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Divine Wisdom

Question (asked by a neighbour):

"Must one leave home?"

Answer:

"No, not altogether. Whenever you have leisure, go into solitude for a day or two. At that time don't have any relations with the outside world and don't hold any conversation with worldly people on worldly affairs. You must live either in solitude or in the company of holy men."

Question :

"How can one recognize a holy man?"

Answer:

"He who has surrendered his body, mind, and innermost self to God is surely a holy man. He who has renounced 'woman and gold' is surely a holy man. He is a holy man who does not regard woman with the eyes of a worldly person. He never forgets to look upon a woman as his mother, and to offer her his worship if he happens to be near her. The holy man constantly thinks of God and does not indulge in any talk except about spiritual things. Furthermore, he serves all beings, knowing that God resides in everybody's heart. These, in general, are the signs of a holy man."

Question :

"Must one always live in solitude?"

Answer:

"Haven't you seen the trees on the footpath along a street? They are fenced around as long as they are very young; otherwise cattle destroy them. But there is no longer any need of fences when their trunks grow thick and strong. Then they won't break even if an elephant is tied to them. Just so, there will be no need for you to worry and fear if you make your mind as strong as a thick tree-trunk. First of all try to acquire discrimination. Break the jack-fruit open only after you have rubbed your hands with oil; then its sticky milk won't smear them.'

Question :

" What is discrimination?"

Answer:

"Discrimination is the reasoning by which one knows that God alone is real and all else is unreal. Real means eternal, and unreal means impermanent. He who has acquired discrimination knows that God is the only Substance and all else is non-existent. With the awakening of this spirit of discrimination a man wants to know God. On the contrary, if a man loves the unreal - such things as creature comforts, name, fame and wealth - then he doesn't want to know God, who is of the very nature of Reality. Through discrimination between the Real and the unreal one seeks to know God.

**The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna
November 28, 1883**

Editorial

Aversion to Fault Finding

"Don't find fault with anyone, not even with an insect. As you pray to God for devotion, so also pray that you may not find fault with anyone." (Sri Ramakrishna)

One of the deadly sins Sri Krishna advises us to avoid is Paisunam. It is a Sanskrit word meaning slandering, fault-finding, spreading scandal, back-biting, calumniating, betraying, being harsh, cruel, low, vile, wicked, malicious, etc. Even in a world context such a type of behaviour can be unprofitable, unwise and even can endanger life. In a spiritual context it means 'talking shop', gossiping, etc and is harmful in the extreme degree.

Unfortunately we live in an age of sensationalism. There is a saying: 'No news is good news.' No news may be good news, but hardly anyone wants to hear or bear good news. If the media - TV, Radio, newspapers, etc - were to broadcast only good news I wonder how many of us would care to see, read or listen to them! The media bombard us with sensational news. Fed constantly on such unsavoury diet our bodies and minds become polluted and unfit for spiritual progress. (Sri Ramakrishna used to sprinkle holy Ganges water on the spot where a newspaper had been left! We may not go to such an extreme.) Hence those who are intent on spiritual progress must take all care to avoid this undesirable quality.

Why should we avoid slandering, fault-finding, etc?

First of all, it is a waste of time, and time is very precious. Many consider time as

money, and those who are intent on profit, worldly or otherwise, cannot afford to waste time. Certainly it is not going to make those whom we are criticising or finding fault with any better; on the contrary they may become even worse. And according to the law of Karma we are sure to get back all that we gave with compound interest. There is a saying: 'To err is human'. If we look around can we find even a single human who is free from faults?

Secondly, it is a waste of energy. Every activity is an expenditure of energy and evil activities require even more expenditure of energy. Energy is limited, and is a precious commodity. If it is spent in wrong ways it will not be available for a higher, creative purpose. As it is we need all the energy we can muster if we want to advance in spiritual life.

Thirdly, those who dwell on the faults of others will develop those very faults; for we become what we think of intensely and constantly. There is a well known saying in India: 'Those who find fault do not know their own faults.' The Holy Mother used to say: "Man is bound to make mistakes. One should not notice them. If one does not follow this rule, it harms oneself alone. By constantly observing the faults of others, in the end one will become a mere fault-finder. To see the faults of others! One should never do it. I never do so. Forgiveness is Tapasya (austerity)." Swami Vivekananda says: "Never talk about the faults of others, no matter how bad they may be. Nothing is ever gained by that. You never help one by talking about his fault; you do him an injury, and injure yourself as well."

It is the experience of many of us that those of us who find fault with others often suffer from those very faults, perhaps in an even greater degree than others! It may, perhaps, be that we have an unconscious recognition of our defects but do not wish to acknowledge the fact because either they are too painful or we are too weak to overcome them. Also very often finding fault with others is a way of feeling that we are somehow better than others. Only those who are shallow and have no substance resort to this method.

Reject the thought that you are better than anyone else. If you think such haughty thoughts, God (who knows what is in you) will consider you worse than they.

"Pride about our good deeds is pointless. God has his own ideas regarding what is good and he does not always agree with us. If there is anything good about you, believe better things of others. This will keep you humble. The humble are always at peace. It will be disastrous for you to consider yourself better than even one person." (Imitation of Christ) In any case pride is a demonic quality and the sooner we get rid of it the better for everyone.

Fourthly, this habit of fault-finding prevents us from looking into our own hearts and finding our own defects and weaknesses. According to Vedanta we are already perfect but ignorance or Avidya prevents us from the knowledge of our true nature. Ignorance manifests in the form of defects and weaknesses. Spiritual practice is meant only to remove these faults and when they are removed ignorance vanishes and the Self manifests automatically. Swami Vivekananda says: "We do not look at our own faults; the eyes do not see themselves, they see the eyes of everybody else. We human beings are very slow to recognise our own weakness, our own faults, so long as we can lay the blame upon somebody else. Men in general lay all the blame of life upon their fellow-men, or, failing that, on God, or they conjure up a ghost, and say it is fate."

Fifthly, Vedanta declares again and again that 'each soul is divine.' So spiritual aspirants are advised to look upon everyone and every object in this world as a manifestation of God. The goal is reached when we can perceive God in everything. Holy Mother says: "But I tell you one thing - if you want peace of mind, do not find fault with others. Rather see your own faults. Learn to make the whole world your own. No one is a stranger, my child. The whole world is your own."

Hard and constant practice is necessary to make even a small advance in spiritual life. Needless to say an aspirant should struggle to uproot this evil habit of fault-finding and slandering.

Lastly it is not only fault-finding but even gossip and meaningless chatter that should be avoided assiduously by those who wish to progress in spiritual life for small talk disturbs the mind, makes it restless, brews undesirable thoughts, and gradually turns the mind away from God. If we do not take care in the beginning it will turn into an evil habit and may be hard to eradicate later.

Avoid small talk as much as you can. Even shop talk can be a great hindrance. Our chattering is an escape from unwelcome thinking. Watch and pray, so that you won't waste your time. If you want to talk about something, discuss a worthwhile subject.

"Failing to guard your mouth is a very bad habit. But reverent discussion of spiritual matters can help us all grow. We will have much peace if we refrain from minding the business of others.

"Try to be patient with the defects and blemishes in others, because you also have many things about you that they must endure. If you can't make yourself what you want to be, how can you expect to remake somebody else?" (Imitation of Christ).

Swami Dayatmananda

We would like to see another person perfect, and yet we ignore our own faults. We would be pleased if others were severely corrected, but we are reluctant to accept similar treatment for ourselves. We want the law to apply to everybody but ourselves. It is clear that we don't measure our neighbours and ourselves by the same standard.

If everyone were perfect, there would be nothing in others for us to bear with for God's sake. But God has seen to it that we must "help to carry one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2).

For no one is without fault, no one is without burden, no one is self-sufficient, no one is wise enough on his own. Therefore, we must support one another, comfort one another, help, teach, and caution one another." (Imitation of Christ)

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If Ramakrishna Were Alive Today (continued)

Swami Chetanananda

In What Manner Will Ramakrishna Come?

Neither the Gospel nor Divine Play includes any direct statement from Ramakrishna concerning how he will return. However, M. records that on 15 March 1886 Ramakrishna said: "A band of minstrels (bauls) suddenly appears, dances, and sings, and it departs in the same sudden manner. They come and they return, but none recognizes them."

On 12 May 1913 Swami Arupananda told the Holy Mother that a devotee from Ranchi had had a vision of the Master. He had seen the Master wearing an ochre cloth, with wooden sandals on his feet, and tongs in his hand.

Arupananda: "Mother, why did the Master have wooden sandals and tongs?"

Holy Mother: "Those things are the signs of a monk. He said that he would come back as a baul. The bauls wear a long robe, grow a beard, and tie their long hair on their heads

in a bun."

On 9 February 1912 Gauri-ma said: "The Master will come back twice and once as a baul."

Holy Mother: "Yes, the Master said to me, 'You will carry my hubble-bubble.' I might have to cook in a broken pan and he will eat from a stone plate. He will travel continually without caring for his surroundings."

Brahmachari Akshaychaitanya wrote in his book Sri Sri Sarada Devi: "The Holy Mother said to Nikunja Devi (M.'s wife): 'One day the Master said: "I know who you are and Lakshmi, but I shall not tell you. To repay my debt to you, I shall be born as a baul and make you my companion.'""

Once an attendant of the Holy Mother said to her, "I heard that you and the Master would come back as bauls." The Mother replied: "Well, you will not escape either. Those who have come this time, they will have to come the next. Have you seen the moon in the sky? Does the moon rise alone? It rises along with the stars." The attendant said joyfully: "Mother, we are all ready to come back because we will be with you."

We really do not know why Ramakrishna said he would come back as a baul. I think it will not be out of place to discuss the meaning of the word "baul," the baul way of life, their spiritual practices, and songs. The dictionary meaning of baul is a person who is god-intoxicated, mad, overwhelmed with divine love. Professor Upendranath Bhattacharya wrote in *Banglar Baul O Baulgan* (Bauls of Bengal and Baul Songs) that until the beginning of the 17th century, the word "baul" did not enter into the Bengali language as indicating a religious sect. The word baul originated from the Sanskrit word *batul*, or mad. Later the bauls formed a religious sect centred on Chaitanya, the 14th century mystic of Bengal. They consider Chaitanya to be the founder of their sect. According to their philosophy, Radha and Krishna dwell in the human body, so it is meaningless to search for God anywhere other than within ourselves. The bauls say: "Whatever is in the human body is also in the universe." The sun, moon, Agni, Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, heaven, Vaikuntha, Vrindaban, and so on exist within the body. That is why their doctrine is called *deha-tattwa*, the body as the seat of all truths.

Bauls are devotees of God, and they worship Him in human beings. They salute each other when they meet. They have no enemies and no caste. They are free from social norms and customs. They have no fixed homes. They travel from one place to another carrying their message in their songs. They inspire people through songs that appeal to the masses. The main themes of their songs are: worship of the Lord, grace of the guru, service to humanity, finding the truth in the body, knowing the six centres of kundalini in the body, and so on. Their songs are full of humility, devotion, passion, longing, detachment, and self-surrender. Bauls practise various kinds of yoga and pranayama. Bauls are not monks, but great lovers of God.

In the *Chaitanya Charitamrita*, Chaitanya described to his disciples the pain of his separation from Krishna and declared himself to be *maha-baul*, the Great Baul. He said that as such he would first control the senses and make them his disciples. Then he would renounce the body-idea and objects of enjoyment and travel with his disciples to Vrindaban in a god-intoxicated mood.

From this statement of Chaitanya, the Great Baul, one can infer that when Ramakrishna returns as an avatar, he will travel with his disciples from place to place, from one country to another. During his last incarnation Ramakrishna was the embodiment of *samadhi*, so it was not possible for him to travel much. Once the Master lamented: "Gauranga and Nityananda carried the name of Hari from door to door, whereas I cannot go any place without a carriage."

One day the Master said to the Brahma devotees: "Without desires the body cannot live. I had one or two desires. I prayed to the Mother, 'O Mother, give me the company of those who have renounced "lust and gold.'" I said further: 'I should like to enjoy the

society of Thy jnanis and bhaktas. So give me a little strength that I may walk hither and thither and visit those people.' But She did not give me the strength to walk."

Trailokya, "Have all the desires been fulfilled?"

Master, "No, there are still a few left."

The desire of an illumined soul never remains unfulfilled. It seems that the Master will come back to fulfil some of his cherished wishes. He said: "I cherished a desire. I said to the Mother, 'O Mother, I shall be king of the devotees.'"

Swami Vijnanananda said: "This time the Master came secretly. The next time he will come in the northwest as a king with tremendous physical strength." It seems that the Master will come as a king of devotees and not as a king of the material world.

Avatar: Real or False?

How can one recognize a real avatar or prophet? Nowadays so many people claim to be avatars; and sometimes disciples proclaim that their gurus are avatars. A monk jokingly said to me: "If anyone wants to be an avatar in the West, that person just needs to write an autobiography and collect three fanatic disciples who will declare their guru to be an avatar."

There is a saying: A jewel may be on the feet and a glass bead on the head, but their worth does not change. A jewel always remains a jewel and a bead, a bead. In the market both are sold according to their respective worth. Just as some unscrupulous traders try to sell glass beads as jewels, so some hypocrites try to achieve name and fame in the religious world. Later, when their true natures are exposed, they are humiliated.

A blazing fire cannot be suppressed. Ramakrishna tried to hide himself as a poor and illiterate temple priest, but he did not succeed. Swamiji said to Sharat Chandra Chakrabarty: "God appears as an avatar in this world every few hundred years. But when I was in Dhaka, I heard that five avatars had appeared in that area. Do you know why? When out of compassion for human beings, God takes a human form and then disappears after performing his wonderful divine play, some people then declare themselves to be avatars for self-glory and name and fame. Studying the religious history of the world, one can see that in every age such false prophets appear. This time God truly appeared as Ramakrishna. Its proof is that within a few years of his passing away, he has been worshipped in the East and the West as an avatar."

Now the question is: If a new avatar comes, how shall we know that he is real, and not an impostor? Here are some general characteristics of an avatar:

1. Shows compassion for all beings;
2. Is the saviour of the fallen and downtrodden;
3. Treats everyone equally;
4. Is pure and all-loving;
5. Possesses supreme renunciation;
6. Is free from animal impulses;
7. Is endowed with divine knowledge and power;
8. Is omniscient and omnipotent;
9. Is the protector and preserver of religion;
10. Removes evil karma;
11. Is free from grief and delusion;
12. Is established in truth;
13. Has no body-consciousness.

Keep the Heart Open

If a new avatar comes, devotees of Ramakrishna should not be upset or sorrowful.

Rather, they should rejoice upon seeing the Master's new lila. The Master never cared

for narrowness or small-mindedness. Those who keep their hearts shut and form sects in the name of Ramakrishna are, in his own words, like a frog living in a well, who has never seen the outside world. He also said, "Dal [sedge] grows in a stagnant pool." Ramakrishna was completely nonsectarian; he was the meeting place of all sects and religious paths. The Master used to say that blind people touch different parts of an elephant and form their own, limited, opinions, but a sighted man sees the whole elephant. Those who have the full experience of God cannot form any sect. For that reason, the Master imparted to Vivekananda various spiritual experiences, including nirvikalpa samadhi, the knowledge of oneness, so that he could not form any sect. Ramakrishna's return to the world is a serious subject. The Master's personality and ideas are spreading rapidly all over the globe. Numerous people are gathering day by day under the banner of the Ramakrishna Mission; and hundreds of centres based on his life and message are emerging. None can stop these developments. Ramakrishna's life and message were based on truth, which alone triumphs.

When the Master was living at the Cossipore garden house, there was a difference of opinion between the monastic and householder disciples regarding how to serve him. Sharat Chakrabarty asked his guru, Vivekananda, about this situation. Vivekananda replied:

"Yes, but [it was] not exactly a split - it was only a misunderstanding, that's all. Rest assured that among those who are Sri Ramakrishna's devotees, and have truly obtained his grace, there is no sect or schism. There cannot be - be they householders or sannyasins. As to that kind of slight misunderstanding, do you know what it was due to? Well, each devotee colours Sri Ramakrishna in the light of his own understanding and each forms his own idea of him from his peculiar standpoint. He was, as it were, a great Sun, and each one of us is eyeing him, as it were, through a different kind of coloured glass, and coming to look upon that one Sun as parti-coloured. Of course, it is quite true that this leads to schism in the course of time. But then, such schisms rarely occur in the lifetime of those who are fortunate enough to have come in direct contact with an avatar. The effulgence of that Personality, who takes pleasure only in his Self, dazzles their eyes and sweeps away pride, egotism, and narrow-mindedness from their minds. Consequently they find no opportunity to create sects and party factions. They are content to offer him their heart's worship, each in his own fashion."

Sharat then inquired whether there was a possibility that sects in the name of Ramakrishna would be formed in the future.

Swamiji replied: "Quite so. Hence, sects are bound to form in the course of time. Look, for instance, how the followers of Chaitanya have been divided into two or three hundred sects; and those of Jesus hold thousands of creeds. But all those sects without exception follow Chaitanya or Jesus and none else. But this Math [Belur monastery] that we are building will harmonize all creeds, all standpoints. Just as Sri Ramakrishna held highly liberal views, this Math too will be a centre for propagating similar ideas. The blazing lights of universal harmony that will emanate from here will flood the whole world."

Swamiji was apprehensive about sects forming in the name of Ramakrishna, who was completely nonsectarian. At Lahore in 1897 Swamiji said to Lala Hansaraj, the leader of the Arya Samaj: "You see, I have such power that I can bring one-third of the world's population under the banner of Ramakrishna. Despite that power, I have no intention of doing that because that will refute my guru's message of harmony: 'As many faiths so many paths.' Furthermore, it would just create a new sect in India."

Ramakrishna never said that he was the only avatar, or even the last avatar. His disciples also never tried to establish this view. It is natural that an organisation develops around an avatar. A sect is not bad, but sectarianism is horrible. If Krishna, Buddha, Moses, Christ, Mohammed, and Ramakrishna were to travel in one car, they

would laugh, joke, and even embrace each other. But if a Hindu, a Buddhist, a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim were to travel together, they might well quarrel among themselves. This is the outcome of sectarianism and fanaticism. Observing this religious conflict and schism, narrowness and bigotry, Ramakrishna told the Brahmo leaders Keshab Sen and Vijay Goswami: "Look here. Your quarrel seems like the fight between Shiva and Rama. Shiva was Rama's guru. Though they fought each other, yet they soon came to terms. But the grimaces of the ghosts, the followers of Shiva, and the gibbering of the monkeys, the followers of Rama, would not come to an end!"

Therefore, if we are true devotees of the Master, we shall not fight like ghosts and monkeys if Ramakrishna appears again. Swami Vivekananda, who was the voice of Ramakrishna, left clear directions for future generations:

"Our watchword will be acceptance and not exclusion. Not only toleration; for so-called toleration is often blasphemy and I do not believe in it. I believe in acceptance. I accept all the religions that were in the past and worship with them all.

"Not only shall I do all this, but I shall keep my heart open for all the religions that may come in the future. Is God's Book finished? Or is revelation still going on? It is a marvellous Book - these spiritual revelations of the world. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I shall leave my heart open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutation to all the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present, and to all that are to come in the future!"

The Spiritual Tidal Wave Is Coming

On 28 November 1883 Ramakrishna said to Keshab Sen: "I have seen big steamers going by on the Ganges, at the time hardly noticing their passing. But oh, my! What a terrific noise is heard after a while, when the waves splash against the banks! Perhaps a piece of the bank breaks loose and falls into the water." Ramakrishna himself was a big steamer. He lived for only a little over fifty years but his spiritual legacy will continue to flow in the veins of humanity for thousands of years.

Swami Vivekananda was a rishi, a seer of truth and of the future. Observing the movement of the gigantic ship that was Ramakrishna, he wrote to Alasinga Perumal from America: "Up, up, the long night is passing, the day is approaching, the wave has risen, nothing will be able to resist its tidal fury. The flood of spirituality has risen. I see it is rolling over the land resistless, boundless, all-absorbing."

At a later date Sharat Chakrabarty asked Swamiji: "Sir, what is the outcome of all your labours here and in foreign countries?"

Swamiji replied: "You will see only a little manifestation of what has been done. In time, the whole world must accept the universal and catholic ideas of Sri Ramakrishna. Of this, only the beginning has been made. Before this [spiritual] flood everybody will be swept off."

Sometime before his passing away in 1902, Swamiji told Swami Adbhutananda: "Brother, what do you see now? You will see the results of what I have done. This is just the beginning. People of Europe and America have started to appreciate the greatness of our Master. After a few years they will accept his ideas. Now they are only a handful, but later hundreds will come. Then you will understand what this Vivekananda has done."

A big ocean wave rolls up the sandy beach wetting the sand. Then the sand dries. After a while, another wave comes and wets the sand again. This is the way of nature. The spiritual tidal wave of Ramakrishna is spreading all over the world, but in the course of time this wave will recede and the sands will dry up. Again a new spiritual wave will come and Ramakrishna, perhaps as a baul, will be on its pinnacle. The new avatar will

establish the great and all-inclusive view of Ramakrishna and spread his universal message throughout the world. The luminous sun does not introduce itself by saying, "I am the sun and the world is illumined by my light." Similarly, the "Great Baul" Ramakrishna will be endowed with knowledge, devotion, love, renunciation, purity, and power to the fullest extent. He will shine in his own glory, so we will have no difficulty recognizing him. If we can simply jump into his spiritual current, we will definitely reach our goal.

(Reprinted from Prabuddha Bharata, Dec, 1942)

Meditation on a Gita Verse **Swami Siddheswarananda**

This is a short commentary on one of the most familiar verses of the Bhagavad-Gita, by the late Founder of the Centre Vedantique Ramakrishna, Gretz, France.

'He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, he is intelligent among men, he is a Yogi, and a doer of all action.'

Bhagavad-Gita IV.18

This verse expresses one of the most important principles of the Vedanta: Truth can only be indicated by contradictions. Intuition of Reality will not be induced by a logical interpretation; an interpretation is a succession of ideas closely attached one to another, a vantage point which only allows us a single perspective. But Reality is not the sum total of perspectives, it is not a totalization.

How may we come to understand this Reality by a supra-logical intuition that the interplay of the opposites could never reach? The finger which points at the moon is not the moon; an explanation should not be taken literally.

Verse IV.18 tells us that the sage who performs an action does not act. The difficulty of discriminating between action and inaction has already been pointed out to us in the preceding verse. In the world we are confronted with the multiple contradictions of daily life, and if we have at the same time spiritual aspirations we will suppose that liberation will come to us as a result of the cessation of action; this is a great mistake, for which primordial ignorance, avidya, is responsible. To cease-to-act is still an action, for every initiative taken by the ego is an action; it merely changes the direction of the energy which drives us towards the outside world. To stop a moving vehicle is at the same time an action of our thought and of our muscles.

To see action in inaction is to understand that nobody can avoid action. When we act we suppose that the force which is being employed comes from our personal ego. But we should understand that it is nature which brings everything about, as it is stated in chapter V, verses 8 and 9:

'The knower of Truth (being) centred (in the Self) should think, "I do nothing at all" - though seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, sleeping, breathing, speaking, letting go, holding, opening and closing the eyes - convinced that it is the senses that

move among sense-objects.'

Wisdom, no doubt, is enveloped in non-wisdom, and men fall into illusion (V.15). But the wrong idea that the source of my action is in myself will be contradicted by a vision of nature that is total; we will then see that it is the 'nature of things', cosmic energy, which is acting.

All our efforts to stop action, with the idea of thus establishing ourselves in inaction, only plunge us deeper and deeper in error. Scripture tells us that the Self is free of all action because it is unborn (Gita II,20-25). How can an entity which is unborn act? If the Self is unborn it does not act: it is prakriti which acts. It is in prakriti that the sense of the ego is born and in which external objects exist: That which is interior and that which is exterior are the representation of the phenomenon, that is of the nature, of prakriti. The Self, the atman, belongs neither to that which is exterior nor to that which is interior. The Gita, as all the Upanishadic texts, teaches the identity of the individual soul (in its very nature, and apart from prakriti) with the cosmic soul, Brahman (outside the grasp of any kind of manifestation).

From the point of view of sadhana we should take up a position beyond the manifestation of prakriti. This statement comprises a contradiction - because there can be no position beyond the range of prakriti. It is only a method of envisaging the direction of our spiritual efforts.

Verse IV.18 shows that Wisdom and the Wise Man are identical. Wisdom is impersonal, the Wise Man is impersonal also. It is difficult to understand this by means of our inferior buddhi; we behold someone who acts or who does not act, who sleeps or who walks, and our intellect which analyses and separates everything cannot seize the impersonal nature of the Sage. Only the impersonal can seize the impersonal, which remains therefore beyond our grasp. In many places the Gita indicates the nature and the comportment of the man of realization; this comportment is in prakriti, which has three modes of expression: sattva, rajas and tamas. The man of realization, for those who behold him, remains on the plane of sattva, and his comportment constitutes an ideal for the world in general. But nobody can understand him as he really is because, being himself Wisdom, he is impersonal.

When this Wisdom is condensed into action - and the Gita tells us that the whole world is action, that is, a multiple expression of energy - we can see in the man who has himself realized the highest degree of sattva; this man, whose intelligence is firmly established (sthita prajna) perceives action in inaction and inaction in action. Nowhere in this wisdom is there the notion of ego; whatever may be the action performed, for him it is inaction. Every action implies an actor, but when the Sage breathes, speaks, walks, and does the innumerable things that life requires, he understands that it is nature in its undivided integrality which is acting, and not he himself. Then everything that he does is inaction; if he ceases to act - which might appear to be inaction - he knows that, on the plane of the man who has not realization, this cessation of action is still, and nevertheless, action.

This verse is considered by Shankara as one of the most important in the Advaitic teaching on the subject of action. Shri Krishna insists on the impersonal nature of Wisdom, which is manifested in the eyes of the ignorant by the actions of the sage. We note that, according to Indian thought, realization is not an abstract idea, distinct from the man who experiences realization. It is our intellect that artificially separates Truth into thought that expresses the impersonal and object that expresses the personal. In this verse IV.18 it is said that the man whose intelligence is firmly established is at the same time a man who feels harmony. There is harmony whenever everything is seen without differentiation. Yoga, says the Gita (II.48) is equality in the manner of seeing, and equilibrium. It is from the point of view of maya that we speak of equilibrium, which is attained on the plane of sattva. The man who has realization then regards in

the same manner a brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and a pariah (V.18). Only he who has lost the sense of an ego, the sense of the personal, and who has attained the impersonal, can achieve this vision.

It is by means of contradictions, as I said at the beginning, that Reality is indicated in this verse.

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Spiritual Discipline (continued)

Swami Swahananda

When you practise meditation, you have to decide on what to meditate. I am to fix my mind on something. A personalized aspect of God is presented. A holy name is repeated, but this is often translated as a holy formula. Why? Because monistic Vedantins often don't take recourse to a personalized God, so they think about a principle, or an idea. Some Buddhists, some Advaita Vedantins do that type of meditation, but they also repeat some word, such as Om. This repetition is called japam, or japa. Round and round you repeat it. Why? Because the mind's tendency is to go away. You try to pull it in, and it goes away, and again you pull it in. So a picture, a photo, or an image of a holy man or a deity may be given. You fix your mind on this, and meditation becomes easier. That's why it is said that the avatar, God, becomes human, so that people can relate to him, to his form. To think of the divine form, an incarnation of God, is one type of meditation. You try to focus your mind on this visualization-the Lord sitting in your heart, or sitting in front of you. It becomes easier if you repeat the name. Say a mother has a son called Richard. Whenever the word Richard is pronounced, she remembers her son. Similarly, when a devotee says God, God, Rama, Rama, he remembers Rama. This repetition, japa, is a reminder of the person behind the name. If I want to meditate on God, God has an expression in the sense of an avatar, a humanized God, or a deity type of God, I repeat a formula, a divine name, called a mantra. It is believed that God's name has got special power. Mantras can be picked up from books; nowadays everything is available in books, and if you repeat the mantra some result will be there. Japa means repetition of the mantra, or the divine name. But the mantra becomes more powerful if it comes through a holy man or another devotee who himself practises; it acquires still more power if it comes from a succession of teachers. The person who gives the mantra is called a guru. So there are five items involved in meditation. First, meditation proper, that is, intense thinking, visualizing. To help it, you have a mantra, which you repeat - japa. The mantra is given by a guru, and he gives the mantra of a deity or an avatar. These five items - dhyana, mantra, japa, guru, and avatar, are necessary.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say that of all the spiritual practices, the two most important and easy methods are dhyana and japa, because they don't require external things. Puja, worship, is done in shrines, or you can keep a picture in your room. Salute, meditate, think. Whenever you see the picture you are reminded of God; that also is very good. Then, religious groups have got pilgrimage, fasting, charity - these are all different methods of spiritual practice; they are also very useful. For day to day practice what are you going to do? Spiritual practice should be done every day, normally a

minimum of twice a day. At one time it was four times a day, at all the junctions of the day, then it became three times a day. But nowadays, lunchtime also is uncertain. So the minimum times insisted upon are morning and evening. When day changes into night, and night changes into day, a natural change is there, and the mind by training often becomes reflective. People throughout the world who are a little religious think of God at these times. This creates a special type of vibration. There is a vibration theory: every time you have thought something, it has left an impression on the atmosphere, as it were. So if you are trying to be good, all the good thoughts will come to you. If you are trying to be bad, all the bad thoughts will come to you. That is why holy association is very much stressed. We must move in a holy place. That is how shrines come.

Vivekananda recommended, in Protestant America in the 1890s, reserving a corner of your room, of your house, or a separate room, where you can think only of God and nothing else. Go and unburden yourself when you are sorrowful, thank the Lord when you are happy, or just simply meditate and think of Him. All the time the emotions need not be mixed in; just calmly sit. His theory was, in three months the place will acquire such a vibration that whenever you go there you will feel uplifted. Some people keep a picture of a holy man or the Ishta, the chosen deity, or an avatar - Ramakrishna, or Jesus, or Buddha. Whenever you look at the picture you are reminded of God.

At one time we had a swami in Philadelphia, Swami Yatiswarananda. Before going there he had been in Holland. He was instructing people to do japam. One mantra he gave, a short mantra normally. It is not a prayer; a prayer is a prolonged thing. Japa is a short thing. So somebody said, "Swami, it is a little boring, repeating the same thing round and round and round." But he gave a very ingenious reply: How many times every day do you think that you are the body? Every time you groan because of this pain, or that pain, or every time you feel happy, or beautify yourself; that means you think you are the body. That many times you will have to think that you are the Spirit; many thousands of times you will have to repeat the mantra. The idea is that you have to remind yourself that you are not the body, not the mind, but the Spirit. That is the Vedantic conclusion. The Vedantins will give argument after argument to try to convince you that you are really not the body. The body dies after 100 years. You are not really the mind, because the mind is changing. But there is a Reality behind you, which is the spiritual self of man, the Atman, it is called. At times you vaguely feel that life is not finished with this body, that there must be something behind, something beyond. Religion especially speaks of that idea.

Now for day to day practice, all of this should be done. All these five items are one integrated method called dhyana. Every day you must sit quietly, twice a day minimum. If you are too busy at one time you will have to sit more at another time. And if you love it, do more. Sometimes people say, "How long should I sit?" It depends upon your hunger. In the beginning, you discipline yourself, even if you don't like it. After some time, you should not force yourself. Holy Mother says that real japa comes when the mind gets concentrated, quiet. Then, shall I wait till the mind gets quiet? The analogy is given of waiting till the waves of the ocean stop before taking a bath. They shall never stop. Both things will go on in the beginning. So every day methodically sit, think of a form of God, think of his qualities, repeat his name, and try to hold the thought as long as possible, with concentration.

At the day to day level it must come to the point where I don't get up from bed without repeating the name of God; I do it automatically. Many people have this habit. Think of God first and then get up. If life is too busy as soon as you get up, if you are swallowed by the chores of life, then practice, sitting on the bed itself. Or get up in the early morning and practice, before the other members of the family get up, and then begin the day. The best thing, of course, would be for all the people to do it. They need not be too religious; it is more or less getting a grip over the mind, getting mental quiet.

Just to stop the mind from running about is a form of relaxation. Sitting gives physical stamina also. But these are all side effects.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, "Come and go." I was in Madras at one time as a novice, a brahmachari. The head of the centre was a disciple of Mahapurush Maharaj, Swami Shivananda, whom he used to quote. Swami Shivananda used to say that for normal, average people, "Coming and going will do." That means come and go to the centre, to the ashram, to the holy place, or to the sadhus, to those who are trying to live the life. Then later I found that Swami Akhandananda said that Sri Ramakrishna himself used to say that. That means by going to a holy place you are reminded of God. So every day, along with your meditation, you should read something which will remind you of God. Gradually it comes to the habit level; instinctively you do it. When the urge becomes very strong, you will do more. But you must hold on to the minimum. So daily I often recommend one page of holy reading - reading of spiritual literature, of a "conversations" type of book, as if you are talking to a saint, like the Gospel of Ramakrishna, Gospel of Holy Mother, talks of Brahmananda, Shivananda and others in our circle. The Gita and others are there, but they are more philosophical. Even Vivekananda is more philosophical. So this is the method; those who are not serious should just do it, those who are serious should read a little extra - the philosophical part. In your daily reading, suddenly you may find, "Oh, this answer is very good, suitable for me." Everything in the scripture you are not to follow. Take whatever appeals to you, whatever applies in your case. That is how spiritual life is built up; it becomes natural. Life becomes enjoyable.

Keeping up the habit and holding on to the thought of God is the method. The immediate result of meditation will be some calmness, some serenity. The test of progress in meditation is that you enjoy doing it. In the beginning every discipline is unpalatable, but after some time you like it. Like exercise it is not very palatable. What is exercise? Giving pain to the body. But you know that if you give pain to the body every day for half an hour you shall have good health for another 30, 40, 50 years. That's why it must be started early in life. Often people say, "Oh, you are too young to be religious now." That means when you are old and can do nothing else, all right, then become religious. Even that is not bad of course - if some awareness is there that there is a higher purpose of life, a higher goal of life. I remember in the 50s, in Reader's Digest, people from all walks of life were asked a question: The world is going to end in 15 minutes. What are you going to do? From a minister down to prisoners, all were asked that question. And they all replied, "We shall kneel down and pray." Of course if they were given 15 years I don't know what they would have done. But for 15 minutes everybody knows life has no other meaning.

So instead of going into varieties of disciplines, I have only taken up one discipline, meditation, which has five disciplines inside it. Posture and other things I am not including, but they are also disciplines. So, you think about practising meditation, convince yourself that it is good, then you will do it. Otherwise you won't do it. You may do it at first out of enthusiasm for two or three months, and then give it up. Millions of people nowadays try to meditate, because they have heard meditation is wonderful. But because they are not convinced, or because of wayward habits, in three months most of them give it up. Many of us, because of our jobs, do some type of concentrated work, or concentrated study. But the rest of life is disorganized and filled with desultory habits. We take a book, we read a little, but there is no definite goal. Some part of our lives should be methodical - that is what I am advocating. Learn to master yourself, your moods, your tendencies, your sense organs, by daily practice. The common practice, instead of varieties and tidbits of practice, should be trying to think of God for some time. Discipline gives you some benefit. Devotees believe that God also gives something. The question comes whether God will be partial to me. I am joining his party; he should

favour me a little extra. All the devotees of the world feel that they are the chosen people. If I join God's group, he should look after me. How to save God from the charge of partiality? Sri Ramakrishna gives an analogy which explains it. The wind of grace is blowing for everybody, but one who unfurls his sails will get the benefit; others will not get it. It will look as if that person is being favoured, but his cooperation is necessary. If you want to get any result, any answer from God, or results from your practices, you must do them willingly. Practice which is forced or done unwillingly is not very useful. This is the prescription. Understand it, try to convince yourself it is good, and most important, do it. Once you do it, even without conviction, after some time, gradually you will get the benefit, and then you will like to do it more and more. That is the method of developing good habits, and developing devotion to God. Ultimately that devotion turns into love of God when you don't expect anything but the fulfilment of life. That is the goal of life. So we should all try to meditate. Meditation is an important part of life; do it every day for some time.

Some Reminiscences of the Early Sri Ramakrishna Maths and Monks

Swami Bodhananda

This will be a rather personal affair, nevertheless interesting, to tell you how I first came into contact with the work which had been started since the advent of Sri Ramakrishna.

It was in 1890 that we formed a small group of students among ourselves - most of them, my classmates. We were about eighteen in number and some of them became Swamis, viz., Vimalananda, Virajananda, Atmananda, Prakashananda, Suddhananda and myself. We used to meet together in the houses of some of our friends and talk over religious matters. That year we were studying for our F.A. Virajananda, Vimalananda, Atmananda and myself were students of the same class. In the month of August we heard that Sri Ramakrishna's deathday was to be celebrated at Kankurgachi. S. Ramchandra Dutt was the owner of that Samadhi temple. This gentleman was a distant relative of Swami Vivekananda. He was a great devotee of the Master. He used to celebrate the death anniversary of the Master, unlike us who celebrate the birthday.

Hearing of this celebration, one afternoon I went alone, all the way to Kankurgachi, without speaking a word about this to my friends. It was 5 o'clock when I arrived there. The date of the celebration fell a couple of days hence; but throughout that week there used to be some celebration or other. I was introduced to Rambabu. He received me very kindly and asked me many questions, what I was, whether I was a student, etc. To each of the questions I gave my answer. He then asked my opinion about Sri Ramakrishna, whether I had seen him. I replied, 'No, I have only heard of him' - 'What do you think of him?' I replied that he was a highly illumined soul. He did not like my remark. You know, he was a bigoted follower of Sri Ramakrishna. So he at once began to explain to me how Ramakrishna was an Incarnation of Vishnu. His argument was that if Ramakrishna was not so, he would not have expressed all the divine powers he had manifested.

He also disclosed to me some incidents of a personal nature - how he got his own

mantram in dream, how he told Sri Ramakrishna about it and Sri Ramakrishna confirmed it and told him, 'Yes, that is your mantram.' He counted this mantram for several months and one day he came to Sri Ramakrishna, who asked him to return his mantram. Sri Ramakrishna touched him on his chest and said that, he had, from that day forwards taken all his disciple's responsibility on his shoulders.

I remember now one more incident Rambabu told me. Rambabu was taking some jilipi (sweets) to Guru Maharaj. As he was going to Dakshineswar a young boy came up to him and Rambabu gave him one or two pieces. When he came to the Master, Sri Ramakrishna could not touch the sweets. You know the Master could not touch any food which had been first tasted by others. Now the Master knew what had transpired and so he could not take the impure food.

He told me many other things. It was 6.30 p.m. and darkness was setting. As Rambabu came home he offered me a seat in his carriage. On our way, he told me about the coming anniversary. I spoke to him about our group of friends. He welcomed them too. When I went home and told my friends about the day's experience, they were all surprised beyond all measure. That night we were all so delighted. We were so jubilant at the idea that Sri Ramakrishna was the Incarnation of this age and that we were all shortly going to witness a festival to be celebrated in his honour. We felt as if we knew Sri Ramakrishna from a long time.

That night we spent in talking about our forthcoming visit. We decided to buy some things to be offered in the temple. As we had no money, we went to different people. Some gave us money and some gave us rice. We sold the rice and used the money to buy sweets. In this connection we went to Iswar Chandar Vidyasagar, famous for his charities. We had a hope that he would give us some money. But we were disappointed. Perhaps he thought that we, young boys, were going to be spoiled in this way. He scolded us saying that we were students and so should mind our studies first. If we wanted to serve saints, we must work ourselves and earn the money and not beg it out! He did not give us any money. However with what little we had, we bought mangoes and sweets and went to the temple. We saw Rambabu about 8 p.m. Afterwards there was keertan (singing). He was very delighted to see us. He told us how he first heard of Sri Ramakrishna. He had first seen an article in a Brahmo paper regarding Sri Ramakrishna. We were fortunate to hear some more reminiscences of the Master.

That day we saw a young man, a relation of Rambabu, going into samadhi. With the progress of the keertan, he became outwardly unconscious. This was the first time we saw a spiritual state practically before us.

We had our supper at 10 p.m. and then we all walked back home that night. The public celebration came the next day. There was a big procession from Simla to Kankurgachi - three miles off - a keertan was accompanying the procession. The keertan parties had been got up after many days' rehearsal. But we joined the parties without any preparations. The result was that we spoiled the whole performance in a way. At Kankurgachi, there was dancing and singing. The sight was worth seeing. That day there was a service, bhog (food offering) and aratrikam (vesper service), and we partook of the prasadam before we left the place.

We were students of the Ripon College. M. (Sj. Mahendra Nath Gupta, the author of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna) was a professor in that college. We saw him one day in the College during his leisure hour. He began to talk to us about Sri Ramakrishna. He told us for the first time that instead of going to Rambabu we must frequent the residence of the sannyasin disciples of the Master. We had heard about them from Rambabu, but he did not talk kindly of them. He did not like the sannyas ideal. He believed that Sri Ramakrishna came to this world to emulate the true house-holder's life. Rambabu thought he understood the Master more than the sannyasin disciples; for he knew Sri Ramakrishna many years before they had met him. M. compared Rambabu to an ordinary

mango but ripe; but the sannyasins, when ripe, would be very delicious. He told us that if we must see Sri Ramakrishna's spirit working in a living form, we must see these sannyasin disciples. He promised to take us to them.

M. used to spend his holidays with the sadhus. One afternoon we accompanied him there. I saw Swami Ramakrishnanandaji. You know, he had never once left the service of the Master, and had stuck to the spot, even when all his comrades had gone on pilgrimage to different parts of India. He was very vigilant about his daily worship. We were four - Virajananda, Vimalananda, Atmananda and myself. Ramakrishnanandaji asked us what we were doing. Hearing that we were students, he asked us not to neglect our studies. He examined us in our subjects. He gave us prasad and also some offered flowers.

When we were ushered into the shrine, we felt the atmosphere simply transporting - so holy. The shrine room was a very small one. The picture of Sri Guru Maharaj was on the bed. In front of the bedstead were his shoes and urn containing his ashes. We saluted them. Swami Ramakrishnanandaji prayed to Guru Maharaj to bless us that our bondages may be cut off.

From that day we began to visit the Math. Sometimes M. used to take us in his own carriage. M. had told us that even if the swamis asked us to go away, we should not do so, we must go on visiting them continuously. We should seek opportunities to do them some personal service, like shampooing them, or preparing chilum of tobacco for them to smoke, or run errands for them. As we began to visit the Math, Swami Ramakrishnanandaji allowed us some privileges. When the day was too hot, he would ask us to take the fan and fan Sri Guru Maharaj. What a wonderful spectacle it was to see Swami Ramakrishnanandaji serving the Master! Day and night the Swami had no other thought but that of his Lord. If he felt hot, he would get up and fan Sri Guru Maharaj. In fact to him the Master was a living personality, who could be seen, felt and served. His services were very simple. He would get up at 4 a.m., and washing his hands and changing his clothes, he would enter the shrine, raise up the curtain from the bedstead and rouse the Lord from His sleep. He would then offer water for washing. Then the bhog consisting of a few coconut laddus (sweets) would be offered; next tobacco to smoke was offered. He would then sweep the room. He never allowed even his brother disciples to help him. Next, he would collect flowers for worship and then go to the bazaar for buying vegetables. He would select the best the market could offer. He himself would dress the vegetables for cooking. Then he would go for his bath in the Ganges. When he would return to the Math (monastery), he would carry with him a pitcher of holy water for pooja. He would then sit for worship; it was very simple - a few flowers devotionally offered. After the pooja, bhog and prasadam would be given. After the bhog the prasadam was distributed. Now and then he would give us the privilege of preparing sandal paste. We enjoyed all this so much.

I think it was two or three years after this, the Math was removed from Baranagore to Alambazar. We in fact belong to the Baranagore days. Although we had not become sannyasins our hearts and souls were with the monks. I was present on the occasion when the Math was shifted to its new abode. It was then about March or April.

One day Swami Trigunatita took me out for begging; he gave me a gerua cloth. We went about two miles, to several houses. We cried out 'Hari Krishna'. Some gave us rice, some pice. That rice was cooked for bhog (food offerings), because Sri Guru Maharaj used to say that alms was sacred.

At that time Maharaj and Hari Maharaj were on pilgrimage (Swamis Brahmananda and Turiyananda). I first saw Maharaj in 1895.

We did not meet Swamiji until he had returned from America. I had seen Swamiji before; but that was without knowing who he was. I was a student in a school in which he was the head-master for a time. I was in the fourth class and I used to see Swamiji

coming to the school every day. I was impressed by his sparkling eyes, and his ways of moving about. Then Sri Guru Maharaj was living; but I had not known or heard anything about him. I did not know that this, our head-master, was to be our future Swamiji. When he used to come to the school, we could see him from a window - 200 feet from the main street. He used to look about with great dignity and have a book in his hand. In 1895 Swami Brahmanandaji returned from his tour. He was for the most part spending his days in Brindavan. Maharaja's nature was like a child's. His body was as soft as butter. He used to ask us to press his body. In 1896, Holy Mother was living at a house in Bagh Bazar near the Ganges. Maharaj was also with her. Though they lived in the same house Maharaj hardly used to go upstairs to see Mother. Mother used to send fruits and sweets for him: 'Take these to Rakhal.' Of Sri Guru Maharaj, he used to talk very little. In fact, Maharaj incorporated into his life much of what Sri Guru Maharaj actually was. His feelings were so deep and intense, that he could not talk anything about him. To him it mattered not if people looked upon Sri Guru Maharaj as a perfect soul or avatar. To him it was enough if people came into contact with Him. I found him, performing worship one day. After Swami Ramakrishnananda left for Madras, Swami Premananda did the worship. One day he was sick and so Maharaj had to do it. In this connection, I remember also the worship which Swamiji performed. He was very particular about meditation. For some months we used to keep vigils. By turns, we used to sit for meditation the whole night and thus the spiritual thought was kept alive. One day when all were meditating about 10.30 a.m. Swami Premanandaji came and requested Swamiji to do the pooja. Swamiji took his seat. He mixed the sandal paste with the flowers and sprinkled the flowers on the altar, urn and shoes and threw the remaining flowers on us who were meditating in the shrine room. To him, Sri Guru Maharaj was a living person. He neither rang the bell nor sprinkled water, nor did prana prathishta. Swamiji saw the presence of Sri Guru Maharaj in his disciples also. So he worshipped them too. What a grand idea of worship! After the pooja was over we all prostrated before him. We had never heard of Swamiji until the end of 1893. The first letter he wrote was from Japan, to Swami Ramakrishnananda. We received it in August. Until then, we did not know that he was going to America. I was then a teacher away from Calcutta, so I could not come as often to the Math as before. I saw Swamiji in February 1897. That day was Sri Guru Maharaj's celebration, and I had come away to attend the birthday. Swamiji was then staying in Seal's Garden House which was two miles away from the Alambazar Math. Without informing anyone, I had come to see him. As I went to him Swamiji had just got up and was washing his face. Swami Sivanandaji introduced me to him. Swamiji said, 'I will make you a sannyasi, my son; well, can you bring me a glass of water?' - 'Yes,' I replied - 'I am going to the Math,' he continued, 'to initiate Harrison; (Swamiji initiated him and gave him mantram) I don't know whether Sashi (Swami Ramakrishnananda) would like it. What do you think of it? You can come with us.' I replied, 'If there is no room in the carriage, I can walk.' But Swamiji said, 'No, you can sit on the top of the carriage.' There were G. G., Kidi and Chakravarty. We had hired three carriages. We came to the Math; Swamiji initiated Harrison. Then we accompanied Swamiji to Dakshineswar. There had assembled a record crowd. That day's public celebration was the last of the kind held in Dakshineswar. People thronged round Swamiji. He made two or three attempts to speak, but the crowd made it impossible for him to be heard. He came back to the Math. That day I enjoyed the privilege of fanning him. But I could not stay there long as I had to attend to my school work. During the coming summer vacation time I came back to stay at the Math. It was during these days that the rules and regulations of the Math were framed by Swamiji. One evening he was teaching us Sankaracharya's philosophy, so nobody could attend the shrine during the evening service. Swami Premanandaji resented this omission and reproached Swamiji for holding up the members. But Swamiji took him to task severely.

'You see, Baburam, this study is as great as your service in the shrine.' Swami Premanandaji took to heart Swamiji's scolding. He was very sensitive and so, after the aratrikam, all of a sudden he disappeared. Everybody felt very anxious for him. So all went out in search of him. After a long time and search we discovered him sitting in a corner on the terrace. Then we made much fun of him. Swamiji then asked him, 'Baburam, you are my brother. Are you angry with me?' Hearing these words of Swamiji, he fell prostrate at his feet and asked his pardon for his conduct. Whenever Swamiji would scold anyone, he would soon compensate it by his love.

About that time the discipline of the Math was very rigid. Everybody had to get up at 4 a.m., then meditate and chant Gita. Swamiji asked us to commit to memory ten stanzas a day and recite them before him daily.

In June he left for Almora. At one o'clock he came to Calcutta and before he departed he gave us a talk on 'The Gita'. Only one verse he explained. It was this: 'Yield not to unmanliness, O Son of Pritha! Ill doth it become thee. Cast off this mean faint-heartedness, O scorcher of thine enemies!' (Chapter II, verse 3).

Swamiji told us that the whole secret of the Gita was contained in these words and as he explained the verse, his face became bright with an unusual lustre. Swami Yogananda and Alasinga went with him. From Almora he went to Kashmir. He did not return to us until November.

In 1898 I gave up my position as a teacher and joined the Order finally. Then the Math was already removed to Nilambar Mukerjee's house in Belur. Swami Saradananda had just returned from America. He used to take two classes, one on the Gita and the other on Bhashyam. Swami Nirmalanandaji was holding Upanishad classes. The classes were held very regularly.

At the end of that year we moved to our present quarters in Belur. Swami Vijnananandaji supervised the work of building construction. Swamiji was present when the Math was moved to its permanent quarters. For a few days he performed the Rudra sacrifice in the yard. In that year we were initiated into sannyas.

In 1899 Swamiji left us for America (and only at the end of December 1900 he came back). This time he took with him Swami Turiyanandaji. Swamiji had a very great respect for him. He used to call him 'Hari Bhai'. You know Swamiji's new ideas of work were not received with full sympathy by his brother disciples. But Swamiji used to say that under no circumstances 'Rakhal' (Swami Brahmananda) and his 'Hari Bhai' would desert him. Of Swami Turiyanandaji he used to say that he was the ornament of the Math. He was full of spiritual lustre. When Swamiji took him to America, he never expected him to deliver lectures. He wanted him to live the orthodox sannyasin's life and wanted to show to the West the life of an ideal Indian sadhu.

When Swamiji returned from the West, I was in Belur Math. He came without giving us any intimation beforehand. Nobody received any letter or telegram that he was coming. At 11 o'clock in the night he arrived at the gate of the Math. The gate was then closed and locked. He called the gardener; but before he came and opened it, Swamiji jumped over the fence and walked to the Math. In the meanwhile, the gardener ran before him and informed us that a sahib was waiting at the gate. When Swamiji reached the Math building, Swami Premanandaji saw him first and so he shouted out, 'This is our sahib.' That night after Swamiji ate his dinner, the whole night was spent in talking. He narrated briefly some of the incidents during his visit to America.

Early next year Swamiji went to Benares. I was then at Hardwar. So I wanted to see him and came down to Benares. I brought some perfumed rice for him from Hardwar. Our ashram in Hardwar was just being started then. Swami Kalyanananda was in Hrishikesh. He had a small dispensary and men used to come to him for treatment. We lived in tents and had our madhukari (door to door acceptance of food) from the neighbouring villages. I hurried up to Benares to see him. When Swamiji knew that I had come, he

sent word, 'Tell him to come straight up to me. I want to see him in his Hrishikesh dress.' When he saw me, he very fondly inquired about my health and then about our tapasya and said, 'I am so glad you have come. One Maharaja has promised to meet the initial expenditure for the construction of an ashram here. He has given Rs. 500/-. Will you take up the work?' I humbly pleaded my inability to cope with such a work in Benares where there were many pandits who could expound the scriptures with greater ability than my own self. Hearing this plea Swamiji at once remarked, 'You need not imitate others. I ask you to lead the life and work in your own natural way. Work sincerely and success will surely be yours.'

When Swamiji went back to Calcutta I accompanied him. Swamiji then sent Swami Shivananda and Swami Achalananda to start the ashram at Benares. This was how the advaita ashram of Benares was founded. I remained afterwards with Swamiji till he passed away.

One morning we overslept. He punished us all for this. We were forbidden to take meals at the Math and we were asked to go to Calcutta and beg our meals. He told me that I must not go to the houses of any of my friends. I met Swami Trigunatita at Calcutta. He offered me some money, but I refused it. On my way back at the ghat I again met Swamiji. He enquired after my day's experience.

It is impossible to describe to you how loving Swamiji was. His broad humanitarian heart appealed most to me. He was a real purushottama (the best of men). Sri Ramakrishna used to say of himself that he was all jnanam within, all bhakti outside. (He, Swamiji, said one day that Sri Ramakrishna, while seeming to be all bhakti was really, within all jnana; but he himself, apparently all jnana, was full of bhakti and that thereby he was apt to be as weak as any woman. (Notes on Some Wanderings with Swami Vivekananda by Sister Nivedita, p.46.)

One day we were accompanying Swamiji for a walk along the Ganges side. When we came in front of Dakshineswar Temple, Swamiji began to talk on Sri Ramakrishna. Very rarely he used to talk about the Master. At every time he used to begin speaking he used to become so emotional that it made it impossible for him to talk. This day he told us that he was all devotion, inside and all knowledge outside, while Sri Ramakrishna was just the opposite. Then in his genial humour he remarked, 'I have wrecked all the prospects which a promising life held out for me, by being a slave to the love of an illiterate Brahmin priest.' It is not possible for me to give an idea of his intense love towards Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji did not describe him as an avatar or popularise the Master as such. He used to say that whether he was an avatar or something more, he did not know! To describe him was to belittle his greatness. Swamiji had an extraordinary love towards his brother disciples. His veneration for Sri Maharaj (Swami Brahmananda), knew no bounds.

One day the Marwaries of Calcutta held a picnic on the banks of the Ganges in the Math. Swamiji was taking a stroll in the evening along the banks there, and in the presence of so many people, pointing to Sri Maharaj he declared, 'He is our Raja (King), and we are all his servants.' Swamiji had an unbounded regard for the personality of Sri Maharaj. He used to say that Sri Maharaj had the raja-buddhi (wisdom of a king) in him. Swamiji knew that Sri Maharaj was the best person to be at the head of the religious order, so Swamiji appointed him as the first President of the Ramakrishna Mission. Swamiji was enjoying tolerably good health. The end came too soon. That day when he gave up his body, he had taken a class on Panini's Grammar. He had gone out for a long walk in the evening with Swami Premananda. I remember as he came back from the walk we were sitting on the verandah of the Math, around the tea table. Swamiji had mounted the stairs; but he came a few steps down and addressing us said, 'The malarial season is coming. So those of you who have holes in the mosquito curtains, better have them mended.' These were the last words I heard from him. He went up and you know how

the end came.

Sri Maharaj had gone the previous day to Calcutta on business. Immediately word was sent to him. I remember how his body was trembling when he got down from the boat. He went straight up and catching hold of Swamiji's feet began to weep like a young child. You must remember that Sri Maharaj had always possessed a strong personality and would never give vent to his emotions ordinarily. This time he was so overpowered with feelings that he held Swamiji in embrace for a long time and he had to be forcibly taken away.

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Leaves of an Ashrama: 18.

Holy Indifference as Positive Aspect of Renunciation

Swami Vidyatmananda

There is a word commonly used in connection with religious life which seems to me to be unfortunate. Every day this expression and its synonyms create misunderstanding about spiritual goals. The concept resulted in my making considerable lost motion at first, and from the questions outsiders ask I can see that it is responsible for suspicion concerning mysticism on the part of individuals otherwise drawn towards higher life. What I am thinking of is the whole concept of renunciation.

The idea of renunciation is negative and forbidding. So are "mortification", "self-naughting", and "self-abnegation". The notions these terms present may appeal to an occasional disgruntled extremist: pitching out all your possessions, severing every source of financial and other stability, and wandering forth dramatically into limbo, an earthly purgatory. But there is no virtue in mere poverty, as the example of any pauper will testify, and vagrancy is punishable by law.

Besides, "renunciation" and similar words are too suggestive of external action. I may close out my bank balance, but the wish for it may cling to my mind as tightly as a burr to one's sleeve. Real self-abnegation is inner, not outer. But worse, there is here suggested a cause-and-effect relationship in which I will rid myself of something and thus merit something in return. But this is rank commercialism.

As I have thought about renunciation and tried to practice it, I have come to see that we cannot really do anything ourselves - even renounce. You have only to try to do it to be convinced. Those who claim they have given up seem too often to wear their poverty on their chests like decorations. Poverty for poverty's sake is an outworn idea. The Christian tradition has seen enough of narrowness, prohibitions. Hence I have come to appreciate the concept stressed by Sri Ramakrishna of self-surrender, or in de Caussade's¹ useful term, "self-abandonment to divine providence". There is no commercialism here, no attempt to take action, only a knowing position of "I don't care; I am not the doer" - an enlightened neutrality. This is a much more sophisticated position, for it recognizes our total inability to take any action without His leave.

Augustine Baker² called the resulting state "holy indifference". I may have a bank account or not; it is all right. I may have the experience of God's grace, or my prayers may seem unproductive; it is all the same. I may try to find God-realization in a monastery or in a life of family or business. Wherever I am I must seek to give up attachment as well as aversion, and just try to remember Him. That is all. Here is a fresh emphasis in spiritual practice, opening the way to spiritual aspiration without social dislocation.

"Self-surrender" or "self-abandonment" may not be perfect expressions, but properly understood, they would seem to be more helpful than many others. For in cases where I have seen it work, self-surrender leads towards what renunciation is supposed to produce but so often does not - real absence of the idea of self, real continuousness of the thought of God. This, of course, is the objective of all religious striving.

Their Power and Their Love (continued)

Swami Vijayananda

Holy Mother

The attendant of the Holy Mother once told me, 'Mother was the real Mother; she always stood at the back. As she was really the head of the Order after Thakur (Shri Ramakrishna), she showed by her life that she was the Mother of the monastic organization and all the rest'.

Swami Brahmananda

When Maharaj came to stay at Belur Math, many of the boys used to meditate in the verandah outside his room. Some were blessed enough to be allowed to meditate inside, with Maharaj. I had just joined the Order and knew nothing about meditation, and as I had not been initiated, it was not even possible for me to do japa. But I remember noticing that at the Math everyone had a happy face. I observed that at the time of his meditation, Maharaj's body used to become stiff; however, he had the habit of licking his lips now and then.

One day while I was sitting with Maharaj and attempting to meditate with him, I suddenly wondered what would happen if, in that holy atmosphere, I were to let worldly thoughts occupy my mind. So great was the temptation that I immediately began to think of secular things. But I found that I could not continue doing so for long; a tremendous power stopped me. However, on leaving the room I determined to try again with greater strength. The next day my secular train of thought was allowed to continue for about 11½ minutes; then I was possessed by such a severe pain in my legs that I could not stand it and had to go out. When Maharaj came down for his morning walk he called me (from the very beginning, when we were alone, he would call me by an English name; I was, he used to say, a Westerner) and said, 'Look here, my child, if you want to try me, try me in private. But if the other swamis find out, they are so powerful that they will give you a terrific whack'.

One day while I was walking with Maharaj I asked him if he would initiate me. 'I already have', he replied. 'But in front of everybody else you just told me to repeat Thakur's

name,' I said; 'This is not initiation'. Maharaj said very gently, 'You keep on, and when the right time comes I will call you'.

When I came back to Belur Math, after my stay in Varanasi, I approached Maharaj one morning and again asked him to initiate me. He, in his usual way, said, 'I will give you two mantras'. And he gave me the mantras whose ideals are Jesus Christ and Lord Buddha. I protested: 'But these are not my ideals.' Then Maharaj told me, "You love Mahapurush (Swami Shivananda) more than you love me, so go and ask him to initiate you'. I replied, 'Maharaj, hear me well; I have chosen you as my guru. If you do not initiate me, then I shall die without being initiated'. Then, with tears in my eyes I hurriedly bowed to him, touched his feet and went downstairs.

Two days later Swami Omkarananda came to me with the message from Maharaj that I was to leave all my work and go to him immediately. I was very nervous. I went to Maharaj, saluted him and stood waiting for his orders. Maharaj, the most beloved human being that I ever knew, told me in his poetic sweet way, 'My child, tomorrow is an auspicious day. With Thakur's grace I shall initiate you. Have a dip in the Ganges, wear fresh clothes and sit quietly before the meditation room. I shall call you when I am ready.' The next morning I was there with others who also were to be given the ceremony on that day. At about 7 a.m. Maharaj entered the meditation room like a king. He was followed by Swami Nirvedananda, who made ready the flowers etc. for Maharaj, and then came to me and told me to go in. As I did so I saw Maharaj sitting, trembling. He made three offerings at the feet of the picture of Shri Ramakrishna and asked me to do the same. Then he gave me my mantra, told me to repeat it several times before him and then asked me to salute him. As I did so he put both his hands on my head and told me to go and sit on the verandah outside and repeat my mantra. He told me especially not to get up until I was called. After an hour or so he called me to the verandah of his living room and asked me how I was feeling. I replied, 'This is the most peculiar feeling that I have experienced in my life.' Then he said, 'Ask me anything, my boy, and I will tell you.' 'Maharaj,' I said, 'I am so full of joy that I have no more desires, at least at present. I do not know what to ask you.' He told me: 'Go deep down in your mind and ask yourself if there is any favour that you want from me.' Concentrating my mind, I found what I really needed. I told him, 'Maharaj, please bless me that I can love every human being.' He became very grave and said, 'You are asking for a very difficult thing. But with the blessings of the Master, who is Love Incarnate and who gave me his love, I bless you that before you die you will be able to love all human beings without any discrimination.' He told me this while standing up, and putting his hands on my head he silently blessed me. I almost fell down at his feet. Then he asked someone to bring some sweets and ordered me to eat them before him. When I had finished them he told me to go, and repeat my mantra for some time more.

For seven days consecutively, I, who was a fault-finding moralist and critic, lost the sense of evil, and to my great astonishment and joy found that I could see only goodness in everybody.

Every day Maharaj used to sit on the bench outside the temple at Belur and smoke his hubble-bubble. He used to take a few puffs only and then go into a super-conscious state. I noticed that when in this condition he altogether stopped breathing. After a time he would draw a deep breath and say, 'After all these years these boys still cannot properly make up a hubble-bubble'.

The great love the other disciples of Ramakrishna had for Maharaj and the way they served him cannot be explained, but only felt. An incident comes to my mind. It was in Varanasi. Maharaj and Swami Turiyananda were out walking. Although their physical differences were very great, they presented a striking pair. Maharaj was tall and walked very quickly, whereas Hari Maharaj (Turiyananda) was short and walked with a limp. He had almost to run, therefore, to keep up with Maharaj. While they were thus walking a

ray of the sun came and touched Maharaj's face; at once Hari Maharaj held up his umbrella to shield Maharaj. The latter made some remark to which Hari Maharaj replied, 'To whom else should I do it?' Some time later, when Maharaj went to the bathroom, Hari Maharaj stood outside waiting with a water pot and towel, and when Maharaj came out he washed his hands for him.

Swami Turiyananda

When I was at Varanasi in 1920 I would accompany Swami Turiyananda on his daily walk. I would come and greet him and he would say, 'How many times have you repeated (your mantra)?' I would tell him and then the walk would begin. We would go to the ghat and he would ask me to go down and get some Ganges water and sprinkle it over him. One day I saw two swamis of another order pass by. One of them said to the other, looking at Hari Maharaj, 'There is a brahmajnani'. I listened attentively for anything more they might say, when I heard Hari Maharaj growl, 'Have you come to walk with me or are you going to hear more nonsense?'

The day came when we had to part. Weeping, I prostrated full-length before him. The Swami came near, put his hands on my head and said, 'May Thakur bless you and give you all that you desire'. I managed to choke out that I had no desire, save the desire to love all. 'This will be fulfilled in your very life', was his wonderful blessing.

Although I had the worst of scoldings, all the disciples of Ramakrishna with whom I had contact, were so very kind. Many times I would be the news bearer; others, somewhat apprehensive of them, used to send the news through to me.

Swami Shivananda

Once Mahapurush Maharaj told me, 'By the blessings of the Master, Swamiji and Maharaj attained perfection. The rest of us (meaning the monastic disciples) perfected the love he gave us before we were thirty-five years old. Hurry up, my boy. Before 40 one is full of energy. Use it for one purpose, to receive the grace of the Lord and so enjoy Divine Bliss!'

The moment of my departure for South America arrived. I went to Mahapurushji to receive his blessings. He was not at all well, having very high blood pressure. He looked outside at the stormy weather and said, 'Rain before starting: that is a good omen for you'. Looking then at me he remarked, 'You will not see me again. Do not weep. You will make many mistakes, but when you suffer you will always feel me by your side, at such moments of misery'. And I have always felt his presence. Always.

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Peace