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Even This Will Pass Away

Once in Persia reigned a king,
Who upon a signet ring Carved a maxim strange and wise,
When held before his eyes,
Gave him counsel at a glance,
Fit for every change and chance:
Solemn words, and these were they:
"Even this will pass away."

Trains of camel through the sand
Brought him gems from Samarcand;
Fleets of galleys over the seas
Brought him pearls to rival these,
But he counted little gain,
Treasures of the mine or main;
"What is wealth?" the king would say.
"Even this will pass away."

'Mid the pleasures of his court
At the zenith of their sport,
When the palms of all his guests
Burned with clapping at his jests,
Seated midst the figs and wine,
Said the king: "Ah, friends of mine,
Pleasure comes but not to stay,
Even this will pass away."

Woman, fairest ever seen
Was the bride he crowned as queen,
Pillowed on the marriage-bed
Whispering to his soul, he said
"Though no monarch ever pressed
Fairer bosom to his breast,
Mortal flesh is only clay!
Even this will pass away."

Fighting on the furious field,
Once a javelin pierced his shield,
Soldiers with a loud lament
Bore him bleeding to his tent
Resting on his tortured side,
"Pain is hard to bear," he cried,
"But with patience, day by day,
Even this will pass away."

Towering in a public square
Forty cubits in the air,
And the king disguised, unknown,
Gazed upon his empty throne
Looked upon his sculptured name,
And he pondered, "What is fame?"
Fame is but a slow decay!
"Even this will pass away."

Struck with palsy, sore and old,
Waiting at the gates of gold,
Said he with his dying breath
"Life is done, but what is death?"
Then as answer to the king Fell a sunbeam on his ring;
Showing by a heavenly ray,
"Even this will pass away."

Theodore Tilton

The Five Commandments of Sri Ramakrishna (continued)

Swami Dayatmananda

"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. The companionship of the holy and the wise is one of the main elements of spiritual progress." This is the second commandment of Sri Ramakrishna. Man is a gregarious animal. He wants friends and companions to share his feelings, thoughts, joys and sorrows. Even saints and people advanced in spiritual life desire the association of similar minded people. Sri Ramakrishna prayed for a pure soul as his companion and obtained Swami Brahmananda. For spiritual aspirants holy association is indispensable. Sri Ramakrishna compares holy men to physicians and says that unless aspirants keep holy company constantly their worldliness which has become chronic cannot be cured. The wicked get transformed into good people or even become saints by the potent influence of holy company. Saint Tulasidas, in his Ramcharitmanas bestows high praise on the benefits of holy company. He says: "The association of holy men can turn a crow into a cuckoo and a heron into a swan. As iron is transformed into gold by the touch of the philosophers' stone, so is the transformation that takes place by contact with a saint." He goes so far as to say: "If the joys of heaven and salvation could be weighed together in a balance, they would not equal the happiness that results from a moment of Satsanga (holy company)". Once in the course of conversation with devotees Sri Ramakrishna observed : "I visited the museum once. I was shown the fossils. A whole animal has become stone! Just see what an effect has been produced by company! Likewise, by constantly living in the company of a holy man one verily becomes holy." There is a Sanskrit verse which says: "Even a moment's association with the holy becomes a boat which takes one across the sea of transmigration." This is not a mere panegyric. Innumerable instances can be cited of the transformation of sinners into saints by mere association. The devotees of Sri Ramakrishna may recall how a thief became a saint by coming into contact with Pavahari baba. Kalipada Ghosh turned over a new leaf by the blessings of Sri Ramakrishna. Amjad the robber became a good man by

the grace of Holy Mother Sarada Devi. Who knows how many such incidents remain unknown to us! Sri Ramakrishna also used to say : "If the aspirant thirsting after self-improvement mixes indiscriminately with all sorts of worldly people, not only does he lose his ideal, but also his former faith, love and zeal; they die away imperceptibly. The society of pious men is like the water in which rice is washed. This rice-water has the potency of dissipating alcoholic intoxication. The society of the pious relieves worldly men, drunk with the wine of vain desires, of their intoxication." That is why he recommends the cultivation of holy company so strongly. The Sanskrit word for holy company is Sat-sanga. The word sanga means company, and sat means good, truth, and God. To seek the company of the holy means to become good, to observe truthfulness, and to thirst after truth and God. Invariably one who keeps good company, first becomes good, pure, unselfish, and kind. Then he becomes sincere and truthful; after that he becomes a seeker of Truth and God. He practises japa, prayer, meditation etc; he experiences constantly the presence of God. In the end he obtains the grace of God and realises Him as the Self of his self. The effect of Satsanga is incalculable. We live in the midst of an adverse environment saturated with materialism and atheism. Added to that we also bring our own past impressions which constantly are trying to pull us down. There will also be times when we feel depressed, frustrated and likely to lose our enthusiasm. Then there are the inevitable events of life - accidents, death, pain and suffering. Under these circumstances the difficulty of keeping our faith in God and higher ideals is easily imagined. In these trying times the company of the holy and pious can help us a great deal. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: "Bondage and liberation are of the mind alone. The mind will take the colour you dye it with. It is like white clothes just returned from the laundry. If you dip them in red dye, they will be red. If you dip them in blue or green, they will be blue or green. They will take only the colour you dip them in, whatever it may be." Holy company makes one holy. The need for holy company has

been emphasised by all religions. Not only is holy company necessary, it is impossible to progress in spiritual life without it, says Vedanta. To emphasize this point the following story was narrated: Uma was the Universal Mother incarnated as the daughter of Himavan. She blessed her father with the vision of the several manifestations of the omnipotent Mother. Himavan, highly pleased, asked his daughter to help him have the realisation of Brahman. Uma replied, "O Father, if you wish to realize Brahman, you must live in the company of holy men - men who have entirely given up the world." It is not easy to get holy company. Even confirmed non-dualist that he was, Sri Sankara has affirmed that there are three things which are hard to acquire and can be had only by God's especial grace, and these three are : human birth, an intense yearning for liberation and the association of a great soul. Narada in his Bhakti Sutras makes a reference to the companionship of the holy and points out that this companionship creates a rare opportunity; its influence is subtle and difficult to comprehend. It is obtainable only by the grace of God, but once obtained its effect is unending. Holy company is a wonderful lifter, for it exercises a silent and lasting influence for good on all sincere recipients. However it is not easy to recognise a holy man, for he does not go about advertising himself. He does not assume false glories, rather he likes to remain incognito, to stay in the background. Sometimes he appears very ordinary and commonplace; at other times he even behaves in a queer way to keep intruders out. It is therefore not an easy thing to recognise a great soul. It is only as a result of the cumulative effect of merit earned in many births that one comes across a holy man. But there is no need to despair. There is a law which sees to it that the earnest seeker does come by his guide. As Swami Vivekananda says when the field is ready the seed must come. What are the benefits of holy company? It gives inspiration, and guidance. Holy company makes one aware of one's faults and one will make the necessary correction. The biography of Sri Ramakrishna narrates many incidents of how he used to correct

Swami Yogananda, Swami Niranjanananda and other disciples and devotees and put them on the right road. We can find similar incidents in the lives of every saint. The life of every saint acts like a powerful search-light illuminating the path to God. In the company of holy men one understands scriptures in the right way, for as Sri Ramakrishna used to say, scriptures contain both sand and sugar i.e., essentials and non-essentials. One needs right guidance to understand and apply them correctly. Then one is able to understand the nature of the world, life, its meaning, the goal of life and the best way of reaching it. In the company of a holy man one is inundated with peace and an indefinable bliss, for holy men radiate peace and bliss. Swami Turiyananda used to say that one visit to Sri Ramakrishna used to inebriate him with bliss for days and days. Many people used to visit Ramana Maharshi with their minds full of doubts and questions, but once in his presence all their doubts disappeared and all questions ceased. Holy men are free of egotism and their hearts are filled with loving compassion. Hence their company helps one reduce the ego, the root cause of all bondage. Holy company spontaneously brings the thought of God into one's mind. Sri Chaitanya states: "Know him to be a holy man whose mere sight produces in the beholder a spontaneous devotion to the Lord." What can be achieved only with great difficulty and by hard practice for a long time can easily be obtained in the company of holy men. The company of the holy gives strength in times of depression and low periods. In the presence of a holy man lust, envy, anger etc. cannot raise their heads. Once a disciple of Swami Brahmananda wanted to test his Guru. In his presence this disciple deliberately tried to think worldly thoughts but failed. Then he realised how powerful and uplifting was the presence of these great disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Above all a saint by his grace can even grant the vision of God, for as Narada states there is no difference between God and His devotees. As Vedanta also asserts, a knower of Brahman becomes Brahman. An illumined person's will is merged in the universal will; he becomes a perfect instrument of God. Hence whatever he does is

really an act of God. We can now see why Sri Ramakrishna instructs us to cultivate holy company. But there may be a difficulty. It is rare to obtain the constant company of a holy man. And then even if we are fortunate in coming into contact with a holy man it may be for a short time only. What then should we do? Holy company means not only the companionship of saints. Anything that inspires and propels one toward a nobler goal, towards God, is holy company. It could be a book, or a place or an object. Every religion insists on the study of scriptures and pilgrimage. A devout study of scriptures and the lives and teachings of saints and sages is a wonderful way of having their holy company. These have the power of truth and truth always uplifts and inspires every one. The study of these holy books instantly transports us into the presence of these great souls. For example when we read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna we can palpably feel his presence immediately. Regular study of the scriptures slowly brings about an inner transformation. The places and objects associated with holy men can also act as powerful uplifters. Visiting holy places definitely raises our minds. Clothes, rosaries, or sandals and other objects associated with saints also remind us of their life and help us. This is why relics (not merely for their apparent miraculous powers) are cherished so devoutly by devotees all over the world. Even certain events can help us turn towards a higher goal. Many aspirants are advised to visit now and then crematoriums, hospitals and lunatic asylums. These visits can bring to our minds vividly the evanescence of life, check our mad rush after fleeting sense pleasures, and produce dispassion and discrimination. We also learn to count our blessings and appreciate the grace of God in having a healthy body and mind; we are reminded of the preciousness of time and opportunity given us. But the best holy company is the practice of the presence of God in our hearts. Constant prayer, japa, and remembrance unveils the Lord who is present at all times and at all places. To feel the presence of God—this is the true meaning of Satsanga. All the other means discussed earlier are only helps toward reaching this goal.

Until we achieve this we are advised to take recourse to all the other means mentioned earlier. Thus we can see how the cultivation of holy company confers so many blessings and is so very necessary in spiritual life. We can ignore it only at our peril. (To be continued)

Seeing Brahman with Open Eyes (continued)

Swami Siddheswarananda

Some aspects of the Mandukya Upanishad The evolution idea, the idea of 'progress', tells us that form A precedes and, therefore, is the cause of form B which we are seeing now, and so on. This is an error: the so-called cause is always the one and same reality ('clay'). The same applies to the practice of spirituality: 'realisation' or 'liberation' is not the 'product' (effect) of a foregoing, personal effort (cause), however much it may take its legitimate place. Also one should always try to get rid of the notion of a substratum, of a separate, more or less concrete base serving as a 'ground' cause. Shankara's theory of superimposition (adhyasa) of the reality as presented in the classic example of the piece of rope which is being mistaken for a snake, is a concession to the presupposition of causality. Nobody ever experiences ignorance or unreality directly. It is always only afterwards, through memory, that we speak of unreality or of error - so always in relation to an experience in the past. The notion of reality persists through all of our perceptions and experiences: the clay remains clay under all of its forms. The Mandukya Upanishad places a time bomb under the presupposition of causality.

Turiya

The first part of Shankara's invocation of the Mandukya Upanishad is addressed to Brahman, the one reality, looked at from the causal standpoint: God (in religious terms).

The second part is addressed to turiya, a term which does not occur in any other upanishad. Turiya is the one reality, looked at from the non-causal, metaphysical standpoint. The Mandukya Upanishad actually contains a study of the three states of consciousness which each individual is going through daily. As such it first gives us a definition of the waking state, the dream state, and the state of deep sleep. Subsequently the upanishad speaks of `turiya' as being a fourth state of consciousness, thereby using the word `pada' which may mean both `foot' and `quarter'. In his commentary Shankara explains that turiya is not, for example, like the fourth foot of the four feet of a cow, in other words, as part of an arithmetical series. Turiya is Brahman, looked at from the non-causal standpoint, and is not part of any enumeration or classification. The upanishad actually identifies turiya with the fourth quarter of a coin that is divided into four parts as it were, according to Shankara. The three states of consciousness of waking, dreaming and deep sleep make up the first three quarters of the coin. The first quarter merges into the second, the second quarter merges into the third, etc. Turiya, being the fourth and last quarter into which the first three merge themselves, completes the coin by making it into one whole and, in that sense, it contains the first three-quarters. It could then be argued accordingly, that each of the first three quarters represents a state of consciousness, and that turiya is a fourth state of consciousness into which the first three are merged successively. Turiya would thus complete and `perfect' the other three states by making them into one whole, thereby raising itself to a state of `transcendence' as compared to the other three states. But it is not at all like that: Turiya is not `a state' which one enters, stays in for a while, and then leaves again. Turiya is the non-causal reality which persists throughout the three states of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. It is the awareness of the reality, the sense of the real, which accompanies all of an individual's perceptions and experiences. The realisation of turiya is a metaphysical insight. The one reality is an indivisible Totality

and forms no part of the scheme of numbers. The example of the coin is used only to arrive at the notion of prime number: the philosophy of Shankara is non-dualistic (advaita) therefore un-divided and in-divisible. For that reason turiya, the one, non-causal reality, is considered as the number 1. Whether one multiplies, adds or divides, the number 1 is always implied. Whatever the process that is being applied, the number 1 is always implicitly present, we can never eliminate it. The divisions which we make are but our own, mental divisions, the abstractions of our intellect. The notion of '1' is a metaphysical insight: turiya is the 1. Turiya is the Intemporal, the eternal Now, always staying outside the framework of the personal vision. Here it is not a matter of a 'fourth' state of 'transcendence': turiya is the eternal 'here-and-now', present under all circumstances and in all states of consciousness. This given fact is, normally speaking, being disregarded by the individual, because of the power of ignorance (avidya), resulting in the denial and negation of its very in-dividuality, its in-divisibility. The realisation of turiya is the removal of that denial, which does not mean the 'removal' of the world: it is only the ignorance which is removed. If the ignorance (avidya) results in the negation of the one reality, then the realisation of turiya is the removing of that negation, leading to an affirmation, namely that everything is this one reality: everything is Brahman. At the same time this realisation gives us the knowledge that cause and effect are one in the moment of the eternal Now.

Avasthatraya: the three states

The unique contribution of the Mandukya Upanishad lies in an investigation into the nature of the three states of consciousness (avasthatraya) of waking (jagrat), dreaming (svapna), and deep, dreamless sleep (sushupti). With a very rigorous logic it can be established that, from the standpoint of consciousness, it is impossible to arrive at a dualism. The individual which imagines itself to be passing through the three states of

consciousness every day, is in reality nothing but the indivisible, pure and non-dual consciousness. The dialectics of this analysis is well explained by K. A. Krishnaswami Iyer in his book: 'Vedanta or the Science of Reality.' One never becomes conscious of consciousness as an object. As in the example of the clay, so also is consciousness not an 'object' to be known as such, nor is it an entity of which the individual as a 'subject' could have the experience. On the other hand, for consciousness itself everything is equally an object, including the individual in its role as subject. In the Samkhya philosophy also everything is prakriti, matter, the whole of the mental world included. In Indian thought there is no dualism between matter and mind. I think that that is the big issue which separates European thinking from Indian thinking - there lies the whole difference: From the standpoint of consciousness no real distinction can be made between mind and matter. For that reason Cartesian thinking ('Cogito ergo sum') actually represents a big fall in western philosophy, spiritually speaking. Pure consciousness is like the number 1: indivisible (advaita). The notion of individuality, the sense of 'self', is really the notion of consciousness, essentially undivided, persisting through the three states of consciousness of waking, dreaming and deep sleep. The universal man - he who knows through realisation that he is pure consciousness - bears the whole universe within himself. In the waking and dream states there is the experience of the reality in its manifested aspect, characterized by the opposition between the 'I' and the 'non-I'. In the state of deep sleep the reality is in its non-manifested aspect, which is the negation of the manifested aspect. Well then, no one can imagine a state in which there is a subject and an object, without there being another state, in which there is no subject and no object. Everything which is experienced here in the manifested, is known, because of its being opposed to its antipole, the non-manifested: all relative knowledge arises from an opposite. According to Prof. V. Subramanyam Iyer: 'This is one of the greatest achievements of Indian

thought.' The positive can only become a form of knowledge, if the negative also exists. We can only acquire the integral knowledge of the relative, if we have an experience of another order in which all relative knowledge is absent. Well then, every person is daily in the state of deep sleep, the state of the non-manifested. An understanding of the position which deep sleep takes up within the whole of the three states of consciousness, gives a clarifying insight in which the error collapses. The non-manifested is a negative affirmation. Is empirical knowledge possible without its opposite? All knowledge arises through opposition: black - white, cold - warm, pain - pleasure, etc. Empirical knowledge cannot arise, unless there is non-empirical knowledge as well. If the whole of empirical knowledge is only a play between the positive and the negative, then empirical knowledge as a whole can only arise, if its opposite as a whole is also a factor of our experience. Now then, without the state of deep sleep it would be impossible for us to come to an experience of the waking and the dream state. This is made clear in the last line of verse 5 of the Mandukya Upanishad: 'Deep sleep... who is the doorway to the experience (of the dream and waking states).' This knowledge regarding the state of deep sleep is only received through oral transmission. If all relative knowledge arises through opposition, then the same applies to the awareness of reality: because we are able to interpret the experience of the world and of our own person against the light of pure consciousness as changeable, we also have the awareness of an opposite, unchangeable reality, through our sense of the real.

Maya or life as the confrontation of contradictions

Maya is that which is constantly changing, thereby giving rise to the numerous contradictions in life. That is why Swami Vivekananda explains that maya is not just a theory of illusion, but a fact of our experience: it is the confrontation of the contradictions in life, the play of interaction between the positive and negative poles,

where the ordinary, relative knowledge springs from. The only way by which we may know life, is by means of opposites, by opposition. And the true knowledge (jnana) arises from the confrontation of the silence and the tumult. Only very few can have that. This confrontation is to be met on a basis which connects all the data of our perceptions and experiences, and which is not a denial. (Compare the concept of 'dharma' which literally means: 'that which holds things together.')

When you faint, you deny pathologically; in samadhi you deny supernaturally, in a trans-psychological state. But the reality is the Totality, the whole of everything (sarvam). A summing up of three or four states of consciousness would mean that the one reality is a compound, which is impossible. And it is the great error of spiritual and philosophical life to think that all that is matter in life is to be rejected: by trying to make psychological supports and abstractions for oneself, by practising yoga, by leaving the world, retreating into caves and thus to deny the world completely. Surely, there are ways to leave the world, to practise meditation, samadhi, etc. for oneself, but that is not the ultimate state. It is not a matter of denying, of escaping or destroying the world, but of destroying avidya: the fact that we are ignorant of the one reality as one undivided Totality. One seeks solitariness, because one is too much occupied by the outer world. We practise detachment and renunciation in order to break our attachment to the material world, we enter the monastery in order to discipline ourselves, but we can never deny the Totality. Why not try to get rid of those contradictions of life here and now, in the little place that we occupy in life? Why practise all this gymnastics, which only serves to postpone the true knowledge? Therefore, it is not the yoga-samadhi as such, as the ultimate form of meditation, against which a charge is being made by the Mandukya Upanishad, but the wrong use of it as a means to arrive at the knowledge of the reality. It is a warning against the practice of meditation as an end in itself. The world is not going to be explained by concentrating oneself exclusively on a condition of peace or by

making oneself immune to the world. And this explanation of the world, of life's contradictions, that is what is needed. The word `samadhi' means: `sameness of vision'. That sameness of vision comes with the enlightenment of the buddhi, the faculty of metaphysical discrimination, as a metaphysical insight. In the Bhagavad Gita Sri Krishna taught this `buddhi yoga' to Arjuna on the battlefield. He did not advise Arjuna to go and meditate in the caves, but to fulfil his duty as a warrior on the battlefield, established in the metaphysical insight. Sri Ramakrishna also admonished Naren (the later Swami Vivekananda) to see Brahman `with open eyes'. Thus we can make a distinction between the yoga-samadhi and the jnana-samadhi: the former is a condition, inserted in time between a `before' and an `after', whereas the latter is a metaphysical insight in our true, intemporal being, which is not time-related. So the Mandukya Upanishad breaks with the wrong notion as though the philosophy of the Vedanta or the spirituality of Hinduism would advocate an escape from the world. The solution of the problems and contradictions of life is the vision of the Intemporal here and now. Why not seek that knowledge right from the beginning? `The unreal does not exist; the real never ceases to exist. ` Even in the very confusion of the error the awareness of the reality of the eternal Now never fails.

Time

The question `Why?' cannot be grasped; the `Why?'s' are the barbed wire in which our intelligence gets stuck. The real question is: `How?' When one meditates on the `How?', automatically the value is given to the present moment, to the here and now. That brings us to a study of the concept of time. I would not call anything a true metaphysics, unless it deals with a study of the concept of time. All the rest is but theology. And in this study of time there is no transcendence, there is no possibility at all to place oneself outside of time. The notion of a transcendence of time, of time coming to a

standstill, is one of the most childish ideas in philosophy. Nor can time be a means for seeking time; that would be like trying to seek the mind by means of the mind. Meister Eckhart says: 'To seek the Truth with the mind is seeking the light of the sun with the help of a candle.' The Mandukya Upanishad which treats of the three states of consciousness, is a study of the problem of time: it explains to us the three faces of time. We make a distinction between Time itself as the Totality of the eternal Now (turiya), and time-duration, which is an interpretation afterwards of that which is constantly changing. The eternal Now is an ungraspable certainty, it is the eternal Subject which never becomes an object of knowledge. When there is the notion of particular attention, there arises the notion of time-duration, of Time apparently being divided into duration. Then there is duality and multiplicity, and we enter into the scheme of numbers. Through particular attention we are living in time-duration as it were, in other words: in relativity. This particular attention is innate in all beings and is the negation, as it were, of the Totality as the indivisible One. That is the ignorance, the avidya of the Vedanta, the western 'fall' and 'original sin'. It keeps 'the third eye' of wisdom closed. Now just try with the help of objectless attention (pure attention without content) to perceive the three states of consciousness of waking, dreaming and deep sleep on one and the same level. Then the three states are not in time-duration, but in me, that is to say: the Me which is the pure consciousness of the eternal Now - turiya - the One which is never divided into pieces, the silence which is non-contradiction. It is realized through the practice of objectless attention. That attention is at the same time the infinite possibility for particular attention: the very objectless de-tachment of the pure consciousness possesses within itself the infinite possibility for particular at-tachment. This is the explanation of the Vedanta. (Compare also the insight-meditation of vipassana in Theravada Buddhism and of shikantaza in Zen Buddhism.) Realize the non-contradiction of the silence in the very heart of life's

contradictions - that is the metaphysical insight. It is not an experience, for experience takes place in time-duration. Nobody can experience Time, the eternal Now. 'I am Time', says Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita. The three states of consciousness express the Intemporal Time as duration (in the temporality of the waking and dream states), and as non-duration (in the non-temporality of the state of deep sleep). Realisation of the eternal Now may be attained through insight in the opposition between duration and non-duration. One should look upon the state of deep sleep as a 'substitute' for death, then there arises a great contrast. Duration and non-duration form a big contradiction in life; they express the contradiction between existence and non-existence, between life and death. Our primary existential fear in the states of waking and dreaming is a direct consequence of the non-dual and non-temporal nature of deep sleep, to which one instinctively surrenders oneself without any fear. (To be continued)

A Mother's Heart (continued)

Swami Ishanananda

This is the second instalment of Swami Ishanananda's reminiscences of Holy Mother.

The story of the sick widow

One morning during the rainy season in 1917, Varada arrived at the Mother's house in Jayrambati with some vegetables and flowers for the worship. He then was told that Holy Mother had gone to visit a certain neighbour. When the Mother returned after a while, she explained that she had been to the house of an orphan widow who was suffering from an infection in the ears. The lady's only relative was her small child, so she had no one to look after her. Due to lack of medical treatment the infection was much advanced, riddled with maggots, and it smelled so badly that nobody was willing

to come near the widow. Early that morning, Holy Mother had prepared some juice of margosa leaves and, together with a Brahmachari, had gone to see the poor lady. Squirting the liquid on the sore, the Mother had cleaned it thoroughly. Now it was late in the morning; after finishing her bath quickly, the Mother performed the daily worship, and then fed Varada with the consecrated food. Still speaking about the sick widow, the Mother told him: `Well, my dear, you sometimes take sick and helpless people to your Koalpara Ashrama and look after them nicely. It would be a great service if you could take her to your place and arrange for her treatment. Due to lack of care, the sore smells very unpleasantly, and that is why no one goes near her. Her little boy is also suffering so much!' Hearing these words of the Mother, Varada started for Koalpara immediately. When the head of the monastery heard the story, he decided to go and fetch the widow as soon as possible. A group of monastics left for Jayrambati by bullock cart that very night after supper, arriving at the Mother's house early morning the next day. The Mother was very happy to see them, and exclaimed: `Eat plenty of puffed rice, and then take the lady with you, otherwise you will arrive at Koalpara too late at night.' The widow was laid on a wooden plank and lifted on to the cart. Just before departure, Holy Mother gave her some hot milk to drink and lovingly comforted her with sweet words. Covering seven or eight miles of muddy, rainy-season tracks, the party reached Koalpara in the evening, and they called in the village doctor at once. After the doctor had administered some medicine and bandaged the affected area, they realized how deep the infection was. From the nose and mouth very big maggots came out, and from the ears oozed pus and blood with a horribly rotten smell! The Ashrama members nursed the patient day and night by shifts, but all efforts to cure her proved fruitless, and after a few days the widow passed away. When Varada visited Jayrambati in order to make arrangements for the funeral, he informed Holy Mother about the sad news. The Mother exclaimed: `Alas! You have cared for her like her sons, my dear. If she had stayed on

here, with no help at all, she would probably have died of thirst even.'

Holy Mother and her brothers' Guru

It was the year 1918, the Jagaddhatri Puja was being celebrated at the Mother's house in Jayrambati. From early morning that day, Holy Mother had been repeatedly coming near the image and, prostrating in all humility, had prayed to the deity for the successful completion of the worship. One Hrishikesh Bhattacharya officiated as pujari (priest), while the tantradharaka (the prompter who helps in the recitation of the lengthy mantras) was the family guru of Holy Mother's brothers. After the three worships and food offerings had been performed according to scriptural injunctions, there was arati (waving of lights before the image) and a homa ceremony (worship in the fire). When all the ceremonies were over, Holy Mother prostrated before the image of the Divine Mother, and then prostrated before the family guru, taking the dust of his feet. When the Mother was about to prostrate before the priest, the latter did not allow her saying: 'Mother, that you should prostrate before us! Please bless me!' He was very annoyed at the family guru's accepting Holy Mother's prostrations without any objection. Holy Mother was revered and worshipped by so many people, and besides, she was much older than the guru. When the priest expressed his displeasure to the guru, the latter, somewhat understanding his mistake, replied with the following well-known verse: 'By whom the entire universe is pervaded,
Both the moving and the unmoving,
Whose undivided form is the whole universe,
To the One who has revealed that State to me,
To that Guru, be my salutation.'

On hearing these words, Holy Mother exclaimed: 'Oh, please don't speak like that' and left the room. Afterwards the consecrated food was distributed among all the devotees

and the villagers present. Lalu has some fun On the day after the above incident, Lalu the fisherman came to Holy Mother and after prostrating to her said: `Auntie, today in the evening I will sing some baul2 songs.' Mother replied: `Oh no, what will you sing? You will only give me trouble! Where are the canopy and the lantern? I cannot arrange these things for you.' Lalu was not to be put off so easily, he said: `No problem, auntie. I will procure all those things.' At the appointed time, shortly before dusk, Lalu appeared on the scene carrying a broken trunk on his head, and with a tom-tom hanging from his shoulders. On seeing him, the Mother tried to discourage him: `Lalu, why do you want to make people laugh at you? Instead of this, why don't you just sit with the other boys and sing a few devotional songs to Mother Jagaddhatri? You can have Mother's consecrated food before going back home.' Lalu, however, had already made up his mind, and started setting things up on the meadow opposite Holy Mother's house. He improvised a frame of bamboo poles and spread on it some torn canvas cloth, thus getting the canopy ready. He then tied a hurricane lamp to the canopy. The stage being ready, Lalu began to play the tom-tom very loudly, so as to let the villagers know that a special performance was about to commence. After a while, when Lalu had played the announcing tom-tom for a second time, he managed to get a small crowd of spectators around the stage. He took a cloak, anklets, and the ektara out of the trunk. As he unfolded the cloak and was about to put it on, lots of cockroaches fell from it! Nalini3 exclaimed: `You rascal! You need not do any singing. I see you've come here to release cockroaches only! Close that trunk quickly and be off!' Undeterred, Lalu shook the cloak clean and then began his performance to the accompaniment of the ektara:

`He who takes this world for real, he is indeed deluded,

Just think: who is whose father,

Who is whose uncle, in this insubstantial world?

Now take a puff at the hubble-bubble,

And a gurgling sound it makes,
But see the old man whose teeth are gone,
Puffed rice powder is all he takes.'

By singing a few such songs, Lalu entertained the villagers, who were very happy and laughed a good deal. Holy Mother also was seen laughing now and then, she enjoyed the function too!

Holy Mother's reaction to human suffering

During the famine of 1918 in Orissa, the Ramakrishna Mission took active part in the relief operations. At that time Holy Mother received a long letter of three or four pages from Swami Saradananda, written from Orissa itself. In it the Swami described people's suffering and fervently prayed to her for the improvement of their condition. He explained that the help the Mission was rendering was quite insubstantial compared to the needs of the people, and that they did not know how to cope with the situation. After the whole letter had been read out to her, Holy Mother prayed to the Master with tearful eyes: 'Lord, I can no longer see and hear about people's misery; please put an end to their sufferings.' Then she added: 'Have you noticed Sarat's (Swami Saradananda's) large-heartedness? He is always ready to assist those in distress.' 'Oh Lord, give them in abundance; may they be able to supply the needs of all the people!' Then the Mother wiped her tears with her hands.

Holy Mother entrusts some relics to Varada

Whenever Holy Mother combed her hair or pared her nails, the lady devotees used to quarrel among themselves, trying to secure some memento from the Mother. After one such row concerning the impression of Holy Mother's feet, she never allowed anyone to take her hair or nails again. Instead, she used to keep them tied in a corner of her sari,

and would either give them to some devotee in secret or throw them in the waters of the nearby pond. Holy Mother blessed Varada on three different occasions, by giving him some keepsakes. The first time was one day after lunch. During his noon rest, Varada was suddenly woken up by the voice of the Mother repeatedly calling him. When he went to her, she quietly put some of her hair and nails in his hands saying: 'Clean them well and keep them with you.' The second time was while Holy Mother was cleaning her teeth, and one tooth fell out. She gave it to Varada then and there. The third time was towards the end of Holy Mother's life, shortly before her last journey from Jayrambati to Calcutta. The Mother gave him a small bundle containing some of Sri Ramakrishna's hair, and a fragment of the asana (seat) Sri Ramakrishna had used during meals, saying: 'Keep these with you.' Varada replied: 'Mother, you are giving me all these precious things, what shall I do with them? Where shall I keep them?' He only had a biscuit tin where he used to keep Mother's letters, together with the ink-pot and pen. But the Mother reassured him: 'Later on you may see what arrangements can be made. Now you keep them with you.' Fifteen years after Holy Mother's passing away, at the time of the centenary celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday, Swami Ishanananda (Varada) was down with chicken-pox at the Ramakrishna Mission's hospital in Benares. At that time, arrangements were under way for the opening of the newly constructed temple to Sri Ramakrishna there. The senior Swamis of the Ashrama used to come often to the hospital to visit Swami Ishanananda. During one of these visits, the Swami told them the following: 'Holy Mother, of her own will, gave me some precious relics for me to keep; but see the condition of my health. Besides, I do not have the strength now to install these relics by building a temple for them. If you all agree, we could install them for good in the new temple. What better opportunity could we get than a new temple in Benares?' The Swamis were delighted at the proposal, and agreed at once. Swami Shantananda had a large, firm copper box made, with four compartments inside, where

the four different relics were kept separately: Sri Ramakrishna's hair, Holy Mother's hair, Holy Mother's nails, and Holy Mother's tooth. A description of each relic was engraved on each compartment. On the day of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration, the relics were duly worshipped and installed under the altar of the new temple.

A Mother's Heart

In 1918, when Holy Mother was sixty-five years old, she fell seriously ill with malarial fever at the Koalpara Ashrama, near her native village. The monastic members of the Ashrama as well as the villagers of the locality were very concerned about her delicate condition. At this juncture, when Holy Mother would have been much comforted to have her dear niece Radhu by her side, the latter -whimsical as usual- suddenly took it into her head to visit her husband's parental home in Tajpur, not far away, and left at once in a palanquin. Holy Mother must naturally have felt a bit hurt, but nevertheless decided to send a Brahmachari to Radhu, to find out whether she would like to accompany her to Calcutta. Radhu would not listen to any such suggestion, and refused to move from her father-in-law's house. Meanwhile, Swami Saradananda and Yogin Ma arrived with a physician in order to take Holy Mother to Calcutta, where she could receive proper medical treatment. Within seven or eight days, when the patient was in a condition to travel, they all left for Calcutta. This was Holy Mother's first visit to Calcutta without Radhu. In Calcutta Holy Mother soon recovered from her illness, but then it was Radhu's turn to fall sick! By the middle of June of the same year Radhu had a painful boil on one finger and wrote to the Mother in Calcutta asking if she could stay with her again. The compassionate Mother, whom Radhu had recently deserted during her illness, now behaved as if she did not remember anything of it at all! She at once made all arrangements for Radhu's journey to Calcutta. Radhu travelled with her husband and her mother, and a Brahmachari escorted them all the way from Koalpara. They arrived at

the Mother's house after nine in the evening, and the next day a doctor began to treat Radhu's finger.

Maharaj's (Swami Brahmananda's) visit to Holy Mother

One morning at nine o' clock, Swami Brahmananda arrived at the Udbodhan House to have the darshan of Holy Mother. Covering herself with a shawl, the Mother sat on a cot and asked Varada to bring the Swami in. Varada escorted Swami Brahmananda, walking behind him towards the Mother's room, and, as they came into her presence, he could see the Swami's legs trembling! Maharaj made a full prostration at the Mother's feet and then asked her about Radhu's health. The Mother blessed him by placing her hand on his head, then told him about Radhu's illness, and asked him about himself and the other monks. After giving brief replies to the Mother's questions, Maharaj came out and sat in Swami Saradananda's room. Varada then saw that, after meeting the Mother, Maharaj was perspiring profusely. Following the Mother's instructions, Varada arranged some biscuits, fruits, and sweets on a tray. Holy Mother held the offerings before Sri Ramakrishna's picture for a while, partook of a tiny bit of it, and then gave it to Varada saying: `Give this to Rakhal'. When Varada entered Swami Saradananda's room and handed the prasad to Maharaj, Swami Saradananda exclaimed: `Will you eat the Mother's prasad all by yourself? Maharaj: `Sarat, you eat Mother's prasad daily, do you want a share of this prasad as well? All right, here you are. After all you are Mother's doorkeeper; unless you are pleased one cannot go near the Mother.' Swami Saradananda: `Brother, you are the one who appointed me to this job!' Joking in this way, the two brother-disciples ate the Mother's prasad with great joy.

Holy Mother's efforts to cure Radhu

In 1919 Radhu was pregnant, and gradually becoming mentally unbalanced. Seeing the

Mother at a loss to know how to cure her, Nalini suggested that they make Radhu wear bangles offered to the 'Mad Goddess Kali' of the Tirol village, since that had once worked in lessening Radhu's mother's insanity in the past. The Mother agreed at once and, turning to Varada, said: 'Look, Nalini is right. Varada, tomorrow without fail please go to Tirol, offer worship to Mother Kali there, and bring the bangles with you.' Varada left for Tirol the next day, spending the night at a devotee's house on the way. Arriving in Tirol on the second day, he offered worship to Mother Kali and bought the bangles, returning to Holy Mother at Koalpara in the evening. The following morning before breakfast, Radhu was bathed and the bangles were put on her wrists according to scriptural injunctions. Holy Mother prostrated herself in the direction of Mad Goddess Kali's shrine, and fervently prayed for Radhu's recovery. Radhu's condition, however, did not change or improve in the least by wearing the bangles; rather, Radhu's mother's madness took a turn for the worse! She began to quarrel with Nalini for having prescribed the bangles for Radhu. After a few days, Radhu's mother began to reproach Holy Mother again and again, telling her: 'Why did you bring Radhu from Calcutta? If she had stayed there, she could have received proper medical treatment. Now the weather is so hot; in Calcutta they would have applied ice on her head, and that would have alleviated her condition. If you can manage to procure ice and apply it on Radhu's head, she will be cured.' Holy Mother again believed in the new proposal and turning to Varada said: 'Varada, she is right. Tomorrow please go by bicycle to Bankura and bring some ice.' As his bike was not in a very good condition, Varada was reluctant to cycle all the twenty-four miles distance to Bankura, but the Mother assured him: 'It will be all right, you please go.' The next morning Varada presented himself before the Mother, ready to depart. The Mother did some japa (repetition of a holy mantra) on his head and chest, and gave him an offered flower to tie in his cloth. Travelling by bicycle and by train, Varada managed to return to the Mother with twenty pounds of ice nicely packed, by

five in the afternoon the next day. At the Bankura Ashrama the members had given Varada some cucumbers and other things for the Mother's household, so in the end the young man had to carry a forty-pound load! While Holy Mother and Radhu's mother were happily applying the ice to Radhu's head, Uncle Kali (Holy Mother's brother) happened to come that way. Hearing of the new treatment prescribed by the mad aunt (Radhu's mother was known by that name), he said to Holy Mother: `Sister, do you apply ice on the head of a pregnant girl on the advice of the mad aunt? Take care that she doesn't catch a cold.', and: `Sister, you don't understand. If the big doctors of Calcutta have admitted defeat, being unable to cure her, then this is no disease at all. In my opinion she is possessed by a ghost. In the village of Sushnegere there is a tantrik practitioner; why don't you send for him and get his opinion about Radhu?' At these words the Mother stopped applying ice on Radhu's head and said to her brother: `Fine. Tomorrow Varada will go to Jayrambati; from there you will take him to Sushnegere. Explain the case to the man and see if you can bring him with you.' The next day Uncle Kali and Varada arrived in Sushnegere and, as soon as they approached the tantrik occultist, the latter threw some mustard seeds at both of them, and at his altar, and then said: `Yes, I have understood everything. In the next couple of days I will have to go there. I have received the command.', etc. Uncle Kali still told him in detail about Radhu's mental condition and requested him to come to Koalpara to examine her. On the way back to Koalpara, Uncle Kali began to talk to Varada on different subjects, and finally said, referring to Holy Mother: `Look, Varada, if my sister would save all the money that the devotees give her, she could be very well-off, but instead of that, she spends it all on Radhu and her brothers, she doesn't save at all. Well, to whom do you think she gives most?' Seeing that Varada uttered no response, the uncle continued: `Look, Varada, my sister is not at all attached to money, that is why she is respected by so many people. Her relatives try to take advantage of her generosity as much as they can. If she were attached to money

like ordinary people, then she wouldn't be respected. That is why she is not a human being. She is a Goddess, do you understand, Varada? Well, you boys have given up home and family at such an early age, and are busy serving Sister day and night. You are your parents' only son. I know your father, he is a God-fearing, noble soul. You boys of Koalpara, how much you serve Sister! And Sister also is so gracious to you! Taking upon herself such a heavy burden as Radhu, Sister depends on you for help and support. Varada, you are indeed blessed! While the uncle talked in this manner, the two finally reached Jayrambati. The uncle stayed at his home and Varada proceeded alone to Koalpara. When he met Holy Mother she asked him in detail about the tantrik charmer, and then asked him further: 'What did Kali say all along the way?' As Varada repeated Uncle Kali's words, the Mother smiled lightly and said: 'Kali is always thinking about money. As if Sister were a money-bearing tree! But he also has some devotion and faith. It is Kali alone who stands by his sister through thick and thin, who always enquires about her. All the other brothers, if they can get some money, that's enough for them!' The next morning the charmer arrived at Koalpara. Holy Mother prostrated before him in all humility and explained in detail about Radhu's condition. He examined the patient and attributed the malady to the influence of spirits. The remedy he prescribed, however, was impossible to procure: the oil extracted from ten pounds of sesame seeds; four gallons of Rui fish oil; iron obtained from distant, inaccessible places; and various kinds of plants and herbs. All these ingredients had to be heated in a fire made of bull-dung cakes. The resulting oil had to be applied on Radhu's body, and from the iron from far-off places an amulet had to be made. Having given all these instructions, the charmer took a five-rupee fee and left. At first the Mother was very eager to get all the ingredients collected, but with the passing of the days it became obvious that the task was simply impossible. In this regard the Mother said, after a few days: 'How many deities do I pray to for Radhu's sake, but I get no response at all. Whatever is to happen,

will happen. Oh Master, you are the only protector!' (To be continued)

The Life of Ibrahim Adam - Aga Syed Ibrahim Daba.

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The Sufi sage Ibrahim Adam was the king of Balkh in Persia, but he was spiritual-minded and always feared God and aspired for a saintly life. He liked the company of sages and honoured them at his court. During his rule he tried to be just and drew moral and spiritual lessons from ordinary incidents. One day he bought a slave and asked him his name. He replied, "I am your slave and whatever name you will give me that will be mine." His next question was, "What do you eat?" The man answered, "I am a slave and will eat what you give me." He then enquired what dress he would like to put on, to which also the slave gave the same answer. "Have you no wish of your own?" asked the King, and the slave replied once more, "I am your slave. The slave's wish is that of the master's." The king was so impressed by these replies that he began to cry and said, "After a lifelong period of religious life, I learn today the true attitude of a devotee towards God." One day the king was out hunting and at night he camped in the forest. A dervish too was passing along that way to Mecca, and hearing that the famous king Ibrahim Adam, who was so renowned for his piety and wisdom, was camping there, he wished to meet him. When he was taken to the tent he saw there ropes of silk and pegs of gold. The dervish said in surprise, "O king, I heard that you were a seeker of God; how is it that I find you in such luxury?" The king said, "What do you advise me to do?" The dervish answered, "If your faith is true, come with me on foot to Mecca." The king without hesitation left the tent and, dismissing his servants, accompanied the dervish alone for the pilgrimage. They had not gone far when the dervish said, "I have forgotten my begging bowl left in your tent; kindly wait a moment here, till I go and fetch it." The

King replied, "Do you see the difference between you and me? I have left all my riches and comforts without a thought while you cannot even part with your begging bowl!"

The dervish thereupon acknowledged him as a sage, and they both went up to Mecca on foot. The incident which changed the entire course of Ibrahim Adam's life was this: One night when he was asleep in his palace with his wife he heard the sound of some footsteps on the terrace. Wondering who could be there at that hour he got up from his bed and, climbing the stairs, found to his surprise that a very holy-looking fakir was walking up and down fearlessly. The king asked, "What are you seeking here at this time of the night?" The fakir replied, "I have lost my camel and have come in search of it."

The king said, "How can a camel be here?" The fakir replied, "When the wise king hopes to find God in the luxury of this palace, mine is a more reasonable wish." The king's aspiration was kindled and he went down greatly impressed and deep in thought, pondering on what the fakir had so dramatically told him. Next day when he was holding his court a man in the garment of a sage advanced towards him in great haste. So awe-inspiring and holy he looked that nobody dared to stop or question him. He came right up to the king and stood silent. The king asked, "What do you want?" The fakir replied, "I want to stay in this traveller's bungalow for a short time." The king said, "It is my palace and not a traveller's bungalow." The fakir said, "Who was on the throne before you?" The king said, "My father." "Who was here before your father?" asked the fakir. "My grandfather," replied the king. "Who will be here after you?" enquired the fakir. The king answered, "My son." "When so many people come and go living for a short time in this house, what else is it but a traveller's halting place?" Saying this the fakir turned back and walked away. The king was so impressed by his dignified manner that he got up from his throne and went after him and asked him, "Tell me who you are?" The fakir replied, "I am Khizir." (Khizir was a prophet who was the Spiritual Guide of God-chosen devotees, and it was the order of God never to question him however wrong or doubtful the order

seemed apparently. After his death it was believed by some that he was still alive and meets a devotee suddenly at some place and gives the necessary guidance.) When Ibrahim Adam heard that it was the great Prophet Khizir who had spoken to him in the garb of that fakir he felt a fire burning in his soul and a great pain in the heart. He came back to his house and lay down on his bed but found no comfort. He thought of going out riding and while he was riding, absorbed in thought, he heard a voice, "Wake up before thou art awakened by death." He heard the same voice once or twice again and thinking it to be a Divine command he decided to renounce the world and take wholly to spiritual life. When he turned back he saw that he had already drifted away from his servants, so he took the path of the forest. On the way he met a young farmer to whom he gave his horse. He exchanged with him his royal robes, and sending with him his last message to his wife and the minister, he walked away into the forest. Ibrahim Adam then lived in a cave and was all the time absorbed in prayers and austerities. He came out only once a week and chopped wood for fire and made a bundle of it which he carried to the neighbouring town and sold in the market on Friday mornings. After that he would say his Jumma prayers in the mosque and go again to the market and buy food for the week, half of which he used to distribute to the poor and with the other half return to his cave and busy himself with his meditations and prayers till the next weekend. As nobody knew him he got no visitors. The place too was solitary. One night it was unusually cold, yet he took his bath shivering all the while. When he went to the cave he saw some chopped sticks of wood and wished very much to light a fire and warm himself with it but he restrained himself thinking it an unlawful luxury and commenced his prayer. He then went to sleep on the bare ground. During his sleep he felt that somebody had come and covered him up with a warm blanket, but on waking in the morning he saw to his surprise that a big snake had coiled itself over him. He felt afraid and prayed to God, "O God, though Thou hast sent it in Thy mercy and love, I am seized with fear which

transforms Thy aspect of Love into that of Terror." While he was praying thus the snake uncoiled itself and glided away into the bushes. When the people discovered his identity he left the cave and wandered away towards Mecca. People of the town then began to come to the cave to pay reverence to it. A Sufi sage of the time named Abu Syed also came to it as if on a pilgrimage and on entering it he said, "Even if this cave had been filled with musk and amber it would not have been as fragrant as the short stay of the aspiring soul has made it." Ibrahim Adam spent many years in wandering before he reached Mecca. Once again he met Khizir the immortal Prophet, from whom he acquired great wisdom and attained Realization. When he was approaching Mecca the people of the town came to know of it and they gathered in large numbers to welcome him. The sages of Mecca too came out of the gate when the caravan was arriving. When Ibrahim Adam saw them he fathomed their intention and separated himself from the caravan. He met some servants who asked him about the saint Ibrahim Adam. He replied, "What have the holy sages of Mecca got to do with that Zindiq (an irreligious man - a name often given to Sufis by the religious orthodox section). When the people heard the revered name so badly abused they beat him on the neck and said, "How dare you call such a holy sage a Zindiq? You yourself are a Zindiq." He laughed and said, "That is exactly what I mean to say," whereupon they left him and went in search of Ibrahim Adam elsewhere. Then he turned to his ego and said, "Do you see how you have been punished? I thank God that I did not fail, but kept you from enjoying the pride and comfort of the welcome." There he lived in the fields near Mecca earning his livelihood either by chopping firewood or by taking care of the crop or by working in the fields. When the news of the arrival of Ibrahim Adam reached his wife, she and her son started in a caravan of four thousand people for the pilgrimage that year. When his son, who was about sixteen or so, arrived in Mecca, he inquired from the sages where his father was, and they told him all about Ibrahim Adam and advised him not to disclose his identity to

his father, who would not be able to recognise him as he was a baby when he had left home. The son thereupon went alone in search of him and was told that he had gone to the forest for gathering wood. Being too impatient to wait he too went there and found that an old man was carrying a bundle of sticks and coming slowly towards the town. The son, suppressing all his desire to help his father, went slowly behind him till he reached the market where his father, putting the load on the ground, cried, "Is there any one amongst you who would like to exchange some purely earned food with this pure and honest labour?" A man gave him some pieces of bread and took the bundle. He took the bread and came with it to some poor fakirs and giving it to them began saying his prayers. On the day of the pilgrimage Ibrahim Adam watched his son from a distance for a long time. Somebody asked him why he was staring at the boy to which he replied, "I think him to be my own son whom I left in childhood." Next day a dervish brought his wife and son to Ibrahim Adam. On seeing him, they wept till they fainted. When the son recovered consciousness he was asked, "What is your religion?" The boy replied, "Islam." Thereupon Ibrahim Adam felt pleased and said "Alhamdo lillah." Then he asked him again, "Did you read the Quoran?" The boy answered in the affirmative. Then again he said, "Alhamdo lillah", and after some time asked, "Have you acquired any learning?" The boy again replied in the affirmative and he once more praised God. After some time he wished to get up and go, but his wife and son clung to him and did not let him move. He thereupon prayed to God standing, and the son suddenly fell down and died. When his disciples asked him the cause of it, he replied, "I felt such a strong love for them that I did not wish to leave them any more. Then I heard a voice, 'You teach renunciation to others; now see how you follow it yourself.' Thereupon I prayed to God, 'O God, either take away my son or me.' The prayer has been answered and God has separated me from my son." The disciples said, "It was a great sacrifice." To this he replied, "Not as great as that of the Prophet Ibrahim who consented to slaughter his own son as an offering to

God." Ibrahim Adam had a great desire to remain alone at the Kaba at night when nobody else would be there. He said, "On one rainy night I was the only person there; so I wept, and went round it and prayed to God for my salvation. Thereupon I heard a voice, `It befits you more to pray for others than for your own self.'" Some people asked him why he had left his kingdom, to which he answered, "On the day when I left it I gazed into the mirror which was just in front of my throne and I saw that my last abode on earth was the grave. I said to myself that the voyage beyond was long, and I had no means of spiritual sustenance for the long journey. The great God is Just and I had nothing to justify myself before Him. Thinking so my heart grew cold and freed itself from the bonds of pleasure". Once a man brought to him a thousand gold pieces and requested him to accept them. He replied, "I never take from the needy." The man said, "I am very rich." Thereupon the sage replied, "But don't you want more?" The man said, "Yes." Thereupon he said, "Take away your money, for you are the prince of the needy ones." On a certain day Ibrahim Adam was feeling very weak and tired because of prolonged fasting, and on getting no food he prayed to God to send him some food. Shortly after a man came and asked, "If you are hungry, come to my house and I will feed you." He consented and went with him. On reaching the house when the man saw him in the light he suddenly cried out, "I am your slave, O master! All that is in this house is your own; take it and consider me still your slave." Ibrahim Adam replied, "Today I free thee for ever from slavery," and turning to God he prayed, "O Lord, I will never again ask Thee for anything worldly. I asked for food and Thou hast once more given me the riches of the world and lordship over men." Once he wished to join the group of some fakirs, but they did not let him enter their circle and said, "You have still the odour of kingliness about you." The biographer comments, "Just imagine, when they did not accept such a God-realised sage in their circle, how can ordinary men hope to enter it." "Once," he said, "I was crossing a river in a boat. My garments had all been torn

to shreds and my hair was long. Everybody in the boat began making fun of me and teased me. A man would every now and then come to me and give me a blow, or pinch and abuse me. I was happy to see my ego hurt and chastised. Then a storm rose and the boat began to capsize. The men said that it was necessary to throw someone overboard to allay the fury of the water and they decided to throw me and took me by the ear. Just then the storm abated." On another occasion, when his boat was sinking, Ibrahim Adam placed a Quoran between the boat and the storm and prayed, and the storm subsided. Once a man came to him and said, "O sage, I have performed many austerities; now give me some advice." He replied, "I will tell you six conditions which you must follow. The first is that when you disobey God and commit some sin, don't eat the bread that God gives you." The man asked, "Whose bread am I to eat then?" Ibrahim Adam said that it was not proper to eat His bread and be disobedient to Him. The second condition is that when you are on the verge of committing any sin, get out of God's dominions." The man answered, "The whole creation is His, where can I go outside it?" The third condition was that he should commit a sin only where God could not see him. The man said that that too was impossible. "It is quite unfair," said the sage, "that a man should eat His bread and live in His kingdom and yet disobey Him before His very eyes." "Fourthly," said Ibrahim Adam, "when the angel of Death comes to put an end to your life, tell him to wait till you repent and ask forgiveness." The man said, "This too cannot be, for he won't listen to me." "In that case repent before you die. Fifthly, when the angels of God visit thee in the grave to question thy life, turn them out." The man said, "This too is impossible for me." "Then," said Ibrahim Adam, "be prepared with thy answers. Lastly, when thou art driven towards hell refuse to go there." "This too is impossible," said the man. "Then, in that case," answered he, "don't commit sin." This is one of the typical examples of his preachings of a moral nature. Ibrahim Adam was a religious man throughout his life. The remarkable thing about him was his complete

forgetfulness of his past and his great change of life. He always feared God and obeyed Him and he never made any experiments with the mysteries of Truth nor tried to look beyond religion and shariat. He was a pious man to the core. In his last days he left the world utterly and repaired to some place where none could find him. It is not certain in which place he died. Some say he is buried in Shaam, and some opine that his grave is in Baghdad, while a third section asserts that he lies near the grave of Hazarat Loot.

Swami Bhuteshananda Religion and Life (continued)

What is buddhi?

Buddhi is a modification or vritti of the inner organ. That which decisively reveals an object is called the intellect or buddhi. When the mind becomes pure, the buddhi also becomes pure. When buddhi becomes pure the Self is reflected as it is in it. Sri Ramakrishna has said that the pure intellect and the Self are one and the same. When the mirror is clean there will be no obstruction to its reflection; so also the pure mind will not create any obstruction to the reflection of the Self. When the pure mind expresses itself as the pure buddhi, it becomes the pure Self. So Sri Ramakrishna has said: `Pure Mind, Pure Buddhi, Pure Atman - all these are one and the same'. [The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 802]. In the Gita(3.42) it is said that the senses are great, but greater than them is the mind, and greater than the mind is the intellect, but the greatest of all is God. Why has it been said that He is beyond the buddhi? That is because the buddhi is also a vritti. The Atman is not a vritti and so it is beyond the intellect. How are the thought waves of the individual mind connected with the supreme Mind? Biologists say that the body is a collection of cells; the body is controlled by them. The Brhadaranyaka Upanisad [3.7.15] says: `He who is in every being but within them, whom no being knows, whose body is all beings, and who controls all beings from within, is the inner Controller. That is your own Self.' This is a remarkable statement. He dwells

in all beings but is different from beings. All beings are `mine' because all are the body of the supreme Being, but they don't know `me'. It's a beautiful paradox. It is He who resides in all beings and controls them. So it is the reflection of the Supreme Mind that is the individual's mind. The thoughts of the cosmic mind are reflected to a slight extent in the individual mind. He resides in us and controls us. It is not like an instrument, mechanically controlling from outside. He is the inner Controller. The Self inside you is the antaryamin. If the body dies, He does not die. He is different from the body.

Is it necessary to study the scriptures?

He who is not interested to learn the truths of the scriptures need not study them. But those who want to understand the truths that the scriptures teach and try to reflect them in their own lives must study them.

What is the real truth?

Is there something like `real' or `unreal' truth? That which is absolute can never be relative. So truth is truth and has no `real' or `unreal' in it.

What is the ego?

Ego is that form of mind which feels, `I am the doer' and `I am the enjoyer.' When there is no one to act, nothing to be acted upon, and no effect is seen, then there is no action at all. But when we regard the intellect as a faculty, mind as another faculty, etc, then we give different names to the special modifications (vrttis) of the inner organ (antahkarana). When the mind becomes pure we have pure vrttis rising in it. When the antahkarana becomes pure, it becomes transparent. Then there remains nothing to distort it.

What is pure antahkarana?

By pure antahkarana both pure mind and pure intellect (buddhi) are meant. When the intellect becomes pure, it is pure Self. Just as the sun is hidden by clouds, the mind envelops the Self and hides it. As the mind becomes pure, it becomes transparent. As it becomes transparent, the real nature of the Self or God becomes progressively clear to it. When the mind becomes completely pure in this manner, there will remain no impediment and the Self stands revealed.

What is the pure Self?

It means that the Self has no superimpositions. The body has birth and death; but we think that the Self also has birth and death. This is superimposition. When something is superimposed on something else, it is clear that the superimposed is unreal and so the thing-in-itself is 'impure'. When superimposition goes, the thing-in-itself is revealed as it is.

How can we make our mind pure?

The mind is said to be pure when only pure thoughts arise in it. Do not entertain or give room to unholy thoughts in the mind and thus the mind can become pure. It will not do merely to sit and weep that the mind is impure or restless: one must be up and doing.

Why is the Self regarded as unattached?

Non-attachment implies that the Atman is indifferent. In other words, the Self is absolutely untouched or unaffected by our feelings of happiness and misery, pain and pleasure.

Where is this Self?

The gross body, the subtle body, and the causal body -behind these three is the Self or Atman. Everything else is illumined by the light of the Self. The causal body is also called the seed body; it is from this that the subtle and gross bodies are formed. What is the difference between all these bodies and the Self? We see that when someone dies, he is either cremated or interred. When this is done, the body that we used to see disintegrates and merges with the five elements, called panca-bhutas. Earth, water, fire, air and space - these are the five elements. When thus the gross physical body disintegrates, we cannot see anything else. There is the subtle body which we cannot see. This subtle body will merge into the causal body. The causal body, as I said, is the seed body (bija sarira). Thus the causal body remains in seed form. It is like this: in the state of deep sleep, we do not function. We have no awareness but that there is bliss. This deep sleep (susupti) is called the causal state. Behind this causal body is the Self; it is beyond the causal state. Thus the Self or Atman is neither gross, nor subtle, nor causal; it is beyond everything. When we, who have the awareness of 'I', transcend the limitations of the gross, subtle and causal, then we attain to the state of the pure Self. If we are to transcend body-consciousness or the feeling of identity with the body, we shall have to practise spiritual disciplines sincerely and progress steadily. How can we be liberated? Our scriptures repeat times without number that once the feeling of I-ness goes there is liberation. He who considers himself to be bound is bound. He who considers himself to be free is free.

Are liberation for one and bondage for another predestined? What do you think about this?

If you really wanted liberation, you would become restless like a fish out of water.

Can sacrifice, etc., bring liberation?

He who has a thousand rupees in his pocket will not become mad after a rupee, will he? He will tap his pocket and say, 'I have a lot of money.' He who wants liberation will not perform sacrifices.

So are sacrifices only meant for fulfilment of desires?

Mostly so. Having acquired this life, spending it well or ill is in our hands. We shall have therefore to struggle. King Parikshit (of the Bhagavata) was destined to die in seven days. What did he do during those seven days? He went out of the city and spent his time in repeating God's names. He never felt, 'Since there are only seven more days left, let me enjoy life'. He had good past impressions (samskaras) in him and so he tried to spend his last days fruitfully. The Bhagavadgita says that out of thousands of people one or two strive for God. This was so in ancient times and will be the same even today.

- Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar: due acknowledgements to Prabuddha Bharata