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Editorial

Control of the Mind

Sri Krishna says in the Gita: "*Man is his own best friend and his own worst enemy. He who has controlled his mind by discrimination is verily his own friend; but he who has not, becomes his own worst enemy.*"

A controlled mind is neither a blank nor one filled with unworthy ideas, thoughts and imaginations. Mind control always means filling it with higher, nobler aspirations. Such a mind becomes pure, peaceful and joyful.

Now the question is how to control the mind?

One of the best means of controlling the mind is meditation. Of course, it is not easy to meditate. According to the eight-fold scheme of Patanjali, meditation is the last but one step, next only to *Samadhi*.

If meditation is to be fruitful certain conditions must be fulfilled.

a. There must be a noble goal or purpose. Meditation itself acts as a self-reinforcing mechanism. The more one meditates the stronger becomes the goal.

b. The mind must be calm and peaceful to some extent at least. Pranayama or Breath-control can be a help in this respect.

c. One must practise regularly whether one likes it or not.

d. Part of the meditation practice is to find out one's defects and obstructions and the best ways of getting rid of them.

Practised regularly meditation helps one develop insights into the nature of life, the world and Reality. It helps us in discovering our own personality, helps us get rid of our weaknesses, and helps us unfold our potentialities. The benefits of meditation are truly stupendous: relaxation, good health, efficiency, peace and happiness - these are but a few superficial benefits.

The real benefit of meditation is the realisation of Self, or God-vision. As Sri Ramakrishna says, the goal of human life is to realise God.

Swami Dayatmananda

Aquinas and Sankara

Anthony Elenjmittam

Thomas Aquinas (1225 or 1227 - 1274 A.D.) is not only one of the most representative Italians like Leonardo da Vinci, Dante Alighieri, Michelangelo and St. Francis of Assisi, but is also the greatest and most representative official philosopher and theologian of the Latin Church. In the history of philosophy and theology the name of Aquinas is second to none in the world. In India the best glimpses into the life and teachings of Aquinas are gained by comparing and contrasting him with Sankaracharya (788 - 820 A.D.), the biggest synthetic genius in Indian philosophy.

Aquinas was born at Rocca Secca, of Norman descent, of Count Landolf of Aquino and Theodora, in the year 1225 or 1227. As a child of five he was trained at the famous and most historical cradle of Western monasticism, Montecassino, and subsequently, was educated at the University of Naples. In the year 1243, still a teenager, Thomas entered the Dominican Order, then reaching the zenith of its glory and splendour under John Teutonicus, the second successor to Dominic of Guzman who founded the Order of Friar Preachers. Count Landolph and his family opposed Thomas from joining the Order. They seized and imprisoned the young Thomas at Rocca Secca for two years, forcing him with threats and enticements to give up his decision to become a mendicant monk. But neither threats, nor promise of aristocratic career and worldly fame, nor even the seductive wiles of a tempting girl, could change the mind of Thomas. At last, Theodora, his mother, helped her prisoner-son to escape and rejoin the Dominicans. In 1245 we find Thomas in Cologne where he went on foot after three months' journey in order to study philosophy under Albert the Great, the most famous scientist, naturalist, philosopher and theologian of the Order. It was Albertus Magnus who first detected the potentialities of young Thomas. To the students who made fun of Thomas as `Bos mutus

Siciliae' `the silent ox of Sicily', Albert the Great said: `But when this silent ox speaks the whole world will listen to him'. No prophecy proved truer.

In the next year Thomas studied in Paris until the year 1248 when he returned to Cologne again. It was in the year 1256 that Aquinas defended the rights of the Religious Orders in the University of Paris at the time of William of St. Amour. In fact, after the break-up of the Roman Empire and collapse of the Greek civilization, the Catholic Church through the religious Orders like the Benedictines, Dominicans, Franciscans and the Cistercians, was mainly responsible for the preservation of the Greco-Roman culture.

In 1256, when Pope Alexander IV was on the throne, Thomas was declared Master of Theology in Paris. The fame of Aquinas as a lecturer, teacher, writer and thinker had spread far and wide. The voice of the `silent Sicilian ox' had begun to be heard by the entire Catholic Christendom. So much addicted to studying, teaching, writing and engaging in public affairs was Aquinas, that he renounced the offer of the archbishopric of Naples made to him by Pope Urban IV. Summoned by Pope Gregory X to attend the Council of Lyons in 1274, Thomas started on his journey when he fell ill and passed away at the Cistercian monastery of Fossa Nuova on 7th March 1274.

Sankara, in his broadest biographical outlines, in his teachings and the unique position he still holds in orthodox Hinduism, has most striking parallels with Aquinas. Both were monks, life-long pure angels in flesh, embodiments of pure intellectualism in philosophy and religion. Sankara, born in Kaladi in Malabar in 788, renounced worldly pursuits in his early teens like Aquinas, and became the disciple of the famous teacher Govinda. Govinda was to Sankara what Albert the Great was to Aquinas. As Aquinas had Cologne, Paris, Rome and Naples as the strongholds of his intellectual influence, so Sankara founded four cultural centres, viz. Sringerimath at Sringeri in South India, Saradamath at

Dwarka in West India, Jyotirmath at Badrikasram in North India and Govardhanmath at Puri in East India, as though they were the four watchdogs of Indian culture and philosophy. Both Sankara and Aquinas died in their youth, the former in his thirties and the latter in his forties.

The writings which Aquinas and Sankara left behind have influenced the minds of posterity even more than Aristotle and Plato. Both Aquinas and Sankara stand out as models of scientific precision in their philosophical terminology, clarity, and thoroughness in their exposition, supreme models for academic, scholarly and precise terminology and, above all, mines of inexhaustible philosophical and spiritual wisdom.

The main works of Aquinas like his *Summa Theologiae*, *Summa Contra Gentes*, *Questiones Disputatae*, *Quodlibetales*, Biblical and Aristotelian commentaries, commentaries in Boetius and Pseudo-Dyonisius and his Eucheristic lyrics have very many points in common with the writings of Sankara, notably in the Acharya's commentaries on the *Brahma Sutras*, *the ten principal Upanishads*, *the Bhagavadgita*, *Sanatsujatiya*, *his original works like Vivekachudamani*, *Atma-bodha*, *Upadeshasahasri* and his *Stotras*. Aquinas wrote in Latin, *latino discreto*, as is qualified by Dante, while Sankara wrote in classical Sanskrit. Unlike the simple scholastic Latin of Aquinas, Sankara writes in most refined aristocratic Sanskrit and his works, besides their philosophical worth, are of high literary merit. Aquinas displays his literary gifts only in his poems, sermons and non-academic writings, while Sankara's works are literary masterpieces as well from beginning to end.

Italy is not only a land of beauty, of poets and artists like Virgil, Dante and Leonardo, but is also a land of philosophers and saints. It is rightly said that Thomas Aquinas is the most learned among saints and the saintliest among the learned in the whole Catholic Church. This is equally true of Sankara who to this day remains the greatest philosopher

among the Indian sages and the most sagely among the Indian philosophers. Aquinas is at once the tallest philosopher of Italy and the foremost theologian of the Catholic Church so much so that during the Tridentine Council the Summa Theologiae of Aquinas was placed on a par with the Bible. John XXII declared Aquinas a saint of the Church in 1323. Pius V in 1567 declared Aquinas the 'Doctor of the Church', chronologically the fifth in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, after Jerome, Ambrose, Augustine and Gregory the Great. Since then Pope after Pope heaped praises and eulogies on Thomistic philosophy until the time when Leo XIII raised the 'Angelic Doctor', as the patron and inspiration of all ecclesiastical universities, colleges, seminaries and educational institutions. Neo-Thomism, under the influence of Mercier, Maritain, Lagrange and others, has brought back Aquinas and Thomism to the modern world, even outside the pale of Catholicism and Italy. Dante introduces Aquinas (Paradise X: 8) to speak about celestial truths. Descartes, Baillet and other moderns had Aquinas as their favourite.

Both Aquinas and Sankara are system builders. Both of them studied and mastered almost all the thinkers, philosophers, prophets and writers before them; and both took their firm stand on their respective religious scriptures. Sankara says:

'In matters to be known from Scriptures mere reasoning is not to be relied on... As the thoughts of men are altogether unfettered, reasoning which disregards the holy texts and rests on individual opinion only, has no proper foundation, since we observe that even men of the most undoubted intellectual eminence, such as Kapila, Kanada and other founders of philosophical Schools, have contradicted one another.' (Sankara, B. Sutras II. I. XI.)

Thomas Aquinas likewise distinguished philosophical truths discovered through rational inquiry from theological truths which are 'science derived from revealed scriptures' (l.a.d.1.a.2.). In other words, both Sankara and Aquinas are religious philosophers and

not pure philosophers like Plato or Aristotle. That is the reason why Catholicism upholds Thomism and Hinduism supports Sankaraism, because both systems are double-edged swords to defend both the religion and philosophy of the respective cultures.

To both Aquinas and Sankara, real and lasting happiness is to be found only in the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality, God. 'The ultimate and perfect happiness of man cannot be anywhere outside the vision of the essence of God', says Aquinas (I-II ae. 0. 3. A. 8). Sankara also repeats that the goal of the human pilgrimage is the discovery and realization of God as the Ultimate Reality of the Universe and the real Self within man. One of the classical aphorisms of Sankara says: 'God alone is the Absolute, the universe is relative; your real Self is one with God, not distinct'. Gnosticism in Sankara reaches its topmost heights in his idealistic monism and emancipation is held out to those who can find union with God the Real. Aquinas, the Christian philosopher, is not a monist; but Sankara, the Hindu thinker, is. Says Sankara:

'I, like the boundless ether, permeate the universe within, without, abiding always, for ever similar in all, perfect, immovable without affection. Existence, Knowledge, undivided Bliss, without a second, One, supreme am I. The perfect consciousness that 'I am Brahma', removes the false appearance projected by ignorance, just as elixir, sickness. The universal soul knows no distinction of knower, knowledge, object to be known'. (Atmabodha.)

As Aquinas interpreted Greek and Arabian philosophers like Aristotle, Avvicenna (980-1047 A.D.), Avverrois, Avecebron, Maimonidas and the 52 Greek and 22 Latin Fathers of the Church, so Sankara studied and interpreted Jaimini, Kanada, Buddhist philosophers and all other cultural trends in the country under the light of the non-dualistic Vedanta philosophy and the Upanishads. As St. Thomas, the 'Prince of Scholastic Philosophy', is still the weightiest authority and soundest philosopher-theologian of Catholic

Christendom, so Sankaracharya is still the foremost philosopher-theologian of Hinduism. As neo-Catholicism accepts and integrates the findings of modern science and scholarship on the basic principles of Aquinas, so neo-Hinduism as interpreted by men like Ram Mohun Roy, Vivekananda, Gandhiji, Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore and others, tries to graft modern scientific culture to the trunk of the perennial philosophy of the Vedanta of Sankara. As Aquinas reveals the soul of Italy and Latin Catholicism in their philosophico-religious depths, so Sankara unfolds the soul of India's philosophers and prophets of all times.

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Leaves of an Ashrama: 2 Pain as God's Prod

Swami Vidyatmananda

"Why should there be suffering?" This is a familiar question, asked by everyone who has begun to think about the deeper mysteries of life. "Why does the Almighty permit pain? Shame on him! If God were the least bit humanitarian he would have abolished misery long ago, or would not have included it in his plan."

On the other hand, there is the story of Kunthi¹, the mother of the Pandava brothers, who prayed that she might never be free from distress. "Pain", she said, "drives my mind to the Lord Krishna. So let me always suffer, in order that my thoughts may always run to him." And I recall the remark of a senior swami, commenting on the questionable activities of a certain individual. "Yes, what he is doing is wrong. But let him be. What he is doing will cause him to suffer; and suffering will wake him up and make him stop."

Although I am repelled by misery and would escape it, yet I have come to see something wonderful in it. Beneath the unpleasant hides the beneficial. Pain is the whip that Providence uses to drive us - against our will - to our best destination.

Every one of us is looking for bliss. This search may, for example, cause one to fall in love. One pursues an earthly object because of the promise of beauty and bliss one sees in it. There are moments of joy in such human relationships. But, as everyone knows, these are mainly the come-ons - the sales pitches of the barkers out in front of the carnival tent. Once inside, one finds the show not at all up to the advertising.

My search for pleasure has brought me pain. This again drives me on to continue the hunt for joy. No luck! I try something else. But again the same result. Each shiny apple turns rotten as soon as I bite into it.

But something good is happening. The alternatives open to me are diminishing. Pain is driving me from one position to another, each as untenable as the previous one. At last I come to the end of all possibilities. There is now nothing left but God.

I have been told countless times that renunciation is the indispensable condition of religion. I know it, but I can't put it into practice. Who can renounce willingly, rationally, because it is the right thing to do? Attachments have to be torn away; or I have to drop them because to hold them hurts me more than letting them go. We don't renounce, we are forced to relinquish; and pain is the agent that forces this to happen.

I can see that tribulation is God's instrument of mercy. Instead of berating Him for having made suffering a part of the scheme, I should thank God for having done so. Pain is the Lord's special invention for bringing us to His side.

There is no Death

Apollonius of Tyana

Letter of Apollonius of Tyana, 1st Century A.D., addressed to the Consul Valerius on the loss of his son.

There is no death of anyone, but only in appearance, even as there is no birth of any, save only in seeming. The change from being to becoming seems to be birth, and change from becoming to being seems to be death; but in reality no one is ever born, nor does one ever die. It is simply a being visible and then invisible; the former through the density of matter, and the latter because of the subtlety of being - being which is ever the same, its only change being motion and rest. For being has this necessary peculiarity: that its change is brought about by nothing external to itself; but whole becomes parts and parts become whole in the oneness of the all. If it be asked: what is this which sometimes is seen and sometimes not seen, now in the same, now in the different? it might be answered: It is the way of everything here in the world below that when it is filled out with matter it is visible, owing to the resistance of its density; but it is invisible, owing to its subtlety, when it is rid of matter, though matter still surrounds it and flows through it in that immensity of space which hems it in but knows no birth or death.

But why has this false notion (of birth and death) remained so long without a refutation? Some think that what has happened through them, they have themselves brought about. They are ignorant that the individual is brought to birth through parents, not by parents, just as a thing produced through the earth is not produced from it. The change which comes to the individual is nothing that is caused by his visible surroundings, but rather a change in the one thing which is in every individual. And what other name can we give

to it but primal being? 'Tis it alone that acts and suffers, becoming all for all through all; eternal Deity, deprived and wronged of its own self by names and forms.

But this is a less serious thing than that a man should be bewailed, when he has passed from man to God by change of state and not by the destruction of his nature. The fact is that so far from mourning death, you ought to honour and reverence it. The best and fittest way for you to honour death is now to leave the one who's gone to God, and set to work to play the ruler over those left in your charge as you were wont to do. It would be a disgrace for such a man as you to owe your cure to time and not to reason, for time makes even common people cease from grief. The greatest thing is a strong rule, and of the greatest rulers he is best who first can rule himself. And how is it permissible to wish to change what has been brought to pass by the will of God? If there's a law in things, and there is one and it is God who has appointed it, the righteous man will have no wish to try to change good things; for such a wish is selfishness and counter to the law; but he will think that all that comes to pass is a good thing.

On! Heal yourself. Give justice to the wretched and console them. So shall you dry your tears. You should not set your private woes above your public cares, but rather set your public cares before your private woes. And see as well what consolation you already have! The nation sorrows with you for your son. Make some return to those who weep with you; and this you will more quickly do if you will cease from tears than if you still persist. Have you not friends? Why! You have yet another son. Have you not even still the one that's gone? You have, will answer anyone who really thinks. For "that which is" doth cease not - nay is just for the very fact it will be for aye; or else the "is not" is, and how could that be when the "is" doth never cease to be?

Again it will be said, you fail in piety to God and are unjust. 'Tis true. You fail in piety to God, you fail in justice to your boy; nay more, you fail in piety to him as well.

Wouldst know what death is? Then make me dead and send me off to company with death, and if you will not change the dress you've put on it, you will have straightway made me better than yourself.

(Note: These words of Apollonius recall so vividly certain passages of the Bhagavad-Gita that we think it interesting to cite some of them. "There is no existence for the unreal, and the real can never be non-existent. Know that to be indestructible by which all this is pervaded. No one is ever able to destroy that Immutable. These bodies are perishable; but the dwellers in these bodies are eternal, indestructible and impenetrable. The soul is never born, nor does it die, nor after once having been, does it go into non-being. The soul is unborn, eternal, changeless. The dweller in the body of everyone is ever indestructible; therefore thou shouldst not grieve over any creature." Also in the Katha-Upanishad it is said: "The wise who know the Self (soul) bodiless, seated within perishable bodies, great and all-pervading, grieve not." "Knowing that which is soundless, touchless, formless, undecaying, tasteless, odourless and eternal; beginningless, endless and immutable; beyond the Unmanifested: knowing That, man escapes from the mouth of death." And in the Chandogya-Upanishad: "By the old age of the body, That does not age; by the death of the body, That is not killed. It is the Self, free from sin, free from old age, from death and grief, from hunger and thirst.")

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Keep on Polishing the Floor!

Swami Bhavyananda

(A short extract from a lecture entitled 'Spiritual Life', transcribed by David Black)

There must be strict discipline. Nothing can be achieved in spiritual life without hard struggle and practice. Society or the organised church will give you certain broad principles, a framework within which you have to work. How I work it out is my personal individual business. Nobody can help me in that.

There is only one principle or Divinity, around which we have to organise ourselves. From lower truths we should grow into higher truths: "I understand only this much today, but as I go on contemplating it, the wider truth opens itself out to me." The main thing is to practice and grow naturally with it. We have to proceed step by step, from the gross to the subtle. Our vision must become clearer and steadier every day. Say I want to keep a room clean, I do a little each day and everything works out very well. Just that gentle 'doing' is good enough, but it must be regular and systematic. See, in India, material comforts are so minimal. When I started living in Shillong, it was my first experience of having wooden floors. I had always lived in a warmer climate before that. In Bangalore, all our floors were covered in a fine cement as a sort of polish. It lasted for centuries! In Shillong it was cold, houses were built on stilts and had wooden floors. I didn't like this dull wood, but I couldn't afford to carpet it. Somebody suggested rubbing linseed oil on to protect it, but I wasn't satisfied as it still looked very dull; so every morning I took a piece of cloth and rubbed it! People used to laugh at me and ask me what I was doing and I'd tell them I didn't like this dull-looking wood! Really, I never knew about wax polish, but with this simple rubbing of the floor every day, it became so clear and bright people thought I'd put some kind of polish on it - just gentle rubbing, that's all, nothing more was needed!

That's what we have to organise in our inner life. Every day, this polishing goes on... "I can't spare much time, I don't have the patience or the equipment. Perhaps I'm really

not made that way... but I feel it's the correct thing." So you do what you can - simply do it, rub it, clean it every day, that's enough. Then slowly it opens itself. The best possible for my personality, within its limitations, comes out. When that much comes out, it opens itself further, because essentially we have the Divine Power within us and you've just created a situation for it to open itself up. So if that happens, you get strength also to do more.

You needn't feel discouraged or disheartened that you're not able to do this or that... "Oh, I make a good resolution then I fail". It doesn't matter. Make another resolution, that's all! You start walking, and you tumble and stumble and fall. Get up and start walking again, that's all! The failure is not in failure alone: in accepting the failure, that's the real failure. So don't accept it! Just get up, and start walking again, and you will learn.

In spiritual life, this is what I personally feel one has to do. That's what is practical, within my understanding. It doesn't matter, mistakes are there; big lessons are given. "I just cannot follow it - but I follow what I can." It all adds up in the long run, and slowly the change, the transformation comes.

One shouldn't yield to the temptation of this feeling "I am not fit for it". That kind of self-criticism, self depreciation is not really worthwhile for a spiritual aspirant. "God has given me this much strength, within that I shall do, then what happens, we shall see!" That should be the attitude.

The Blessed Ekaterina

Zealot of the Pyukhtitski Monastery (continued)

John Phillips

Z.L. continues her reminiscences:

Along with my old friend, I came to Pyukhtitsa in the summer of 1956. At that time buses were very infrequent and we came from the station by taxi. The driver stopped at the guest-house, which was outside the monastery perimeter. We got out and saw at the gate a small elderly nun with large light grey eyes. She looked at us and said: "Father Gurii has arrived." We looked round, but there was no one. "Mother, we came alone," I retorted. But she shook her head in a dissatisfied manner: "What nonsense!" she said. "I say: Father Gurii has come!" So as not to continue the pointless disagreement, we silently entered the guest house. A novice took us to a vacant room, brought water in a hand-basin, and then brought in a tray with tea. And just as I was about to drink tea to my heart's content, my friend banged the table and said: "You know, Mother spoke the truth, when she said that Father Gurii had come." I looked at her in astonishment. "Well, you remember, what in your youth our Deceased Father Alexis called you, and after him all the others?" - "Father Gurii. How would I forget that?" "But you did forget, and this old nun foresaw that." "What is the name of that little nun, who was standing at the gate, when we arrived?" my friend asked the novice, who came to us with a tray of fresh strawberries. "Mother Ekaterina", she answered.

At the beginning of the fifties a celibate priest served with us. Mother Ekaterina was wearing a bright embroidered belt, just like the celibate priest, and would not let him

through: she stood during the service opposite him, used bad language and behaved in a eccentric manner, gabbled: "boo-boo-boo". The sisters did not understand what had happened with Mother Ekaterina. But this celibate priest soon went away to the world and got married.

Two Estonian boys from early morning tended the cow not far from the monastery, although they were still small. Mother Ekaterina spread some monastery butter on bread, put some sweet thing on it and brought it to them - and then stayed with them to tend the cow, saying that she loved them very much. Once she was coming out of the monastery with the sweets wrapped in paper, and I asked: "Mother Ekaterina, where are you going and to whom are you taking the sweets?" She stopped: "But this," she said, "is for the pastors, who are tending the flock!" I thought: "What flock? - One cow and a dog!" So she foresaw in advance that both the brothers would become orthodox priests, but they were from a Lutheran family.

The nun E. remembers the blessed eldress as follows. Entering the monastery in 1947, the young novice Olga (that was her name on baptism) was assigned to the cattle farm, where she served and lived in a small monastery house.

Once in spring, when the sun was rising, she awoke and heard that someone was knocking at the window. Under the window stood an unknown woman wearing long dark clothes and head-scarf, who asked to be let into the house. The novice Olga as yet knew few inmates in the monastery. Becoming alarmed, because it was a very early hour and all the sisters were still sleeping, she said: "Please wait, I am new here, I will ask the senior." The senior at the farm was Mother Avramia. Waking Mother Avramia, she told her about the unknown early morning guest. When Mother Avramia went out of the house and saw her, she immediately recognised her: "Why that is Katya from Gethsemane!" All this time the unknown woman had been walking up and down under

the window, not saying anything.

When they had all dispersed to their duties, Mother Ekaterina, as everyone called her, asked the novice Olga, what her name was. "Olga", the latter answered. "Well," said Mother Ekaterina, "what shall we call you when you take the veil?" And she herself answered her own question: "Elena. Because Princess Olga was also christened Elena. So you will be Elena."

Many years passed. The conversation was gradually forgotten and the novice Olga remembered it only at the moment when she was being received as a nun. When Bishop Alexis (Bishop of Tallinn and Estonia Alexis - now the Most Holy Patriarch Alexis II) began to receive her he gave her the name of Elena and thereupon added: "Princess Olga was also baptised Elena". Then Mother Elena remembered the prophetic words of the blessed eldress, which came exactly true in due course of time.

Mother Ekaterina received many people in the alms-house. A priest came with me, they greeted one another. Suddenly Mother Ekaterina said: "Father, do not ride on a motorcycle!" He smiled and answered: "Mother, I do not even know how to ride a motorcycle!" "Do not ride on a motorcycle!" the eldress repeated. As I was lighting a lamp, I heard Mother Ekaterina saying: "Here there is blood, there also there is blood, here something is knocked down, there something is broken!" And she herself pointed to her shoulders, and her hands. The priest soon said goodbye and went away, having discussed his affairs with Mother Ekaterina. As it then happened, when he had gone home, he was soon called to a religious rite and had to hurry. Coming out of the house, he saw that someone was riding a motorcycle from the village and this person offered to give him a lift. At first the priest refused, but then mounted, as he was in a great hurry. On that day there was a very strong wind. An electric pylon fell along the road and the wire caught the motorcycle. The priest was seriously injured and landed up in hospital,

then remembered what the blessed eldress had told him. He wrote a letter and then came himself, but Mother Ekaterina had by that time passed away - he told us all this himself.

Mother Ekaterina foresaw many things. She knew many years in advance, for instance, who would be the Most Holy Patriarch. Bishop Pimen, when he was still assistant abbot of the Pskovo-Pecherski Monastery, often came to our monastery. Early one morning Mother Ekaterina woke me up: "Get up! We shall meet His Holiness! What side do you get out, on the right or the left?" - she asked and dressed me as subdeacon and girded herself crisscross with a towel. Bishop Pimen came to us in the alms-house, brought sweets - mandarins, chocolates, attar of roses. Mother Ekaterina and I met him at the gates as two subdeacons. She addressed him as "Your Holiness".

Mother Ekaterina also predicted concerning His Holiness Patriarch Alexis II. She said: "We met one - and we shall meet our other one!" One day Mother Ekaterina and I went out of the alms-house to the house of the Mother Superior, Mother Angelina. At that time there came to us Archbishop Sergius (Golubtsov), and our bishop - the present Most Holy Patriarch Alexis, who was then still the bishop of Tallinn and Estonia and had not long been appointed to that see. While we were going to the Mother Superior's house, Mother Ekaterina asked me: "Galochka, to whom shall we go first for blessing?" And she repeated: "To whom shall we go? ... According to rank and years, we must first go to Archbishop Sergius and according to seniority - we need to go to our own!" Then in a whisper she added: "Yes, we shall go to His Holiness, let us go to His Holiness!"

There once came to us a man dressed in ordinary civilian clothes - at that time I used to meet new arrivals in the monastery and assign them to accommodation - who at once said: "Send me to Mother Ekaterina!" I escorted him to the alms-house and to Mother Ekaterina's cell, and as she was lying down, she immediately got up and bowed to the

ground before him. Then we learned that this was Abbot Isaiah from Mount Athos. It was the first time he had been in the Pyukhtitski monastery and Mother Ekaterina had never seen him before. Subsequently his spiritual children informed us that he died at the Feast of the Annunciation.

11. In retreat

The Pyuktitski sisters recall the sorrowful time at the end of 1961 and the beginning of 1962, when a black cloud hung over the monastery and the bell ceased ringing ...

Mother Ekaterina undertook the spiritual feat of changing God's anger into mercy. Before the beginning of Lent in 1962 she went into retreat, choosing for herself as her place of residence the house of the Mother Superior, and remained there in fasting and prayer until Easter of that year. During that time not only pilgrims, but even any of the sisters did not see her face, except those living in the Mother Superior's house.

Lent passed and Holy Saturday came. Mother Ekaterina came out of her retreat. At Easter, for the first time after a long silence, the bell pealed joyfully, triumphant: "Praise be to God!"

"I remember that before the evening service I went to see the blessed eldress," Sister E. recounts. "She was lying on her bed, I stood by her and talked to her about something. Suddenly she asked: 'Did you see the saints going into the church?' - 'No, Mother Ekaterina, I did not see,' I replied. 'But I saw them. They came before the people. They went ... they went one behind the other ...' And she began to hurry me up: 'Go, go quickly to the church, as yet the service has not started.'"

12. Metropolitan Manuil

"At the beginning of December 1964 I happened to meet the great practitioner of piety and great church activist of blessed memory, Metropolitan Manuil, who at the time governed the Samara diocese," - Sister E. remembers - "During our conversation the Metropolitan asked a lot and in detail about the blessed eldress Ekaterina, calling her Schema Nun, although at that time she had not been given that rank. As far as I could, I told the Metropolitan about Mother Ekaterina and to conclude I added: `Your Grace, I think you are like one another.' I had in mind their unlimited self-created love and compassion for people, the full sacrifice of their lives to the service of God and their neighbours. And they also had something in common externally: their small stature, slim figure. Even their facial features were similar: the oval face, long nose and those large grey eyes, in which great souls were reflected ...

"Yes we have met," said the Metropolitan.

"How did you meet, personally?!", I exclaimed, knowing that this could not have been.

"No," replied the elder, smiling and lowering his head.

On the day of Mother Ekaterina's guardian angel, the Metropolitan sent her a congratulatory telegram, addressed to "Schema Nun Ekaterina." When I was going away, he asked me to bow down before the blessed eldress.

When I arrived home, I went to Mother Ekaterina and conveyed greetings from the Metropolitan, and she also surprised me, saying:

"I know him, we have met."

"How did you meet, personally?" I asked her.

Becoming serious and lowering her gaze, the eldress did not answer.

After the Metropolitan's death, in his post-mortem synodal message they found the name of Mother Ekaterina (she passed away before him) under the heading: "Concerning those who did not want to become famous."

13. "Deliberate Stupidity"

It is difficult to describe her life, as it was an unusual life, incomprehensible to the human mind - folly for the Lord - the greatest and most difficult spiritual feat with full self-abnegation and submission to the will of God.

The following is what it was possible to extract from the diary notes of her confessor:

"Folly for Christ's Sake or deliberate Stupidity"

Mother Ekaterina explained this matter very well. "Stupidity is a sin," she said. "Because the person does not make use of the gift of God, burying his talent in the ground, like a lazy slave."

And about herself, she said: "I renounced my reason, - for the glory of God, of course, to submit one's whole will to Him. I brought my life as a gift to God.

"And God gives a person the gracious gift of higher reasoning and clairvoyance. God's revelation is received through prayer" (copied word for word). To one of her spiritual daughters Mother Ekaterina wrote:

"When I gave my mind to the Lord, my heart became wider and wider ..."

During the last years of her life the Blessed Eldress rarely went out of the house, she spent more time lying down. If she got up and unexpectedly appeared somewhere, that was a major incident and meant that in that house or cell something special and

important had to happen.

Her state of health was sometimes worse, sometimes better, but she did not complain of anything and no one knew what was wrong with her. In her last letter to A.V., whom the eldress especially loved and wrote some letters only to her, Mother Ekaterina wrote:

"How easy it is to undertake a spiritual feat and how difficult it is to finish it ..."

And at this point she asked: did Anna Vasilevna know how to ease her suffering? Mother Ekaterina always had inflamed skin in the mouth, she got sore and peeled as though from burning. She suffered from chronic cold in the head, so that instead of handkerchiefs she used head-scarves. There were polyps in her nose and she breathed through the mouth. Some indications suggest a stomach complaint, and the almost continuous smothered cough suggests a lung complaint. Only God knew her suffering, she did not express it in any way externally, except that she lay down more often, but was in as awakened a spiritual state as formerly.

Mother Ekaterina took communion (after taking the vows) every Wednesday, and then she changed Wednesday into Saturday, and moreover only with her confessor.

It happened that unexpectedly for everyone Mother Ekaterina moved from her own bed to the kitchen couch of the house superior - this was twice, when the Mother Superior was dangerously ill.

14. "Abbot" John of Kronstadt

"Once in winter 1968 I went to Mother Ekaterina," Sister E. remembers. "She asked me: 'Who is the Abbess here?' 'Mother Barbara', I answered. 'And the abbot?' she asked. 'I do not know,' I replied. 'How is it you do not know who the abbot is?' she retorted. 'Who helps Mother?' I remained silent. 'Stupid!' she became annoyed. 'There is the

person who is the abbot!' she said sternly, pointing to the portrait of dear Father John of Kronstadt.

Not long before Mother Ekaterina passed away, Mother G. remembers, a monastery priest requested me to ask, whom she was leaving the monastery to. I asked: "Mother Ekaterina, who are you leaving us to, and me in particular?" Mother Ekaterina was lying down. She turned to the wall and said: "There - dear Father!" and pointed to the portrait of Father John of Kronstadt, which hung next to the icons (at that time each Pyukhtitski eldress had his portrait beside the icons). Mother Ekaterina had already told me several times before: "Dear Father was with me today! Dear Father came! Father gave me communion!"

And once it happened as follows. I came into the church - the service was then held in the refectory church in autumn, winter and early spring - the cathedral was not heated. I stood in the refectory church and saw: Father Peter was serving and near him one other priest stood in a light coloured robe. I looked again and thought: "It appears that I am seeing double today!" When the service had finished, I said to Father Peter: "Father, I am really seeing double - it seemed to me that there were two priests today!" (At that time there was only one priest and he served without a deacon).

After the service I came to Mother Ekaterina and she at once said to me: "Today Dear Father was with us in the refectory!" I had not had time to tell her anything, when she herself was telling me about this. I saw him for several minutes: he was at the altar - Father Peter was taking out pieces of bread, and the other priest stood next to him. I always stood on the left, by the ambon itself, next to the cross. That was my place - they assigned newcomers their place in the church and we did not stand in anyone else's. When the door to the altar opened, I could see everything very well. However many times I rubbed my eyes that day, I still saw two priests - I rubbed my eyes, rubbed

them again and yet there were two!

Mother Ekaterina loved and revered Dear Father very much and often remembered him. She told me: "In difficult times in my life I always asked for Father's help!" Formerly memorial services were often celebrated in the monastery for Father and the Blessed Ksenia, especially in difficult days for the monastery. On 19 October and 20 December, his commemoration days, Mother Ekaterina and all the sisters in the monastery always tried to take communion.

15. Passing

On 4 May 1968, the news flashed like lightning through the monastery compound: "Mother Ekaterina is ill ..."

One after another, the sisters proceeded to the alms-house.

The Blessed Eldress was lying down on her left side, with her face to the wall. Forcefully wringing her hands, her deep, laboured breaths indicated that she was having difficulties. She met each one with a calm, serious, somewhat sad glance. The sisters passed in line to her bed, silently bidding her farewell, bowing down to the floor to the Blessed Eldress. On that morning they gave her holy communion.

On 5 May 1968, the second Sunday after Easter, was the feast of the myrrh-bearing women. A bright dawn heralded a radiant sunrise; a warm, bright morning began, the air was fresh and pure; the birds harmoniously glorified their Creator, flying about and diving in the rays of the sun. The bells sounded for the liturgy. Mother Superior Barbara proceeded with quick steps to the church. "What about Mother Ekaterina?" - the thought flashed through her mind, and she decided to inform the Blessed Eldress. Coming to the alms-house, Mother realised, that the last moment had come in the course of this great

exceptional life, and so she did not go to the liturgy, as she had intended, but stayed by the bed of the sick woman. On the previous day, on Saturday evening, she had also not left her until late at night.

In the morning, before the liturgy, holy communion was again administered to the eldress.

After the divine liturgy there was a procession of the cross around the cathedral, in which the Mother Superior took part, and afterwards at once went to the alms-house.

A wonderful sunny spring day began. Both the hearts of the people and nature were full of bright Pascal joy. "The Pasca of the Lord! Pasca!" "The myrrh-bearing women came in the morning before the tomb of the Giver of Life!..." - the notes of the nuns' voices sounded through the air. The bells rang out solemnly. With joyful, radiant faces the people came out of the church, but sad news awaited them: "Mother Ekaterina is dying..."

At the bedside of the dying woman were the Mother Superior Barbara, Mother Superior Angelina and the Superintendent Mother, the nun Nektaria.

Mother Ekaterina was lying on her right side, covered with her robe. There was almost no life reflected in her eyes, her head was a little thrown back; through her open mouth she was breathing deeply and heavily.

At the head of the bed were placed the Kazan icon of the Mother of God, a nun's cross and candle. With the blessing of the Mother Superior, the miraculous icon of the dormition of the Mother of God was brought from the cathedral and held over the dying woman.

People were queuing to bid farewell, not hanging about and taking one another's place,

but not everyone wanted to go away. They twice read out the prayer for the dying, after which Sister E. began reading the Acatistus of the Kazan Mother of God.

Life was slowly ebbing away. The eyes became dimmer and dimmer and the facial features became pronounced. During the reading of the 13th verse "O All-Chanted Mother!" the nun Ekaterina quietly passed away ... It was 2.10 p.m.

Those wonderful eyes were closed for ever, which had so affected human hearts and penetrated into the depths of the soul.

Some were fascinated by the slow departure of the soul of the blessed eldress. The nun Ekaterina left us, keeping her life as secret and by her death preserving the secret of her life till the end.

After the necessary preparation of the body for laying in the tomb, twelve peals on the big monastery bell proclaimed the passing of the blessed eldress. At five o'clock in the evening, they carried the coffin with the body of the deceased into the cathedral and the first memorial service was at once conducted. After this began a solemn all-night service for the feast day of the great martyr George the Triumphant. After the all-night service a memorial service was again conducted, then at the tomb of the deceased began the vigil of reading the psalter, which was only broken by services and memorial services.

On the next day at the liturgy the number of people noticeably increased, and at the evening service the church was full of people. After the evening service the people for a long time did not leave the church, very many stayed at the tomb all night and prayed with the reading of psalms. At the "glory" of the kathema the whole congregation sang "O Christ, may the deceased soul of thy slave rest with the saints ..."

On 6 May a telegram was received from Metropolitan Alexis, saying: "I mourn the death of the eldress nun Ekaterina. May the Lord give rest to her soul in the heavenly abodes. I pray for the soul of the departed, I am sorry that I myself cannot accompany her in the way of all flesh. I send blessings to the Mother Superior, the Fathers, the priests, the sisters of the monastery and all those who have gathered to accompany the nun Ekaterina on her last journey. Alexis, Metropolitan of Tallinn and Estonia."

On Tuesday, 7 May after the divine liturgy, there was a ceremonial burial service for the deceased eldress.

All the bells rang. They rang joyfully and did not speak of death, but of resurrection: "Christ our God lead us from death to life, from earth to heaven ..."

Mother Ekaterina was buried at the altar section of the Nikolo-Arsenievski cemetery church, on the south side, next to the path*.

*The biography was obtained from letters of Tatiana Konstantinovna Malkov-Panina, the wife of the elder brother of the nun Ekaterina, Georgia (died in 1969) and reminiscences of the sisters of the Pyukhtitski monastery. --

Pravrajika Ajayaprana

Nivedita's life was a unique one in every feature, quite different from that of every foreigner who lived, worked and died for India. This uniqueness is best reflected in the words of Bepin Chandra Pal who says: 'Nivedita came to us, as no European had as yet come, not as an adept, but as a novice; not as a teacher but as a learner'. She came to this land as a humble student of a great teacher and became one of the people.

As in the case of all great souls Miss Margaret Noble, as she was known before she became Nivedita 'The Dedicated', felt a void in her early life. She was discontented with her surroundings and her life, and felt a hankering after something which she could not yet define. Born as the daughter of a priest, her keen, discriminating, reasoning intellect could not take in, as a whole, the dogmatic views and teachings of the Church. She longed for that religion which could satisfy her intellect. The Church could not quieten the turbulent waves raging in her mind, so she began turning towards agnosticism, as did many intellectuals of the then European society.

In the social field Miss Noble tried to drown herself in incessant work. The field of education attracted her. She plunged herself heart and soul into the propagation of the new educational system envisaged by Pestalozzi, but even this could not satisfy her hungry soul. She felt she had a mission to achieve on this earth.

Just at this crucial hour there rose on the Eastern horizon the blazing sun, in the personality of Swami Vivekananda, before whose brilliance the New World stood awe-struck. After his thundering success in America, Swami Vivekananda landed on British soil bearing the torch of Vedanta. Miss Noble was one of those who accepted him as their guide and guru. She felt herself like one of 'the people that walketh in darkness have seen a great light'. Miss Noble's appreciation of the new personality ran thus: 'I

recognised the heroic fibre of the man, and desired to make myself the servant of his, for the love of his own people. But it was his character to which I had thus done obeisance.'

Was it a thing so easy for a person like Miss Noble to follow a personality like that of Vivekananda? Days and months of mental agony, continuous doubting, questioning and testing at every step preceded the final acceptance. In later years in a reminiscent mood Nivedita call herself Swamiji's 'most rebellious disciple'. Every truth revealed by this strange monk was new to the Western mind, but arrested the attention, admiration and veneration of intellectuals of the day. The idea of man's oneness with the All-powerful, Omnipresent Being staggered the English thinkers. They could not at first understand the significance of the words, 'Ye, children of Immortality', but still they felt a thrill, an elation at thus being equated with the Supreme power behind the universe. Miss Noble struggled hard to model her ideas so as to be in tune with the principle of a life quite foreign to her.

Slowly but surely the teaching and learning process went on. Miss Noble was overcome with admiration at the masterly way in which the teacher guided his 'most rebellious disciple' through the intricacies of the abstruse truths of Hindu philosophy. According to Nivedita, 'The teacher who really forms us is he who sees better than we do ourselves what we really long and strive for, how far our effort is right, and in what points we might make it still finer and better. He who interprets it to ourselves, and at the same time gives us hope, is the true educator.' This is really an outline of what Swamiji did to Miss Noble to transform her into Nivedita. In due course the aspirant in her began to see that the Hindu religion, the Sanatana Dharma, the most ancient of all religions, is the only one which can give the sorrowing world a torch of solace and peace. 'Because it has the power of self-addiction and re-adaptation, in greater degree than any other

religion that the world has ever seen. We believe it to be the one immortal faith, the great tree-stem, bearing on itself, as outlying branches, all the other fugitive creeds of the world', says Nivedita.

Love for Hinduism brought her closer in touch with the land of its birth. She saw her master uttering the name of his motherland with respect, in every breath. Here religion and poverty were almost synonyms. Hence attraction towards Aryavarta began to take a more and more definite shape in her, and a time came when she longed to leave the shores of her own motherland and come over to this ancient land for ever.

Miss Noble's master was not ready to accept her service at first, though he himself once wrote to her from India, 'I have plans for the women of my own country in which you, I think, could be of great help to me.' Two factors seem to be the possible reasons for his reluctance to accept the services offered by this disciple, points out one biographer. One was the consideration about the strange climate and hard living conditions of his land. The second was that Swamiji was absolutely intolerant of those foreigners who posed as patrons or sympathisers towards his poverty-stricken country-men. He suspected such an attitude in Miss Noble. He used to shower praises on her in words like, 'It is no superstition with you, I am sure, you have the making in you of a world-mover, and others will also come.' Still he did not welcome her offer. But her persistence, self-abnegating sincerity and conscious efforts at identifying herself with the land of her adoption at last won over his heart. Not only did he give her permission to come to this land, but he applauded her coming in exultant words - 'Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man but a woman; a real lioness, to work for the Indians, women specially. India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination and above all, the Celtic

blood make you just the woman wanted.'

The disciple came and was very heartily and enthusiastically welcomed in the homeland of the master. She was dedicated at the holy feet of Sri Ramakrishna by her illustrious teacher and from there emerged the tapasvini Nivedita. Gradually but accurately the young English lady began Indianising herself in her personal life. It was a remarkable success, astonishing even to her master. In one of the most backward, orthodox and thereby original sections of Calcutta, began such a life of silent service and unostentatious spiritual s%odhana, that the women of the neighbourhood soon came out of their rigidly orthodox seclusion to welcome her as one of their own; and they all became ardently devoted to her. She was the guardian angel to them in all their hours of need. The poor uneducated women lived in the most unhygienic surroundings. When plague made its devilish advent over the city of Calcutta dealing death and destruction, Nivedita could be seen in the innermost by-lanes of that city cleaning the dirty drains or sitting near the bedside of an ailing patient giving solace and succour to a bereaved mother or daughter in the name of Kali. The mem sahib was a goddess to the people of the locality.

Education was the field in which Nivedita found her real moorings. 'Knowledge,' she says, 'is truly the bread of life. Let us hasten, with the best that is in us, to offer knowledge to all about us!' With this idea her school started on a very meagre scale. At first it was very difficult for her to get pupils, for the orthodox parents did not allow girls to go to school, but slowly her school began to gain recognition as she tried to coax and persuade the girls, by various methods, to take to education. The Holy Mother herself installed the photo of Sri Ramakrishna in the school and that day was considered by Nivedita the greatest day in her life. This school which now became the whole centre of her attention began to grow up slowly till it flowered into today's huge school in the

Bagh Bazaar section of Calcutta, one of the major schools of the city - bearing her name.

Nivedita did not intend her institution merely to be a place where girls could learn reading and writing. She wanted to use this institution of hers as an experiment to demonstrate practically the ideas and ideals of women's education as propounded by Swamiji. So the curriculum she adopted was an attempt at carving out an all-round figure of a woman proficient in arts, science and housekeeping along with the mastery of the three `R's. Now, this institution in its pristine glory is a standing witness for all time to the good work that this self-dedicated foreign woman has done for our motherland.

The school and relief activities during the epidemics, brought Nivedita more and more in touch with the poorer section of Calcutta. Slowly she began to feel that religion or even education cannot by itself present a permanent remedy for the eradication of the ills of the Indian masses. At the root of all evil was the political subjugation by a foreign power. Her head hung in shame, many a time, at the dishonour meted out to some of the greatest of Indian personalities merely because they belonged to a subject nation. She began to feel that her task was `to awaken the nation, not to influence a few women'. The famous `Bose war' prompted her to align herself with the anti-government parties of the province. Yet, in her heart of hearts, lingered a small doubt that this switching over to the field of politics from the life of a religious recluse was alienating her from the ideals set by her master. She wanted his full approval for this new trend of her activity, but whenever the topic of her activities was broached before him, Swamiji assumed an indifferent attitude. `Habitually Swamiji never dictated terms nor did he ever call for any confession of faith', remarks a writer. He was leaving her free to act on her own. She felt the loosening of the tie more and more as Swamiji's last days

approached, but Nivedita moved on undauntedly. The words of her Master always rang in her ears, 'I will stand by you unto death whether you work for India or not, whether you give up Vedanta or remain in it. "The tusks of an elephant come out but once, but never go back" - so are the words of a man never retracted.' Though she never came to the limelight of politics, her strong power influenced many young enthusiasts to dedicate themselves at the altar of the motherland.

Soon Swamiji shook off the shackles of his mortal coil and became one with the Infinite. Nivedita's drifting away to politics now clashed with the ideals and rules of the Ramakrishna Mission of which she was a member, so the Mission authorities had to ask her to secede from the organisation, which she did with much heart-rending, by announcing her withdrawal in the papers. Nivedita of the Ramakrishna Mission became afterwards Nivedita of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda.

The field of art also was very much influenced by Nivedita's life. The famous artists of Bengal, Nandalal Bose, Rabindranath Tagore and others, were in close contact with her and they gained much in the field of drawing and painting from the valuable suggestions given by her. Rabindranath Tagore moved very closely with Nivedita and was much influenced and encouraged by her. The field of science also felt the impact of her personality. Sri J.C. Bose in the dark days that followed his world-shaking discovery found in her his best friend, guide and consoler. The last days of Nivedita were spent with the Bose family. Under the snow-capped Himalayas, amidst the calmest of surroundings, nursed by her dearest of friends on October 7, 1911, Sister Nivedita breathed her last at the age of forty-four with the name of 'Mother' on her lips.

The symbol of Kali attracted Nivedita the most. Her lecture on Kali-worship is a treatise by itself. It is a masterpiece. In this symbol her religious aspiration finds its real ground. In exultant language she goes on finding out more and more hidden meaning in each and

every aspect of the idol. To the ordinary man Kali's protruding tongue bespeaks of all that is terrible and devilish, whereas to Nivedita it is the token of the natural shyness and fear of the Indian village maiden. Animal sacrifice is in her eyes a humble attempt of man at sacrificing at least a small possession of his, in his inability to sacrifice himself at Her hallowed feet. Thus the vision of Kali was to her 'the vision of the greatest symbol, perhaps, that man has ever imagined for himself'.

Mr Noble, the father, had foreseen years ago the hidden propensity and incalculable potentialities of his daughter. On his deathbed, he had told his wife that her eldest child was not an ordinary one, but she was born to do great deeds in the world. That came to pass. She lived such a life of tapasya, service and sacrifice that India will remember her with gratitude for all time. It is but fitting and proper that we pay our homage to the illustrious disciple when we celebrate the birth centenary of the illustrious teacher.

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Religion and Life (continued)

Swami Bhuteshananda

Swami Vivekananda has called Sri Ramakrishna the embodiment of the Vedas. Why?

'The embodiment of the Vedas' means that he is the personification of eternal knowledge.

Maharaj, the spiritual treasure which Sri Ramakrishna has handed over to Swami Vivekananda, and has spread through the medium of Swami Vivekananda, has not become so widespread even after a hundred years; why is this so?

The number of aspirants who really and sincerely yearn for spiritual life is extremely less. Amongst those who have taken to the spiritual path, only one or two have reached the goal. As the Gita [7.3] says: 'Amongst the thousands and thousands of people, occasionally a few try to attain the knowledge of the Self; and amongst these few, rarely do one or two reach the goal.' So you can imagine the situation, reading the Gita. What the Upanisads say is only an echo of this truth. Sri Rama, Sri Krsna, Bhagavan Buddha - so many avatars have come from time to time. Keeping their ideals before him, if the human being struggles with steadfastness, then alone can he reach the goal; not otherwise.

In the Vedas, Upanisads, and Puranas there are so many lives of saints and sages mentioned. The Truth has been realized in the lives of so many spiritual aspirants since thousands of years. So we should not give up *sadhana*, thinking that God is impossible to reach.

Swami Vivekananda has declared that the *Satya Yuga* has begun with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna. The world cannot be bettered all in a day. And it is also not true that bad people are to be found only in this age of the four, Satya, Treta, Dvapara and *Kali*. Good and bad are there always. It is true that Sri Ramakrishna has come. But it is not true that just with the advent of avatars the world will change for the better. This is the sport of the Lord. If all are liberated, where will be the play of the Lord? An artist is painting a picture. He cannot paint using only one colour. The picture will be complete when there is a harmonious blend of all the colours. The Upanisads declare: 'The descendants of Prajapati were of two types: the gods and the demons. For obvious

reasons, the gods were indeed few in number and the demons were numerous.'

[*Brhadaranyaka Upanisad*, 1.3.1.]

God incarnates only to correct the lifestyle of human beings. Sri Ramakrishna has said that when Rama incarnated, only twelve sages recognized him as the Lord. The others thought he was Rama, the son of King Dasaratha. Deluded by the power of maya, human beings cannot comprehend the true nature of God; and this is happening since time immemorial. This world is impermanent, and the avatar too is coming and going; but only a few can understand him.

So it is not true that the world will be transformed in no time just because Sri Ramakrishna came. But this is also true that his life has inspired a number of people. Doctors are trying to cure diseases. Does that mean all the diseases in the world are gone? God comes as the human being to sport here, and since ordinary minds are impure, they cannot recognize Him. The number of demonic type of human beings is far more than the godly type. If they so wish, people can change themselves through the practice of *sadhanas*. He who has attained love for divine bliss can enjoy it by being alert and practising spiritual disciplines.

During the years when Sri Ramakrishna lived at Dakshineswar, some people stayed with him all through the day. There were neighbours and others. Did they have spiritual awakening? I shall tell you of one such day. Swami Saradananda was sitting with devotees. Amongst the devotees sat a newcomer. He said: 'I have come to have holy company.' Saradanandaji replied: 'Is holy company so easy? When Sri Ramakrishna was a priest at the Kali temple at Dakshineswar, there were priests, workers, neighbours and others who lived all the twenty-four hours near him. But no improvement was noticed in any of them, though they lived with the avatar himself.'

Individuals go according to their natures. So to reach a particular goal, the noble mind takes to noble paths while the ignoble goes along the ignoble path. Sri Ramakrishna saw God in the so-called sinners too. He is travelling by a carriage and sees some drunkards enjoying their inebriated state. Seeing them, Sri Ramakrishna experiences the bliss of Brahman. He was so pure! Some woman of bad character stands at her door in the forbidden locality. Seeing them, Sri Ramakrishna says, `Jai Mother Anandamayi! Jai Mother Anandamayi!' Such was his way of looking at things.

Consider Swami Vivekananda himself. He is staying as the royal guest of the king of Khetri. A dancer is about to sing and the king invites Swamiji to listen to her songs. Swamiji sends word that he being a monk cannot go to listen to the songs of the dancer-girl. So Swamiji does not go. But since the king forces Swamiji to come, he has to go. Meanwhile, that dancer begins to sing: `O Lord! Please do not consider my faults. Your name is Same-sightedness; so please save me. The knife is used both for worship (in dressing fruits) and for killing animals by the butcher, etc.' Listening to the singer's heartrending prayer and pain through her song, Swamiji is moved. He says: `Mother, you have said the right thing. Everywhere there is Brahman alone. No one is a sinner.' It is said in the Bible that you see evil in the world only because your eyes are bad. To Sri Ramakrishna, nothing was bad or evil: everything was pure and holy. To him the same Brahman is present everywhere. So who will he discard, who will he own? It is like standing on the Calcutta Monument and seeing everything as the same: the mounds and troughs appear alike.

In Holy Mother's life too we see instances of equanimity. Mother's love was for everyone. Amjad was a dacoit, but all the same, Holy Mother called him `son' and showered her love on him as she would on Swami Saradananda, her faithful attendant.

The Divine Mother is said to have told Sri Ramakrishna to remain in bhavamukha. What

is bhavamukha?

Swami Saradanandaji has explained *bhavamukha* in *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*. *Bhavamukha* implies the source of all ideas. That is the supreme state where infinite (*ananta*) and finite (*santa*) are experienced simultaneously.

Swami Saradananda says: `The Master [ie Sri Ramakrishna] appeared to us as a visible embodiment of the "aggregate of all kinds of ideas." Such a great king in "the world of ideas" was never seen before. Constantly dwelling in Bhavamukha, the Master manifested in himself to the fullest degree all the spiritual states from the non-dual Nirvikalpa to the Savikalpa, acquainted devotees of all classes with the details of their particular paths and goals, and thus brought to them extraordinary light in the darkness of ignorance, unprecedented hope in despair, and incomparable peace amidst worldly trials and tribulations' [*Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, p. 435].

Maharaj, shall we say that the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna are the Vedas? No, not that way. Sri Ramakrishna's words are not Vedas, but he has spoken the truths of the Vedas.

Hriday served Sri Ramakrishna so much. Yet why did he suffer the way he did? M., the compiler of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, remarked once that Hriday was perhaps not free from selfish motives in his service to Sri Ramakrishna. That may be the reason for his suffering. Further, there are no hard and fast rules that a devotee of God will not suffer grief and sorrow; there are many such instances in the Puranas. The devotee Sudama was very poor and could not afford even daily meals. One day Sudama went to Krsna to seek help. Krsna asked him: `What have you brought for me?' Poor Sudama did not have much to give. He brought out a few sweet balls and hesitantly handed them over to Krsna. Krsna expressed great happiness at this and ate the sweet balls. Sudama returned to his village and saw that his hut was no longer there. Instead, there stood a

huge building. This is not a reward for Sudama's sweets, nor is it the fruit of his karma. This is an imagination. If one has craving for wealth and prays to God, it is not that God will fulfil the wishes. The gopis of Vrindaban did not know anything but God. Yet they had to weep their whole life. Some gopis had been taken to Dwaraka. While returning, some dacoits looted their wealth; so they jumped into a well and committed suicide. So it is not that you become wealthy and happy just because you are a devotee. Wealth and happiness are all imaginations of the human mind. Human beings love to think of these things. The *Gita* [7.16] says that there are four types of devotees: one type who call on God to remove distress; a second type who want to know His nature; a third type who seek wealth and plenty; and the last type who are persons of knowledge, who hold on to Him, knowing His nature. He who knows God's nature and holds on to Him is His greatest devotee.

What is the meaning of 'Alakh Niranjana'?

Alakh means 'that which is not seen' and *niranjana* means 'without any stains'; it is the Self or Atman.

Brahman is static. When It is creating, preserving and destroying, It is called Adyasakti. Sri Ramakrishna advises us to pray to Adyasakti. Now, are Sri Ramakrishna and the Mother different?

Sri Ramakrishna too is Adyasakti alone! He has said several times that within him Adyasakti or the Divine Mother alone resides. He said, 'I feel that it is the Divine Mother Herself who dwells in this body and plays with the devotees' [The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 831]. We must think of Sri Ramakrishna as the embodiment of all moods and all the gods. Holy Mother is a special manifestation of Sri Ramakrishna's power. If we hold on to Sri Ramakrishna, it means we hold on to Holy Mother, and vice versa.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that he would have the vision of the Divine Mother as he came down from the state of nirvikalpa samadhi. How is this explained?

Between the non-dual and the dual states is the world of bhava. Since in that state there is a fusion - and so the experience - of both non-duality and duality, Sri Ramakrishna could retain his power of speech and narrate his experiences. He had to teach the world, so the Divine Mother told him that he must remain in bhavamukha. That source from which the world of dualities (jagat) originates is called bhavamukha, 'the source of bhava'.

Please do not compare Sri Ramakrishna with any of his disciples, or with anybody else. In his disciples there was only a partial expression of his spiritual glory; if not, they too would have been called incarnations. Sri Ramakrishna has no parallel. Sri Ramakrishna has said that there were two persons in his body: one, the Divine Mother, and the other, the devotee [cf. The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 943]. There is no conflict between dualism and non-dualism there. Swami Turiyananda used to quote Sri Ramakrishna and say that the body knows its troubles, but let the mind be immersed in bliss. Sri Sankara also has said: "One has to endure suffering if one assumes a body; so hold on to the Self." (Kaupina-pancakam)

Sri Ramakrishna has said that Vedanta is not good for the householder. Why?

By Vedanta, the 'I am He' idea is meant. Sri Ramakrishna has said that for those who lead householders' lives, and those who identify themselves with the body, the attitude of 'I am He' is not good [The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 593]. So he has said that they must not read books on Vedanta like the Yogavasistha. But he has advised householders to look upon God as the Master and on themselves as His servants.

Maharaj, is it possible to follow so many teachings of Sri Ramakrishna?

Is it possible for any to follow all the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna? Each individual

