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### **Tulsidas**

**By Swami Yatiswarananda**

The fundamental unity of religious India

Our saints and sages, our holy men and holy women, were born in all parts of the country. They may speak different languages but they all place before us the ideal of realizing the eternal relation between the eternal soul and the eternal God. Their teachings form part of our entire spiritual heritage, our common spiritual knowledge. The more we recognize this the more our hearts will beat to the same spiritual tune and bring about a grand union, essential not only for the progress of India but for the whole world itself.

Even from the most ancient times the worship of the Supreme Spirit in the aspects of Shiva and Vishnu has been prevalent both in the North and the South. The religious stream flowed from the North to the South and again from the South to the North.

It is a remarkable phenomenon in the religious history of India that while Rama and Krishna - the two most popular incarnations of Vishnu - the all-pervading Supreme Spirit - were born in North India, they came to be worshipped in South India also. In the post-Buddhistic revival of Hinduism, South India had become the storehouse of Hindu culture and gave birth to the three great Acharyas - Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhwa. All the three travelled to the North, preached their doctrines and greatly influenced the religious thought of North India.

Sri Ramanuja is credited with having founded a Sri Vaishnava School at Varanasi during his visit there. Fifth in apostolic succession to him, Ramananda became the inspirer of the Bhakti movement propagated by his disciples Kabir, Ravidas and others. According to one tradition, Ramananda had another disciple Naraharidas and it was he who raised the child who was later on to become the famous Tulsidas, and also initiated him into Rama-Mantra.

## Tulsidas - his life-story in brief

Tulsidas was born in 1532 A.D. in a Brahmin family in an obscure village in Uttar Pradesh. It is said that the boy uttered the name 'Rama' as soon as he was born. Considering this an ill omen, the ignorant parents abandoned the boy! He was then picked up by Naraharidas at the command of the Lord Himself. Later, Tulsi paid his heart's tribute to this Guru and foster-parent:

I salute the lotus feet of my Guru,

The ocean of compassion, and God (Hari) in the form of man (Nara),

Whose words like rays of the sun

Dispel the heavy darkness of over-powering delusion.

He studied under another sadhu -ÊSesha Sanatana - for fifteen years, mastering the Vedas and the Vedanta.

Tulsidas married Ratnavali who bore him a son. He was passionately fond of his wife. One day, on returning home, he found that she had left for her father's place. Pining for her, he followed her to his father-in-law's place, though uninvited. When he met her there, she was annoyed at his unbecoming attachment and said: "Great is your love for this body of mine composed of bones and flesh. Had you offered half of that love to Rama, you would have been spared from worldly troubles and have attained salvation." These sharp but wise words brought a new light to Tulsidas. It awakened him to the unreality of the world and worldly relations, and also to the reality of the Supreme Spirit manifest as Sri Rama. The result was that he renounced the world, and after having finished his pilgrimage to the four great holy places, Rameshwar, Dwaraka, Puri and Badarikashrama, he settled down at Varanasi. He undertook some more short pilgrimages now and then but would always return to Varanasi.

According to one tradition, Tulsidas was born in 1497 and died in 1623, and thus lived for 126 years. Some modern scholars, however, hold that he was born in 1532 and passed away in 1623 at the ripe old age of 91.

## His spiritual visions

Now, at Varanasi his whole soul was drawn to Sri Rama and longed for a vision of Him. It is said that through the grace of the great Rama-Bhakta, Hanuman, he was blessed with several visions of the Beloved of his heart. Once the Lord appeared to Tulsidas on horseback as a prince. It is said that at the blessed vision he lost all consciousness of the outer world and remained in an ecstatic state for three days. At another time he saw the charming form of the prince, sporting on the banks of the river Sarayu, with his companion.

At Brindaban Tulsidas visited many temples. Wherever he went, he saw only the image of Radhakrishna installed in the shrine. On visiting the famous temple of Madanmohan,

he prayed to Sri Krishna: "Lord Krishna, You are very beautiful with Your flute and peacock plume but I would like to see You as Rama, the one with bow and arrow." It is said that the prayer was granted and the Lord appeared to him in the blissful form of Sri Rama. The well-known utterance, attributed to Maruti, is true of Tulsidas also: "I look upon Vishnu and Rama as one and the same; but still I hold the lotus-eyed beautiful Rama as my All-in-all."

### His great love for God and man

At Brindaban again, learning that Tulsidas was a devotee of Sri Rama, a bigoted worshipper of Sri Krishna told him: "The Krishna Avatar is the greatest; Rama is only a partial incarnation". Hearing this, Tulsidas replied in his inimitable way: "My soul was full of love only for the son of Dasharatha, and I admired his incomparable beauty. Now that you tell me of his divinity, my love is increased twenty-fold!"

The Lord made Tulsidas an instrument for the spread of Rama-Bhakti. In due course he realized that he who was born as the son of King Dasharatha was no other than the Supreme Spirit. His divine realizations filled him with love and sympathy for his fellow-beings and he was eager to share with all the blessings he himself received. We find evidence of this not only in certain incidents relating to his life but specially in his works, including his immortal Ramacharitamahas. The very circumstances leading to the composition of his second best work Vinaya Patrika reveal his great heart overflowing with divine love.

Once a murderer came on pilgrimage to Varanasi and he would cry: "For the love of Rama, give alms to me, a murderer." Hearing the name of his beloved Rama, Tulsidas called the man to his house and gave him consecrated food, and declared him purified. The orthodox brahmins of the place asked him how the murderer's sin was absolved. Tulsidas replied: "Read your own scriptures and learn about the power of the Divine Name." The brahmins were not satisfied; they asked for a further proof. They all agreed that if the sacred bull of the Vishwanatha temple would eat from the hands of the murderer, they would accept Tulsidas's words. The man was taken to the temple and the bull did eat from his hands. Tulsidas proved that the sincere repentance made by the devotee was accepted by the Lord. A new trouble, however, arose: Kali - the embodiment of evil - threatened to devour Tulsidas. Tulsidas prayed to Hanuman who appeared to him in a dream and advised him to file a petition to Sri Rama - the Lord of the Universe - to remedy the evil, and that was the origin of the Vinaya-Patrika.

### His choosing the people's language for his writings

Following in the footsteps of his predecessor Ramananda, Tulsidas also wrote his works in Hindi, for the benefit of the masses. This drew the criticism of the Sanskrit scholars. One day a pundit who was proud of his knowledge of Sanskrit, came up to him and asked: "Sir, you are learned in Sanskrit. Why then do you compose an epic poem in the vulgar tongue?" Tulsidas replied: "My language in the vernacular tongue is imperfect but it is better than the Nayika-varnana (the amorous descriptions of heroines) of you Sanskrit-loving pundits." The pundit asked for clarification; Tulsidas replied: "If you find a jewelled vessel full of poison and an earthenware one full of ambrosia, which will you

accept and which will you refuse?"

In his introduction to his famous Ramayana, Tulsidas vindicates his choice of Hindi: "I am confident of one thing - that the good will be gratified to hear me though fools may laugh. If my homely speech and poor wit are fit subjects for laughter, let them laugh; it is no fault of mine. If they have no understanding of true devotion to the Lord, the tale will appear insipid, but to the true and pious worshippers of the Lord, the story of Raghuvir will be sweet as honey."

Some touching incidents from his life

Once some thieves broke into Tulsidas's place and found there a guard in the form of a young man of cloud-dark complexion, with bow and arrow in his hands. Wherever they moved, the watchman turned to them and threatened to punish them. They were terrified. Something more must have happened to the thieves: at daybreak they came to Tulsidas and asked: "Sir, who is this dark-complexioned lad of yours?" On hearing this, Tulsidas was deeply moved. He knew that the Lord Himself had appeared as the watchman; he gave away all he had to them. Now, the thieves themselves, having received the vision of Rama and the magnetic touch of Tulsidas, became spiritually inclined. They received instructions from the saint and lived a pure life, devoting themselves to God.

Once, he took shelter in a certain home. As he was doing his cooking, the lady of the house offered him some spices to which he replied that he had those things in his bag. Then she offered him some other things which also, he said, were there. On hearing this, the lady replied: "Babaji, you have so many things in your bag. Only you have no place in it for your devoted wife!" Who was the lady? She was none other than the young wife whose words had changed the course of his life. She recognized him, although he could not and considered her a stranger.

Various other incidents reveal how divine realization was the sole object of his life, and how he wished others also to strive for the same, with all their body, mind and soul.

One Kamal Bhav requested him to procure for him a vision of Lord Rama. Tulsidas replied: "You do not meditate on the Lord with single-minded devotion; how is it then possible to have His vision? Continually worship Him with concentration. His grace will come of its own accord and you will see Him in a vision." Kamal Bhav insisted and so Tulsidas told him to erect a trident and jump over it repeating the divine name of Rama, and then Rama would come to save him. The man was afraid and would not take any risk. Another devotee, however, who had full faith in Tulsidas, did as he was instructed, and before the trident could touch his skin, it is said the Lord appeared and saved him.

His ideal of renunciation and divine realization

Emperor Jahangir was said to be an admirer of Tulsidas. One day he offered to give the saint a heavy purse. Tulsidas replied: "One who wants to cultivate devotion to the Lord should never seek to accumulate riches. The contemplation of money and its attendant

anxieties soil the mind and render it unfit for meditation on the Lord."

On another occasion Jahangir observed: "Swamiji, our minister Birbal is very wise." Tulsidas replied: "That may be so; but if, while gifted with this valuable transient body, he does not seek to realize God, then there is none more foolish than he. To be successful in repartee, as he is, is no sign of wisdom; wisdom consists in the realization of the Godhead."

Maharaja Man Singh and his brother and other princes used to visit the poet and honour him greatly. Once a man asked the saint why such great people came to see him in those days, while in former days none came. Tulsidas replied: "Once I used to beg and could not get even a cracked cowrie in alms. Then no one wanted me; but Rama, the cherisher of the poor, made me of great price. Previously I used to beg from door to door for alms; now even kings worship my feet. Then it was without Rama; now Rama is my helper."<sup>1</sup>

The fervent prayers of the Vinaya-Patrika

In Vinaya-patrika Tulsidas says in one of his prayers:

Lord Rama! My honour is in Your hands.

You are the protector of the poor; I surrender myself at Your Feet.

I have heard of the sinners whom You have reclaimed.

I am an old sinner, pray extend Your loving hand and take me to Yourself.

To destroy the sins of the sinner, and to remove the ailments of the afflicted is Your occupation.

Grant me devotion to You, O Lord, and confer Your grace on me!

Tulsidas speaks of his awakening from the sleep of Maya, and expresses his determination to live the spiritual life:

Up till now I have lost much and wasted life in idle pursuits.

The grace of Lord Rama has aroused me from sleep.

Awakened now, I shall not allow myself to be victimized by Maya (illusion).

I have gained the grace of the Lord's Name. I shall hold it fast to my bosom and not let it from me for a second.

The beautiful form of the Lord I shall cherish in my mind.

Long has this world mocked me, making me a slave of the senses.

Now I shall have no more of it.

I am now a bee at my Lord's Lotus Feet and shall not allow my mind to leave the enjoyment of their nectar for a moment.

In another remarkable prayer he expresses his great faith in the Divine Name:

O Lord, let any one accept any sadhana, he is free to follow its pursuit.

But to me Your name is the granter of all boons.

Karma, upasana, jnana - the various paths outlined in the Vedas for the emancipation of the soul - all are good.

But I seek only one shelter and that is Your name; I seek nothing besides....

I have enjoyed the sweetness of Your name. It is the fulfiller of my wishes here and in the world to come...

A man may have his affection riveted anywhere as also his faith,

But I recognize my relationship with the Name - Rama -; it is my father and mother.

I swear by Shankara and state the truth without hiding it,

That Tulsidas sees all good accruing to him only by repeating Your name.

Tulsidas gives expression to pure devotion when he prays:

O Lord who is there besides You who will hear my cry?

Strange is my petition: a poor man, I, I seek to become a king...

From time immemorial I have suffered the tortures of hell and have lived through many low births, but I crave not for wealth or even salvation though I know that You can confer all these.

What I desire is to become in every birth a toy for You to play with or a stone to touch Your Feet.

The unique epic - Ramacharitamanas

We now come to Tulsidas's famous epic-Ramacharitamanas. It is not just a translation of

Valmiki's Ramayana though it is based on that great work. It is more akin to Adhyatma Ramayana which is highly devotional in its trend. In it Shiva Himself narrates the story of Rama to his consort Parvati. Manasa Sarovara is a great lake in the region of Mt. Kailas, the abode of Shiva. Ramacharita - the story of Rama - is a lake conceived in the mind of Shiva. The lake at first remained hidden in the mind of Shiva until Parvati, through her question about the real nature of Rama, made it flow for the good of mankind. Tulsidas, the author, has embodied in his Ramayana, besides the story of Rama, translations of important texts of the Upanishads, the Gita and the Bhagavatam and other scriptures, thereby making the great truths hidden in Sanskrit available to the Hindi-knowing people - to the masses and the upper classes alike. Believed to be an incarnation of Valmiki, Tulsidas surpasses Valmiki at many places in the depth of his devotion and in his human touches.

Ramacharitamanas begins with a dialogue between Shiva and Parvati. Parvati asks:

O Lord, sages, who are the knowers of Truth,

Say that Rama is Brahman without origin.

Is he the same Rama, who is the son of Dasharatha, the king of Ayodhya,

Or is he some other unborn, unqualified, and indivisible Being? If he is the king's son how can he be Brahman?

Shiva replies:

There is no difference between the qualified and the unqualified Brahman. ...

He who is unqualified, formless and invisible

Takes form through the love of his devotees.

To Tulsidas the Supreme Spirit who took the form of Rama is manifest everywhere. In the Balakanda he says:

Knowing all conscious and unconscious beings in the world to be full of Rama,

With folded hands I salute the lotus feet of all.

The Jiva under the control of Maya

Tulsidas declares:

The Jiva is a part of God and is indestructible;

It is consciousness, pure, and blissful by nature.

It has fallen under the control of Maya,

And is tied down like a parrot or a monkey.

The proud Jiva is under the control of Maya

And Maya, the repository of all qualities, is controlled by God.

And what is the nature of Maya? In the Aranyakanda Tulsidas declares its nature.

Rama is speaking to Lakshmana: "The feeling of 'I' and 'mine' and 'You' and 'Yours' is Maya, which holds sway over all created beings. Whatever is perceived by the senses and that which lies within the reach of the mind, know it to be all Maya.

"Hear of its divisions, also: they are two, knowledge and ignorance, Vidyamaya and Avidyamaya. The one (ignorance) is vile and extremely painful, and has cast the ego into the risk of worldly existence. The other (knowledge) which brings forth the creation and which holds sway over the three Gunas (Sattwa, Rajas and Tamas) is directed by the Lord and has no strength of its own."

Attaining freedom from Maya

Posing the question as to how the Jiva can be freed from Maya, Tulsidas replies that it is through spiritual wisdom. And again, what is spiritual wisdom? Replies Tulsidas:

"Spiritual wisdom is that which is free from all blemishes in the shape of pride, hypocrisy, violence and so on and which sees the Supreme Spirit equally in all."

Which is the path that the Jiva (individual soul) should follow? Like a true devotee Tulsidas has his preference for Bhakti:

The path of knowledge is like the sharp edge of a sword;

One can fall from this path in the twinkling of an eye.

But ignorance, the root of the round of birth and death,

Is destroyed through Bhakti without much effort.

The glory of the Divine Name

The chief spiritual practice according to Tulsidas is Japa (repetition) of the Divine Name: "The Lord's name - Rama - fulfils all the desires and aspirations of the devotees in this



Iron Age. It destroys the direst evil and turns poison into nectar." He says: "I salute the Name of Rama... which is like Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, the soul of the Vedas and without parallel."

Name and form are two attributes of God who cannot be described. The forms of God are dependent on His Name, for no form can be known without a name. But greater than Brahman with or without attributes is His Name because both can be known through constant remembrance of the Name. In a doha, a saying, the saint stresses this point:

When meditation on the personal God is distasteful,

And the impersonal is too far away from the mind,

Remember the life-giving name of Rama.

The grandeur of Tulsidas's poetry

Tulsidas's poetry is unparalleled in its depth and originality. When Rama meets Valmiki in the forest and asks him to suggest a place where he can build a hut and live with Sita and Lakshmana for a while, among other things Valmiki says:

Those who have neither desire nor anger,

Nor pride nor conceit nor delusion,

Those who are loved by all,...

Those who look upon You as father, friend, master,

Mother, and teacher, to whom You are all in all,

Dwell in the temple of their hearts...

Those who never wish for anything,

Who love you quite naturally,

Live in their hearts forever.

There is your home.

The Lord is pleased with the simple Bhakti of His devotee. Sri Rama, in the course of His wanderings comes to the cottage of Shabari. The maid had grown into an old woman waiting for him for years. Awaiting the arrival of Rama, she had preserved for Him fruits which she first tasted and found to be sweet. Sri Rama comes. Tulsidas describes the scene in a touching way: Sri Rama is asking Shabari for those fruits and eating them with great relish. Tulsidas observes here very aptly: "The Lord is the enjoyer of great

sacrifices. Yet remaining unsatisfied with those grand offerings, He feels satisfied and happy with the fruits offered by the poor forest devotee."

This aspect of Sri Rama reveals to the world that He dwells where there is love and becomes, as it were, a slave of this selfless love. The conversation that follows is also illuminating. The woman ascetic, Shabari, asked Sri Rama: "How can I extol you, the lowest in descent and the dullest in wit as I am?" Raghupati replied: "Listen, O good lady, to my words. I recognize no other kinship except that of devotion. Despite caste, kinship, lineage, piety, reputation, wealth, physical prowess, numerical strength of his family, accomplishment and ability, a man lacking in devotion is of no more worth than a cloud without water". Then He told her of the nine forms of devotion:

- (i) The first in order is fellowship with the saints (who are full of the spirit of God and remind one of God).
- (ii) The second is marked by fondness for stories about the Lord.
- (iii) The third is the humble service of the Lotus Feet of the spiritual preceptor.
- (iv) The fourth consists in singing the praises of God with a guileless heart.
- (v) The fifth is repeating the Name of the Lord with unwavering faith.
- (vi) The sixth consists of practice of self-control and virtues, desisting from manifold activities and ever pursuing the course of conduct prescribed for spiritual seekers.
- (vii) The seventh type is practised by him who sees the world full of the Almighty without distinction and reckons the holy men as even greater than the Lord Himself.
- (viii) The eighth type is to remain contented with whatever one gets and never think of detecting the faults of others.
- (ix) The ninth form of devotion demands that one should be guileless and straight in one's dealings with everybody and should cherish in one's heart implicit faith in the Lord without either exaltation or depression.

Whoever possesses any one of these nine forms of devotion, says Sri Rama, be he man or woman, or any other creation - sentient or insentient -, is most dear to Him (Ayodhyakanda, 34-35).

#### From self-surrender to self-realization

The final step in the path of Bhakti is the soul's self-surrender to the Supreme Spirit, the Soul of all souls. We ordinary people make the ego the centre of our life. The devotee, on the other hand, makes God the centre. He offers himself, body, mind and soul, to the Supreme Spirit. As the ego dies God reveals Himself and makes the devotee realize his eternal relation to Him. As a devotee he is the humble servant of the Lord; as a soul he is an eternal portion of the Supreme Being.

This is exactly what had happened to Tulsidas also. He realized that He who was the son

of Dasharatha was no other than the Self of all beings.

May we be able to pray with Tulsidas: "O Lord, You are the inmost Self of all. I tell You the truth, I do not cherish any worldly desires in my heart. Do You free my mind from passions and other impurities. Do You grant me intense devotion unto You."

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## **The Five Commandments of Sri Ramakrishna**

**By Swami Dayatmananda**

M. (humbly): "Yes, sir. How, sir, may we fix our minds on God?"

Master:

(1) "Repeat God's name and sing His glories, and

(2) keep holy company; and now and then visit God's devotees and holy men. The mind cannot dwell on God if it is immersed day and night in worldliness, in worldly duties and responsibilities;

(3) it is most necessary to go into solitude now and then and think of God. To fix the mind on God is very difficult, in the beginning, unless one practises meditation in solitude. When a tree is young it should be fenced all around; otherwise it may be destroyed by cattle.

"To meditate, you should withdraw within yourself or retire to a secluded corner or to the forest.

(4) And you should always discriminate between the Real and the unreal. God alone is real, the Eternal Substance; all else is unreal, that is, impermanent. By discriminating thus, one should shake off impermanent objects from the mind."

M. (humbly): "How ought we to live in the world?"

Master: (5) "Do all your duties, but keep your mind on God. Live with all with wife and children, father and mother and serve them. Treat them as if they were very dear to you, but know in your heart of hearts that they do not belong to you."

On his second visit M. received the above five commandments from Sri Ramakrishna. M. practised them to perfection all his life and taught them to devotees who used to visit him.

These five commandments are of supreme importance for those who wish to progress in spiritual life. All aspirants, especially the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, must remember and assess their spiritual progress in the light of these commandments. If followed faithfully they are sure to lead to the highest realisation. To the extent the devotees are able to practise them, to that extent they are progressing in the realm of God.

The first of these commandments is to repeat God's name and sing His glories.

Religious lore is replete with the praises of the power and glory of God's name. Of all the spiritual practices, taking the name of God is the easiest. Sri Chaitanya was a prophet who preached the glory of God's name. Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna all have unequivocally emphasized the need for repetition of the name of God. A host of saints all over the world have advocated repeating the name of God. Many became saints solely through the repetition of God's name.

The name and the named are one; God and His name are one. The Master said: "God and His name are identical; that is the reason Radha said that. There is no difference between Rama and His holy name."

The name of God purifies and uplifts one who takes it; it washes away all sins and impurities. Indeed there are devotees who maintain that the name of God is even greater than God Himself. Through the power of God's name one can reach the highest realisation. Throughout his life Sri Ramakrishna himself repeated the name of his sweet Divine Mother even after attaining Nirvikalpa samadhi.

Sri Jagadananda Pandita, a Vaishnava saint, wrote in verse a book called *Prema-vivarta* (On the Glory of Divine Love), where he distinguishes different methods of taking God's name uttering, repeating, chanting and singing. But the best practice, he says, is singing the Divine Name, for that requires the services of many sense-organs. *Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu* of Rupa Goswami recognises sixty-four forms of devotion. Of these there are five main forms. They are: keeping the company of devotees, singing the Divine Name, hearing the scriptures, staying in a holy place, and serving the Deity with devotion. According to Vaishnava tradition the important sadhanas are three: kindness to all beings, taste for God's Name, and service to fellow devotees. Caitanya-caritamrta considers the chanting of the Divine Name as the best way of promoting devotion.

God's name is within the reach of all. Even illiterate people can attain God by the power of His name. Amongst the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, there was a lonely widow known as Gopala's Mother, who lived in a room beside the Ganges and spent her time in repeating the name of Gopala. Her life-long remembrance of God was rewarded in old age by the constant vision of Gopala, the Divine Child, who lived with her night and day for two months. She is to this day loved and honoured by the disciples and devotees of

the Ramakrishna Order.

The glory of the Divine Name bears no comparison. As the Adi purana puts it: "There is no knowledge like Name, no vow like Name, no meditation like Name, no fruit like Name."

Chanting of the Lord's name does not go in vain. It must bear its benign result. It is like the philosopher's stone converting all baser metal into gold. It is like the magic wand of the magician performing unbelievable and unthought of miracles; it transforms man's life for ever.

Name is both the means and the end. To take God's name lovingly and to see Him are the same. To the votary of the Divine Name, it manifests itself as the Form, Quality and Sport of the Lord. The Form of the Lord is identical with His Name. Devotees say the Name is even greater than Form. Evidences of this can be seen in the lives of Rama and Krishna. While Sri Rama had to construct a bridge to cross the ocean, Hanuman crossed it with the strength of Rama's Name. When Sri Krishna was put on the balance against His Name written on a Tulasi leaf, he was found to be lighter.

The essence of all scriptures is God's name. Once a sadhu who had remarkable faith in the name of God came to Dakshineswar. He carried with him a book in which the solitary word "Om Rama" was written in big letters in red ink. He worshipped this book daily with flowers and sometimes opened and read it. Sri Ramakrishna became curious to know what was written in the book. The monk showed him the book and said to him: "What is the use of reading a large number of books? For it is from the one divine Lord that the Vedas and Puranas have come; He and His name are not separate. . . That is why His name is my only companion"

Sri Ramakrishna himself was a great advocate of using the name of God. He said: "Chant His name and purify your body and mind. Purify your tongue by singing God's holy name."

Holy Mother said:

"The Mantra purifies the body. Man becomes pure by repeating the Mantra of God. ... It is said, 'The human teacher utters the Mantra into the ear; but God breathes the spirit into the soul.'

"As wind removes the cloud, so the Name of God destroys the cloud of worldliness."

Once a devotee showed to Holy Mother a tiny banyan seed and said to her, "Look, Mother, it is tinier even than the tiniest seed we know. From this will spring a giant tree! How strange!" "Indeed, it will," Mother replied. "See what a tiny seed is the Name of God. From it in time come divine moods, devotion, love, and spiritual consummation.

"Very powerful indeed is the Lord's name. It may not bring about an immediate result, but it must one day bear fruit, just as we find that a seed left long ago on the cornice of a building at last reaches the ground, germinates, grows into a tree, and bears fruit, perhaps when the building cracks and is demolished. Knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or unconsciously, in whatever state of mind a man utters God's name, he acquires the merit of such utterance. A man who voluntarily goes to a river and bathes therein gets the benefit of the bath: so does he also who has been pushed into the water

by another, or who, when sleeping soundly, has water thrown upon him.

"There is a great power in the seed of God's name. It destroys ignorance. A seed is tender, and the sprout soft; still it pierces the hard ground. The ground breaks and makes way for the sprout."

The best thing for people whose minds are attracted by sense-objects is to cultivate the dualistic attitude and chant loudly the name of the Lord as mentioned in Narada-Pancharatra (a work on devotion).

"Through the path of devotion the subtle senses come readily and naturally under control. Carnal pleasures become more and more insipid as Divine love grows in your heart."

How to love God and surrender to Him whom we have never seen is a question that often arises in our mind. To some such query of a devotee Swami Adbhutananda, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, replied:

"It does not matter if you do not know Him. You know His Name. Just take His Name, and you will progress spiritually. What do they do in an office? Without having seen or known the officer, one sends an application addressed to his name. Similarly send your application to God, and you will receive His grace."

The answer was characteristic of Swami Adbhutananda, temperamentally a man of simplicity and faith. Though a simple answer, it satisfied the inquirer, for it carried the strength that is in the words of a man of realisation.

This assertion of the Swami, however, is corroborated by the scriptures, where the Divine Name has been considered identical with the Deity it signifies. It is not merely a combination of letters. It is both the means and the goal. Words, especially the syllable Om, have been designated as Brahman by the Vedas. All scriptures glorify Holy Names. Every religious discipline prescribes the Name of God for repetition. Its efficacy is recognized by all faiths. Theistic religions specially recommend it to their votaries. In Hinduism even the Advaita system of philosophy, which does not recognize the ultimate separate existence of a personal God, appreciates the value of the repetition of God's Names as a purifying act.

In the theistic faiths, however, its place is significantly important. Of all the systems it is the Vaishnavite School of Sri Chaitanya, which has laid particular stress on the Divine Name and has raised its repetition to the status of an independent spiritual practice.

Sri Chaitanya, the founder of Bengali Vaishnavism, has himself composed a few verses singing the glory of the Name which forms a cardinal doctrine of his system. In the first verse of his Sikshastaka, he speaks about the nature of Name and the efficacy of its repetition:

Chant the name of the Lord and His Glory unceasingly,

That the mirror of the heart may be wiped clean,

And quench that mighty forest fire,

Worldly lust, raging furiously within.

Oh Name, stream down in moonlight on the lotus heart,

Opening its cup to knowledge of Thyself.

Oh self, drown deep in the waves of His bliss,

Chanting His Name continually,

Tasting His nectar at every step,

Bathing in His Name, that bath for weary souls.

He also says that the Lord's Name is to be always sung by one who is humbler than even a blade of grass, with more endurance than that of a tree and who, being himself devoid of conceit, bestows honour on others.

Man seeks refuge in God's name also when he is confronted with difficult situations or involved in crises. Innumerable stories are extant which go to illustrate this fact. When Draupadi was being subjected to insult and humiliation in the court of the Kauravas it was Krishna's name that saved her honour. When Radha, the cowherdess of Vrndavana, was asked, as a test of her chastity, to bring water in a multi-holed pitcher it was with the name of the Lord that she came off more glorious than ever, out of this fiery ordeal. The great hero of the Ramayana, whom Tulsidas calls the 'jewel in the great garland of Ramayana', Hanuman, crossed the ocean to Lanka merely by taking the name of Rama.

Though it is said that chanting or repeating the name of God is enough it must be understood rightly. Undoubtedly there is an inherent power in the name of God. Even if one chants it mechanically it will save one in course of time. In fact many aspirants do japa only mechanically. There is little or no intensity or feeling in it. That is why little progress is seen in their lives.

Concerning this a great poet-saint, Kabir, has warned us against the complacency and self-satisfaction that may be indulged in by the mere mechanical repetition of the name. He says:

"The remembrance of God is not achieved

By the revolving of beads in the hand,

By the rolling of the tongue in the mouth,

Or, by the wandering of the mind in all quarters."

Yet there is hope even for those who take God's name mechanically:

Disciple: "Is it of any use to be merely repeating His Name without intense devotion?"

Holy Mother: "Whether you jump into water or are pushed into it, your cloth will get drenched. Is it not so? Repeat the Name of God, whether your mind is concentrated or

not. It will be good for you if you can repeat the Name of God for a fixed number of times daily."

However it would be far more profitable if one chants the name of God with faith, love and longing. Sri Ramakrishna emphasizes intense yearning:

Goswami: "Sir, the chanting of God's name is enough. The scriptures emphasize the sanctity of God's name for the Kaliyuga."

Master: "Yes, there is no doubt about the sanctity of God's name. But can a mere name achieve anything, without the yearning love of the devotee behind it? One should feel great restlessness of soul for the vision of God. Suppose a man repeats the name of God mechanically, while his mind is absorbed in 'lust and gold', can he achieve anything?"

"Therefore I say, chant the name of God, and with it pray to Him that you may have love for Him. Pray to God that your attachment to such transitory things as wealth, name, and creature comforts may become less and less every day."

The scriptures and saints tell us that there is a tremendous joy in God's name, for God is of the nature of Bliss; He is Satchidananda. A beginner, however, does not experience any joy. On the contrary he may feel only dryness. It is not the fault of God's name. The fault lies in the mind of the devotee. As long as the mind has not turned away from worldly delights it is not possible to taste divine bliss. One must try to develop discrimination and dispassion for the world. Only when the mind is purified of worldly dross does one begin to taste the joy of divine name. One must pray to God with yearning for getting rid of desires and for getting delight in His name:

Devotee: "How can I take delight in God's name?"

Master: "Pray to God with a yearning heart that you may take delight in His name. He will certainly fulfil your heart's desire."

So saying, Sri Ramakrishna sang a song in his sweet voice, pleading with the Divine Mother to show Her grace to suffering men.

Then he said: "Even for Thy holy name I have no taste. A typhoid patient has very little chance of recovery if he loses all taste for food; but his life need not be despaired of if he enjoys food even a little, that is why one should cultivate a taste for God's name. Any name will do Durga, Krishna, or Siva. Then if, through the chanting of the name, one's attachment to God grows day by day, and joy fills the soul, one has nothing to fear. The delirium will certainly disappear; the grace of God will certainly descend."

Utmost caution and guidance are required to chant the Name effectively. When one chants it with due regard and propriety, said Swami Vivekananda once, one can have both devotion and knowledge through it. We have to impress on our minds that purity of thought and sincerity of purpose are the essential conditions one has to achieve and develop in the religious life if it is to be expeditiously fruitful. An aspirant must practise self-control. He has to avoid all slips in ethical life and should live a life of discipline. These are the sine qua non of the higher life, and it is well-known that nothing will happen if spiritual disciplines are practised perfunctorily. When that purity of purpose and sincerity in sadhana is achieved and when one tries in secret and in solitude and with single-minded devotion to repeat the name of God, His vision will come and the



devotee will get absorbed in Him. This chanting of God's name must form a regular habit.

Sri Ramakrishna says: "And one must always chant the name and glories of God and pray to Him. An old metal pot must be scrubbed every day. What is the use of cleaning it only once? Further, one must practise discrimination and renunciation; one must be conscious of the unreality of the world.

"One should constantly repeat the name of God. The name of God is highly effective in the Kaliyuga (iron age). The practice of yoga is not possible in this age, for the life of a man depends on food. Clap your hands while repeating God's name, and the birds of your sin will fly away."

A devotee asked, "Mother, what is the secret?" Holy Mother pointed to a small clock in a niche and said, "As that timepiece is ticking, so also go on repeating God's Name. That will bring you everything. Nothing more need be done. While performing Japa, take the Name of God with utmost love, sincerity, and self-surrender. Before commencing your meditation daily, first think of your utter helplessness in this world and then slowly begin the practice of Sadhana as directed by your Guru."

The Master: "Ecstatic devotion develops in taking the Name of the Lord, eyes overflow tears of joy, words are choked in the mouth, and all the hairs of the body stand erect thrilled with joy.

Devotee: But I do not find delight in His name.

The Master: Then pray with a yearning heart that He may teach you to relish His name. Undoubtedly He will grant your prayer. . . . I say, "Find joy in his name." Durga, Krishna, Siva any name will do. And if you daily feel a greater attraction for taking His name and a greater joy in it, you need fear no more. The delirium must get cured, and His grace will surely descend on you.

"Japa means repeating the name of the Lord silently, sitting in a quiet place. If one continues the repetition with concentration and devotion, one is sure to be blessed with Divine visions ultimately one is sure to have God-realisation. Suppose a big log of wood is immersed in the Ganges with one end attached to a chain, which is fixed on the bank. Following the chain, link by link, you can gradually dive into the water and trace your way to it. In the same manner, if you become absorbed in the repetition of His holy name, you will eventually realise Him."

According to Vaishnavism the Divine Name must be taken without committing ten faults. These are: (1) disparaging genuine devotees, (2) regarding God as absolutely different from His Names, Form, Qualities, etc., (3) showing disrespect for one's spiritual preceptor, (4) speaking too lightly or contemptuously of the sacred scriptures, (5) considering the glory of the Divine Name mentioned in the scriptures as mere eulogy, (6) considering the Divine Name as imaginary, (7) committing sins repeatedly and intentionally on the strength of the Divine Name, (8) regarding the repetition of the Divine Name as equal to other spiritual practices, (9) imparting it to unworthy persons, (10) wanting taste for the chanting or hearing of the Divine Name even after listening to its excellencies.

These faults however will be rectified by chanting the Divine Name itself. As Padma

purana puts it: The sins of those who commit offence to the Divine Name is remedied by the Name alone. And it bears the desired fruit if taken constantly.

If one chants the name of God sincerely with faith, feeling, and yearning, and takes care to avoid the faults mentioned above, one is sure to progress in spiritual life, obtain His grace and attain Him in time.

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## Seeing Brahman with Open Eyes

### Some aspects of the Mandukya Upanishad

(This article is based on notes taken during lectures delivered in the 1950's by Swami Siddheswarananda, founder and first spiritual director of the Centre Vedantique Ramakrichna, Gretz, France. With thanks to Mr. Gilbert Vaillant, France; translated and edited by Andre van den Brink, 2001.

The text of the Mandukya Upanishad is from Eight Upanishads, vol. II, translated from the original Sanskrit by Swami Gambhirananda (Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 2nd edition, 1966).

Invocation

OM

O gods!

May we hear auspicious words with the ears.

While engaged in sacrifices,

may we see auspicious things with the eyes.

While praising the gods with steady limbs,

may we enjoy a life that is beneficial to the gods.

May Indra of ancient fame be auspicious to us!

May the supremely rich (or all-knowing) Pusha be propitious to us!

May Garuda, the destroyer of evil, be well disposed towards us!

May Brihaspati ensure our welfare!

Om, Peace, Peace, Peace!

The Mandukya Upanishad

1

The letter Om is all this.

Of this a clear exposition (is started with):

All that is past, present, or future is verily OM.

And whatever is beyond the three periods of time  
is also verily OM.

2

All this is surely Brahman.

This Self is Brahman.

The Self, such as It is, is possessed of four quarters.

3

The first quarter is Vaishvanara,

whose sphere (of action) is the waking state,

whose consciousness relates to things external,

who is possessed of seven limbs and nineteen mouths,  
and who enjoys gross things.

4

Taijasa is the second quarter,  
whose sphere (of activity) is the dream state,  
whose consciousness is internal,  
who is possessed of seven limbs and nineteen mouths,  
and who enjoys subtle objects.

5

That state is deep sleep,  
where the sleeper does not desire any enjoyable thing  
and does not see any dream.

The third quarter is Prajna,  
who has deep sleep as his sphere,  
in whom everything becomes undifferentiated,  
who is a mass of mere consciousness,  
who abounds in bliss,  
who is surely an enjoyer of bliss,  
and who is the doorway to the experience  
(of the dream and waking states).

6

This one is the Lord of all,

this one is omniscient,  
this one is the inner Director of all,  
this one is the Source of all,  
this one is verily the place of origin  
and dissolution of all beings.

7

They consider the Fourth to be that  
which is not conscious of the internal world,  
nor conscious of the external world,  
nor conscious of both the worlds,  
nor a mass of consciousness,  
nor simple consciousness,  
nor unconsciousness.  
Which is unseen,  
beyond empirical dealings,  
beyond the grasp (of the organs of action),  
uninferable, unthinkable, indescribable.  
Whose valid proof consists in the single belief  
in the Self,  
in which all phenomena cease,  
and which is unchanging,  
auspicious and non-dual.  
That is the Self,  
and that is to be known.

8

That very Self, considered from the standpoint of the syllable (denoting It), is OM.

Considered from the standpoint of the letters (constituting OM), the quarters (of the Self) are the letters (of OM), and the letters are the quarters.

(The letters are): A, U, and M.

9

Vaishvanara, having the waking state as His sphere, is the first letter A, because of (the similarity of) pervasiveness or being the first.

He who knows thus, does verily attain all desirable things, and becomes the foremost.

10

He who is Taijasa, with the state of dream as His sphere (of activity), is the second letter U (of OM), because of the similarity of excellence

and intermediateness.

He who knows thus,  
increases the current of knowledge  
and becomes equal to all.

None is born in his line  
who is not a knower of Brahman.

11

Prajna,  
with his sphere of activity in the sleep state,  
is M, the third letter of OM,  
because of measuring or because of absorption.  
Anyone who knows thus,  
measures all this,  
and he becomes the place of absorption.

12

The partless OM is Turiya,  
beyond all conventional dealings,  
the limit of the negation of the phenomenal world,  
the auspicious,  
and the non-dual.  
OM is thus the Self to be sure.  
He who knows thus,  
enters the Self through his Self.

## Introduction

The Mandukya Upanishad is the only upanishad which is purely metaphysical. It teaches the ajata vada, the way of the unborn, of non-causality. For that reason it is sometimes called 'Karika Vedanta' - in contrast to the classical Vedanta - after the famous commentary (karika) which Gaudapada, the guru of the guru of Shankaracharya, wrote on this upanishad. Shankara himself has also commented upon the Mandukya Upanishad and on the karika of Gaudapada,

In the metaphysics of Vedanta a distinction is made between (1) reality (tattva), that which does not change and which persists through all our experiences, and (2) truth (mata), of which, according to the Vedanta, there may be any number. Swami Vivekananda explains this with the example of the sun: somebody is travelling towards the sun and at each stage he takes a picture. The images are all different, but no one can deny that they all show the same sun. The reality always stays the same, whereas the truths, although all true at their own particular level, are relative. As such the other is entitled to a place for his standpoint which is just as big as the place occupied by our own standpoint.

The Mandukya Upanishad is a philosophy of the Totality of existence, which is not the same as the sum total of a number of separate entities or data added together. It seeks the knowledge of that Totality, which endeavours to solve the greatest problem of philosophy: the contradiction between life and death.

The reality is the Totality of existence, which shows itself under two aspects: (a) the manifested aspect, and (b) the non-manifested aspect. The purport of the Mandukya Upanishad is to prove that, irrespective of the level of existence at which one may find oneself, it is only the one reality which is. Nevertheless, from the standpoint of the practising of spirituality (sadhana) the waking state is of superior value to us.

## Non-dualism

The dialectic of the Vedanta, such as used by Shankara, does not serve to establish non-dualism (advaita) as a position. A dialectic which seeks to establish a position is propaganda. Non-dualism cannot be established as a position within temporality, because there everything is constantly changing. If, through dialectics, you are establishing a position, then this is destined to be refuted again in the course of time. The dialectic of the Vedanta merely serves to destroy the ignorance (avidya) regarding the ultimate, non-dual nature of the one reality.

Non-dualism is not a philosophical system; it is a metaphysical insight. All explanation is but the language of defeat - we stand before a wall... In every explanation there is a deceiver and a deceived! Sri Ramakrishna said that only Brahman, the Absolute, cannot be sullied by the tongue.

Since advaita is not a thesis, it never takes up a position. As in Zen Buddhism, it expresses itself through silence or through paradox. We cannot erect a dialectic of the Absolute. However, through knowledge (jnana) we are able to realize the one reality as



non-duality. In order to do so we have to arouse within ourselves the power of the buddhi (the faculty of metaphysical discrimination) by means of spiritual practice. The realisation to be attained should (a) be free from contradictions, (b) be self-evident, and (c) be universal, not being subject to the limitations of time and space.

In non-duality there are no relations: there is only the one reality. That is why the Mandukya Upanishad speaks of 'Asparsha Yoga' the yoga of 'no-contact', of 'no-relation'. This in contrast to everyday-life, which consists of relations and rapports only. The problems in the life of an individual are always relational problems. It is only through relations and rapports that we can have knowledge, normally speaking. This you ought to keep as a keystone for the study of the Mandukya Upanishad: all is rapports.

### Causality: a presupposition

Causality is a principle which is established by our intelligence in order to find an explanation via relations and rapports. It is also a given fact of our education, of our culture. From early childhood each human being has been conditioned by the principle of causality, and thus it has become a universal principle. Nevertheless, it is only through the intelligence of our imagination that we have created such a universal principle in order to be able to interpret and manage our everyday world. The notion of a primary cause is only an idea born from the need to understand. The thirty-three thousand gods of Hinduism represent only that one idea: the search for the cause - God (in religious terms). It is very difficult to eradicate the notion of a cause.

In religion, once we have been caught by the principle of causality, there are the ideas of immanence and transcendence. We then believe that there is the one reality and that that is a transcendental state. In that state a 'fall' takes place, and then, in that fall, the manifestation takes place, and so on. From an early age we have been nourished by that theological dualism, and we don't even ask ourselves whether such an idea is really correct!

The Mandukya Upanishad, on the other hand, is a metaphysics leading to wisdom, to knowledge. In it there is no redemption, no God, no sanctity, no transcendence, no mysticism, no esoterics. There one does not run to the forest in order to attain the final samadhi. This metaphysics is reserved for very few people and, therefore, in India this teaching was given behind closed doors so as not to confuse others.

The problem of cause and effect is well presented in the example of the clay and its forms, which is found in the Chandogya Upanishad: Brahman, the one reality, is the clay. No one is able to perceive clay as such: we always see only forms of clay - where there is form, there is clay, and where there is clay, there is form. Thus, as an 'observer', we can never go and stand outside the one reality; being a form of clay, we are inescapably part of the Whole and, as such, we will never be able to 'grasp' the Whole. As an individual we are indissolubly connected with the one reality; we cannot objectify the reality nor abstract ourselves from it as a subject. As no form of clay can exist apart from clay, so also no material or mental form can stand outside the reality. In this sense the idea of a separate, independent personality - however much unique in itself- is an illusion.

In terms of cause and effect we can never experience the cause, Brahman, as an object.

What we see are always the effects only, even when the effects (the forms of clay) cannot be distinguished from their cause (the clay), as in the case of a substance that is constantly changing, but which remains unknown in itself. Our error is that we are trying to find a cause apart from the forms. Brahman, the one reality, is being known through the forms by means of the metaphysical insight, just as the clay is known through its forms, for the clay and its forms are inseparably one.

(to be continued)

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### **Religion and Life (continued)**

On the full-moon night of Rasa, the gopis ran to Sri Krishna, hearing the sound of his flute coming from the forest. But why did he ask them to go back home?

The Lord tried to scare the gopis away in many ways. Of them, the first was the fear of protecting their bodies, the second was the fear of public censure, and the third was the fear of losing their virtue. When the gopis went to Krishna hearing the sound of his flute, the Lord said: 'There are numerous dangerous animals around and you have come to this almost impregnable dense forest at night. Why did you do so? If you delicate women are attacked by ferocious animals, you can't do anything.' He further said: 'You have definitely not come here for hunting; why have you come then? If the sylvan beauty is what draws you here, then see the forest bathed in moonlight and return home soon. You have work back home: you have to attend to your relatives and look after the children. What a silly thing you have done by running here! What will people say of you!' Next Krishna said: 'Granted that you have come here listening to my flute. But can that be an excuse for you to come out to this jungle thus at dead of night?' With these words Krishna pointed out to the gopis their faults. In fact he was testing them.

Did the gopis pass Krishna's test?

Oh yes, they did, and with flying colours! How beautifully has this been explained in the Bhagavata. The Lord was playing his flute melodiously from within the dense forest and it was not falling on everyone's ears; it was being heard only by those ardent aspirants who waited always for this melodious music. Sound is there for everyone's ears, but can everyone hear? Those who are without that sharp ear to listen, and those who are busy with their household activities cannot hear this. But it reaches the gopis' ears all right. The details are interesting. Maybe a gopi was serving her husband, maybe another was caring for her child, maybe yet another was cooking - but as soon as this flute was heard they gave up all their activities and ran to the Lord as they were. It is said that one of the gopis was locked up in her room; she could not get out. Her soul was panting desperately to go to the Lord. She saw that her body alone was the problem - the

obstacle - to reach the Lord. So she gave up her body and ran to him.

Sri Krishna told Arjuna in the Gita that his devotees will not perish. How is it possible?

Even as God is eternal, the devotee too is eternal. The human body will die, no doubt, but the Self is immortal. God never allows his devotee to perish because through life-cycles, the devotee remains the dear servant of God.

The way things are going on at present, honesty appears to have little value. Why is this so?

You see, he who is honest will himself have to pay the price. If you are honest, you will have to sacrifice much. But the more you can sacrifice for the sake of truth, the greater will be the evaluation of your honesty and the more will be your joy and peace.

- Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar:

due acknowledgements to Prabuddha Bharata

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## **A Mother's Heart**

(Swami Ishanananda, the writer of these reminiscences, was indeed a blessed soul. He had the good fortune of becoming Holy Mother's close attendant and helper when he was just an eleven-year-old schoolboy. He belonged to the group of young novices living at the Koalpara monastery, close to the Mother's village, who used to assist the Mother in running her household. The Swami met the Mother in 1909 and served her until her passing away in 1920.

The following selected incidents have been taken from his Bengali book `Matrisannidhye'. The free translation is by Br. Bodhi Chaitanya.)

Dedication of the book by the author

Mother,

During the celebration of your birthday at the Udbodhan House in 1918, while your children-devotees were offering flowers and prostrating at your lotus feet, I, according to your instructions, stood by watching. After everyone had finished their salutations, I offered flowers at your lotus feet in the name of all your children, known and unknown, just as you told me to do.

Mother, for eleven years I had the rare good fortune of being in your holy company. Today, half a century after the aforementioned incident, in the evening of my life, whatever memories I have, however insignificant they might be, I offer them at your holy feet in the form of this book. May the faithful devotees who read this book experience the divine peace and joy of your presence. This is my prayer at your holy feet.

Your Child, Ishanananda.

The Mother's House (Udbodhan), 1968.

#### Varada's initiation

In 1912, a couple of days before Krishna Puja, Varada<sup>1</sup> requested Holy Mother to initiate him with a mantra. Golap-Ma overheard the conversation and exclaimed in her usual loud voice: 'Such a small boy! After a few days he will forget the mantra! Look, you live very near the Mother's village, you can easily take your initiation later on, when you are a bit older.' So saying Golap-Ma went away. Holy Mother, however, reassured the boy: 'Don't listen to Golap. If one learns something well at a young age, can one ever forget it? From now onwards you just try to do what you can, and then, I am there, to be sure.'

On the day of Krishna Puja, after the initiation had been performed, the Mother saw that the boy was repeating the mantra just as she had instructed him to do, and told him encouragingly: 'That's it. Will you not be able to remember this much? Of course you will! In future, if necessary, I will show you everything again.' When the boy rose after prostrating at the Mother's feet, she blessed him by placing her hand on his head and chest. Then, looking at Sri Ramakrishna's picture she prayed: 'Please look after him here and hereafter.' Rising from her seat the Mother said to him: 'Come with me', and took him to the adjoining room. There she took two sweets that had been offered in the shrine, ate a tiny piece from one of them, and handed them to him saying: 'Eat'. Seeing that he felt shy to eat in her presence, she asked him: 'Why so shy? One should eat prasad (consecrated food) after initiation', and then gave him also a glass of water.

#### Swami Saradananda's devotion to Holy Mother

In 1916 the building of Holy Mother's new house in Jayrambati was completed, and the happy occasion was duly celebrated. Swami Saradananda, who was the person behind the project and had worked so hard for its consummation, could not be present at that time. He had to travel to Vrindavan instead, to attend to some work of the Ramakrishna Mission. The Swami was able to visit Jayrambati only about a month later, and was

delighted to see the new building finished. It was then decided that the Swami would take Holy Mother to Calcutta with him, but before that, there was still some work for the Swami to do. He had to register the new house, the adjoining Punyapukur pond, and a plot of land in the name of Mother Jagaddhatri (Holy Mother's family deity), at the same time investing the Trustees of the Ramakrishna Order with the right to manage the property.

After spending a few days in Jayrambati, the Swami, along with Holy Mother and her companions, were on their way to Calcutta. They stopped at the Koalpara Ashrama for a day and the Swami called in a sub-registrar from nearby Kotolpur. Swami Saradananda's behaviour towards the officer that day left everyone at the Ashrama spell-bound. It revealed the depth of his faith and devotion for Holy Mother's work.

It had been arranged beforehand that on that day, in the evening, the sub-registrar would be brought in a palanquin to Koalpara in order to register the new property. Swami Saradananda spread a seat for the visitor in the courtyard outside Mother's house and, keeping cigarettes, betel leaves, and a fan near at hand, patiently awaited his arrival. After some time the palanquin arrived and the sub-registrar alighted. He was a Muslim and looked very young, he may have been 27 or 28 years old. On seeing him, the Swami, who was rather heavy-set and already 50 years old, at once rose from his seat and respectfully welcomed him. When the young man took his seat, the Swami sat by his side and began to fan him. Then he gave him cigarettes and a matchbox so that he could smoke. At first the man seemed a bit puzzled at this special treatment, and after some time, when he saw how deeply the Swami was revered by everyone present, felt definitely embarrassed! After having tea and a betel leaf, he began his work. The Mother was sitting on the veranda of her house with Radhu and others. He asked her a few questions, which she answered from the veranda itself, and finally she signed the document with her thumb-impression. The job being done, the Swami again entertained the officer with some refreshments. When it was time for the 'guest' to leave, the Swami helped him to get on the palanquin. Before finally saying good-bye, the Swami even walked alongside the palanquin for some distance.

Swami Saradananda looked so happy and satisfied to have been able to perform another job for the Mother! Seeing his unusual behaviour, many of the devotees and monastics present on that occasion had felt rather uneasy, but on reflection they understood: when one works for the Mother one should do it whole-heartedly, giving up all sense of ego or position.

### A son caught in a storm

A few days before Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration in the year 1917, Varada arrived by bicycle one day at noon at the Mother's house. He was on some errand for her. The Mother was then having lunch. When he had finished his work, the Mother gave him some prasada to eat. Radhu wanted him to stay for some time before returning, but he refused, knowing that there was a lot of urgent work to do at the Koalpara Ashrama. Radhu kept on insisting, and, in order to pacify her, the Mother also tried to persuade him to stay a bit longer. Looking at the sky, the Mother saw some clouds and said: 'Look, some clouds are gathering, and Radhu also is insisting so much, just stay for some time and then you can go.' Varada, however, had already made up his mind, and left at once on the bike. When he reached the fields beyond the village of Deshra, a terrible

hailstorm arose. As the hailstones were quite large, he tied the cloth he was wearing round his head and took shelter under a tree. Unfortunately it was late winter and the tree was quite bare, so it couldn't afford him much protection. The pelting was so severe that his toes began to bleed. After a while, when the storm subsided, he resumed his journey on foot, pushing the bicycle along. Reaching Koalpara at dusk, he went straight to bed without telling anything to anybody. The next day in the morning, a devotee from Jayrambati arrived with a letter for the Mahanta (the head of the monastery). The letter was from Holy Mother, and read: 'Please let me know whether Varada arrived safely and how he is now. Yesterday I spent the night in great anxiety because of his travelling during the hailstorm. I am very worried.' In the reply the Mother was informed that the boy had had some fever during the night, but that now he was all right. After a couple of days, when Varada again visited the Mother, she told him: 'You were obstinate and left without listening to me. Afterwards, how worried I was on your account! In order to avoid the abbot's scolding, you left without listening to me. Am I then a stranger to you? If you do not listen to my words, I am the one who has to suffer. When someone speaks from the heart, one should listen to them.' Then the Mother asked him in detail about his journey in the storm.

to be continued

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## Book Reviews

Centred in Truth - The Story of Swami Nitya-Swarup-Ananda

by Shelley Brown, M.D.,

published by Kalpa Tree Press, 65 East 96th St., Suite 12d,

New York, NY 10128

1093 pages, price £35.00

This large two-volume set is a powerful tribute to the monk of the Ramakrishna Order largely responsible for the establishment of the Institute of Culture in Calcutta.

The first chapter provides scanty details of the Swami's early life and entry into the Ramakrishna Order, followed by several chapters detailing the growth and development of the Institute from its humble beginnings in 1938 in one rented room to its now world-renowned setting in Gol Park, South Calcutta.

Swami Nitya-Swarup-Ananda (it was his own decision to hyphenate his name to make it more accessible to Westerners) worked with vision, enthusiasm and indefatigable energy

to see the Institute come into being, thereby inspiring many who came into contact with him. Yet, when he retired from the Institute in 1962 to the apparent shock of many, he would take no credit, saying it was the dreams and teachings of Swami Vivekananda alone that had brought it into being.

Swami Nitya-Swarup-Ananda then left for a tour of America and the rest of the world, sponsored by the American government and various other foreign governments. He returned to India in 1964 and in 1970 was asked to take up again the role of Secretary to the Institute of Culture. The remainder of his life until his death in 1991 was spent in dedicated service to the Order through the Institute and in making further visits to the United States where he had a number of devoted friends.

In volume two of this prodigious work are numerous testimonies to the effect meeting and knowing Swami Nitya-Swarup-Ananda had on the lives of people in India and abroad. A charismatic and strong character, his was a life not untroubled by controversy. His opinions were strongly held and expressed and were not always supported by all his fellow monastics in the Order. Despite this, he remained true to the Order and all it represented to him to the end, chanting "Belur Math-Thakur-Ma-Swamiji" and clapping his hands in his last days.

This work by Dr Brown is a testament to the life of an extraordinary monk who clearly demonstrated the marvellous effect of upholding an ideal throughout his long life.

Eve Wright

The Prasthanatraya: An Introduction

by Swami Harshananda

published by Ramakrishna Math, Bull Temple Road,

Bangalore 560 019

Price Rs.25

This is an ideal book for a newcomer to Vedanta, who wishes to survey the basic texts containing the principles of Vedanta philosophy. As the author explains, the Vedanta system of philosophy is based primarily on three scriptures, namely the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgita and the Brahmasutras. Of these three, the Upanishads are the primary source of the philosophy, while the Brahmasutras are a systematisation of this philosophy and the Bhagavadgita an explanation of its essence.

In this little book Swami Harshananda gives brief factual and explanatory introductions to these three works, then a detailed summary of each book and quite a lot of

background information on the dating, composition and contribution made by these scriptures to Indian philosophical thought.

The text of this book is not new. All three sections in it were published earlier as separate booklets. The Swami has brought these three booklets together under the title "The Prasthanatraya; An Introduction". He explains that the title means "the three fundamental works that take one to the final goal of life ("Prasthanana")". He expresses the hope that bringing the three together in one volume may help students of Vedanta to comprehend the subject matter.

Certainly such a clear and succinct presentation of often difficult texts will prove to be a useful aid to studying the Vedanta philosophy. As the Swami himself writes with regard to the Upanishads: "By its very definition, an Upanishad is an esoteric work, recondite in nature and spirit. The language is archaic. Many of the concepts, being closely allied to the sacrificial religion of the Samhitas and the Brahmanas, are unintelligible to us, removed as we are, by millennia, from those rituals or ideas. Hence it is impossible to understand them, much less get a consistent view of them, without an authoritative and reliable commentary." Swami Harshananda's book could perhaps be regarded as such an introductory commentary.

John Phillips

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