

Magazine Articles July / August 2006

1. [Divine Wisdom - The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna
December 14/16, 1883](#)
2. [Editorial - Tyaga or Renunciation](#)
3. [Work Without Worry - Swami Bodhananda](#)
4. [The Indian Tree or What's in a Name? - John Phillips](#)
5. [Freedom in Vedanta \(continued\) - Stuart Rose](#)
6. [If Ramakrishna Were Alive Today \(contd.\) - Swami Chetanananda](#)
7. [Leaves of an Ashrama: 16. Benefits from Dying not to be Disparaged
Swami Vidyatmananda](#)
8. [Their Power and Their Love - Swami Vijayananda](#)
9. [Reviews by JP](#)
10. [News and Views](#)

Divine Wisdom

The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna December 14/16, 1883

Question: (asked by a devotee)

"Sir, how should one live in the world"

Answer:

"Live in the world as the mudfish lives in the mud. One develops love of God by going away from the world into solitude now and then, and meditating on God. After that one can live in the world unattached. The mud is there, and the fish has to live in it, but his body is not stained by the mud. Such a man can lead the life of a householder in a spirit of detachment.

"One cannot renounce by mere wish. There are Prarabdha Karma, inherited tendencies, and the like. Once a Yogi said to a king, 'Live with me in the forest and think of God.' The king replied: 'That I cannot very well do. I could live with you, but still cannot leave

the desire for enjoyment. If I live in this forest, perhaps I shall create a kingdom even there. I still have desires."

Question: (asked by Mr. Mukherji)

"Sir, what is the difference between worldly and otherworldly things?"

Answer:

"While striving for the realization of God, the aspirant has to practise renunciation, applying the logic of 'Neti, Neti'- 'Not this, not this'. But after attaining the vision of God, he realizes that God alone has become all things.

"At one time Rama was overpowered by the spirit of renunciation. Dasaratha, worried at this, went to the sage Vasishtha and begged him to persuade Rama not to give up the world. The sage came to Rama and found him in a gloomy mood. The fire of intense renunciation had been raging in the Prince's mind. Vasishtha said: 'Rama, why should you renounce the world? Is the world outside God? Reason with me.' Rama realized that the world had evolved from the Supreme Brahman. So He said nothing.

"Buttermilk is made from the same substance as butter. One who realizes this knows that butter goes with buttermilk and buttermilk with butter. After separating the butter with great effort - that is to say, after attaining Brahmajnana - you will realize that as long as butter exists, buttermilk must also exist. Wherever there is butter, there must be buttermilk as well. As long as one feels that Brahman exists, one must also be aware that the universe, living beings, and the twenty-four cosmic principles exist as well."

Editorial

Tyaga or Renunciation

Swami Dayatmananda

Tyaga means renunciation or sacrifice. Renunciation is one of the most important spiritual quality; it is the very foundation of spirituality. Without it no one can progress in any field of life. Man becomes great in proportion to all that he can give up.

The Bhagavad Gita is an exposition on renunciation.

There are hundreds of commentaries on it, but Sri Ramakrishna's commentary is the shortest and the most succinct:

"The essence of the Gita is what you get by repeating the word ten times. The word becomes 'tagi', which refers to renunciation. The essence of the Gita is: 'O man, renounce everything and practise spiritual discipline for the realization of God.'"

The word renunciation does appear to be negative, life-denying, and almost abnormal, especially these days. The progress made by science and technology has brought many changes in the ideals and attitudes of people everywhere. One of the results of progress in science is that we have lost faith in God and religion and our preoccupation with this world has increased.

All the great teachers of the world proclaimed again and again that man is divine and without manifesting this innate divinity man cannot attain to true peace and happiness. There is a teleological urge in every one of us which will not allow us to rest until we

reach perfection and infinity.

It is in this context of spiritual life alone that the idea of renunciation makes sense. Renunciation or sacrifice is a most natural thing in the world. Parents make great sacrifices of their time, energy, wealth and happiness for the sake of their children. Great men forgo their happiness for the sake of art, freedom or some new discovery. Patriots cheerfully give up their life for the good of their country. People are doing it all the time albeit without being aware of it most of the time; without renunciation life becomes impossible.

Only when it comes to spiritual life people balk at the idea of renunciation. Saints and sages renounce the joys of life willingly, cheerfully and undergo lots of suffering for realizing God. There is no religion which does not advocate renunciation; there is no scripture which does not extol renunciation. Without renunciation there can be no spiritual life.

Sri Ramakrishna says: "Knowledge never comes without renunciation of lust and possessions. With the dawn of renunciation is destroyed all ignorance, all Avidya."

What is renunciation? It is the giving up of the finite and mortal in order to attain the Infinite and Immortal; it is the giving up of the lower for the attainment of the higher. Renunciation is not in giving up of the external. It is not in putting on the ochre dress and wandering about. True renunciation is in the giving up of egoism, of lust and gold. Here is a relevant passage from the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna:

Narendra said to the Master with a smile, referring to Bhavanath, "He has given up fish and betel-leaf."

Master: "Why so? What is the matter with fish and betel-leaf? They aren't harmful. The renunciation of 'lust and gold' is the true renunciation."

Here is a beautiful story:

Once a famous scholar, respected and wealthy, longed for the realization of God. He approached a holy man and asked him for instruction.

The holy man smiled, and said: "You must renounce. That is the way to the Self."

Accordingly, the scholar gave away all he possessed, his treasured books, his gold, even his house. He was left with only a simple loin-cloth to cover his body, a blanket, and a bowl with which to beg his food.

Time passed, but he still was unable to find peace. He went again to the holy man and asked him for instruction.

Again he was given the same answer: "Renounce. That is the way to the Self."

The scholar owned only a bowl, simple cloth, and blanket; he gave these away also. A long time passed, but he did not find peace. So he approached the holy man and was given the same advice.

He said to himself: "I renounced everything except this body. If it is this which stands in my way of realization, I shall give it up also."

He built a large fire and was on the point of throwing himself into the flames when his teacher arrived and held him back. "What are you doing?" he said. "Do you think you will realize God by destroying your body?"

Then the scholar realized it was his "ego" he must renounce, and at last understood the true meaning of renunciation. In time he realized the imperishable Self, which is beyond all change and attained peace.

A rich young man asked Jesus, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus said unto him, "One thing thou lackest; go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasures in heaven: and come, take up thy cross, and follow me. "

Renunciation is the turning point in all the various Yogas.

Swami Brahmananda said: "Sri Ramakrishna's message in this age is renunciation of lust and gold." Renunciation of lust and gold is the ornament of a holy man, and it is the only

means of attaining God.

This also is the message of the Gita and all scriptures. Without renunciation one cannot attain to Self-Realization.

As the Kaivalya Upanishad says: "Immortality is not attained through action, progeny or wealth; it is attained only by renunciation."

Work Without Worry **Swami Bodhananda**

There are two elements in Karma Yoga. One is ethical, and the other psychological. The former pertains to the amount of quantity of result, and the latter consists in right thought or purity of intention. Krishna, in his teachings, has attached greater importance to the latter than to the former. In one of the verses in the Gita he says: "Whoever, with sincere love and devotion offers to the Lord a glass of water or a flower or a leaf or a fruit, any simple thing, that is more acceptable to Him, than any pompous gift." I want to tell you a story that will illustrate this:

Once Arjuna, the great hero of the Mahabharata, performed a great sacrifice, and he thought that he was a great sacrificer, because he had given away many precious things in that sacrifice. In order to humble his vanity, Krishna called his attention to a little mongoose, one-half of whose body was natural, and one-half gold. When Arjuna saw this strange animal, he asked Krishna how this animal could be one-half natural, and the other half gold; and Krishna said, "Why don't you go to him and ask the reason?" Then Arjuna goes to this animal, and asks him, "How is it that half of your body is natural, and the other half gold?" The mongoose says: "Sir, many hundreds of years ago there was a great sacrifice performed by a small family of Brahmins, and I happened to crawl along that place, and one-half of my body turned gold. I heard a voice say that if I ever came to another place where a similar sacrifice was performed, then the other half of my body would also become gold, and I heard that you had performed a great sacrifice right on this spot and I am crawling here, but the other half of my body has not turned gold yet."

Then Arjuna says: "Will you tell me how this sacrifice was performed, and who performed it?"

The mongoose says: "Sir, there was once a great famine and there lived a family of Brahmins, a man, his wife and two children, and they did not have any food for several days, and one afternoon this Brahmin got some flour and when they were going to eat the bread that they had made from it, a guest came to the door and said: 'I have not eaten any food for several days. Give me something to eat or I shall die.' Then this Brahmin family opened their door and invited him in and gave him the bread that they had made, and the result was that they all died that night from starvation." And this was the greatest sacrifice, although it was done unnoticed. Nobody knew it was done, but the spirit of it was great, the intention, the thought was pure.

So, we must endeavour to have that right intention. Our object should be not only to perform great works, works that can commend themselves to ordinary people's attention, like the building of large hospitals, or school houses and things like that, but also to develop purity of thought. Of course, these institutions are great, but far greater

than the building of these institutions, is the developing of the right spirit and purpose. If a person does not know how to be good himself, and wants to do good to others, his actions are not so meritorious as the intentions of those who know how to live right, and be good rather than do good pompously.

If you can be good, then whatever you do must necessarily be good. So, in our philosophy, greater importance is attached to psychology, to right disposition, and right thought rather than to mere achievement or success. That is, that man who can maintain an attitude of evenmindedness, who is pure from within, from conscience, that man is a greater worker than he who does work for the sake of name, fame, praise or honour.

Those who work for name or fame, get the merit right away; but those who can work without any desire for name or fame, those who can work for the sake of the work, for the love of the work, they are great; they may not build hospitals, they may not build schools, or roads, but they build character. Their thoughts work, their thoughts can cross the ocean, and can penetrate mountains. They are the ones who keep the fire of spirituality ablaze on earth.

In the Western countries any work that does not bring a grist to the grinding mill is not considered great, but in the East, particularly in India, we call those men who have developed purity of thought and purpose, and can maintain equanimity in regard to all pairs of opposites, we call them real workers.

By worry we waste our time and energy. And what is the cause of worry? Intense desire for the fruits of action. Those people who desire the fruits of action as a rule never succeed. Those alone succeed who do not speculate upon the result. Says Krishna: "You have a right to the work, and not to the fruits thereof." That is, dedicate the fruits of work to the Lord, and if we can do this, then the results come to us many, many times multiplied, but if we work for actual and immediate results, they come just in that form. If we can work with love and devotion without wishing for the results then they come many, many times more in quality as well as in quantity.

That is, those people who have that devotion, they always have equanimity, nothing can disturb their calm, their peace and poise, but those who are impatient and anxious for the fruits of their work are not well poised; they worry and as a rule do not derive real benefit from what they do.

I will tell you another story:

Once the great sage Narada was going to Heaven to see the Lord, and on his way he met two Yogins. They had been practising for many years, fifty or sixty years, and they asked him to inquire of the Lord how many more years they would remain there and meditate before they could see Him. Narada delivered the message to the Lord and when he returns these two men see him again, and ask him what the Lord said. Pointing to a large tree, says Narada: "The Lord said that you, both of you, would see Him after as many years as there are leaves on that tree." There were thousands and thousands of small leaves on that tree. One of them, when he heard this, began to dance with great joy, saying: "After all, I shall see the Lord." The other man grumbled: "I have been practising so many years and I have to wait still so many years before I can see Him." Then Narada said to the first man: "You have already seen the Lord." So, those who can work with patience, who can make work their worship, they have seen the Lord, have reached the spiritual goal, because they have attained the state of peace and poise. So, we must have this poise, which Krishna calls samattwa, even-mindedness. "Yoga is the state of equanimity in regard to all pairs of opposites, like success and failure, victory and defeat, profit and loss, praise and blame." That is the lesson Krishna has taught in the Gita. Develop that attitude, that perfect poise, and you will ever be in peace in the midst of all actions.

He says: 'Why do you worry about these things, wealth or poverty, health or ill-health,

success or failure? These things come and go. No one can avoid those things throughout his life. But he is great who does not attach any importance to them, can treat them alike, yet remains devoted to work."

Those who are undeveloped attach greater importance to the first one of these opposites than to the other and suffer the consequence. For instance, they are very susceptible of praise, they appreciate it, but when its opposite comes they feel sad and unhappy.

This does not mean that we must not work. Krishna has emphasized work. "No one can live even one moment without doing some kind of work. He knows the secret of work who can make all work into the worship of God." And we can convert all work into God's worship by maintaining the right disposition.

"Whoever can consecrate the fruits of action to the Lord and can live in this world like a lotus leaf which floats in the water, but is never wet with water, that man is a great worker." We must live in this world without being of it. So, Krishna advocates work for its own sake, love for the sake of love.

In the Western countries if there is no return in love, then that is not considered as love. We in India consider that a true lover is a great sacrificer. His is not a shopkeeper's love. The shopkeeper buys something and sells something, and he always balances his account to ascertain whether he is gaining or losing. But the true lover considers it a privilege to love without any thought of return in any shape or form. He likes to die in his love. That is his highest reward.

I will tell you another story:

"Yudhishthira, the older brother of Arjuna, was famous for his truthfulness. He never uttered a prevarication in his life. But he suffered so much; he lost his Kingdom, he was separated from his brothers, from his sisters and mother, and sometimes even from his wife, and, mind you, Krishna himself was his greatest friend. But he took his suffering in a most philosophical way, with calmness and cheerfulness. Neither joy nor sorrow, nothing, could disturb his mind. His wife, Draupadi, once asked him, "How is it that you who are so virtuous, so good, loving and kind to everybody had to suffer these hardships?" "But my beloved one, I love the Himalayas for their beauty; so I love the Lord because the Lord is beautiful. I do not expect any return for my love. It is my nature to love, to sacrifice. I do not calculate the results." This was Yudhishthira's reply.

So, we can dedicate all our works and their fruits to the Lord. He who thinks constantly of the fruits of action does not get them, but he who does not care for them, and works constantly, to him they come in manifold ways and forms.

We have no faith in the Lord, we have no faith in ourselves, we have no faith in the teachings of the great Masters. That is the reason why we don't accomplish much spiritually.

"Those who, with whole-hearted love, can devote themselves to God, He brings unto them whatever they need."

Those people don't have to worry about things; if they have the right faith, faith which is the result of knowledge, then all these things that they need come to them. The Lord Himself brings all things to His devotee.

One commentator, a great devotee, made some footnotes on that verse in the Gita, where Sri Krishna has said that the "Lord brings with His own hands what His devotee needs." The comment was that that verse is not literally true. After making that remark, he went out for his ablution. He was worried about his needs. He had nothing to eat at home, and out of that anxious thought he made that remark. He did not find consistency between the Lord's action and His promise.

In the meantime, a young boy, with a basket filled with fruits, rice, butter, bread, etc., comes to his wife, but his body was streaming with fresh blood as if somebody had whipped him. When the wife saw this young man she asked, "You are covered with

blood, fresh blood, who beat you?" Then he said, "Your husband," and saying that, he disappeared and when her husband returned home, she scolded him saying, "That beautiful boy; you beat him!" He said, "What do you say? I did not beat any boy." The wife said, "He came with these things, and you beat him." Then he realized what had happened: "Oh, Lord, I made that remark, ignorant as I am, forgive me. Now I realize that you actually supply your devotees with all their needs."

So, my dear friends, if we had that sincere faith in the Lord, I don't think we need worry about anything. All these things come. So, the cause of worry is our lack of trust and faith in the Lord.

The great cause of all our worry and suffering is the mistaken identification of the Self with the non-self. When we have things, when we have a beautiful body, a comfortable home, riches, etc., we think that we are these things. We all think that we are the body. All of us have that mistaken notion that the body is the same as the Self or the soul, and that mistaken attachment to the non-self is the cause of all our troubles here. It is not that we must not have these things; if wealth comes, take it and enjoy it. If poverty comes also take it and don't complain. We welcome certain things and we resent certain other things. That is wrong. There are people who are so stoical, so pessimistic, that they seek sorrow and suffering, so that they may remain pure and God-fearing. But that is not a right thing, either.

That attitude is just as wrong as that of those who seek only the other set of opposites like health, wealth, success, and so on. The right attitude should be the attitude of evenness, or equability in regard to all those things. Do not seek or reject either. Take them all with calmness, serenity and cheerfulness.

So, if you have homes, estates, children, always know that these things do not belong to you; that thought of ownership is the cause of all sorrow and distress.

Those people who have identified their true self with these other things, when these things are lost they think that a part of their own self has been lost. The right thing is this: while you have a home, while you have children and wealth, take good care of them, always remembering that these things are not yours forever - that they shall not remain forever with you. Not that you must find fault with them. Try to be calm and cheerful in the midst of all conditions, pleasant or unpleasant.

We must always hold ourselves as trustees. If we have children, we must love them and do our duties by them; educate them; feed them; clothe them; shelter them. If they die we must not mourn. We must not think that we have lost everything.

That is love. Ordinarily we love through selfish attachment to the body, to the person; we do not love the spirit, the real man. If a man really and truly loves a friend or a relative, when he dies he will never mourn. On the contrary, he will rejoice. He rejoices because he knows that the deceased is now freer and happier in the care of the Lord Himself, who gave him to him for some time. Such things have actually happened. This is not a story:

A friend of ours had only one son, and while the son was living he was very devoted to him, and when he died, he actually rejoiced and said: "I know that my son will be better cared for now by the Lord Himself and be happier there."

To illustrate the evil that comes to us from selfish attachment, I will tell you a story:

Once there lived a grocer. A holy man came one day to his house, and was his guest for a few days. He gave his host some spiritual instructions. Of course, spiritual instruction is the greatest gift. Thoreau once said: "One word of wisdom is worth the State of Massachusetts, many times over."

This man told the grocer: "Now you are an old man, and it is time you retired to spend the remainder of your life in the practice of religion." But this man was very much attached to his store, children, money and farm, and he said: "Sir, what you say is the right thing, but do allow me one year more"; and the holy man said, "All right, I will

come after one year, and then you must do as I say."

After one year, he came again, and inquired of his sons for him, and they said: "He is dead, sir." But the holy man, by his meditation found out in what incarnation he was living; that man was living as a horse in that same house. He goes to this horse, brings him his past memories, and asks him: "Why did you not come with me last year. You have died since and now you are a horse. Will you come with me now? I can give you back your human body."

He answered: "My sons don't know much about farming, and that is the reason why I am born as a horse to plough their fields."

The holy man said: "Well, then I will come again for you after another year."

Another year passes, he comes again, and finds that the horse is dead, that he was born as a dog, and was living in that same barn. He goes to the dog and speaks to him the same way as he did before and asks him to come with him, and the dog says: "Give me a little time, sir. I am born as a dog to watch the farm." Then the man answers: "All right - I will come for you again a year after."

Another year, and he came again and found out that the dog was dead, and by his meditation he also discovered that he was born as a snake. Then he said to the sons: "Do you want some money? I will show you where to find it." He takes them to a room in the house and asks them to dig a particular spot. In India people put their money in a pot or a jar and bury it under the earth. They saw a big snake coiling around the jar. The holy man spoke to him again: "You chose to be born as a snake to guard the money you saved as a grocer. Are you now ready to follow me if I restore you to a human body?" This time he realized his mistake, and begged the holy man to make him a disciple. This is the evil of attachment.

So, it is not the right thing to have any attachment for anything, but at the same time do not feel discontented if you have anything. That will be wrong. Always remain separate mentally and spiritually from these things. That is the spirit of renunciation that Krishna has taught in the Gita.

"Live in this world without being of this world." That is His idea of renunciation, and He also advocated work - of course, unselfish work, work as a duty. If you study the fifth and sixth verses of the third chapter, you will find how He has expressed this idea.

"Those who do not work with the hands and feet, with the senses, but retain in their hearts the desire for the objects of the senses, that is, in whom the relish remains for sensuous objects, such men are hypocrites. They are of false character. They are not practising renunciation. But that man who has eliminated all desires for objects and can still remain engaged in work, considering work as worship, that man practises renunciation."

So we have to eliminate all selfishness, all sensuality and all desire for show from our hearts and minds.

You can't attain that state of peace and poise by mere intellectual comprehension of the teachings. Work for it. Incorporate it into your soul, and you will become like the flint-stone. The flint-stone can remain immersed in water for several years, and when you take it out of the water and strike it with a piece of steel it will give out sparks of light. Water cannot enter it and destroy its power. With that power of poise you will have to live in this world. That is the great lesson that Krishna teaches in the Gita.

He has taught us how to develop all the great powers and potentialities already within us, how to become strong and spiritual while in this life.

A coward is always afraid of this world, he is afraid when success, health, wealth, etc., come lest he should lose them. He is afraid when their opposites come lest he should be crushed under them.

Never worry about these things one way or the other. If you can love the Lord truly and really, and if you can do your duties well and unselfishly, all these things shall be added

unto you and more. You will attain everlasting peace and bliss in this life.
If you can make all work subservient to the Lord, and not to your small self, then you will understand this philosophy of conduct, and abundant peace will be yours.
Wherefore we must know how to combine ethical energy with philosophic calm.
(Reprinted from Vedanta for East and West, Sep-Oct 1984)

The Indian Tree or What's in a Name?

John Phillips

(The following is freely rendered from the Persian verse of the "Masnavi" of Jalal al-Din Rumi)

A scholar at the king's court once told the following tale: 'In India there grows a certain tree such that whoever plucks and eats of its fruit never grows old and never dies.' The king, hearing this tale, conceived a desire to eat of the fruit of this tree and sent one of his secretaries to India in search of the tree. For many years his messenger travelled about India in his quest, wandering from place to place in search of the tree; he left no mountain and no plain unvisited. Everyone he questioned held him up to ridicule.

'Who would search for such a thing, except a madman or a fool?'

Many poked fun at him playfully; some said: 'Prosperous fellow, how should the enquiry of so clever and brilliant a man as you prove fruitless or in vain?'

However, the exaggerated respect shown by the latter was harder to bear than a slap in the face.

'Great man,' they mockingly extolled him, 'in such and such a place there is an enormous tree. In such and such a forest there grows a green tree, very tall, very broad, every branch of it being huge.'

The king's envoy kept hearing a different report from everyone he asked. Much he travelled over many years, and all the while the king kept sending him money to live on, but he suffered much weariness until he finally became incapable of further searching. Not a trace was to be seen of the thing he sought, nothing but the report of the object of his quest, so that the thread of his hope was snapped and his search was in the end abandoned. He resolved to return to the king. Shedding many tears, he trudged along the way.

Coming to a halting-place on the road, the king's secretary met up with a wise sheikh.

'Hopeless as it is, I will go to him', he said to himself. 'From his threshold I will set out on the road, that haply his blessing may go along with me, since I am in despair of reaching the goal.'

Shedding abundant tears, he went to see the sheikh.

'Sheikh,' he cried, 'now is the time for compassion and pity. I am in despair; now is the time for loving kindness.'

'Tell me the reason for your despair,' said the sheikh. 'What is the object of your quest? What do you seek?'

'The king,' said the envoy. 'chose me to search for a certain well-branched tree. For there is a tree, unique in all the world, whose fruit is the substance of the Water of Life. Many years have I searched, but I have seen no sign of it, save the banter and ridicule of merry-makers.'

'Simpleton,' the sheikh laughed, 'this tree you have been seeking is the tree of knowledge. It is indeed very high, very huge, and very wide-spreading - Water of Life

from the Ocean Divine. You have gone after the form only, and have gone astray; you have abandoned the reality, and therefore cannot find it. Sometimes it is called "tree", and sometimes "sun"; sometimes it is called "sea" and sometimes "cloud." It is the one Thing from which multitudinous effects arise, and the least of its effects is life everlasting. Though it is single, it has a thousand effects; names innumerable are proper to that one. One person may be father to you, but son to someone else, wrath and foe to another, to another loving kindness and goodness. Hundreds of thousands of names he has, yet he is one man. Even someone who can name his every quality is blind to his reality. Whoever searches after the name only, though a man of trust, like you, falls into despair and distraction. Why do you stick to the name "tree", so that you remain with bitterness in your mouth, utterly luckless. Pass on from the Names and contemplate the Attributes, that haply the Attributes may guide you to the Essence.'

Men's disagreements stem from names; when they come to the reality, peace ensues.

Freedom in Vedanta (continued)

Stuart Rose

Where is freedom?

Would it not be just very helpful if God was a thing like everything else in the Universe, with a name and a form, an Other? I would then know exactly what God was, and where, without question - I could even carry a photograph of God around in my pocket.

Would it?

If God was other than me there would be a separation, a distance between God and myself. If this were the case, then God could not be everywhere; God could only be where I was not, and this would make God less than perfect. In this case, God could not be omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent, which, of course, God has to be to be God.

Similarly, we can say that if spiritual freedom was a thing, then it could be found, reached, and enjoyed. After a little investigation, however, it can again soon be found that freedom is not external, that it is not a thing.

This means that God (and freedom) is just as much available within me as everywhere else: not more, not less, just the same everywhere - not more powerful, nor more knowing, nor more present, in anyone else at any particular time; completely constant. God, or the Self, could not exist in any other way. This is the Oneness of Ved[^]nta.

As a matter of course, this means that I do not have to go looking for God outside of myself. By the description given above, it is clear that all of God is already within me, to be uncovered, as it were, wholly within myself. I have total freedom here and now. The whole of the spiritual path, the journey to the Absolute, is within me. The logical - and perhaps startling - conclusion to this is that the path has no destination. This is because there is nowhere to go; the end of the path is here and now, all of the time.

In Ved[^]nta, help to clarify this truth is available from the Upanisads and other spiritual texts; it can be found from a teacher (guru); but in the end I have to find it, and understand it, for myself, through my own effort.

Freedom has already been described in terms of a merging into Brahman. So, in turn, where is Brahman?

Brahman is described as all-encompassing, eternal, and infinite. This means that there can be no 'place' - gross, subtle, or causal - inside or outside of me that is not Brahman. This has been described in many ways, for example, in two famous analogies. First, the

widely known and recited Tryambakam mantra³ describes Brahman as pervading all, as fragrance pervades sandalwood. There is no part of sandal-wood which does not have the fragrance.

The second analogy is from the Ch[^]ndogya Upanisad, and relates to the teaching of Udd[^]laka to his son Svetaketu about salt in water. Svetaketu found that, after adding the salt, it could not be seen, yet it could be tasted throughout. Udd[^]laka says:

That which is this subtle essence, all this has got That as the Self.

That is the Truth.

That is the Self.

Thou art That, O Svetaketu.⁴

As a consequence of these teachings, what is shown is that freedom must be readily available and findable within me in its fullness, here and now. It also means that I need nothing new or extra in order to reveal it, as Brahman is complete.

Nothing stops me accessing and enjoying this freedom. So why is it that I am not free?

What is the obstacle to freedom?

The only obstacle to freedom is me. If I can overcome me (my I-ness), I will be free.

This sounds simple, but when we delve into the subject of me more deeply, and look at how the me is constructed, the simplicity assumes a more complex character.

Nevertheless, the only major obstacle to freedom is always the single concept of me.

Also after close scrutiny, we can see that this me is a difficult concept to pin down in order to examine its solidity. When we think we get close to it, somehow it vanishes, and then surfaces immediately elsewhere, in another guise or thought. It is a very slippery 'fish' indeed. On the face of it, as has been said, this mind appears to be substantial, but after detailed examination we find that it is quite the opposite and wholly insubstantial: a lot of hot air, as it were. Yet it is very powerful and commands all of our attention; it is distracting, riveting, and it seems that we are completely under its control, completely bound by it.

Ved[^]nta identifies two main causes for this bondage. The first of these is because I have come to believe that the unreal or impermanent and changeable (the an[^]tman), is the real and unchanging permanence (the [^]tman). The cause of this mistaken identity is my ignorance (avidy[^]), and it results in all my actions being based on false knowledge, because my mind does not 'see' - or does not wish to see, or is fearful of seeing - the truth of life, the truth of its impermanence.

Additionally, it can be established that there is no ignorance apart from in the mind - ignorance does not have existence on its own, that is apart from it. It is the mind that creates the finite existence (sams[^]ra) from its misguided perceptions. In fact, given just a moment, the mind creates hundreds of wrong projections, and this goes on all of the time, all through life, unless it is controlled.

Life and all of nature is comprised of three fundamental qualities: each and everything has the same three qualities in varying degrees, not just material things, such as our bodies, or trees, mountains, space, and so forth, but non-material things such as thoughts, emotions, and feelings, too. These are called the gunas: sattva is purity; rajas is projection and activity; and tamas is inertia. All three of these qualities exist in everything which comprises each person, including my I-ness. It is the objective of the spiritual endeavour to remove tamas with rajas, and to remove rajas with sattva.

Finally, sattva, too, has to be removed.

Of these three qualities, ignorance - the first cause of bondage - is said to be primarily the veiling quality of inertia (tamas), whose familiar characteristics also include laziness, delusion, confusion, slothfulness, and fear.

The second cause of bondage comes out of the first, everything is linked. In our ignorance, we believe the unreal is the real, and therefore we actively promote,

nurture, and hold on to, the false or nescient. Thereby, the first 'error' is compounded. Bhagavatp^{da} says that 'thinking their unreal body to be the real like the ^{at}man, one nourishes it, bathes it, and protects it by sense-objects, and gets bound by them like the silkworm by its threads'⁵, which means that we entrap ourselves, and cannot easily escape. Of the gunas, this is the power of projection and activity (rajas), whose characteristics also include the attachments of desire, anger, avarice, pride, jealousy, egoism, and envy. These attachments are binding - they tie us in knots (granthis) - and create what has been called the 'great death' of sams^{ra}.

What happens in the creation of these two causes of bondage is known as superimposition (adhy^{sa}), and this also only arises in the mind. Here a false - be it impermanent or changing - idea or thought is overlaid on to the real, causing the real to appear to be this false idea.

An analogy to help explain this occurrence is the cinema. Here the projector can be thought of as the mind (transience), and the screen as consciousness (permanence). What is seen are the projections reflected on the screen, and not the screen itself. The screen is always in place, but is unseen because of the distractions of the projections. The distractions are caused through a lack of wisdom of what is real, and a concomitant surfeit of ignorance (avidy[^]). Superimposition does not occur when there is wisdom concerning what is real and what is not real. Hence, the importance, mentioned earlier, about the need to come to a clear understanding of what Brahman is.

The culprit that creates bondage and keeps us from freedom, as has been said, is the mind. It is the mind through its various faculties which creates the world (m^y[^]): we see it with our sense of sight, feel it with our sense of touch, and so forth.

It is apparent that only the mind creates our bondage and obscures the real (^{at}man).

Without a clear understanding of it we will find that it is impossible to approach the mind in order to rectify its compounding characteristics of inertia and activity.

Ved^{nta} has identified that the mind - or human personality - is comprised of five sheaths (the pancakosa). It teaches us that each of these sheaths (starting with the first) causes bondage, and that the many aspects of each have to be identified, seen for what they are, and negated, in order to expose the real. Through such negation, m^y[^] is also negated, which means that the whole of the spiritual journey of Ved^{nta} is comprised of dispensing with these sheaths. Thus it is vital to come to understand what the binding characteristics of the five sheaths - the obstacles to freedom - are comprised of.

The 'outer' sheath is the food sheath (annamayakosa). Food makes life possible. It is sustaining, and without it we die. This sheath is the body, which is just a bundle of skin, flesh, blood, bones, and filth, and is itself inert, as is seen in something that is dead; but it demands so much of our attention, and is the focus of most of our desires. We know that the body and everything about it changes all of the time - it is born, lives, and dies - and so cannot be the ^{at}man, which is infinite and unchanging.

'Inside' this, is the vital air sheath (pr^{nam}amayakosa), which is a modification of air that permeates and sustains the food sheath; it also includes the five organs of action (hands, feet, speech, reproduction, and evacuation). The air, by itself, is inert, and normally we are not conscious of it. What is more, the air or breath (pr^{na}) is not stable - constantly moving and changing - and so it also cannot be the ^{at}man.

The middle sheath, so to speak, is the mental sheath (manomayakosa). This is comprised of the faculty of perception and the mind, it causes the sense of 'me' and 'mine', and it is through this sheath that the sense organs and the phenomenal universe (the waking and dream states) are brought into being. The mind is the source of ignorance (avidy[^]), and is responsible for both bondage and liberation. It causes all attachments and superimpositions. It has already been shown that there is no permanence here, and therefore cannot be the ^{at}man.

Next is the intellect sheath (vijñ^{nam}amayakosa), which constitutes the intellect. This

sheath controls the faculty of perception, and is always identified with the body and senses. It is the cause of sams[^]ra, and has the powers of knowledge and reflection. It also has the power of superimposition (adhy[^]sa), and creates a false [^]tman (mithy[^]tman). Hence, it cannot be the [^]tman.

Finally, the bliss sheath ([^]nandamayakosa). Even closer to the [^]tman than the intellect sheath, but this is not the bliss of the [^]tman. It contains ignorance of the real, and most fully manifests in deep sleep. What is spiritually pleasurable is known by this sheath, but it has limitations (up[^]dhis), it acts almost like a decoy, and is 'tied' to the other sheaths, and so even this sheath cannot be the [^]tman.

When all five sheaths have been negated what is left is that illuminating factor: described as existence, consciousness, and bliss (satchit[^]nanda). It is the substratum which remains after dissolution of all that has been superimposed; it is the witness of the three states of consciousness.

All of what has been described comprises the obstacles which, in their myriad forms, bar the 'passage' to the experience of freedom. All limitation is created by the mind and must be overcome. All sense of reality of the obstacles has to be made to disappear. This task may seem daunting, an impossibility, a far too difficult and onerous task. The 'bright lights' of sense objects lure us to their entrapment. Like the poacher turned game-keeper, the mind alone is the cause of bondage, and of release. Bhagavatp[^]da says that the desire for sense objects, which creates an awareness of difference, is the great binding chord.

(to be continued)

If Ramakrishna Were Alive Today (contd.) **Swami Chetanananda**

We Are Blessed and You Are Blessed

In this world those who doubt are miserable. Doubt destroys happiness and peace of mind. In the Bible, we read the story of Doubting Thomas, a direct disciple of Jesus. When Jesus appeared before his disciples after his resurrection, Thomas was not there. When they told him of the resurrection, he replied that he would believe it only if he could touch the marks that the nails had made on Jesus' body. After eight days, Jesus again appeared before the disciples. He said to Thomas: "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." Overwhelmed, Thomas responded: "My Lord and my God." Jesus then said to him: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Blessed they are who have taken refuge in the Master after only hearing his name. Swami Turiyananda said: "Never forget this adage of Swami Vivekananda: 'Make your own fair -- whether you have a companion or not.' To whom else should you look for help? The Master used to say. 'I am and my Divine Mother is.' That is all. Whom else do you want? The main thing is to patiently adhere to the ideal. If you can do that, gradually everything will become favourable. Hold on to the Master; you will be surprised at what will follow. The Master used to say, 'An imitation custard apple reminds one of the real fruit.' Similarly, the Master's photograph will remind you of the Master. Feel his presence in his photograph and devote yourself to his service and worship. You will surely be imbued with his spirit."

Some people lament: "Our samskaras are bad"; "We are unfortunate and hopeless"; "This

life has gone in vain" and so on. The Master and his disciples did not like such negative attitudes. Once Swami Vijnanananda reminded the devotees of their greatness by saying: "We became inspired by seeing the Master, and you have become intoxicated by just hearing his name."

Once a monk said to Swami Shivananda: "Maharaj, we did not see the Master. You are here and it brings us great joy. You are a direct disciple of the Master. Is it a small privilege that we can be with you? Because of your presence, all of us - the monks and devotees - are very happy. When I think about how many people from distant places spend so much money and travel all the way here to see you only once, I realize how fortunate we are to be able to stay with you all the time."

Shivananda: "The Master is especially merciful to you. That is why he is making you serve his devotee (meaning himself). You are blessed; I too am blessed because I am with you. Who knows where I would have been otherwise!"

When talking to some devotees, M. described Brahma's prayer to Krishna from the Bhagavata (10.14). In it, Brahma said:

I enjoy being born in the world, and particularly in Vrindaban. The people of Vrindaban think of Krishna day and night; as a result they are always united with Krishna. O Lord, the dust of Vrindaban is blessed by the touch of your feet and your devotees' feet. My life will be blessed if I can touch that dust with my head.

O Krishna, as long as people are not absorbed in you physically, mentally, and verbally, their worldly thoughts rob them of everything and throw them into a vortex of suffering. Moreover, their home becomes like a prison and their feet are tied with a chain of delusion.

O Lord, you descend to the world as an avatar only to bestow peace and joy upon your devotees. In fact, you are transcendental.

M.: "Ah, what a beautiful statement Brahma made! Being the creator of the universe, he wants to be born as a man in Vrindaban. Why? Because the people of Vrindaban constantly think of Krishna and have become one with him. Brahma would consider himself blessed if he could get the dust of that holy place on his head. Brahma further said that the avatar assumes a body to give joy to his devotees.

"We are truly blessed. We lived with the Master and loved him. We also received his love and affection. We touched his feet with these hands, ate his prasada, saw him with these eyes, heard his words with these ears. It was through his grace that we saw his divine form; truly he led us from death to immortality, from fear to fearlessness. We are truly blessed. You are also blessed because you have loved the Master without seeing him, only hearing about him. The monks have renounced everything for him. The Master said that his devotees who lived at home were not truly householders."

A devotee said to the Holy Mother: "Mother, some of your children see the Master with eyes closed and some with eyes open. I am unfortunate that I have not seen the Master." The Holy Mother replied: "One can see the Master if one's body and mind become pure." Later, the Mother blessed that devotee by touching his head and saying: "I say that you will not pass away without seeing the Master. This is your last birth."

Once Swami Premananda said to Girijananda, a disciple of the Holy Mother: "Are you an ordinary person? Are the children of the Mother inferior to the children of the Master? Do you think that because people take the dust of our feet, we have become great? We came after seeing the Master and you have come without seeing him. You are greater than we are." [Krishna said: "Those who are my devotees' devotees, they are the supreme devotees."]

Girijananda: "The Master made you great."

Premananda: "The Master did not make us great; he made us small and humble. Always try to be small and humble. Drive away all ego from the mind. The Master used to say: 'All trouble and botheration come to an end when the "I" dies. Not I, not I, but Thou,

Thou."

When people lamented their ill luck for not having the chance to meet Sri Ramakrishna, Girish would reply, "As Mother Ganges flowed in a hundred streams in order to redeem the Sagara dynasty, so the exuberant love of Sri Ramakrishna is flowing through hundreds of devotees in order to eventually redeem the world."

If Ramakrishna Were Alive Today

When we are tormented by worldly maya, and we see darkness all around and cannot find a way out, at that time we think that if Ramakrishna were alive today, we would go to him for peace and nourish our hearts with his advice. Poverty and misery, disease and grief are constantly burning human beings. The funeral pyre burns only once, but worries and anxieties burn constantly. For that reason people went to Ramakrishna for bliss, which is the most essential thing in life. Once Swami Akhandananda said: "Don't show your gloomy, grouchy face. Always be cheerful. The Master was always joyful and would make us laugh with his stories. He was very humorous."

Kedar Nath Bandyopadhyay, a native of Dakshineswar, wrote in his reminiscences:

One day I started for my office and crossed the Ganges by boat. Due to some family trouble, my mind was very disturbed. It occurred to me that it would be better to go to the Master than to the office, so I took another boat and landed at the temple ghat of Rani Rasmani.

The Master was standing on the western veranda of his room, looking at the Ganges. As I walked up to him, he said: "What! You ran away from your office? That is not good. Live in this world like a crocodile. It lives under water, but sometimes it raises its snout above water, takes a deep breath, and again dives below the surface. People are submerged in their worldly life, and they come here only when they are suffocating at home. Does anybody tread the path of religion without first undergoing sorrows and sufferings? Misery has great value. It helps a person find the path to God."

He continued: "I know you are married. Do you have a mother?"

"Yes, my mother is still alive," I replied.

He was silent for some time, and then said: "All right, now stay at home. A little misery is good. It helps one to make progress in spiritual life. If there were no misery, would anyone chant the Lord's name?"

He went on talking in this way, but it seemed to me that he was tired. Indeed, the cancer in his throat was developing day by day. I said to him: "Sir, please take a little rest. You have just finished your lunch and I am disturbing you."

"It is true," he said, "the pain is there. But if you wish to know anything, you may ask."

Smiling, I replied, "We want to know so many things, but where is our capacity for understanding?"

The Master said: "Know God. Make some effort and you will find Him. He is ever-present. Develop a deep longing for God."

I then implored him, "Sir, please bless me."

In reply, he said: "Longing does not come through blessings. It depends upon self-effort. Increase your love for God." He was ready to answer my questions, but I could not think of any. After accompanying him to his room, I left for home.

The Master came to awaken God-consciousness in us. We are fortunate to have had him in our midst. Now the more I think of him, the more my heart yearns for him and tears flow from my eyes.

After Ramakrishna passed away in 1886, Kedar went through a difficult time. A few years later he was going to Calcutta by boat. Seeing the Kali temple of Dakshineswar, a thought arose in his mind: "If only the Master were alive today." He disembarked at Baghbazar ghat in Calcutta. He heard that the devotees had installed the Master's relics in Ram Chandra Datta's Kankurgachi Yogodyana. Kedar did not know where Kankurgachi

was; he knew only that it was somewhere past the rail line near Narkeldanga. He began to walk. He was possessed by the thought, "If only the Master were alive today."

Kedar recalled:

I passed the rail line and the gardens on both sides of the road. The area was sparsely populated. It was noon on a hot summer day. The road was almost empty. I guessed that Ram Datta's garden would be somewhere nearby. I moved forward. I found a lane that turned to the right; at the end of it there was a gate and a bamboo grove. The gate was not locked. I entered the compound and closed the gate behind me.

But where was the temple - the Master's temple? Was this not the right garden? I felt that it was. I proceeded a little and found a small pond extending east to west, and a path around it. There was a small painted brick building at the east side of the pond, facing west. I looked at that building and noticed that the door was open. What was this? It was the Master! My heart was overwhelmed with joy. Blessed are these devotees who installed the living image of the Master. I saw the same joyful face, and the same cloth, with part of it placed on his shoulder. I also observed that parts of his beard were moving in the breeze. It was amazing to see! The same living form of the Master that I used to see in Dakshineswar."

After a few minutes, Kedar heard the priest call out from the northeast corner of the garden: "Who are you? What are you looking for here?"

"I am looking at the Master. Is this the garden of Ram Datta?" Saying so, Kedar moved towards the priest.

Priest: "What did you say?"

Kedar: "I was gazing at the image of Ramakrishna Paramahansa."

Priest: "Where is the image? What are you saying?"

Kedar: "I saw the Master inside that room."

Priest: "The room is closed and here is my key. Do you want to see inside? After I finished the worship an hour ago, I went for lunch. There are some silver vessels for worship, so I locked the door. But you say that you saw the Master's image?"

Then both went in front of the shrine and saw that the western and southern doors of the room were open. There was no image of the Master inside. Controlling himself, Kedar said to the priest, "Sir, please check your silver vessels and other things in the shrine." The priest was dumbfounded and said: "I see that everything is intact. I have worshipped here for the last few years, and I have never forgotten to lock the shrine."

Kedar then wanted confirmation: "Is this the garden of Ram Datta?"

Priest: "Yes, it is Ram Datta's Yogodyana. And this is the memorial temple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Well, may I know who you are? Where have you come from? Many people come here, but I have never seen you. Shall I inform Ram Babu?"

Kedar: "No, it is not necessary to inform him. I came as many people have, to bow down to the Master."

Then the priest served Kedar some of the Master's prasad: cucumber, banana, papaya, sweets, and a glass of water. Kedar enjoyed the prasad on that hot summer day and left for Dakshineswar.

As soon as he returned to the street, a coachman stopped his horse carriage in front of him and asked, "Sir, where do you want to go?"

Kedar replied: "Dakshineswar."

"Please come," replied the coachman. "This carriage belongs to Beni Saha of Baranagore. I am returning there."

Kedar got into the carriage and began to think about the wonderful lila of the Master and how the Master had fulfilled his wish: "If only the Master were alive today."

The Second Coming of Ramakrishna

"Ramakrishna's Second Coming" is a somewhat controversial topic. One of our American

devotees read that after 100 years Ramakrishna would be born again as a baul, minstrel. So in 1986 (Ramakrishna passed away in 1886), she went to attend the Jaydev Fair in the Birbhum District of West Bengal, an annual gathering of all bauls. She moved among the bauls, then told me of her disappointment. I wrote this as an article in Bengali at that time.

In The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Ramakrishna is quoted as saying: "I shall have to assume a human body again, in a northwesterly direction." Northwest from Dakshineswar are located places such as Burdwan, Punjab, Afghanistan, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Greenland, and so on. Some disciples have said that the Master would return again after one or two hundred years; some have said that they did not know when he would return.

When Swami Vivekananda was visiting the West, someone asked him: "When will Christ come again?" Swamiji replied: "I never take much notice of these things. I have to deal with principles. I have only to preach that God comes again and again, and that He came in India as Krishna, Rama, and Buddha, and that He will come again. It can almost be demonstrated that after each 500 years the world sinks, and a tremendous spiritual wave comes, and on the top of the wave is a Christ." Swamiji knew that the Master was the avatar of this age.

The Holy Mother said: "The Master will live in the hearts of the devotees for a hundred years." When the Holy Mother said "a hundred," she must have meant "hundreds"; because one hundred years have already elapsed since the Master's passing away, and innumerable devotees all over the world are still carrying Ramakrishna in their hearts. If one takes every word in the Ramakrishna literature literally, it is possible to fall into confusion. It may be that the recorder of the Mother's reminiscences wrote "a hundred" instead of "hundreds."

Rama was born in the Treta age, Krishna in the Dwapara age, Buddha 2500 years ago, and Christ 2000 years ago. But they are still alive in the hearts of millions of people, and will remain so. The lives of avatars, as well as their messages, are beyond space and time. It does not matter if Ramakrishna appears at any time, at any place, in any form; his life and message will continue eternally like those of Rama, Krishna, Buddha, and Christ.

I kept this manuscript with me for many years. Some monks discouraged me from publishing it because they thought it might confuse devotees. However, some devotees in the East and the West were already confused by reading what the Master said about this subject in addition to many contradictory statements made by others. To solve this dilemma, in 1997 I read this manuscript to a learned, senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order at Belur Math. He listened attentively as I read the manuscript and at the end encouraged me to publish it.⁴ Truly, I did not form any opinion about the Master's second coming; I tried only to reconcile the various statements published in the Ramakrishna literature.

Imagination and Expectation

Ramakrishna was a joyful, loving, and lovable person. He was a spiritual magnet; it was hard to resist his attraction. Everyone loves to think about a loved one, and to imagine that one is with the beloved. This is inherent in human nature. One is fulfilled when one can establish a strong and steady relationship with the beloved. Rupa Goswami wrote in his Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu about the characteristics of one who has a passionate love for the Beloved, God: "The minds of those who have developed this love never oscillate; they do not spend time other than in thinking of God; they are humble and unattached to sense objects; they cultivate hope and are always eager to reach God; they love to chant God's name and praise His glory; they are eager to live in a holy place, and so on." It is natural for a genuine devotee to live in the expectation of seeing God. "I shall surely

see my beloved Lord in this life" - one should hold this hope firmly in one's heart. The devotional scriptures say: "For those who hold this hope, there is a strong possibility that they will attain God."

We would not expect Ramakrishna to return if he had not said he would. The places and persons connected with his divine play are still vivid; his conversations, stories, and songs still reverberate in our memories. Although he passed away nearly 120 years ago, the clothes he wore, his coat, his cot and bed, his cups and plates, his hubble-bubble, his caps and shoes, his photos and manuscripts, and so on still exist. When we see those things with our own eyes, we tell our nonbelieving minds, "Look, these things were used by an avatar himself." This enhances and strengthens our faith. When we read about Ramakrishna's life and his teachings, we feel that he is our very own. An American disciple of Swami Satprakashananda, who was a disciple of Swami Brahmananda, told me candidly: "Swami, Ramakrishna is my [spiritual] great-grandfather."

M. said: "I get joy when I see a person thinking of the Master, the highest ideal. His teachings are living and inspiring. He just recently came, so his ideas are very fresh; they are spreading all over the world. Those who cannot achieve the goal in this life, will have to spend many more lifetimes to reach it."

It is a great unfathomable mystery how the infinite God takes a human form made of flesh and blood. One day the Master said to M.: "God speaks through this mouth, so this [meaning himself] is an avatar. What comes out through this mouth are the Vedas. A person will achieve everything if he or she visits this place." Another day, while going to Calcutta by carriage, the Master said to M., "God is seated near, and still people are searching for God here and there."

The avatar comes to fulfill the need of the age. When religion declines and irreligion prevails God incarnates - this is a historical fact. The advent of Rama, Krishna, Buddha, Christ, Chaitanya, and Ramakrishna substantiate this truth. When people feel emptiness, dryness, restlessness, and a lack of peace and joy, they long for someone who can give them peace and bliss. Just such a person is an avatar. M. remarked: "When the avatar comes, many great souls come with him to enjoy and share in his lila [divine play]. For example, if there are a few trees and a pond in the midst of a vast desert, people stop there and take rest during their journey. Similarly, people take rest and refresh themselves at that source of eternal freshness -- the avatars. Some among the Jews waited with great longing and said, 'Our Messiah is coming.' Bharadwaja and other sages waited for Ramachandra. Advaita Goswami said, 'Chaitanyadeva will come.'"

The avatar does not come alone; he comes with his companions. The avatar is the very embodiment of spirituality like a mighty glacier; his disciples are like streams carrying the melted water to a parched continent. They are the avatar's messengers.

Ramakrishna said: "The illumined rishis of previous cycles come to this world along with the avatar. They are intimate companions of God. God spreads spirituality in this world through them."

The Awakening of Brahma-kundalini

It is truly astounding how radio, television, internet, telephone, and other communication systems can carry information around the globe within a few seconds. Human beings can travel from one part of the world to the other in a very short time. The world is now very small. The lives and messages of the previous avatars were limited to small geographical areas during their lifetimes and for a couple of centuries afterwards. We find that Rama's influence extended only from Ayodhya to Sri Lanka, Krishna's from Mathura-Vrindaban to Dwaraka-Prabhas, Buddha's from Kapilavastu to Gaya-Varanasi, Christ's from Judea to Samaria-Galilee, and Chaitanya's from Navadwip to Puri-Vrindaban. It was not possible for Ramakrishna to go to distant places to spread his message because he was in samadhi most of the time. But as he sat in the village of

Dakshineswar, he shook the Cosmic-kundalini so vigorously that his message encircled the globe within a short time of his passing. This Cosmic-kundalini is the Divine Mother Kali. Swami Shivananda said: "The Master was, after all, none other than Mother Kali, who in the form of the Master is saving the world even now." Swami Shivananda continued: "Swami Vivekananda once said: 'In this age the Brahma-kundalini - the Mother who is responsible for the creation, preservation, and destruction of the universe - has been awakened by the fervent prayers of Sri Ramakrishna. No wonder the individual kundalini will be awakened now!'"

At Cossipore, the Master told Swamiji: "Wherever you take me on your shoulders, there I will go and stay, be it under a tree or in a hut." That is why Swamiji carried the relics of the Master on his own shoulder and installed them at Belur Math. Then he said to the Master's disciples: "Know it for certain, the Master will dwell in this place for a long time and benefit humanity." The power of the Brahma-kundalini that appeared in the form of Ramakrishna, was transmitted to Vivekananda by Ramakrishna himself. Later, Swamiji wrote in the Belur Math rule book: "The Lord has not yet given up the Ramakrishna form. Some see him in that form even now and receive instructions from him, and all can see him if they so desire. This form will last until he comes again in another gross body. Though he is not visible to all, that he is in this Order and is guiding it, is a fact of everybody's experience. Otherwise such a worldwide movement could never have been set on foot in so short a time by this handful of insignificant, helpless, and persecuted boys."

The Ramakrishna Order firmly believes that the Master is working through this organization. Swami Shivananda once said: "It will take a long period of time to understand who Ramakrishna and Vivekananda were. It had been thousands of years since such a great power had appeared in the world for the benefit of humanity. People understood the greatness of Buddha hundreds of years after his advent. Gradually his all-inclusive message spread all over the world. It is amazing to consider the great event that took place for just one of his teeth! A huge temple was built over one tooth of Buddha. Here at Belur Math we have the relics of Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother, and Swami Vivekananda. I get goose bumps when I think about it. People from all over the world will come and roll on the ground of Belur Math. We see signs of this already. What great commotion is rising centred on the Master! We are blessed that we can see it. You will also see so many things in the future!"

(to be continued)

Leaves of an Ashrama: 16.

Benefits from Dying not to be Disparaged

Swami Vidyatmananda

Last night I had written in my journal: "What a grace it is; all of a sudden I feel that I am no longer hesitant about dying. Despite all the good things this life has afforded me, it has been no more than that - a less than marvellous affair. I've been held back by a body

which has never wanted to obey; and a mind that simply wouldn't open up, or not enough, to higher consciousness, no matter how hard I struggled. So let me sample what waits beyond this all-too-well-known condition. My fear of dying has vanished. I feel suddenly that I have little to lose in departing, and probably much to gain."

It was a new and arresting idea. The next day I looked again at what I had written, to test whether I still felt the same way. I did, and that pleased me. What a consolation, after so many years of holding on to life, and recoiling from the prospect of my dissolution, to be willing now - even eager - to experience what the unknown has to offer.

I had come to see that a life is useful to a man mostly as a means for showing him that ordinary life is not enough. Life is all maya, and maya is all muddle. There is an instinct in man which tells him that he should expect better than maya and muddle.

I saw that being associated with a body is useful, but only to teach a person that this dearly held colleague must reveal itself eventually as liar, robber, traitor. Who wants to perpetuate a relationship with such a cheat?

And the mind? Possessing a mind - what has that done for me? It has given me a glimpse or two into the Promised Land, like Moses had, and then - just as in the case of Moses - cruelly refused me entry. Abandon the mind, too. Who can be bothered to be dependent on such a doublecrosser?

Thus I see that the Designer is kind. Kind to offer me existence, kind to fashion that existence in such a manner that it refuses to yield what I am looking for, kind to give me an alternative so that I can renounce mere human existence without regret. Somewhere I had read: "Wisdom consists in knowing what you have to accept." A distressing necessity transmuted into an advantage. Clear it is to me that one can trust one's fate to a Designer like that, even walk up confidently to the portal of His domain and shout across: "Hello, over there. I am curious to know what You propose. The abandon that I am feeling now, and the complete abandon that I shall feel as I traverse the threshold into Your domain - will this be adequate to give me the change of being I struggled for here and did not achieve - and fulfil the intimations of my instinct? Let it be so. Or if not, is it Your purpose that I should rest a little, rekindle enthusiasm and force, then come back to try again, better disposed next time? Let it be so. Whatever it is to be, I am confident that it will be different from what I have known up to now, and better."

I recalled with a smile a line or two from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself":

Has anyone supposed it is lucky to be born?

I hasten to inform him or her, it is just

as lucky to die, and I know it.

Their Power and Their Love

Swami Vijayananda

Swami Vijayananda joined the movement in 1919 and was privileged to meet several of the first disciples of Sir Ramakrishna. After doing pioneering work in Argentina from 1932 he passed away aged 75 on 1st September 1973. The following are some of his reminiscences.

Swami Brahmananda

One day at Belur Math, while Maharaj (as Swami Brahmananda was known) was out for his walk, I happened to pass by with a copy of the Gita, containing Shankara's commentary, in my possession. 'What is it you have in your hand, my boy?' he asked, seeing me. I told him. 'Bhagavad Gita', he said. 'Well, let me tell you one thing: your first and second readings of the Gita should be with the help of a dictionary. Know the text first. You see, these great commentators like Shankara, Nimbarka and others, had very powerful minds. Their thoughts have great drawing power. Be sure, therefore, that you understand what the text says. Do you think that when Shri Krishna spoke the Gita to Arjuna he had Shankara or anybody in mind?'

Maharaj could scold terribly and could also be very caustic. At the Math he once gave me an assignment. There were two plants which were growing, one on either side of the entrance to a building. Taking me there he said, 'Look; you see these two plants: they need to be watered every morning at six o'clock and every evening at six. Can you do just this one thing for me?' 'Of course, Maharaj,' I replied. And I did pour buckets of water on them at the stated times. It happened, one afternoon, that I had to go out to Calcutta on business, and neglected to arrange with anyone to do this watering. When six o'clock arrived, my duty came to mind, but I thought to myself, 'I will water them when I return; that will not be too late.' It was about nine o'clock when I got back to the Math and was able to water them. But Maharaj tackled me the very next day. 'Did those plants have water last night at the proper time?' he asked. I told him. Then he began to

scold and castigate me. 'Could you not have arranged with someone? You are faithless. The disciple who is disobedient does not love his guru'. And on he went in this way, until I was nearly weeping and had to say, 'Stop, stop, Maharaj!' Then he at once became more tender and remarked, 'You see, the plants get thirsty at just certain times. Six o'clock was the time to water these - not nine or any other time.'

The following incident took place in Varanasi in 1919. It was Christmas Eve, and the occasion was being celebrated as usual in the Math, with the worship of Christ. Maharaj, Swami Shivananda (Mahapurush Maharaj), Swami Shuddhananda and others were present, including myself. Swami Brahmananda was deep in meditation. Swami Shuddhananda was reading from the Bible, and another swami singing Girish Ghosh's song of the divine nativity, with Mahapurush Maharaj accompanying on the tabla. Near the end of the song, but before it was over, everything suddenly stopped. All eyes were on Maharaj, who sat before the shrine. I noticed that his head was swaying a little, forward and back. All was silence for some time. Then the great Swamis prostrated and got up.

'Did you see Him, Tarak-da?' asked Maharaj.

'Yes, Maharaj, I saw Him come,' Swami Shivananda replied.

'Yes,' said Maharaj, 'He came with a blue tunic and talked with me. Did you see Him, Sudhir?'

'No,' said Swami Shuddhananda, a bit wistfully, 'but I felt such a peace of mind as I have never felt in my life.'

Late that evening we saw, walking outside, three Roman Catholic Fathers. 'Go, my child,' Maharaj commanded, 'and ask the Fathers if they can stay and join us in the sacred food that we have offered to Christ.' I delivered the message, but angrily I was told, 'What right have you to put our Christ with everybody there?'

'I do not know about these things,' I replied, 'but this is the message sent by the President of our Order. Will you not come and partake of the offered food?'

'No,' was the terse response and the Fathers went away. When I returned and told Maharaj, all he said was, 'Unfortunate people!'

At one time I suffered very much from a peculiar kind of pain near the heart. It would just double me up with a sort of twisting sensation in the chest. It was unbearable. Sometimes Swami Omkarananda would have to hold me tight and squeeze till I felt some relief. On this occasion it was so bad that Maharaj had me carried inside to a bed, and the doctor called. But the doctors were unable to find any physical ailment. The heart was sound, the lungs, and so on it went. Then Maharaj came and sat down on the side of

my bed. 'My boy,' he said, 'are you afraid to die? But you will not die. No, you will not die.' Then he told me that the trouble was caused by emotion and that they (the Master's disciples) had had it too, but far worse; 'but in your case,' he said, 'it happens to have taken this physical form.' (to be continued)

(Reprinted from Vedanta for East and West, Jan-Feb 1974)

Reviews by JP

The Parables of Sri Ramakrishna

Format: DVD

Producer: Swami Chetanananda, Vedanta Society of St. Louis

Running time: 58 minutes

Price: \$19.95

Website: <http://www.vedantastl.org>

A parable is a story illustrating a lesson of moral or spiritual truth. Buddha, Christ and other great teachers used parables to make their teachings easy of comprehension. Parables help the listener to discover the deeper meaning and truths of scriptural teachings.

Sri Ramakrishna was a past master in the art of teaching through parables; it came so naturally to him. All the tales and parables of Sri Ramakrishna are now available in book form.

Swami Chetanananda has done a great service by bringing out forty of the parables of Sri Ramakrishna in a DVD format. The production is superb. Besides being educative the DVD is very entertaining.

This video is highly recommended to all the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, especially those who have children.

News and Views

The National Foundation for Communal Harmony (an autonomous organization with the Ministry of Home Affairs, Govt of India) has conferred the National Communal Harmony Award for the year 2005 on the Ramakrishna Mission in recognition of its outstanding contribution towards promotion of communal harmony and national integration. The award, which consisted of a citation and a sum of Rupees five lakhs, was handed over by the President of India, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam, to the General Secretary, in a function held at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi, on 1 May, 2006.

