consciousness is an essential factor to observe the atomic system. In the oft quoted words of E.P. Wigner, "The measurement is not completed

until its result enters our consciousness... (this) last step is, at the present state of our knowledge, shrouded in mystery and no explanation has been given for it so far, in terms of quantum mechanics, or in terms of any other theory".⁴ Hideki Yukawa wrote, "It is obvious that unless something rises into the consciousness it cannot become an object of rational thought, of rational consideration. At the same time, everyone will surely agree on the importance of an awareness that living in a world open towards both the exterior and the interior is a special characteristic of man's lot".⁵

c) *The World is Fundamentally Discontinuous*: Our activity introduces discontinuities in whatever we are observing. These discontinuities are fundamental to the new physics of the twentieth century.⁶ Bohr knew that the world was fundamentally a discontinuous and quantum jumping world. To Bohr, discontinuity was a fundamental truth.⁷ The ultimate declaration is that nature is discontinuous in its core, more like a staircase than a ramp. The discontinuity implies Unmanifest to manifest. Excited by light, an atom will jump to one or the other of the higher levels, absorbing a photon. Then a short time later, it spontaneously emits a photon and returns to the ground state.

Biological Evolution

a) A living organism is all the time building up more complex chemicals from the chemicals it feeds on, more complex forms of energy from the energy it absorbs, and more complex patterns of "information" - perceptions, memories, ideas - from the input of its receptors. A direction towards increasing order seems to be present in evolution. As an organism goes up the spiral of the evolutionary ladder, there is greater and greater complexity of matter, greater and greater order, and a resultant expression of a higher level of consciousness. The increasing order implies a higher form of unity in a more complex variety.

In the realm of life, the wholes are of a higher order both of articulation and of integration. They are developing wholes and organised totalities at any one moment, and become more highly differentiated and integrated on successively higher levels of organisation, so that their past history determines their present nature and functioning.

The process of differentiation and integration of cells, giving rise to different structures of different parts or organs, seems to be governed by cell-consciousness; so each moment of the past is in each moment of the present. The cell-consciousness also

appears to be responsible for recovery, repairs and restitution of tissue in each part. The organism which is a special kind of whole is governed by individual consciousness, so the whole is in each of the parts.

b) Embryos repeat the evolution history of their ancestors in some abbreviated form in the course of their development. It suggests that our ancestors evolved from fish through amphibian and reptilian phases. The recapitulation of its early history suggest a biological inheritance, or a morphogenetic field.

Matter, in itself, does not have the characteristic of self-duplication. When consciousness interpenetrates at a fixed hierarchical level in matter arranged in a given pattern, then matter assumes the role of a self-duplicating molecule. In the chromosomes, the genes are coded. The differentiation and re-integration of cells give rise to embryos, which grow to adult and then disintegrate to elementary bits, and are governed by consciousness. The morphogenetic fields of a species are identical and represent the total evolution of matter; these fields are governed by consciousness and deal with repetition of genetic matter in a fixed pattern.

c) In the waking and dreaming states there is the experience of the reality in its manifested form (time-consciousness, ego-consciousness and sex-consciousness). In the state of deep sleep the time-consciousness, ego-consciousness and sex-consciousness go to abeyance, so the reality is in its non-manifested form, which is the negation of its manifested form. Sri Ramana Maharishi says, "The non-manifested equally exists in your waking state".

Life begins with breathing-in (a set of atoms) and death begins with breathing-out (a set of modified atoms). Life is inhalation, death is exhalation. Breathing-in is at a higher quantum energy potential than breathing-out, so there is discontinuity. Discontinuity happens when there is the unmanifest. Breathing-in and breathing-out are not two opposite things, they are parts of one whole. Similarly love is breathing-out and hate is breathing-in. So the unmanifest transforms death to life, hate to love. The waking, dreaming and deep sleep states are nourished by the Life Field, the Unmanifest, the Brahman.

Through the waking state and deep sleep, there is the Unmanifest. One can move to a higher quantum energy potential by the grace of the Unmanifest, and we have to purify

our instruments of perception to accept the grace. This grace is flowing everywhere in the cosmos, and beyond the cosmos. (To be continued)

The Holy Mother, the Saint-Maker

by Swami Madhavananda

The Holy Mother, like Sri Ramakrishna, was such a unique personality that whatever great tributes you pay to her, they will fall short of the reality. In fact we do not have any adequate standards by which we can judge such great personalities. In one of his talks Sri Ramakrishna spoke of a large block of diamond lying on the steps to a river. Not knowing that it was a large piece of diamond, people thought that it was a mere stone; they rubbed and cleansed their feet on it and went away. One day a jeweller came and he recognized it and declared it as such.

Our Holy Mother was like a diamond of that type and ordinary people who had the privilege of meeting her saw in her only what lay on the surface, but much more lay deep within. In order to judge her correctly we have to take the testimony of Sri Ramakrishna, who said she was the embodiment of the Goddess Saraswati.

The Holy Mother's life from early childhood up to the end was an example, was a model of what a woman's life should be. She came of a very poor family. For their very existence, the whole family had to work and the Holy Mother even as a child had to help her mother and father in trying to make a livelihood. But her heart was expanding even as a child; she showed that she felt for others. When there was a great famine, the father of Holy Mother, Sri Ramachandra Mukherjee, though a poor man, arranged for large pots of food to be prepared and served to everybody who came. The khichuri (a rice and dal preparation) would be very hot and people would not wait to let it cool down. The Holy Mother, even though a little child then, would rush with her hand-fan and try to cool that food. That great love persisted up to the end.

To her brothers she was an ideal sister. Unfortunately those brothers were not worthy of

her supreme love. They were materially-minded, quite opposite to the Holy Mother who was absolutely spiritually-minded. In the later years of Holy Mother's life, they were always extracting the maximum possible amount from her slender purse. One aspect of the Holy Mother's life was that when she once gave protection, once she had taken a family into her custody, she never left them. There might be evil in the world, and there was a time when the Holy Mother also saw evil, but she prayed all the time that she might not develop the wrong attitude of seeing evil in others. Therefore, even though her brothers behaved like that, she befriended them right up to the end. In this way the Holy Mother tried to show how we can make our lives sweet even by living in this world.

Sri Ramakrishna's advice was, 'Bear and forbear', because in this world evils are bound to come and if one reacts in an improper way, there will be chaos everywhere.

Unfortunately we do not grasp that lesson and therefore there is so much bloodshed, so much of strife all over the world. The world has progressed in science. India also is copying after the West, but unfortunately the West is essentially materially-minded. It believes in the external world; it believes in the external power. India is known for its spirituality and our great saints have come from time to time to show Indians and the whole of mankind which way one should proceed to attain peace and happiness.

In Sri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother we have not merely two saints; they were the makers of saints. In fact, in such matters, to understand their real personality, only his or her own perception of the other, should be considered as a true guide. She was a simple ordinary mother to those who came to her for advice and guidance and spiritual ministrations because in this way alone the Lord's descent on earth could be properly utilised. If God comes to the earth with his divine majesty, then we shall all be appalled and we shall not be able to approach Him. Therefore, the Lord hides His majesty in forms that we may appreciate. In this particular instance God's divinity was clothed in motherly affection. Sri Ramakrishna sometimes could be stern, but the Holy Mother was never stern to anybody. There had been occasions when probably stern measures were necessary, but the Mother in her, that great motherhood, always controlled her. She said, 'If my child smears itself with dirt, is it not the duty of the mother to clean it and take it on her lap?' This was the attitude of the Mother. Therefore people flocked to her in hundreds. All of them were blessed by her, not necessarily because of their intrinsic merit, but because of the abundance of the Holy Mother's grace and compassion. She knew her mission in the world that Sri Ramakrishna had passed on to her. Bit by bit he

had trained her for the great role of the world teacher Sarada Devi was to become afterwards. When she said, 'I am a mere woman', Sri Ramakrishna told her that more than what he had done she would have to do, and actually we find that after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, the Holy Mother lived for nearly thirty-four years and those were eventful years so far as her spiritual ministrations are concerned. She did not care for herself at all. While Sri Ramakrishna lived, she was all attention to him, to his personal comforts. She spared no pains to keep Sri Ramakrishna in a healthy state. Those who have seen the music tower in Dakshineswar where the Holy Mother stayed can have an idea in what condition of discomfort she had to live in, in order to serve Sri Ramakrishna. It is a very small place and in that little room not only would she be there but several other lady devotees would be there also. She somehow managed. She was the very personification of modesty, as it were. Self-abnegation was the breath of her life. When she was young, and news of her husband's madness reached her ears at her village home, she had to pass anxious days, but she never lost faith. Her faith triumphed when she came to Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar and saw that he was not mad in the usual sense, but was intensely God-intoxicated. That faith she had throughout her life. Numerous disciples came to her, some of a very devotional type. They would consider her as their own mother. Mother responded equally. She would not hesitate to clean even the leavings of food which a Brahmin lady would never do. Once she cleaned the place where a Mohammedan dacoit had eaten and when challenged she said, 'Amzad is as much my child as Sarat (Swami Saradananda)'. You can well imagine the great intensity of spiritual realisation of a person who can utter this statement. Swami Saradananda was the Holy Mother's faithful attendant and to compare him with that dacoit Amzad! The Holy Mother had risen to such a height which is unimaginable to an ordinary mortal. She always realised and was conscious of her own divinity. Only to make things easy for us she put on that cloth of motherhood. She went to Madras and lived many happy days there. Supernatural powers were there. She had Samadhis of high states on numerous occasions. As her teachings had been put on record and published as books, people came to know of her very easily and expected a lecture from her. She said, 'I am no lecturer', and referring to a lady disciple of the master, Gauri Ma, remarked, 'If she had come with me she would lecture'. When giving initiations, persons not knowing Bengali also came, but somehow or other an inner communion was established and the disciples understood what the Holy Mother said and the Holy Mother was also satisfied.

So it is extremely difficult to judge a personality like Holy Mother as it is extremely difficult to judge Sri Ramakrishna. Only what little they spoke of themselves should be our criteria, but in whatever respect we approach her we shall find that the Holy Mother was almost beyond compare. Among the saints we read of in history, I do not know of any who has proclaimed herself to be an incarnation of Divinity. Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother declared to select audiences that they were incarnations of divinity. At the same time they hid all their divine brilliance, divine majesty and pomp so that people might appreciate them fully.

In the Udbodhan Office in Calcutta she lived rather a restricted life. Hundreds of people flocked to her. Our predecessors were very careful about her. Her body was a delicate automaton. If people of impure mind touched her, she felt excruciating pain. Sometimes for half an hour she would wash her feet with Ganges water. Yet her motherly heart would never turn away anybody.

Even when she was ill, she was doing japa and when somebody asked, 'Why are you doing this?', she plainly said, 'I have to take care of those who have taken shelter in me. Do you think my mission will be ended? I shall not be able to rest content unless everybody is free from the bond of Maya.' It was the mother heart of divinity pouring in human flesh that was manifested in the Holy Mother. Sri Ramakrishna worshipped her as the Divine Mother and manifested the divinity that was latent in her. His attitude towards her had always been respectful. You know one of the questions Sri Ramakrishna put to the Holy Mother after those agonizing months she spent in Jayrambati: 'Have you come to drag me down to the world, to the material world?' The Holy Mother straight-away answered, 'I have not come to stand in your way. I have come to help you.' That shows the relationship between them. When the Lord comes he comes with his Sakti every time. Most often the Sakti does not do anything actively. In the case of the Holy Mother, the Sakti also was doing good to the world in full measure. She was the mother of monks and mother of householders. All have much to learn from her life.

It is a great good fortune that we are learning to appreciate the Holy Mother.

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Discrimination

By Swami Dayatmananda

Self-analysis

We mentioned in our last article that self-awareness leads the way to self-analysis which in turn helps us move forward. Self-awareness itself gives us all the data we need in order to use it. A scientist at first gathers all the data and then starts analysing it in order to reach conclusions. So do spiritual aspirants. Self-analysis is the first step to self-improvement.

Self-analysis is an intellectual research into one's own mind. It is difficult and dangerous. It is difficult because of inner resistances and wrong attitudes. One of the strongest resistances is resignation to one's fate; it means one has practically given up any hope of improvement. Such an attitude breeds cynicism and pessimism. Yet a man would not admit he has given up. He would rather offer any number of rationalisations than face the truth. It also poses dangers because it is the mind itself working on itself. One such danger is wrong interpretation of one's actions due to wrong attitudes. For example a person who is lazy misreads another's activity as restlessness; and a restless man looks down upon a sage as lazy. A miser interprets another person's frugality as miserliness. Or perhaps one who is reprimanded might react with anger and counter accusations but will never admit the defect in himself; because, then, his inner safety is threatened. There is a saying in Telugu: "*A man is apt to find those very faults in others from which he himself is suffering.*" We come across such instances aplenty every day. Needless to say one needs to be alert and objective if one wants to analyse oneself. If we fail to do so we need to take the help of a psychologist. A Guru often acts as an expert psychologist pointing out the defects of an aspirant. Spiritual progress is possible only when one has faith in one's teacher and implicitly follows the directions given by him. That is the reason why so much emphasis is laid on faith in one's Guru (in accepting his directions) and obedience (in implementing his teachings). (In this connection the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna may recall the contrary advice given to Swamis Yogananda and

Niranjanananda.)

Self-analysis is the very first step to success in any field. And success in any field involves mainly four elements: the Goal, the Path, the Instrument, and the Effort. Progress in spiritual life too involves these four elements. Self-analysis helps us in the right understanding and utilisation of these four elements. Let us discuss them briefly.

1. The Goal. We often declare glibly that our goal is Self-realisation. No doubt it is true, but do we really want it now, in this life? What is the intensity of our desire?

Tremendous faith is needed if we wish to realise God in this very life. If we open our eyes we find our life moving in the opposite direction! Often we are blissfully unaware of this. One reason for this is not paying sufficient attention. More importantly we may not wish to pay attention lest we are forced to face the fact that we do not want God. One of the famous psychologists used to say that most of the patients that come to him do not wish to get well, but wish to feel well! So we should take a serious look at our proclaimed goal. More important than this is to find out where we are and what our next step should be. This is where the advice of Holy Mother comes to our help i.e. to stop finding fault with others and start finding our own faults.

The first stage in spiritual life is purification. Purification means gradual reduction of one's defects and acquiring qualities conducive to spiritual progress. So our immediate goal should be purification of the mind. Karma Yoga is a great help in this respect. Swami Yatiswarananda used to say that an aspirant should have a clear understanding of his goal and path. Self-analysis should help us in clarifying both our ultimate and proximate goals. Without being clear about our goals it is meaningless to talk of progress; for monitoring progress is possible only in connection with a defined goal.

2. The Path. We also need to be clear about our path. Though the goal is only one, the paths to it are many. Though all paths are equally valid and lead to the One goal it is important to know the right path suited to one's nature. Hence it is that a Guru is so essential. Generally the majority of people are emotional by nature. That is the reason why Sri Ramakrishna used to say that for this age the path of devotion combined with selfless action is more suitable. Yet it is important to have reason and will also to balance fanaticism and blind superstition. There are some in whom intellect or reason plays an important part. Such people need emotion in order to avoid aridity. So it is necessary to find a right path suitable to one's progress. Failure to do so is sure to

impede progress. Here we may recollect the case of Vijaykrishna Goswami. Vijaykrishna was then a prominent member of the Brahma Samaj. The members of the Brahma Samaj adore the formless aspect of God. Sri Ramakrishna pointed out to him that worship of God with form was more suitable to his temperament. Following the advice of Sri Ramakrishna Vijaykrishna made rapid progress toward God-realisation. Self-analysis directs us toward the right path.

3. The Instrument. Body and mind are our instruments. Most of the spiritual disciplines are meant to purify and strengthen our bodies and minds. Proper food and exercise bring about health and strength of the body. Even so the mind also should be given proper food and it should be exercised. To fill the mind with good and inspiring ideals and thoughts is achieved through holy company, study of scriptures, japa, and meditation etc. Reflection of what has been taken in, deep and clear thinking, and practical application of these ideas in our daily life is the constant exercise to be given to the mind.

Self-analysis gives us a good idea of ourselves, the working of our mind. It helps us see what is holding up our progress and what needs to be done in order to move forward.

4. The Effort. There is a saying that genius is ninety-nine percent perspiration and one percent inspiration. Sadhana is the word for spiritual practice. Most of us know about the essentials of spiritual practice like prayer, japa, meditation etc, but without first achieving a reasonably healthy personality it is impossible to make any progress in any field, much less in spiritual life. Below are a few specifics which need to be thought over carefully in order to bring about required changes in our personality. A few questions are included to aid self-analysis.

a. Attitude. What is my attitude in life? Am I a hopeless pessimist or an unthinking optimist? How can I become a hopeful realist?

Some people are too sensitive and some are highly emotional. Emotion is good; emotion spices up life. Yet too much emotion can wreck lives. People with too much emotion are constantly swinging between heaven and hell. To live with such a person must be a draining experience! Then there are people who are too much attached or coldly indifferent. Here too a good balance is needed. So it is wise to ask of ourselves: Am I too sensitive? Am I always on the offensive? Do I react to events in a highly-strung manner? If

so how can I behave in a more balanced way?

b. Time. Time is a most precious commodity. As a Swami put it so humorously: it cannot be bought, borrowed or stolen! Time lost is lost forever. One who wants to make something of himself cannot be too careless about time. However one need not be paranoid and get stressed out. Right use of time is one of the inevitable hallmarks of all great people. So one should question oneself: Am I conscious of the preciousness of time? Am I using it or killing it? How can I make better use of my time? An honest answer can help us greatly.

c. Activities. What we do in our day-to-day life has a lot of bearing on our goal. What we do should have at least some connection with our goal. This is achieved through judicious planning, and associating activities with God. Certain types of activities, by their very nature, hinder spiritual progress. More importantly our motives determine the results even more than what we do. We should be conscious of doing actions that would lead us gradually to God. Here is a help. Let us ask ourselves: Is this necessary? Is it good? Is it in accordance with truth? Right answers to these should clear a lot of junk from our brains.

e. Our General nature. Vedanta classifies human beings into three categories: Sattvic (well-balanced), Rajasic (restless) and Tamasic (lazy). Of course, this is not a cut and dried classification. One of these three qualities dominates our lives at different times, yet one particular quality may prevail most of the time. In a way all progress is from tamas to rajas to sattva and from sattva to the beyond. It is good to find what one's nature is in general. Then one can slowly attempt to overcome the lower nature and rise to a higher nature.

f. Truth and practicality. It is said: "Know the Truth and the Truth will set you free." Sri Ramakrishna used to say that one who holds to truth will realise God. Truthfulness is a most precious quality in spiritual life. And yet few are able to balance truth with practical life. For most of us what is practical is truth, and if there is a conflict between practicality and truth, then, truth must go out of the window! Needless to say we get what we deserve. Real practicality is that which leads us to Truth, to God. So the question we should ask is: Am I holding on to truth? Is it leading me to God? The answer should give us enough guidance.

g. The Six enemies. Lust, anger, greed, infatuation, vanity and jealousy - these six are considered the greatest enemies of every spiritual aspirant; and all of them are inside our minds. One of the most important functions of self-analysis is to be aware of these - how strong they are, to what extent they influence our behaviour etc. Once we are aware of them, then the next step would be to control and direct them Godward. Once they are directed towards God then these very enemies become our greatest friends and helpers. As Sri Krishna says: "*The mind which is conquered is one's greatest friend.*"

Self-analysis is an indispensable step to progress in any field of life, much more so in spiritual life. One should practise it diligently, regularly, with a clear and strong mind. Self-analysis itself will shine further light which would lead us to self-integration.

What self-integration is and how to achieve it will be in our next article.

(to be continued)

The Blessed Ekaterina Zealot of the Pyukhtitski Monastery

By John Phillips

Commemorated on 22 April (or the Sunday of the Myrrh-Bearing Women), died 1968

God's mercy is poured out on the Russian people by the prayers of its blessed men and women, who are not known to the world. Here is one more servant of God, the Blessed Ekaterina, who shone like a guiding star over sinful modern Russia. Revering the blessed ones is pleasing to God, for "God is worshipped in His saints". This life of a holy contemporary is brought to us from the monastery chronicles.

Blessed are we, when we love and call blessed the people of God. May Russia glorify them! Here the land of Estonia also provides sanctity, and the magnificent valleys of

Estonia are adorned with new heavenly helpers in the building of earthly existence.

*"For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."
(I Cor. 1:21)*

1. Childhood

Ekaterina Vasilevna Malkov-Panin was born on 15 May 1889 in Finland, in the fortress of Sveaborg, where her father, Vasilii Vasilevich Malkov-Panin, was serving as a military engineer.

Her father had a gentle nature. He had no say in the family, and the rearing of the children was entirely in the hands of the mother. Her mother, Ekaterina Konstantinovna, née Pechatkin, came from a family of gentlefolk. She was a woman with a strong, wilful character. There were six children in the family, four sons and two daughters: an elder brother George, twin boys - Konstantin and Mikhail, Katya (Ekaterina) and two younger siblings - her sister Natasha and brother Vasilii. All the children were very fond of one another.

Katya loved her father and he loved her very much. There was a special friendship between them. Of all the children only Katya accompanied her father during his journey to Vladivostok, abroad, and did not leave him during the Second World War. One can suppose that her father was a deeply religious man, otherwise there could not have been such a mutual understanding between him and his daughter.

There was no inner nearness between Katya and her mother. Her mother did not sympathise with her daughter's religious aspirations and Katya had to bear a lot for her attraction to the monastery, situated near their estate, where the family went to church. Obviously it was here that Katya's love for the monastery first arose, but her own people, especially her mother, kept her back from excessive aspiration towards God.

In early childhood Katya showed her kind-heartedness, goodness, pity and compassion towards people. The daughter tried to soften her mother's severe relationship towards those surrounding her, especially to the house servants. So, for instance, the house dressmaker did not dare to approach the mistress direct to ask for thread. She turned to

the mediation of Katya, who then patiently bore her mother's reproaches.

Generally speaking the mother prepared her two daughters for life in society, the more so because both daughters were very beautiful. In this was expressed the mother's inner distinctness from the daughter, not understanding her desires and aspirations. In this way Katya could not invite and be with those whom she liked. And she liked mostly humble girls. Her mother however invited society girls, whose inner feelings were not like Katya's.

Katya's childhood was not completely happy. For many years her mother was ill, and so the children were brought up by others. And when her mother recovered, they lived in a closed-in fashion. They kept the girls "under glass", so that subsequently, when they encountered life, it made Katya react in an unhealthy way to many events. Only two young cousins came to them from St Petersburg and that for only a short time.

In 1900 the family moved to Gatchina (for ten years before that they lived in Helsinki). In Gatchina Katya went to secondary school, and her two brothers went to the modern school. Just before Katya finished at her school and her brothers at theirs, a great family tragedy occurred: one of the twins - Mikhail - died of meningitis. They were preparing for a threefold celebration, but God decided otherwise. Katya and the other members of the family deeply mourned their dead brother.

After the older children had received intermediate education, the family moved to St. Petersburg, where Katya entered the Faculty of Natural Sciences of the Bestuzhevski courses. After completing the courses in 1912-1913 she worked in the Entomological Society. The subject of her specialist study was beetles. Katya studied this very seriously and even when she went to Vladivostok with her father, she discovered two new types of beetles, which are now kept in the zoological museum, but not under her name.

2. Sister of Mercy

The year 1914 approached. Katya went to courses of the Sisters of Mercy and at the same time began to work in the free city hospital, in which connection she often gave her address to thieves and women of doubtful conduct, telling them: "If you have difficulties, you had better come to us."

On completion of the courses Katya joined the Kaufman community of the Red Cross in St. Petersburg. This was a base hospital. Work in such a hospital did not satisfy Katya.

