Cover Story

Ten Commandments of Bhagavan Sri Krishna

page 11
Vinayaka Chaturthi
22 Aug 2020

एकदन्तं महाकायतं लम्बोदरतं गजाननम्
विघननाशकरतं देवं हेरम्तं प्रणमामिव

I bow down to Lord Ganesha, who has an elephant's head, one tusk, a big belly, a huge body, and who is the destroyer of obstacles.

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THE VEDANTA KESARI
A Cultural and Spiritual Monthly of The Ramakrishna Order

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He was a much-celebrated and much-feted Swami. His famous address at The World’s Parliament of Religions, Chicago in 1893 had catapulted him to the status of a super star. But Swami Vivekananda was not one to bask in chaffy glory. A letter to one of his trusted followers, from the USA, dated 12 Jan 1895, read, ‘I want to preach my ideas for the good of the world. ...What work have you done in the way of advancing the ideas and organising in India? ...My life is more precious than spending it in getting the admiration of the world. I have no time for such foolery.’

Swamiji, as Swami Vivekananda was fondly addressed, loved and revered his motherland as his own mother. Every breath of his aspired for her well being and every cell in his body yearned that she regain her lost glory. She had been a beacon light for the world until repeated invasions pillaged her ruthlessly and left her not just poverty-stricken but also psychologically drained. The latter struck at the very core, underlying the urgency for immediate redressal. Swamiji’s panacea for this lay in India’s very own practical and ennobling Vedantic wisdom. Vedanta recognises no weakness. It proclaims that in every individual lies a mine of strength. All that is needed is an effort to draw from it.

Swamiji started looking for the right channel to propagate the powerful message of Vedanta. He opted for the print medium and decided to bring out a journal, giving it the name Brahmovadin. In February 1895, he sent from USA $100 and a letter to his trusted disciple Alasinga Perumal. The letter read: ‘Now I am bent upon starting the journal. Herewith I send a hundred dollars... Hope this will go just a little in starting your paper.’

If selflessness and devotion would have a form, it would have borne the name of Alasinga Perumal. Brahmovadin became Alasinga’s calling and the first issue rolled out from a press in Broadway, Chennai on 14 September 1895. The magazine included a poem of Swamiji specially composed for the occasion. It was titled, ‘The Song of the Sannyasin’. One verse ran thus:
One hundred and seven years and going strong….

"Strike off thy fetters! Bonds that bind thee down,
of shining gold or darker hue one.
Love, hate — good, bad — and all the dual throng,
Know slavish is slave, carefree or whipped, not free.

For fetters, though of gold, are not less strong to bind;
then off with their Sanyasin hold say one: tat sat on

(Handwritten words in Swamiji’s own hand)

With this message that marked its mission, Brahmavadin made a determined entry into the strife-ridden climate of pre-independence India. The birth of the magazine was certainly an occasion for celebration but the struggles were far from over.

One of Swamiji’s letters to Alasinga read: ‘I learnt from your letter the bad financial state that Brahmavadin is in.’ This was followed by another letter that carried the line, ‘I pledge myself to maintain the paper anyhow.’

Bolstered by this pledge, Alasinga Perumal braved on, surmounting many an impediment. Sadly, Swami Vivekananda passed away in 1902, at the age of thirty-nine. Alasinga’s intense anguish morphed into heightened devotion towards the magazine. But the next hurdle in Brahmavadin’s journey came in 1909, in the form of Alasinga’s own demise. In May 1914, the magazine, tottering as it was, floundered and ground to a halt.

It was at this crucial juncture, that the Ramakrishna Mission stepped in to revive it. The Mission was itself in its nascent stages with many a teething problem but nothing could come in its way of reviving the Brahmavadin. For, had not their beloved Swamiji repeatedly said, ‘The Brahmavadin is a jewel – it must not perish!’ And so, the very same month when Brahmavadin closed, it was resuscitated with the new name The Vedanta Kesari.

The history of The Vedanta Kesari is much more than just a tale of sweat, toil and a dream realized. It is a narrative of Swamiji’s passion for India and Alasinga’s devotion to his master. It is a celebration of love, transcending forms.
To establish the magazine on firm financial footing please contribute ₹ 1,000/- & above to the Permanent Fund.

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For the last 106 years, without missing a single issue, the magazine has been carrying the invigorating message of Vedanta and alongside, continuously revamping itself to meet the changing needs of the times.

The relevance of Vedantic wisdom to everyday life is all the more pertinent today than ever before. ‘Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached,’ is the thundering motto of Swami Vivekananda. The Ramakrishna Mission, as you all know, is a unique organization where sannyasis and lay people come together and endeavour for the common good. Let’s join hands in taking forward our revered Swamiji’s vision and mission for *The Vedanta Kesari*.

*Swami Vivekananda*
ATTENTION

Despite the disruption caused by Covid-19 lockdown, *The Vedanta Kesari* has been printed and posted every month for India only. But we have come to know that subscribers in some parts of the country have not received some issues. Given the current situation, it will not be possible to resend the physical copies.

All our issues are available every month for FREE download at chennaimath.org. It is also available FREE as individual articles in the ‘Vedanta Kesari’ Telegram Channel. Install the Telegram App in your electronic device, Join the Channel, and Share with others. The Channel also has video-clips of senior sannyasis of the Ramakrishna Order.

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Sloka - 23

Frightened by this shoreless ocean of births, I am suffering intensely since long. Knowing that you are the only companion in this world that is a path of terrible suffering due to repeated births and deaths, I beseech You to protect me always with Your face turned towards the south which the fortunate ones (the great sages) take refuge in, O greatest of gods.

Sloka - 24

O Shiva, You alone are the controller of the bondage and liberation of those who are subject to birth. What refuge is there other than You for me who am wallowing in the embers of suffering! Therefore, O Pashupati, save me who am suffering in this terrible torrent of transmigratory existence which is the most dreadful repository of all misery.

Sloka - 25

O Lord who are beyond this universe, You who are the foremost among the gods to eliminate all inauspiciousness (suffering) of devotees, who are the great seer and who cast on Brahma at his birth, your glance capable of creating the whole universe, be kind enough to endow me with knowledge for loosening the knot of bondage.

Translated by Sri. S.N. Sastri.
Householder

He who leads the life of a householder should devote fifteen parts of his mind to God; otherwise he will face ruin and fall into the clutches of Death. He should perform the duties of the world with only one part of his mind.

Is there, then, no hope for householders? Certainly there is. They must practise spiritual discipline in solitude for some days. Thus they will acquire knowledge and devotion. Then it will not hurt them to lead the life of the world. But when you practise discipline in solitude, keep yourself entirely away from your family. You must not allow your wife, son, daughter, mother, father, sister, brother, friends, or relatives near you. While thus practising discipline in solitude, you should think: ’I have no one else in the world. God is my all.’ You must also pray to Him, with tears in your eyes, for knowledge and devotion.

For the householder it is very good to look on God as the Master. The householder is conscious of doing the duties of life himself. Under such conditions how can he say, ’I am He’? To him who says, ’I am He’ the world appears to be a dream. His mind, his body, even his ego, are dreams to him. Therefore, he cannot perform worldly duties. So it is very good for the householder to look on himself as the servant and on God as the Master.

If a man leads a householder’s life, he must have unflagging devotion to truth. God can be realized through truth alone.

Husband and wife should offer their minds to God and live in the world like brother and sister after one or two children are born.

Live in the world like a maidservant in a rich man’s house. She performs all the household duties, brings up her master’s child, and speaks of him as ’my Hari’. But in her heart she knows quite well that neither the house nor the child belongs to her. She performs all her duties, but just the same her mind dwells on her native place. Likewise, do your worldly duties but fix your mind on God. And know that house, family, and son do not belong to you; they are God’s. You are only His servant.

Sages like Janaka performed worldly duties. They performed them, bearing God in their minds, as a dancing-girl dances, keeping jars or trays on her head. Haven’t you seen how the women in northwest India walk, talking and laughing while carrying water-pitchers on their heads?

—Sri Ramakrishna
As we celebrate our Independence Day this month, we face two immediate challenges – Chinese government and Covid-19; one threatening our territory and the other our lives and economy.

Amidst a growing anti-China sentiment and boycotting of Chinese products, we should keep in mind not to accredit the misdeeds of the ideology-based non-democratic government to its people, with whom we have deep cultural ties for centuries. More than 100 years ago when China was in total disarray, Swami Vivekananda had prophesied: “I see before me the body of an elephant. There is a foal within. But it is a lion-cub that comes out of it. It will grow in future, and China shall become great and powerful.” A lion-cub from the womb of an elephant! Let us pray to Lord Vinayaka, that in keeping with its traditional dragon emblem which stands for justice, and prosperity, China will learn to use its power to realise universal cooperation and peace.

The fate of a nation, Swami Vivekananda points out, depends upon the “condition of the masses.” Today, lakhs of workers from socially backward sections are facing a severe challenge. It is estimated that over 12 crore Indians, majority of them daily wage labourers and small traders, have lost their livelihood.

When a person is out of work, it is not just a matter of economic loss. Besides supplying basic needs, work provides us self-respect and social identity and dignity. Also at a deeper level, meaningful and productive work gives us the strength to keep our lower impulses under control. Deprived of these important supports, families out of work are witnessing increased self-abuse and domestic violence. Indian Psychiatry Society reports that there is a 20% increase in mental health issues.

In this sombre background and on the eve of restating our patriotism, let us recollect these words of Swami Vivekananda: “I call him a traitor who, having been educated, nursed in luxury by the heart’s blood of the downtrodden millions of toiling poor, never even takes a thought for them.” To think about the suffering masses means to feel for them from our heart, to feel intensely “till the heart stops and the brain reels.” Such feeling, coupled with prayers placed at the feet of the Lord, will show us the path to serve our poor brethren and thus become true patriots.

In this pandemic situation, where we have to keep our outside activities to the minimum, how can we help these suffering men and women? Some noble souls are donating ration kits to their maid, milkman, florist, and others. But what about their medicine costs, loan repayments and other essential needs?

Here is an idea. Give them an unconventional job!

Identify poor families and give them the task of memorising some slokas on gods and goddesses, or some stotras like Skanda Shashti Kavacham, and Hanuman Chalisa, or some verses from the Bhagavad Gita, or the teachings of saints or the Fundamental Duties of Indians. Teach them chanting online or find out some other means. When they memorise and prove it online or in physical presence, pay them a prize-money according to your purse and heart. Give this work individually to both the parents and their children. They will thus earn money with dignity, and also acquire good samskaras and cultural awareness. You can give this job in your individual capacity, or through associations, Bhava Prachar Samities etc.

“Set yourselves to work,” and share with us your experiences and your own ideas. *
It becomes a little easier to go forward on our spiritual journey, made difficult by weaknesses and temptations, when we have some commandments on what to do and what not to do. On the eve of the coming **Krishnashtami on 12 August**, we are reproducing this article that presents ten teachings from The Bhagavad Gita, as commandments of Bhagavan Sri Krishna. The article was first published in the August 1953 issue of The Vedanta Kesari.

In the Gita there are some passages which are directly addressed to the **Jiva** in the second person singular number of the imperative mood, as **Vidhi**. Ten of these collected passages may be considered as the ten commandments of Sri Krishna. The last passage, though not in the imperative mood, forms a fitting conclusion and the first one, though the word of Arjuna, is necessary as a fit opening of this decalogue. For, all commandments become effective only when the listener has a teachable attitude.

\[
\text{वशषय््ेऽहतं शावध मातं तिातं प्रपनिम्}
\]

\*O Krishna I am at thy command. I have surrendered myself at thy feet. Teach me and mould me.*

When the above attitude becomes genuine and firm in us, we shall distinctly hear the following 'ten commandments' addressed to us directly and individually.

1) निबोध में (Learn fully from Me.)
\[\text{ज़ाल्ब्य शास्त्रविधानां कर्म कनूनिहासिः}\]

\*In this life you should work after acquiring a proper knowledge of the commands and rules of the scriptures, through which I speak.*

2) \[\text{न तितं शबोवच्ुमहबिवस – मा शुचः}\]

\*On no account you should grieve over anything whatsoever. No, you must not lament.*

This is the second commandment of Bhagavan enjoining on us to be cheerful and to be equal to all situations. How are we to acquire that strength? The answer is in the third commandment.

3) \[\text{पापमानतं प्रजवह}\]

\*Strive always to remove sin and evil.*

But we have no strength for it. What shall we do? The next commandment shows a way.

4) \[\text{षिुद्तं हृद्यदौ्बिलयतं तयकतिबोवत्ष्ठ}\]

\*Shake off this mean spirit and arise.*

The Lord is all-powerful. He is **satya sankalpaha**. He has commanded us to shed all weakness and to exert manfully. Do we listen to His words? If we do, then certainly we shall have the strength to overcome sin and evil. Still we may say we have no method to shake off this weakness.
hridaya daurbalyam. Answer to this is in the fifth commandment.

5) योगाय युजय्ि – मावमच्ापुतं

Resolve yourself to practise yoga. Yeurn to get Me.

The Lord has commanded us to arise, and we shall arise. But we have to practise the method of union; and the root of this practice is to hunger and thirst after Him as He Himself has taught it. But usually we have not even the desire to seek Him. What shall we do?

6) अनित्यमसुखतं लोकमिमं प्राय्य भज्ि माम्

This life and world of yours is not eternal and is joyless. So the way open to you here is to resort to Me.

The desire to realize God can come only when we are convinced that our life and its environments are impermanent and infested with misery. When we start to cultivate devotion we will be becoming more and more aware of these defects of mundane existence. Then, of course, we should know what real devotion is. The seventh commandment instructs about real devotion.

7) बीजं मां सर्वभूतानां विद्विद् – मे रूपमिदं प्रपश् – सर्वाणि भूतानि मलस्थानित्युपधारय

You must understand that all beings have their cause and seed in Me. You must endeavour to see all this as My form. You must fix once for all in mind that all creatures have their residence in Me.

Here the Lord has commanded us to despise nothing, as the Lord is the seed of everything. We are ordered to see in our relatives, neighbours and all living beings and in the whole of nature the underlying beauty of God, and to adopt an attitude of love and service in and through God. Here we may misunderstand bhajan merely as loving contemplation. So we have the eighth commandment which states that Love is not idle.

8) सन्यतं कुरु कर्म त्यय – तः कर्म समाच १ – युजस्व: समाचार – कुरुष: मद्यर्कण – सन्यतात्त्वभव

You must do the allotted work always. You must correctly, thoroughly and joyfully do the appointed duty. Do it without narrow selfish attachments. Do it as my work, dedicating it to me. Consider yourself a mere occasion (निमित्त) of your work.

These commands will apply to anyone in any position and one may find it hard for practice. But a clue for its easy accomplishment is given in the next commandment.

9) बुध्धियोगपथाश्रितं मञ्चि: सतं भवं – मयेव मन आध्यैतव, मधि बुध्धि निवेठय

Take for your support buddhi yoga and always give your mind to Me. Bring back and place the running thoughts in Me and push your thinking faculty into My focus.

This may be taken almost as the final commandment. Yoga, nitya-anitya viveka, samadarshana, and karma yoga can bear fruit only when we constantly endeavour to remain with God. Hence we get this stress on placing buddhi and mind always in God, with repeated endeavour whenever it strays away. After scanning these commandments it is natural that the jiva still feels diffident. The Lord who is in the innermost heart of all detects this and gives the greatest and the last commandment.

10) प्रतिज्ज्ञाय प्रियोऽवम मे

I promise, you are dear to Me.

We have no loss greater than losing faith in this commandment. Let us feel at every moment that we are dear and precious to the Lord however unclean we may be. When this faith is strong, when we have the sincere conviction that the Lord in His infinite mercy and affection is ever watching us, seeking only for a moment when we whole—heartedly turn towards Him, with the earnest longing that He should receive us and hug us to His bosom, then—at that very moment—we are on the path to liberation and blessedness.

May these commandments make an appeal directly to us and render us strong, illumined and peaceful. *
I noticed a strange thing today. Some small ants were staying in a hole. For some days a big ant was roaming near the hole. Soon, it occupied the dwelling of the small ants and brought its own companions. The small ants then found out two other holes nearby and made their homes there. Today they were coming in a line. A big ant broke into their line and immediately fell down – it was perhaps bitten by the small ants.

See, this is the nature of this world. America, China, Japan – everywhere this is the situation. Each one has a separate world. Within this room you have your world, and I have mine; and again you and I together have one; this house has one, this ashrama has one, and this Order has one. Just as a sadhu has his own world, similarly the judge has one; the servant, the footman, the clerk - all have their own separate worlds. Besides, men, animals, dogs, insects – all have separate worlds. What a wonderful situation!

You will be fine if you keep yourself occupied in serving the Lord, studying devotional books, etc. You will progress. If you sincerely engage yourself in these things, then it will amount to staying in the company of Sri Ramakrishna. Moreover, everything is in Sri Ramakrishna. If you remain in the company of Sri Ramakrishna in this way, you will realise what He is. You pay attention to yoga; work will happen by itself – only work done to please Him.

Swami Hitananda [chief priest in the temple of Sri Ramakrishna at Belur Math] has been serving Sri Ramakrishna for a long time. Besides, he is also well-read. He will attain liberation at the end. On meeting him, nobody can refrain from praising him. At Kamarpukur, Gangadhar [a sannyasi who performed puja] too is absorbed in the ideal of Sri Ramakrishna. That he is on the right path, is revealed by his interest in scriptural study. He is immersed in it. It is Sri Ramakrishna’s message that we see in the Bhagavad Gita. The Gita endeavours to tell us just one thing, arranging it in different ways and presenting it from various points of view. It is as if its speaker has gone crazy in his desire to express his message – he is virtually screaming to be heard! When you feel this inherent pang in the Gita, you know that you have found a taste for the Gita. Gangadhar is proceeding along the right path.
Maharaj: Receptacles like us cannot remain in yoga all the time. Swamiji has said that there are advanced souls, superior even to incarnations like Buddha and Jesus; they always remain in samadhi, like to some extent Trailanga Swami of Kashi. They perform only those actions necessary to keep the body alive. But as we cannot remain in samadhi all the time, what shall we do? For the rest of the time, we will delight in Brahman by regarding every being as personified Pure Consciousness. Worship of the Consciousness that exists beyond the body, mind, and intellect is also a path. We can attain samadhi by following this path also.

The ninth chapter of the Gita has been called *Rajavidya-Rajaguhya-Yoga* because it contains the worship of Brahman with and without attributes (*saguna* and *nirguna*) – of gods and goddesses, as also of the Ultimate Reality. For example, यत्करबोवष यदश्ावस ... (Gita 9:27); पत्तं पुषपतं फलतं ्बोयतं ... (Gita 9:26). Sri Ramakrishna has narrated a story: The gardener of an orchard presents two ripe fruits to his master, and the master is pleased. These are the final stages of worship. Besides, at the end of every chapter the Lord says, ‘Rest your mind in Me.’ All this relates to devotion. But, you know, He is also Knowledge; so without attaining Knowledge we cannot be united with Him. Again, He is personification of Love; therefore, to unite with Him we need Love. He is eternally one with all beings; so we need yoga with Him. He who understands this, offers every action to Him: यत्करबोवष यदश्ावस यज्ुहबोवष ददावस य्् । यत्प्यवस कौन्ेय ्तकुरुषि मदपबिणम् || (Gita 9:27) “Whatsoever you do, whatsoever you eat, whatsoever you offer, whatsoever you give away, whatsoever austerity you practise, O Arjuna, do that as an offering to Me.” मया ततमिं सर्वं ज्ञात्वक्षुमूलिना || (Gita 9:4) “This entire universe is pervaded by Me, in an unmanifest form. All beings abide in Me, but I do not abide in them.”

**Question:** Maharaj, what's the meaning of this verse?

**Maharaj:** We usually say, ‘One Consciousness is in every thing.’ But actually, in the ocean of Consciousness various objects are rising and subsiding on the waves of *Nama-Rupa*, names and forms. The entire world is floating on that Consciousness. Reflect on that incident in Swami Vivekananda’s life. He saw the railings of the Hedua Park [in Kolkata], as well as the rice on his plate as Consciousness. It was the same with Sri Ramakrishna. He saw the door-sill, the marble floor as well as the puja items, as Consciousness.

In the Gita, when Bhagavan says, न च मत्थावनि भू्ावनि (9:5), he is referring to his *nirvikalpa nirguna* (absolute, attributeless) state. Whenever something happens, it is in his saguna aspect (endowed with attributes). For example, see – न च मत्थावनि भू्ावनि पश् मे योगपेष्टम्भु || (Gita 9:5) “And yet beings do not abide in Me. Behold My divine yoga. I am the upholder of all beings and yet I am not in them. My Will alone causes their existence.” Creation, sustenance and dissolution take place in the *prakriti* of Nirguna Brahman, but He is indifferent. Again when He says, सिबिभू्ावन कौन् ेय प्रकृ व्तं यासन् मावमकाम् || (Gita 9:7) “At the end of a *kalpa* (cycle of time), O son of Kunti, all beings go back to My prakriti; at the beginning of (another) kalpa, I send them forth again”, He refers to His saguna aspect.

*Saguna and nirguna appear to be different. We cannot understand how it is possible to see the same entity in two different ways at the same time. That’s why Swamiji said, ‘It appears to be so. It is a statement of fact.’ Earlier they used to call it magical! It truly seems to be like that: He alone does everything, but He says that He doesn’t do anything!**

*(To be continued…)*
The Divine Aloneness of Sri Ramakrishna

SWAMI EKACHITTANANDA

As the Novel Coronavirus is playing its destructive dance across continents, the primary focus is on, ‘How to survive?’ Another question which is becoming equally serious is ‘How to overcome loneliness?’ Especially those who are unaccustomed to being quarantined, are finding their lonesome existence increasingly unbearable. Many have fallen prey to anxiety and depression prone to hearing, as it were, the footsteps of death in their moments of loneliness. Psychologists are of the opinion that even when this pandemic storm ceases to rage, the resumption of a normal, healthy mental life would be a great challenge for the current generation.

Against this backdrop, an attempt is made here to understand another kind of loneliness, which we may call a divine ‘aloneness’, as witnessed in the life of Sri Ramakrishna.

Whenever an avatara descends on earth, an indescribable loneliness awaits him. The reason being that ‘the domain beyond mind’ from where He descends, is made of stuff so exquisitely pure that its very nature is in sharp contradistinction with this world of ours. This is also the reason why those for whose sake he descends, fail to recognise him or understand him. The intensity and extensity of a Man-God’s loneliness far exceeds what is commonly experienced by a human being.

Can we have an inkling of the extraordinariness of this intensity? For an answer we can turn to Sri Ramakrishna’s own utterances as recorded in The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna.

7 March, 1885. Sri Ramakrishna was in the grip of divine restlessness as he went about searching for renouncers of ‘lust and gold’. But to no avail! Resignedly, as it were, he told Mahendranath Gupta or M., the recorder of The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna: “I have been seeking one who has totally renounced lust and greed. When I find a young man, I think that perhaps he will live with me; but everyone raises some objection or other.”

The pages of the Gospel are replete with such moving pictures. On 19 October 1884, we find Sri Ramakrishna attending the meeting of the Brahmo Samaj at Sinthi. Rather disappointed with the part of the Samaj’s worship that eulogized power and wealth of God, he urged the devotees to delve deep into the divine ocean of love. Ironically, he could figure out in an instant that none of those
present there could grasp the essence of his advice. With a touch of pathos, he thought aloud, “To whom am I saying these words? Who will believe me?”

The unique feature of Sri Ramakrishna avatara is the effortless ease with which he moved between *Nitya*, the transcendental and *Leela*, the phenomenal. While in Nitya, he would be immersed in transcendental bliss. In this state there is not the slightest trace of duality. In other words, while in Nitya, Sri Ramakrishna was utterly oblivious of the multiplicity of name and form, characteristic of the world of phenomena. But as part of his Leela, when he became conscious of the phenomenal world, it would appear to him as the ‘land-unknown’ because there was none who could give him the company he sought.

That he had to walk a solitary path in his earthly Leela was not unknown to Sri Ramakrishna. It is not difficult to read an unspoken feeling of impending loneliness in the extraordinary plea that Sri Ramakrishna, in one of his visions, as a divine child made to ‘the sage of the eternal abode’ Swami Vivekananda: “I am going down. You too must go with me.”

From the human perspective, Sri Ramakrishna’s life-story might well appear as a sad narrative of a long aloneness. In his childhood, when he was known as Gadadhar, with a unique power of discernment he understood that people are invariably drawn towards sense enjoyments and a mad pursuit of wealth, name and fame and consequently suffer unending miseries. One wonders if these keen observations convinced Gadadhar once and for all that “there’s no room in this sordid world for thee.”

For an avatara, the pull of the transcendental is too strong to be kept in abeyance for long. During the Shivaratri festival at Pyne’s house, and also on his way to the temple of Vishalakshi Devi, Gadadhar could not help hearkening to the call of the ‘land unknown’. On both the occasions he plunged into a deep meditative awareness. But what a pity! None could understand, let alone appreciate, such sudden manifestations of God-consciousness in him. As his well-wishers, they assumed that he was possessed by some evil spirit and accordingly prayed to God for his well-being!

By keeping his promise of accepting Dhani, the ironsmith’s widow, as his *bhiksha-mata* or alms-giving godmother during the sacred-thread investiture ceremony, Gadadhar held aloft the inviolability of Truth. But this amounted to completely disregarding society’s ironclad-strictures. His family and friends could not make sense of his unusual behavior. Although the issue was resolved through the intervention of Dharmadas Laha, the local landlord and family friend, everyone censured Gadadhar.

After the untimely passing away of his father, Gadadhar befriended loneliness in yet another sense. The flames of sorrow were burning unceasingly underneath his calm exterior. But the people of Kamarpukur only witnessed the joyous and carefree Gadadhar at Manik Raja’s mango grove and at Bhutir-khal cremation ground, without being able to peep into the loneliness in his heart! Nor could his elder brother Ramkumar fathom him. When Gadadhar was about 17 years old, Ramkumar brought him to Kolkata and asked him to seriously take up formal studies. But Gadadhar only replied, “I do not want to learn, the art of ‘bundling rice and plantain’. What I do want is to have that which produces right knowledge and enables man truly to achieve the aim of his life”\(^3\). Ramkumar failed to understand that these words were coming from the depths of his little brother’s heart.

His nephew Hridayram, who served him day and night, too failed to understand Sri
Ramakrishna. He could not make any sense of his uncle’s unusual behaviour. Mathur Babu, the son-in-law of Rani Rashmoni, the owner of the Dakshineswar temple, was fascinated by the Shiva idol hand-crafted by Gadadhar. But when sent for, ‘the younger Bhattacharya’—as Gadadhar was referred to —refused to meet Mathur Babu because he feared he would be asked to accept the temple priest’s job. To Hriday, who was desperately looking for a job, this disinclination to be involved with any worldly affairs was an unsolvable mystery.

Eventually, Gadadhar became the priest at the temple of Bhavataraini. Divinely inspired, he plunged into intense sadhana at the Panchavati, the temple garden. Disrobing himself without any sense of embarrassment, he delved deep into the inner recesses of his self. Hriday was sure that his uncle had gone mad. When asked to explain his conduct, Gadadhar replied, “What do you know? Thus freed from all ties, one should practise meditation.”

Hriday’s response was only a growing bewilderment and annoyance. As his sadhana ripened, Sri Ramakrishna effortlessly transitioned into the boundless realm of pure devotion from the narrow confines of ritualistic devotion. Hriday, to his consternation, saw his uncle touch the offerings of flowers and bilva leaves to his head, his chest and then after stroking it all over his body, offer it at the feet of the goddess! He even found his uncle, in a state of divine absorption, eating the cooked food etc., before offering it to the Divine Mother. Again, at other times he watched the divine priest lying down at night on the bed meant for the Goddess.

And to Hriday’s dismay, these unusual mannerisms did not remain unnoticed for long. Seeing Sri Ramakrishna’s activities becoming increasingly unconventional and unpredictable, the enraged temple employees concluded that either he had gone mad or was under the spell of some evil spirit. They unanimously concluded, “The Bhattacharya is sure to be dismissed this time; as soon as the [Mathur] Babu comes, he will expel him. Giving offence to the gods! How long will they put up with it?”

Well, even if God sanctions, men surely will not! The Brahmin community of Dakshineswar of that time had neither the capacity nor the inclination to understand Sri Ramakrishna.

Alas! No one understood the God-crazed Sri Ramakrishna and he continued to be without a companion!

As evening descended on the bank of the Ganga and the blowing of the conch shell was heard all around, Sri Ramakrishna, seized with sorrow that another day had gone in vain, would throw himself violently on the ground crying, ‘Mother, Thou hast not shown Thyself to me even yet.’ The people around him commented, “He has got colic pain and that is why he is crying so much.”

What to say of the general public, even Rani Rashmoni, identified by Sri Ramakrishna himself as one of the eight companions of the Divine Mother, misinterpreted his agony. On Mathur’s instigation, the younger Bhattacharya was sent to the house of pleasure. Their idea was that this would reduce his God-absorption and with his celibacy broken, he would be brought back to normal life. But that was not be. Sri Ramakrishna threw cold water on their plan when he addressed the courtesan as mother and fell at her feet!

Coming to know of his divine excesses, his mother Chandramoni Devi summoned him back to Kamarpukur. Even there, Gadadhar was found to repeatedly cry heart out uttering ‘Maa’, ‘Maa’. Seeing that, the village elders sagely concluded that he was possessed by an evil spirit.

The deprecatory appellation ‘madcap’ became the adornment of his person—equally during the early, middle, and later phase of his life.
At the later phase of Sri Ramakrishna’s life came Shivanath Shastri, the much acclaimed preceptor of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. After frequenting him, Shivanath heedlessly declared: “Sri Ramakrishna is half-crazy, afflicted with neurotic ailments.” Once when meeting Shivanath, Sri Ramakrishna came down on him with a rapier-like observation: “You think day and night of bricks, wood, earth, money and all sorts of material things and yet consider yourself to be of sound mind, while I—who meditate day and night on God, whose consciousness makes the whole universe conscious—you consider to be ignorant and unconscious. A fine piece of reasoning! What sort of intellect you have?”

When Sri Ramakrishna returned to Dakshineswar and resumed his sadhana, there appeared Bhairavi Brahmani. For the first time, it seemed as though a denizen from his own land had arrived at last— one having the cure for all his agonies. Under her guidance, Sri Ramakrishna completed the Tantric-sadhana with full glory. His avatarahood was established indisputably amongst the learned society.

As the realm of spiritual visions was of easy access to Bhairavi, she rightly recognised the jewel in the form of Sri Ramakrishna. But it is one thing to recognise an avatara and quite a different thing to know with certainty the acts of the greatest among them!

When Sri Ramakrishna broke the shackles of dualism and began to tread on the path of monism with his Advaitic teacher Totapuri, Bhairavi remonstrated: “My child, don’t visit him often; don’t mix much with him. His path is dry and austere. All your ardent affection and intense love for God will vanish if you mix with him.” But her objections went unheeded.

Sri Ramakrishna’s life became the ground of harmony of knowledge and devotion. In his quest for fullness, an unwavering Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya free from all earthly ties, became Ramakrishna Puri in the serene hours of one immaculate dawn.

But Bhairavi was not the lone exception. None of the gurus who came to Sri Ramakrishna could see the entire breadth of the Ganga from its origin to its outlet. Some had seen the origin Gomukh, some Bhagirathi in Kolkata, while others the coast adjoining the Ganga Sagar.

The flower blossomed; a swarm of bees swarmed to it. But who can drink the nectar if the tongue is not yet ready to taste it?

Sri Ramakrishna could not stand the presence of materialistic people. Yet in this phase of his life at Dakshineswar he had to associate with people like the occult-mongering Pratap Chandra Hazra, and the fame-seeking Mahimacharan; people who could neither feel the blessedness of Sri Ramakrishna’s company nor make their own presence joyful to him!

The people of Kolkata failed to recognise the glory of renunciation. And neither could Mathur. After consulting Hriday, Mathur once wanted to legally handover the ownership of an entire ‘taluka’ to Sri Ramakrishna. Coming to know about this, ‘the king of renunciation’ ran like one mad to beat him saying, “Ah, you wretch, you want to make a worldly man of me!”

Tormented by the agony of being companionless, he cried from the roof top of his Temple residence, “Come, my children! Oh, where are you? I cannot bear to live without you.” His all-renouncing disciple-companions then started coming one by one.

Came Narendra— the incarnation of ‘Nara’— the perfected Manhood. Sri Ramakrishna saw in a vision, a streak of light coming all the way from Kashi to Kolkata. He was thus assured that he at last had found a man from the land of true radiance where darkness dare not peep.
The river met the sea. One wonders if the river, at the mergence with the sea, could recognise its sea-nature. One is perhaps led to a slightly contrasting answer as per Swami Premananda’s account. Baburam, the future Swami Premananda, had come to Dakshineswar accompanied by another devotee. This was Baburam’s first visit and night-stay at Dakshineswar. He was suddenly awakened around midnight. He saw Sri Ramakrishna appearing before them just as a little boy and in a sobbing voice ask, “Look here, as I have not seen Narendra for a long time, I feel as if my whole soul is being forcibly wrung like a wet towel; please ask him to come once and see me. He is a person of pure Sattva, he is Narayana Himself; I cannot have peace of mind if I don’t see him now and then.” This repeated throughout the night. What earnestness! Seeing this terrible pang of separation Baburam reflected, “How wonderful is his love! And how hard-hearted that person must be for whom his longing is so devastating and behaviour so pathetic!”

Along with his brother-disciples like Yogen, Niranjan and others, Narendranath had repeatedly put his guru to test. Later, Narendra declared in no uncertain terms: “It was the Master alone who knew how to love and he did love, while others of the world but feign love for the satisfaction of their self-interest.”

But there was a time-gap between Narendra’s first acquaintance with Sri Ramakrishna and his ascension to this deep faith. In the meantime, Sri Ramakrishna’s mind often quivered like a boat in the ebb and flow of hope and despair. Once, when Naren planned to go away as a wandering sannyasi without informing anyone, Sri Ramakrishna divined it and sang to him with tears in his eyes, “I am afraid to speak/ And am afraid not to speak. / The doubt arises in my mind/ Lest I should lose you.”. Again, anxious to prevent Naren from going back to his eternal abode, before fulfilling his mission on earth, Sri Ramakrishna prayed to the Divine Mother of the Universe, “Mother, bind him with your Maya.”

At Cossipore, the ‘thousand-petalled-lotus’ Naren sought Nirvikalpa Samadhi from Sri Ramakrishna. But the king of samadhi reprimanded him: “Shame on you! You are asking for such an insignificant thing. I thought that you would be like a big banyan tree, and that thousands of people would rest in your shade. But now I see that you are seeking your own liberation.” We can read in these words a sense of fear that Naren may not fulfill his mission, which was to preach to the world the unvoiced ideas of Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna’s joy of being surrounded by pure souls was matched only by his anxiety for their spiritual growth or the fear of losing their company. He intensely prayed for their spiritual good, and yet their minds occasionally succumbed to skepticism, and some like Purno and Bhavanath even became ensnared by the world. This fun-play of joy-anxiety went on till the last moments of his life. Finally, when Naren too doubted his avatarhood, the Parthasarathi of this age as if blowing his Panchajanya, declared, “O my Naren, are you not yet convinced? He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, He Himself is now Ramakrishna in this body: not in your Vedantic sense [according to which each soul is potentially divine], but actually so.”

Just as in the matter of the true nature of Sri Ramakrishna’s being, there was no less confusion regarding the essence of his message too. Sri Ramakrishna himself knew that none had recognised him, none could grasp his words, and no one was ready to delve into the ocean of his true being.

When he was staying at the Shyampukur house, afflicted with the throat cancer, Ramchandra Datta and some other devotees joyfully participated in kirtans, dancing merrily
and rejoicing in devotional songs. The spirit of contemplation was overshadowed by sentimentalism. These devotees came to regard contortions of the body, losing consciousness etc., as the yardstick of spiritual growth. Sri Ramakrishna smiled to himself when he said, “Oh Ram, you understood just the opposite!”

Later, at Cossipore when the cancer was in an advanced stage, Pandit Shashadhar Tarkachudamani, a famous religious preacher who had great love and respect for Sri Ramakrishna, one day requested “Sir, if you put your mind on your throat a little, your cancer will surely be cured.” Sri Ramakrishna replied, “How can the mind that I have already offered to the Lord be diverted again to this body of flesh and blood?” The pandit had failed to understand Sri Ramakrishna’s state of awareness.

Though from the worldly perspective Sri Ramakrishna’s loneliness may appear to partake of the element of agony, it must be kept in mind that deep within, Sri Ramakrishna had realised the impermanence of the space-time bound universe. Never did he feel the least worldly attraction for any person or object.

On 29 September 1884 the third day of Durga Puja, we find Sri Ramakrishna in an ecstatic mood in the company of his devotees at Dakshineswar. Replying to a question, Sri Ramakrishna said, “Must I waste my mind, which should be given to God, on useless things? I say: ‘O Mother, I don’t want Narendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal or anybody. I seek Thee alone! What shall I do with man? .... When I attain God, I shall attain everything.’”

Why then did he have an unearthly affection for Narendra, Bhavanath, Rakhal and others? The answer is given by Sri Ramakrishna himself: “The reason is this; these are all pure in heart. Lust and gold have not yet touched them. If they apply their minds to God, they will be able to realize Him.”

Unable to understand the spirit behind Sri Ramakrishna’s divine love for him, Naren once cautioned his guru that he might have to suffer the fate of King Bharata, who was trapped by his affection for a deer. Sri Ramakrishna took this warning straight to his Divine Mother and returned with a relieved smile, “I don’t take your words seriously; Mother has said that I feel attracted towards you because I see Narayana in you; I’ll not even look at your face the day I shall not feel His presence in you.”

In The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, Mahendranath has described a wonderful late evening scene that captures the essence of this discussion. He writes: “In the dim light the Master, all alone, was pacing the hall, rejoicing in the Self as the lion lives and roams alone in the forest.”

Because Sri Ramakrishna is desireless and rooted in the Self, his ‘aloneness’ has the nectar of true companionship, and it acts as the unfailing pointer for us to transcend from self-centeredness to unity, from finite to infinite, and from sorrow to absolute bliss.

The Art of Forming and Reforming Habits

SWAMI BANESHANANDA

(Continued from previous issue...)

The art of forming and reforming habits is of great relevance to all of us, irrespective of gender, race, colour, and age. This article examines how habits are formed and how they can be reformed or changed.

The Idea of Change

'Change' implies the act of 'letting go'. It is like getting a good thing for a good price and 'letting go' the other ones. The quicker we are able to let go of the old, the sooner we will be able to enjoy the new. Our inner resistance to accept any kind of change, is perhaps the most difficult problem we face in this respect. You try to change the location of your bed in the room. Or try to change the position of your reading table. It may be a very insignificant thing; but so much disapproval comes from within! It shows that we have created our own comfort zones and we love to remain there. We think that we are quite safe being there. That is why it is very difficult to bring about changes in one's own personal life or at the workplace.

We may remember that small book, Who Moved My Cheese?, written by Dr. Spencer Johnson. It's a wonderful story about two mice, Sniff and Scurry, and two little indecisive people, Hem and Haw. They used to get cheese regularly from a store without the knowledge of the owner. This continued for a long time. No one ever asked them where they were getting their supply of cheese. So they thought that that was their cheese. Psychologically speaking, when you form a habit like this you think that it is your right to enjoy it indefinitely! One day they came and saw to their surprise that the store was not there anymore! The book shows how it was easy for the mice to accept the change, and to move away and find another store of cheese. But it was a blow for Hem and Haw, the indecisive little people. The one called Haw somehow managed to accept this change and was ready to look for something elsewhere. But Hem was not. He said, 'First, you have to answer the question: who moved my cheese?' He was convinced that it was his cheese. In the same way, we say: this is my body. And my whole Universe issues forth! Actually, this is nobody's body. It belongs to this material world. Modern science also corroborates this, saying that it is made of ingredients available in the world. It is not a property that we really own. Still we say, 'It is my body!' This is a very serious fault. Hem developed habits based on the cheese always being available, its supply guaranteed. Therefore, he was not willing to come out of his comfort zone and accept the change.

There is an example of a great movement called Alcoholics Anonymous (AA, for short).
Bill Wilson (William Griffith Wilson) was the co-founder of AA. Bill himself was an alcoholic. But he succeeded in becoming sober and started Alcoholics Anonymous. The twelve steps that an alcoholic attending AA's programme is advised to follow can be found on the Internet. Astonishingly, seven out of the twelve steps speak of God or God's grace, etc! Initially it was difficult for the modern researchers to acknowledge it as a scientific approach, so they termed it a cult! But the truth of AA's overwhelming success could not be denied for long. This is a programme that deals with the prospect and facts of a change.

We know that the Vedanta philosophy is based on the authority of the Upanishads. The word ‘Upanishad’ has been explained as meaning a process of a change or transformation. The word has three syllables ‘upa’, ‘ni’ and ‘shad’. Here ‘upa’ is one prefix and ‘ni’ is another prefix to the root ‘shad’. As if one prefix were not enough to bring out the seriousness of the undertaking and so it had to have another prefix ‘ni’! The meaning of the root ‘shad’ is to cut asunder. One needs to cut asunder the bondage which is an outcome of one’s attachment that one has grown towards things after mistaking the unreal (or relatively real) for the real. The prefix ‘ni’ is very powerful because it means ‘nihshena’, i.e., completely annihilating, without leaving any trace. Why was this prefix ‘ni’ used? The root ‘shad’ itself seems to be enough to convey the meaning. However, the answer is, it was used because we have grown an attachment to unreal things to the extent of having an addiction! It is just like habits and programming we spoke about in the beginning. What is the process of developing an attachment? Suppose, for example, I like a beautiful face. My eyes are there to look at things. Hence if I look at your beautiful face, it is no harm for me. This is also not the fault of the eyes. But suppose I look at the same face a second time, that shows I have given it my ‘attention’. When I look at the face for the third time, it shows that there is an ‘intention’. If I look at it for the fourth time, it is ‘attachment’; and if I look at the same face again and again, it is called a strong attachment to the point of having an ‘addiction’!

In the second chapter of the Gita, Sri Krishna, while narrating the traits of a person of steady wisdom, analytically and meticulously delineates the process of forming a habit to the extent of addiction. He says:

‘In a person (pumshah) who dwells longingly on the sense objects (vishayaan), an inclination (sangah) towards them is generated.
This inclination develops into desire (kaamah), and desire begets anger (krodhah).

‘Anger generates delusion (sammohah), and delusion results in loss of memory (smriti-vibhramah). Loss of memory brings about the destruction of discerning intelligence (buddhi-naashah), and loss of discerning intelligence spells ruin (pranashyati) to a man.’

The refreshingly significant message that Sri Krishna implies through these two verses is that of a counter process, and is also very vital for forming or reforming our habits. Let us read the above two verses, instead, in the following manner. I have merely replaced the word ‘Ishwaram’ for the object ‘vishayaan’ in the original Gita-verse. We need just to change the object of meditation from ‘matter’ (vishayaan) to ‘God’ (Ishwaram) or our ‘Self’ (Aatmaanam). Now let us note the amazing effect of this small change. It will produce transformation in the consecutive objects and will finally lead us not to our ‘destruction’ (vinaashah), but to our ‘final liberation’ (vimuchyate)!

What a message of hope and inspiration! This shows how a stubborn or diehard habit is formed and how it can be reformed. So the use of the prefix ‘ni’ means that we have to work hard to completely eradicate or change such stubborn habits.

Why are these diehard habits formed? They are formed, as mentioned earlier in this write up, because of our wrong identification of the Self with not-self. We are attached to a particular thing and, therefore, have formed our habits in the way that they accommodate that particular thing! When we are attached to our physical body mistaking it for the reality, physical habits are formed; the physicality about everything is valued and appreciated. When we are attached to our mind, our psychological or intellectual habits are formed. It has been rightly said by Swami Vivekananda that the attachment to ‘name and fame’ is the last hurdle of ‘noble minds’. We are the makers of our habits and hence our destiny.

Neuroscience on Forming and Reforming Habits

There is a branch of neuroscience called Contemplative Neuroscience, founded by Dr. B Alan Wallace. With the help of this method we can learn how our brain works when we think of ourselves. After Swami Vivekananda’s original explanation of the Yogasutras, the following important concepts of Neuroscience have come to the fore:

a) Neuroplasticity, also simply called adaptability: The connections between the neurons are not fatally pre-determined. We can rewire the connections the way we want. This plays a vital role in the study of changing our old habits or developing new ones.

b) Epigenetics: Our habits do not depend on our inheritance, i.e., I cannot be an alcoholic.
simply because my father was an alcoholic! It is outside the control of the genetic codes.

c) Bidirectional communication between the mind/brain and body: There are massive bi-directional pathways between the mind/brain and the body. It has long been discovered by medical science that the brain controls the body. In cases of tremendous mental stress, the body develops pains at different parts like the lower back, shoulder muscles etc. The brain knows that the mind is more important than the body. Hence to save the mind it reduces blood supply to certain parts of the body creating pain there and thereby distracting our attention from the mind to the body! Correspondingly the body also continuously influences the brain in giving feedback and helping it in changing wirings between the neurons. This is why our happiness and unhappiness are also associated with different health conditions! Regular practice of our habits helps the neurons to develop specific connections, and they become stronger and stronger, making the task progressively easier.

Let me quote from a lecture on Raja Yoga by Swami Vivekananda to which I referred earlier. He says: “You must remember that Yoga changes the body. As you go on practising, your body changes; it is not the same body that you had before the practice. That is very rational, and can be explained, because every new thought that we have must make, as it were, a new channel through the brain, and that explains the tremendous conservatism of human nature. Human nature likes to run through the ruts that are already there, because it is easy. If we think, just for example’s sake, that the mind is like a needle, and the brain substance a soft lump before it, then each thought that we have makes a street, as it were, in the brain, and this street would close up, but for the grey matter which comes and makes a lining to keep it separate. If there were no grey matter, there would be no memory, because memory means going over these old streets, retracing a thought as it were. Now perhaps you have marked that when one talks on subjects in which one takes a few ideas that are familiar to everyone, and combines and recombines them, it is easy to follow because these channels are present in everyone’s brain, and it is only necessary to recur them.”

Swami Vivekananda continued to explain that when we want to grow a new habit, there is always resistance: “But whenever a new subject comes, new channels have to be made, so it is not understood readily. And that is why the brain (it is the brain, and not the people themselves) refuses unconsciously to be acted upon by new ideas. It resists.” There will always be resistance because the pathway that we are creating is not strong enough. When the pathway becomes strong, we form a new habit.

(To be continued. . .)

A Teacher Learns a Lesson

Gitanjali Murari

A fictional narrative based on incidents from the childhood of Swami Vivekananda.

“Subeer sir is coming,” warned Hari, running to his seat. The class instantly fell silent. A thin, middle-aged man slowly walked into the room, his sharp eyes noting the small, scared faces. But when he glanced at Naren, his mouth tightened into a grim line. The boy was smiling at him cheerfully.

“Stop grinning at me,” Subeer Sen snapped. “Open your book to page twenty-one and read aloud the poem.”

Naren’s expressive voice held his classmates spellbound and as he finished the first verse, Shibu clapped involuntarily.

“How dare you interrupt the lesson?” Subeer Sen glared at Shibu. A shiver ran through the class, all eyes flitting to the stout stick in the teacher’s hand. “Stand up,” he shouted, beginning to rain blows on the student. Trying to avoid the beating, Shibu caught hold of the stick. “Please sir,” he begged with tears in his eyes, “I am very sorry…I will not disturb the class again.”

The teacher tugged at the stick but Shibu hung on to it tightly with both hands. “Let go of it at once,” Subeer commanded, his face turning crimson with

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anger. Frightened, Shibu made to run out of the class. But the teacher pounced on him. Shibu ducked. Subeer Sen stumbled and fell.

A chuckle shattered the silence in the classroom. The teacher leapt to his feet, his eyes blazing.

Rushing at Naren, he struck him on the head with the stick. “Now let’s see you laugh at me, you insolent monkey,” he raged, “apologize at once for your rude behaviour.”

“No, I will not! I did nothing wrong,” Naren cried out.

Infuriated, Subeer yelled, “I will teach you a lesson you will never forget,” and catching Naren by the ears, he lifted him up. The skin of the earlobe tore and Naren burst into tears. “Who are you to beat me?” he sobbed, “Even my parents never raise their hand on me.”

“What’s going on here?” The principal walked into the classroom, frowning at Subeer. The teacher instantly released his captive student. A thin trickle of blood ran down Naren’s neck and weeping inconsolably, he gathered his books. “I am leaving sir,” he said to the principal, “and I will never come back to this school. Subeer sir always beats us…the whole class is frightened of him…this is not the way to teach children.”

The principal went down on his knees and taking out his handkerchief, stanched the blood from Naren’s ear. “I am extremely sorry, my child,” he said gently. “This is really my fault since I don’t inspect the classes as often as I should. If you leave, this school will lose one of its best pupil.”

Seeing the principal’s sorrowful face, Naren controlled his tears and without saying a word, returned to his seat. “Thank you,” the principal smiled and glancing at Subeer Sen said sternly, “Please come with me…we need to talk.”

After school, Hari and Shibu accompanied Naren home, taking turns to narrate the entire tale to Bhuvaneshwari Devi. Examining Naren’s ear, she declared angrily, “That teacher is a monster! We will get you admitted to another school.”

But Naren shook his head, “No, ma. The principal has set everything right.”

“Yes, pishi,” Shibu and Hari chorused together. “Subeer sir wanted to teach Naren a lesson, but it was he who learnt one instead! ” Breaking into a happy jig, they chanted, “Subeer Sen will no longer teach us! Hip, hip, hurray!” *

Be moral. Be brave. Be a heart-whole man. Strictly moral, brave unto desperation. No religion for you, my children, but morality and bravery. No cowardice, no sin, no crime, no weakness—the rest will come of itself.

—Swami Vivekananda
focus in this issue:

At Paramakudi (Part - 2)

This issue is a continuation of the study of Swami Vivekananda's lecture at Paramakudi. Before we proceed, here is a quick recap of the key arguments covered in the previous issue:

1. There come periods in history where the human race or nations are forced to re-examine their models of social life.

2. Materialism and spiritualism follow each other in wave-like motions.

3. The choice before India. While materialism has helped India, in a sense, but the models of material civilization in the West are also decaying.

4. Whether on the ground of materialism, or of intellect, or of spirituality, the compensation that is given by the Lord to every one impartially is exactly the same. Therefore we must not think that we are the saviours of the world.

5. We can teach the world what it is waiting for.
   - The world is waiting to strengthen its spiritual foundations.
   - The world seeks to transform its basis for governing humanity.

6. India's solution - the religion of the Upanishads will help the world.

In this issue, we continue the second part of the lecture at Paramakudi where Swami Vivekananda explains why India has the answer to the crisis in world civilization.

Turn overleaf to explore >>
The one underlying doctrine among the different sects, philosophies, and scriptures (Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and others) is the belief in the soul of man, the atman. It is this idea that can change the whole tendency of the world.

Everywhere in India there is the idea of a spiritual soul which is the receptacle of all power. All systems of philosophy in India teach that you cannot get this power or purity or perfection from outside because these are your birth right, your very nature.

Impurity is a mere superimposition under which your real nature is hidden. But the real you is already perfect, and already strong.

What makes the difference between God and man, between the saint and the sinner? Only ignorance. What is the difference between the highest man and the lowest worm that crawls under your feet? Ignorance.
2. It is the religion of the Upanishads that will make humankind strong and fearless.

What makes a man stand up and work?
Strength.

- Strength is goodness, weakness is sin.
- If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the Upanishads, bursting like a bomb-shell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word fearlessness.
- Either in this world or in the world of religion, it is true that fear is the sure cause of degradation and sin. It is fear that brings misery, fear that brings death, fear that breeds evil.
- And what causes fear? Ignorance of our own nature.

If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the Upanishads, bursting like a bomb-shell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word fearlessness.

3. When this vision of oneness and divinity of each being is understood, it will change the way humankind looks at life.

- Each one of us are of the substance of God Himself. In fact, according to the Advaita, we are God Himself though we have forgotten our own nature in thinking of ourselves as little men.
- We have fallen from that nature and thus made differences — I am a little better than you, or you than I, and so on.
- This idea of oneness is the great lesson India has to give. And when this is understood, it changes the whole aspect of things, because you look at the world through other eyes than you have been doing before.

We are God himself, only forgotten our own nature

Each of us is heir-apparent to the Emperor of emperors; are of the substance of God Himself. Nay, according to the Advaita, we are God Himself though we have forgotten our own nature in thinking of ourselves as little men.

Unit 3 continues overleaf >>
These are some of the implications of the vision of oneness...

**Implication 1: We see the world differently — we see it not as a battlefield but as a playground**

And this world is no more a battlefield where each soul is born to struggle with every other soul and the strongest gets the victory and the weakest goes to death. It becomes a playground where the Lord is playing like a child, and we are His playmates, His fellow-workers.

**Implication 2: Hope comes to the weakest, when each of us knows that divinity is our very nature (and is not alien to us)**

When we have known the nature of the soul, hope comes to the weakest, to the most degraded, to the most miserable sinner. ...Your nature is pure. It may be hidden for millions of aeons, but at last it will conquer and come out.

**Implication 3: We have the freedom to manufacture our own destiny**

Your own Karma has manufactured for you this body, and nobody did it for you. ... you have yourself manufactured your body bit by bit just as you are doing it this very moment. You yourself eat; nobody eats for you. You assimilate what you eat; no one does it for you. You make blood, and muscles, and body out of the food; nobody does it for you. So you have done all the time. One link in a chain explains the infinite chain. If it is true for one moment that you manufacture your body, it is true for every moment that has been or will come. And all the responsibility of good and evil is on you. This is the great hope. What I have done, that I can undo.

**At the same time, the Grace of the Lord is always available to the pure at heart**

... our religion does not take away from mankind the mercy of the Lord. That is always there. On the other hand, He stands beside this tremendous current of good and evil. He the bondless, the ever-merciful, is always ready to help us to the other shore, for His mercy is great, and it always comes to the pure in heart.

**This vision will have to form the basis of a new society**

Your spirituality, in a certain sense, will have to form the basis of the new order of society. ... if a man has a very crude form of religion and wants temples and forms, he can have as many as he likes; if he wants a Personal God to love, he can find here the noblest ideas of a Personal God such as were never attained anywhere else in the world. If a man wants to be a rationalist and satisfy his reason, it is also here that he can find the most rational ideas of the Impersonal.

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If you have any questions on this lecture, do post your queries on www.vivekanandaway.org

You can also access previous issues of Vivekananda Way here.
ew sights and strange surroundings indicated to Poorva that they were entering a different town. The phenomenal speed at which the Swami and she were whizzing from place to place made her feel like they were riding an invisible Concorde.

The Swami said without any ado, “We’re in Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas.”

A man was pulling a cart that was piled with sacks of fresh vegetables. He must be on the way to the market, thought Poorva, as she neatly sidestepped a mound of fresh cowdung right in the middle of the road. She could hear the gurgling waters of River Vaigai.

Madhura Kavi walked on briskly and Poorva followed him, choosing to walk in the shade cast by rows of trees on either side of the road. Nearby flowed a stream. Poorva dipped her toes in it and revelled in the soothing sounds of nature.

Suddenly, her ears were assaulted by loud noises. Armed soldiers, horses and elephants were marching in disciplined rows. Fear darted across Poorva’s face.

“They are King Nedunjadaiyan Pandyan’s soldiers returning home after a successful war with the king of Venaad, South Travancore.” The Swami seemed unperturbed and that reassured her.

“Oh, what century are we in?”

“Eighth,” said the Swami.

Before she could take in this bit of history, Poorva heard Madhura Kavi’s voice. He was asking a group of people, “Can any one of you tell me the meaning of this verse?” His fingers were pointing to the Kannan Kazhalinai manuscript.

Poorva identified some of their faces. They were the arrogant poets who had quarrelled with Madhura Kavi earlier. With great enthusiasm, they nodded their heads and
began reading the palm leaf. A few minutes later however, everyone in the gathering wore a dispirited look.

Okay folks, why don’t you all admit that you have failed? Poorva thought to herself, when the poets began to look excited again. Curious as to what could have effected this change of mood, she moved closer to them.

One of the poets stepped forward and declared in an insufferably pompous voice, “O Madhura Kavi, we do admit that we are not able to tell you the meaning of this verse, but that doesn’t prove anything. Let us subject all our poems to a test. We’ll place them on the Sangam plank and set it afloat in the temple tank. This extraordinary plank has the capacity to separate the good from the bad. It will most certainly tip over all unworthy manuscripts.” Madhura Kavi shrugged and the others around him smiled smugly.

Poorva watched with bated breath as the manuscripts were carefully placed on the Sangam plank and set afloat. “Swami Thaatha, look! The plank has thrown all the other manuscripts down into the water and is keeping only Nammaazhvaar’s poem afloat. Isn’t that simply awesome?” The wood bobbed gently in the water. The humbled poets apologised to Madhura Kavi and agreed shamefacedly that Nammaazhvaar was the greatest poet of them all.

Madhura Kavi, his job done, prepared to leave, and Poorva looked at the Swami, wondering whether they would be following him. She did not wait for his instructions and instead suggested, “Shall we explore this capital of the Pandyas?”

“Why not?” replied the Swami readily and added, “On the way, we can talk about Nammaazhvaar and Madhura Kavi. I have something more to tell you about them.”

The two walked through the streets of Madurai. The city looked very prosperous. They turned a corner and entered what looked like a market square. The place was bustling with people. Some were gazing around idly, others were buying things, and still others were haggling energetically with vendors.

Poorva noted quite a number of shops selling pearls. The Swami said, “The Pandyan kingdom is famous for pearl fishing. Look at all those traders on horseback. They are bringing in pearls from different parts of the kingdom.”

Even as Poorva longingly eyed some beautiful pearl ornaments, the marketplace mysteriously vanished from her vision, and so did her longing for pearls. Instead, there arose a great desire in her to know more about Nammaazhvaar. This was not surprising, for the Swami steered Poorva’s thoughts too sometimes. Of course, she would never get to know that.

Before Poorva could remind the Swami of his promise to tell her more of the Aazhvaar’s story, he began, “Nammaazhvaar has composed songs on the various forms of God in 36 Vishnu shrines. These include even places in North India like Mathura and Dwaraka.
We saw for ourselves that he never stirred out of Thirukkurugoor. However, his greatness is such that the deities of the 108 important Vishnu temples appeared before him and blessed him."

"Fantastic," exclaimed Poorva, wishing that she had been there to share those visions. "Nammaazhvaar’s spiritual and poetic greatness is such that it will inspire many. The poet Kamban, when composing the Ramayana in Tamil, will offer the first verse to Nammaazhvaar. He will also dedicate a whole composition to the Aazhvaar and call it Shattakopar Andhaadhi."

"Thaatha, how do you know what is going to happen in the future...?"

"Poorva, do you still feel the need to ask such questions?" the Swami asked, his tone ever so matter-of-fact.

"Okay!" said Poorva hurriedly, conceding that there was logic in the Swami’s question. She had another point to clear, however. "Swami Thaatha, there was a slight mix-up in what you said," she began, trying hard to sound casual. "You said that Kamban’s poem on Nammaazhvaar would be called Shattakopar Andhaadhi. Did you mean Nammaazhvaar Andhaadhi?"

"Good observation, Poorva, but recall the day Madhura Kavi carried Nammaazhvaar’s image around the village ..." said the Swami. And only then did she remember Madhura Kavi announcing, “Here comes Shattakopar; here comes Vakulabharanar ...”

"Poorva, the word ‘Shattakopa’ has an interesting meaning. Shatta means the air which hits a newborn at birth, making it cry and forget its past. Kopa means ‘anger’. Since Nammaazhvaar is said to have stopped the air from hitting him when he was a baby, he is called Shattakopa. By the way, the Sri Shattaari also represents the Aazhvaar."

"Swami Thaatha, isn’t shattaari that heavy, cone-shaped silver object they place on our heads in the temple? I’ve noticed that carved on top of it are two little feet." The
Swami nodded appreciatively. “You know, Swami Thaatha, once the priest of a temple was in such a hurry that he banged it on my head. Can you see this bump here, Thaatha? That was caused by …”

“Stop exaggerating, Poorva,” said the Swami gently. “Shattaari is made of two words, shatta and ari. Ari, a Sanskrit word, means ‘enemy’. Since Nammaazhvaar overpowered shatta, he is praised as its enemy. The two little feet atop the shattaari are symbolic of God’s feet.”

The two walked on slowly and passed by the Meenakshi temple and the Azhagar temple. Poorva observed that the Meenakshi temple, unlike what she had seen in pictures, looked very small.

The Swami clarified, “The Pandyas will become great temple-builders only after the twelfth century. The Meenakshi temple will attain huge proportions thereafter.”

Poorva looked at him admiringly. This Thaatha was more an encyclopaedia than a human being.

Picking up a thorn from the middle of the road and throwing it far away into the bushes, the Swami continued, “Nammaazhvaar and his poems will draw the appreciation and admiration of a number of scholars – Sri Ramanuja, the great Vaishnava saint-philosopher of the eleventh century, and his disciples Pillai Lokaacharya and Vedaanta Desika, among many others. Nammaazhvaar’s poems are going to be widely commented on …”

“Commented on?” Poorva looked a little confused.

The Swami explained. “Nammaazhvaar’s poems are so full of meaning that scholars will study them and write pages and pages of explanations for each of his verses.”

“Oh,” Poorva shook her head thoughtfully. The Swami moved on to describe Madhura Kavi’s devotion, when something sounding like a yelp interrupted his narration. He looked around, concerned, and found Poorva wincing in pain.

“My feet are hurting. Is it all right if I lie down there for a while?” she asked, pointing to a wooden bench in front of an overgrown thicket, a little away from the road.

The Swami nodded, “It must be because of all the walking we have done today.”

Swaying on the threshold of sleep, Poorva felt someone slip a soft pillow under her head. She then heard something rustling nearby, and sleepily wondered if it could be a snake. She wasn’t perturbed. “What do I have to worry about, with Swami Thaatha around?” she purred, and slept deeply, like a baby in the comfort of its mother’s arms.

(To be continued...)
QUESTION: How can one overcome the bad Samskaras of the mind?

MAHARAJ: A Samskara is a tendency that has become a mental trait through repetition and brooding. Samskaras are just like pet dogs that have become attached to us by our fondling and feeding them for long. They will not go away if we ask them one morning all of a sudden to get away. We will have to avoid them and if they approach us, give them repeated beatings to drive them away.

So the first thing to do is to be aware of our bad tendencies and avoid situations that stimulate them. It is just like facing a whirlpool. Once we get into it, knowingly or unknowingly, we are helpless. But if we are fully aware of the existence of the whirlpool and really want to avoid getting into it, we must keep aloof from its ambit. But it must be noted that merely closing the eyes will not do. The ostrich with its head buried in the sand only exposes itself to greater dangers.

The more important part of the discipline is to combat the tendency from within. According to Patanjali, the author of the Yoga Sutras, the way to combat a tendency is to meditate on the opposite of it and thus tackle it at the deeper level. It may be contemplation on abstract virtues of an opposite nature, or on persons who are embodiments of these opposite virtues.

But the most effective discipline for a man who has firm faith in God, is to practise prayer and meditation and thus commune with Him.

The Gita raises the question how sinful nature can be overcome, and answers:

The senses, the mind and the intellect are said to be its seat (of the sinful tendency). Covering knowledge by these, it deludes the embodied being. Therefore controlling the senses at the outset destroys sin. The senses are superior to their objects; superior to the senses is the mind; superior to the mind is the intellect (Buddhi); superior to that too is the self (the divine within). Having your hold on that which transcends the intellect, control your lower self by the higher, destroy your enemy sin in the form of desire.

The idea is that by objectifying our mental reactions and taking our stand as the witness of them, we can overcome their overpowering influence. Thus if our senses could watch an object without getting entangled with it, or if our intellects could watch a mental impression and be discriminating without identifying itself with it, we can conquer the power of a mood or a tendency. To objectify and try to be the witness is the way open to all thoughtful men to gain ascendency over moods and tendencies. This is what the Gita means by saying that the senses are superior to the objects, the mind is superior to the senses and the intellect is superior to the mind. Superiority consists in greater subtlety and the consequent capacity to objectify the grosser faculty and be its witness. To be the witness means to have no identification and thus be free from being a victim of the impurities of the grosser faculty. But higher than the senses, mind and intellect is He, the divine spark in all beings, by whose presence alone all the lower faculties work. Finally, therefore, we have to turn to Him with all the lower faculties, senses, mind and intellect, through whole-hearted prayer and meditation. For, in the last resort that alone will counteract and eradicate evil tendencies.
When God Calls

Balaram Bose

RUCHIRA MITRA

This is the third story in the series on devotees who had a role in the divine play of Sri Ramakrishna.

यमेिैष िृणु्े ्ेन लभयः
It is attained by him alone whom It chooses (Kathopanishad. 1.2:23)

One day, Sri Ramakrishna was waiting eagerly for a devotee who had visited him for the first time only the previous day. As soon as the devotee appeared, Sri Ramakrishna joyfully called out to his nephew, “O Hridu, this one belongs to that kirtana (religious music) party of Chaitanya. Do you remember how I saw them all in that vision?”

Sri Ramakrishna was referring to a vision he had of Chaitanya and a surging party of singers singing and dancing through the pathways in Dakshineswar temple garden. Some faces among these followers remained etched in Sri Ramakrishna’s mind. Later, these same people came to him and became his disciples. One such fortunate devotee, whom Sri Ramakrishna was excited to receive this particular day, was Balaram Bose of Bagbazar (in North Kolkata). Today his name is written in golden letters in the annals of the Ramakrishna Movement.

Very often Sri Ramakrishna used to reminisce, “Balaram was a devotee of the inner circle of Chaitanya. He belongs to this place [me].” And as such Balaram was at once accepted into his inner circle.

Balaram belonged to a zamindar family who had estates in Orissa. He was spiritually restless and in need of a spiritual guide. While in Orissa, he read in the Brahmo journals how Sri Ramakrishna had been swaying the minds of the Kolkata intelligentsia. At the same time, his family priest Ramdayal who had visited Sri Ramakrishna became so charmed that he sent a detailed account of the saint to the devout Balaram and invited him to come to Kolkata and be benefitted by visiting Sri Ramakrishna.

Balaram rushed to Kolkata immediately!

It was probably on 1 January 1881 that Balaram met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time. He found Sri Ramakrishna surrounded by the Brahmo visitors. As soon as they left, Sri Ramakrishna said to Balaram, “Now tell me what you have to say.” Balaram asked, “Sir, does God exist?” “Not only does he exist,” assured the Master, “but He reveals Himself if one calls on Him with love as one does one’s own. One should have the same kind of intimate relationship with God, as one has with one’s children and grandchildren.”

Balaram saw a new light in this. Till now his meditation and chanting of God’s name were a matter of routine. He had not called God with any intensity till then. This thought kept ringing in his mind and early next morning he returned to Dakshineswar. The Master now told him, “Well, the Divine Mother told me that you are my own, you are one of Her rasaddars (suppliers of needs). Many things for this place

(Continued on page 42...)

The author is a devotee and researcher on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature. Her doctoral thesis was on the life stories of Sri Ramakrishna. ruchiranewid@gmail.com
AN APPEAL

History: After more than a century of litigations, neglect, and abuse, the ancestral house of Swami Vivekananda began the journey to reclaim its divine legacy when on 10 March 2001 Most Revered Swami Gahananandaji Maharaj, the then vice president of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, laid the foundation stone for its total renovation. The restoration work saw its fulfilment when on 26 September 2004, Most Revered Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj, the then president of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the building as Ramakrishna Mission Swami Vivekananda’s Ancestral House. A few days later on 1 Oct 2004 the then Honourable President of India Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam inaugurated its Cultural Centre. In 2009, the Government of West Bengal recognised Swamiji’s Ancestral House as a Heritage Building (Grade A).

Activities: To actualise Swami Vivekananda’s vision of character-building and nation-building, the centre conducts a number of activities like: Free coaching for school students; Centre for learning languages; Computer training; Classes on Indian culture, and moral and spiritual values; Lectures and seminars on different topics; a Library; a Charitable dispensary; Rural development work; and Relief work. Besides these activities, the centre maintains a Swami Vivekananda Museum, and looks after the upkeep of the Heritage Building.

New Proposal: To accommodate our expanding activities and the ever increasing number of participants, we are constructing an Auditorium with a capacity of 900 seats. The budget for this is Rs. 14 crores. The construction is underway and the Government of India and devotees have already contributed Rs. 4.75 crores towards this noble purpose.

We require Rs. 9.25 crores to complete the Auditorium construction work and conduct the current and new activities on a bigger scale.

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Swami Gautamananda
Adhyaksha
The Story of India-Japan Relationship by Swami Medhasananda will be Advaita Ashrama’s next forthcoming new book. The book mainly deals with Swami Vivekananda and Okakura Tenshin, their meetings and mutual influences; and making this the ground, the author explores the story of Indo-Japan relationship.

Swami Vivekananda was a staunch admirer of Japan for various reasons, and so was Okakura an ardent admirer of India. The study of their chemistry makes for an illuminating understanding of Indo-Japan relationship, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century contexts.

Readers placing their orders before 15 August 2020 will be offered a special 25% discount. They should write to mail@advaitaashrama.org with their postal address and other contact details (phone number and email ID).

Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj, the twelfth President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, was loved and revered by monks and devotees alike for his profound learning, untiring energy, loving heart, and, above all, his spiritual accomplishments.

During the long tenure of his spiritual ministry, Revered Maharaj delivered discourses at various places both in India and abroad in response to the earnest requests of spiritual seekers. This book is a compilation of forty-one of these discourses.

Monks and devotees would meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji nearly every day during his tenure as President of theRamakrishna Order and ask him various questions on spiritual life. Selected questions and Maharaj’s answers to them have been given at the end of the book.
Dear Devotees & Friends,

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math declined open a Math centre at Uttarkashi, an ancient holy town in the Garhwal Himalayas on 20 Oct 2017. There was already an ashrama, named “Ramakrishna Kutir”, on a small piece of land since 1963. It was maintained directly by the Belur Math, and sadhus of our Order used to stay for intense tapasya in the traditional monastic way, begging food from outside and living a simple austere life. The same tradition continues till date.

In view of expanding Swami Vivekananda’s ideals of service and spirituality among the masses we plan to purchase some land measuring at least one acre around Harsil Valley, near Gangotri. Along with retreat centres for sadhus and devotees, some welfare activities for the benefit of the poor and underprivileged will be taken up after acquiring and developing the land.

An estimated cost of Rs. 2 crores is required to set up and develop this additional unit of our Math. We request our friends and devotees, trusts and corporate bodies to contribute liberally to complete this project of welfare and spirituality at the earliest.

Donations can be made by NEFT/RTGS to the account given below:

A/C Name : Ramakrishna Math, Uttarkashi
Bank Name : Union Bank of India
Branch Name : Uttarkashi Branch
A/C No. : 601802010006696
IFSC : UBIN0560189

Foreign contributions may kindly be sent through the headquarters at Belur Math (Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math, Howrah-711202; email- accounts@rkmm.org) requesting it to credit the fund in Uttarkashi Math A/c.

Kindly send us email (to uttarkashi@rkmm.org) or SMS (to 9447051231) after the transaction intimating the purpose of your donation as “Donation for purchase of land and development of the Math.” Please also send your PAN and full postal address.

Donations towards our Math are exempted from IT under 80G Act.

May Sri Ramakrishna, Ma Sarada, Swami Vivekananda bless you all.

Yours in the Lord,
Swami Amaleshananda
Adhyaksha
Balaram naturally felt more intimate to the Master. He resolved that whatever he would present to Sri Ramakrishna he would personally purchase from the market after proper inquiry. So, he went to the market, procured some articles and returned to Dakshineswar the same day!  

Balaram became Sri Ramakrishna’s rasaddar, and his home became Sri Ramakrishna’s ‘Calcutta parlour’. Sri Ramakrishna visited his home a hundred times and met many of his devotees there. Balaram’s family was devout Vaishnavites and they had temples in Vrindavan, Kothar and Kolkata. So Sri Ramakrishna considered this family as very pious and pure. Normally he would not eat cooked food in non-Brahmins’ homes but about Balaram’s home he used to say, “Balaram’s rice is pure. They have been worshipping god and serving guests for generations. I can eat his rice well enough.” From the first meeting till the last day of Sri Ramakrishna’s life, Balaram fulfilled all his needs. He used to supply rice, candy, semolina, sago, barley, vermicelli, tapioca etc.  

Balaram’s home has become synonymous with Ratha Yatra festival because Sri Ramakrishna used to create a gloriously divine atmosphere every year by pulling the ratha (chariot of the Lord Jagannath), singing, dancing, entering into samadhi as well as having prasad there. We read in the Gospel: “He stood in front of the chariot and pulled it by the rope. He began to sing and dance. The music and dance went on as the chariot was pulled to and fro. Sri Ramakrishna was completely intoxicated with divine love. The devotees felt its contagion and danced with the Master in an ecstasy of love.” Even now, every year the Ratha Yatra of Lord Jagannath at Balaram’s house is celebrated by the sannyasis and devotees.

After Sri Ramakrishna’s mahasaradhi, the urn containing his ashes was kept in Balaram’s home by the young disciples who completely depended on him for their every need. Once the first monastery of the Ramakrishna Order was established at Baranagar, Balaram provided for the daily worship of Sri Ramakrishna and the food requirements of the monastics. His brother-in-law Baburam, was Sri Ramakrishna’s intimate monastic disciple and was later known as Swami Premananda. Balaram arranged for Holy Mother’s pilgrimage. She and many direct disciples spent their days of austerity or illness in the loving care of Balaram’s family. And Swami Vivekananda held the inaugural meeting of the Ramakrishna Mission at Balaram’s home.

When Balaram was on his deathbed, his wife had a vision. She was in the inner quarters while the disciples of the Master were attending on Balaram. She noticed a black cloud in the sky, which became denser by stages and began to descend. Soon it assumed the shape of a chariot and alighted on the roof of Balaram’s house. The Master came out of that chariot and proceeded towards the room where Balaram lay. Soon after, he came out, taking Balaram by the hand and entered the chariot again, which then ascended and vanished in the sky. This vision raised her mind to a very high plane where there could be no touch of grief. When she returned to normal state she related this to Golap Ma, who came to the outer room and informed all. It turned out that Balaram passed away precisely at that moment of vision.  

Now his home is a tirtha for Sri Ramakrishna’s devotees and is known as Balaram Mandir. *

usually, young girls grow up with stars in their eyes about the man who will enter into their life. Akka Mahadevi also grew up with such dreams but of a different nature. Although, in tone and content, her dreams were like the fantasy of a young girl, they were special, as the object of these fantasies was the Lord Himself. She tells her friends:

Listen, sister, listen.
I had a dream
I saw rice, betel, palm leaf
and coconut.
I saw an ascetic come to beg...
I followed on his heels
and held his hand...
I saw the Lord, white as jasmine,
and woke wide open.

According to the Indian custom, when a girl comes of age, her parents start looking for a suitable match. In the yesteryears, they would start looking for a groom when a girl was around fifteen or sixteen years old. Following tradition, when Akka Mahadevi’s parents wanted to search for a suitable groom, she refused to get married. Having considered Lord Chennamallikarjuna as her betrothed, she could not think of another husband. It was difficult for her family and friends to accept her unusual choice of groom. Although her parents were devotees, they were unable to understand the ardour of her devotion. Persistent appeals from her parents fell on deaf ears as Akka Mahadevi stood her ground on not marrying.

Lingayatism upholds the institution of marriage and even encourages it. For an individual’s spiritual growth, marriage provides an excellent opportunity to exhaust one’s vasanas (latent tendencies) and desires in a regulated manner, and prepares one for God-realisation. It is believed in Lingayatism that, unless one plays one’s role well in the world, one is not fit for God-realisation. Marriage, as a social institution with its set of taboos and values, helps to discipline an individual’s mind and senses. It serves to nurture the qualities of love, patience, selflessness, forbearance etc., all of which are much needed in the spiritual path. If the purpose of married life is understood, then it becomes a pathway for the attainment of a higher goal of life; otherwise, it becomes a means for sensual indulgence. However, in the case of advanced spiritual aspirants, like Akka Mahadevi, the need for marriage becomes obsolete in the light of their already acquired

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spiritual maturity. Small bushes need the protection of a fence but huge banyan trees don’t need any external protection. Akka Mahadevi’s spiritual zeal and insight, expressed in a vacana addressed to those who tried to convince her for marriage, reveals an evolved discriminative vision:

Is there one husband in this world
And another in the other?
Is there one husband for worldly gains
And another for spiritual purpose?
Except my Lord Chennamallikarjuna,
All other husbands are like clouded dolls.

She recognised Lord Chennamallikarjuna as the only eternal principle and all others as a play of maya or illusion. Both the words used in the phrase ‘clouded dolls’ suggest ignorance of the Truth. Like the clouds hide the Sun, the power of maya conceals the Truth. Dolls are also mere playthings and not ‘real’. Similarly, ‘all other husbands’ are only dolls projected by maya, and getting married to such a doll would only stray one from the quest for Truth.

Akka Mahadevi was able to understand the shallowness and limitation of human love. She says:

Mother, you must be crazy,
I fell for my Lord
White as Jasmine,
I’ve given in utterly.
Go, go, I’ll have nothing
Of your mother-and-daughter stuff.
You go now.

At the young age of fifteen, Akka Mahadevi displayed the rare inner strength and conviction to spurn the closest familial relation in lieu of her love and loyalty to Lord Chennamallikarjuna. She showed the mind-set of a mature spiritual aspirant who has cultivated dispassion on the fertile ground of pure love. Such dispassion is rooted in discrimination between the eternal and the transitory. The awakening of this awareness is found in her description of Lord Chennamallikarjuna as “Formless, deathless and beyond destruction” vis-à-vis her depiction of an ordinary husband as “husbands who die, decay”. Endowed with this realisation, there is no conscious effort in renunciation. This is the beauty in the path of bhakti. It does not require one to tear away from sense objects or attachments; they naturally fall away, just as a ripened fruit falls from a tree.

While an understanding of the transitory nature of the world intensifies dispassion, the sweetness of pure devotion makes sensual pleasures insipid to the bhakta. At this stage all the faculties of the bhakta become focused on attaining the Lord. There is intense longing for union with the Supreme. While suffering the pangs of longing for her beloved Lord Chennamallikarjuna, Akka Mahadevi says:

O Mother I burned
in a flameless fire
O Mother I suffered
a bloodless wound
Mother I tossed
Without a pleasure.

During this time, Akka Mahadevi’s life took an unprecedented turn. Legend says that, one day, while she was in the company of her friends, King Kaushika the local ruler, caught a glimpse of her while returning from his hunt. He stood mesmerised by her bewitching beauty and became besotted with her. On returning to his palace he sent his royal personage with a marriage proposal. King Kaushika was a Jain and did not follow the precepts of Lingayatism. Akka Mahadevi’s parents were not happy with the alliance but under pressure from the king they sought the approval from their daughter. Different scholars pose various opinions on the issue of her marriage.

According to poet Harihara of the 13th century, Akka Mahadevi, foreseeing danger to
her parents’ lives on rejecting the king’s proposal, finally agreed to marry him. She went to stay at the king’s palace but placed three conditions before marriage – she should not be disturbed when she was engaging in prayers, when she was in the company of other saranas and when she was meeting the jangamas. The king initially agreed to these conditions but violated all three clauses after their marriage. Akka Mahadevi left his palace, forsaking everything, including her attire. She walked naked, covering herself only with her long tresses.

The second opinion is more largely accepted by scholars and the general public. Akka Mahadevi went to stay in the king’s palace to protect her parents’ life but on certain conditions. The king failed to keep his promise. It is said that he tried to force himself on her, unable to resist her beauty. As she left him, her words of wisdom were:

Pot of refuse,
Vessel of piss,
Mat of bones,
Stench of pus
Burn this body.
Don’t be destroyed
Holding on to the body;
Know Chennamallikarjuna, jasmine-tender,

You fool.

Since the king was enamoured by her beauty, Akka Mahadevi tried to create dispassion in him by giving a gory picture of the human body. It reveals the dispassion Akka Mahadevi cultivated based on the understanding of the transient nature of the body. When she says, “Burn this body”, she refers to destroying body consciousness and overcoming attachments that stem from a root attachment to the body. While giving in to the needs of the body and the senses, a person without discrimination sinks into death and is destroyed. Akka Mahadevi highlights here that, although death is inevitable, dying in ignorance is spiritual death. The body should be used to “Know Chennamallikarjuna”, meaning the eternal Consciousness. It shows that her love for her beloved, Lord Chennamallikarjuna, is rooted in the understanding of his real nature as Sat-Chit-Ananda.

There is yet another opinion on Akka Mahadevi’s marriage. Some scholars believe that she went to his palace to dissuade the king from marriage but, on seeing his adamantine will, she decided to leave home and not be the cause of trouble for her parents. As a mark of complete renunciation she discarded her garments and covered herself only with her long tresses. Some people believe that she covered herself with a coarse blanket made of wool from sheep. This could have been mistaken later to be her hair. Whatever be the reality, it is her rare courage and austere spirit exhibited at such a young age that becomes a preamble for all spiritual seekers. When she was leaving home, her family members and friends tried to dissuade her but her conviction in the goal was strong. When they showed concern for her materialistic needs – food, shelter, safety etc., she answered with confidence:

When hungry, a bounty of alms in villages;
When thirsty, lakes, streams and wells;
To bathe, gurgling springs;
To sleep, temple ruins;
And for a soul-mate, I have you,
O Chennamallikarjuna, jasmine tender.

The fetters of body consciousness cannot bind a devotee who has a conviction in the reality of the Self. Akka Mahadevi walked naked, casting away her modesty in search of the eternal Truth. This bold decision has earned her the title of a ‘rebel’, a ‘reformer’ by many critics and scholars. If her nudity is analysed
from the perspective of conventional social behaviour, it may appear to be a rebellious move. However, a study of her vacanas suggests that, behind her apparent rebellious act, there is no conscious agenda of social reform. Her deviant behaviour is the natural expression of a highly evolved spiritual state, an honest expression of her inner state of being. She says:

If the cloth that covers them slips,
Men and women become shy.
If you, lord of life,
Envelop the whole world,
What is there to be shy of?

With her decision to go sky clad, Akka Mahadevi shunned the bondage of shame, which binds the human body and is a deterrent on the spiritual path. It is the external expression of her inner state of complete renunciation. Only on attaining this state of absolute detachment, can a devotee experience the light of God Consciousness. Akka Mahadevi professes:

Does one who, being clad in
The light of Chennamallikarjuna,
Has shed all shame,
Need clothes and ornaments.

This courage to go against social norms also stemmed from her inner conviction of the Truth. Akka Mahadevi says in one of her vacanas:

A woman, though in name
I am, if you consider well,
The male principle.

The vacana clearly demarcates the unreal name and form from the real eternal Self. While, in name and form, Akka Mahadevi is a woman, in reality, she is the Supreme Self. When she recognises how her true nature, ‘I am’, is the male principle, she is referring to the concept of Purusha in Indian philosophy. The eternal Self, Pure Consciousness, is known as the Universal cosmic male principle Purusha while the material nature, Prakriti, is compared to a mother, as it gives birth to different varieties of living entities. With her insightful vacana, Akka Mahadevi rips apart any scope for gender discrimination with the assertion that, in spirit, all women are but the eternal cosmic male principle.

A young woman wandering naked, would have created a furore in the 12th century. Even in today’s progressive society nudity among women is not accepted socially or legally. For ordinary people chained to their body consciousness, it is difficult to understand the inner state of being of a saint like Akka Mahadevi. In their ignorant eyes nudity appears to be ‘abnormal’ behaviour or insanity. Akka Mahadevi also faced severe criticism, derision and humiliation from her contemporary society, who could not accept her non-conformist decision. In the face of such staunch opposition and censure she exhibited an extraordinary strength of character. This quality of fearlessness and equanimity is the insignia of a true lover of God. She proclaims boldly:

Do those who are mad with love know
shame?

Do those who are loved by
Chennamallikarjuna,
Care for worldly honour?

Although her naked form evoked unwarranted interest among men, she remained unperturbed. During her wandering days she had to encounter many lecherous men who tried to physically abuse her. Some of her vacanas give an insight into the ordeal she suffered in the hands of lustful men. In one vacana she says to these men:

You came, O brothers,
Seeing the beauty of my bare breasts
And blooming youth.
But I am not a woman,
Nor a whore, O brothers!...
The face of no other person
Than that of Chennamallikarjuna
Pleases me.
It is a wonder that Akka Mahadevi, a lone woman, could defend herself from the sexual advances of these men! It could not have been merely an act of courage. The answer probably lies in her magnificent personality that carried the aura of absolute purity and chastity.

The ascetic life of Akka Mahadevi indicates that she practised brahmacharya in its true sense and acquired great spiritual strength. The power and grandeur of her spiritual stature can be ascertained from a study of her vacanas. Despite facing rigorous physical, mental, emotional and social challenges, she demonstrated unflinching faith and devotion in her ideal.

After an arduous journey Akka Mahadevi reached the holy city of Kalyana. Here she met towering spiritual personalities like Basavanna, Allama Prabhu, and Chennabasavanna in Anubhava Mantapa – the religious hall. This hall was established by Basavanna for the discussion and exchange of spiritual ideas for the saranas. In the presence of many prominent saranas in this congregation, Akka Mahadevi was put to acid test by Allama Prabhu in a challenging philosophical discussion. With great spiritual insight and experiential knowledge, she was able to answer Allama Prabhu’s intricate questions. At the end of the discussion, she won accolades from many eminent saranas. Allama Prabhu bestowed on her the title of ‘Akka’, meaning elder sister, acknowledging her sagacity and rare spiritual excellence. Allama Prabhu says in his tribute:

I say Hail, O hail! To the holy feet,
Of Mahadeviyakka, who
Her inner light become her outer whole,
Abides inseparably
In Guhesvaralinga.

Akka Mahadevi walked the path of Divine Love, true to herself, undaunted, and invincible in spirit. Endowed with a rare combination of bhakti, jnana and vairagya, she traversed the spiritual landscape at a tender age to reach the pinnacle of spiritual attainment. Her vacanas bear the stamp of her originality and genius. While they excel in poetic sensibility and lucidity of language, they also display a rarefied understanding of complex ideas. They are an ideal amalgam of bhakti and jnana, of passionate longing and deep mystical insight. In the form of her vacanas she has left behind a rich literary and spiritual legacy.

Like a moth attracted to fire loses its identity in the fire, she lost herself in the fire of love for Chennamallikarjuna. But the celebration of her spiritual glory continues; it inspires and encourages the lovers of God to take the road to eternity.

After spending days in communion with the saranas, Akka Mahadevi left for her final destination – Srisaila. Once again travelling a long distance, facing many adversities, she reached the plantain grove ‘Kadali Vana’. This was the last stop of her spiritual journey. It is believed that here she attained final union with her divine consort Chennamallikarjuna. She says:

I won’t call it Linga
Nor union with Linga.
I won’t call it communion.
Nor consubstantial union.
I won’t say “I can do”.
I won’t say ‘You’, nor ‘I’
After having attained union with Linga,
I won’t say anything,
O Chennamallikarjuna!

The English translation of the vacanas are selections from Yaravintelimath, Ramanujan, and Chaitanya.

(Concluded.)
Shakti: Sri Ramakrishna’s Contribution to Vedantic Thought

WILLIAM PAGE

Sri Ramakrishna: Life and Teachings, a masterful treatise by Srimat Swami Tapasyananda Ji, one of the former Vice-presidents of the Ramakrishna Order, was recently updated from its original July 1983 edition and republished in August 2018. Subtitled An Interpretative Study, it makes the point that Sri Ramakrishna’s interpretation of Vedanta differs significantly from the classical Advaita Vedanta of Adi Shankaracharya. Shankaracharya’s Vedanta was the Vedanta of Sri Ramakrishna’s guru, Tota Puri. In this school of thought, Swami Tapasyananda Ji writes, “There was not much room for a Personal God or the Divine Mother, who had hitherto been a part and parcel of Sri Ramakrishna’s life.” (p. 86) We all know the story of how Sri Ramakrishna attained nirvikalpa samadhi under Tota Puri’s guidance. Later Tota, struck down by dysentery, tried to drown himself in the Ganga, but found to his amazement that the river had become too shallow to allow it—a condition that is completely contrary to empirical reality and seems to have been a trick played on Tota by the Divine Mother.

“At this point,” the swami writes, “a new revelation came to the astonished mind of Tota. His conviction till then had been that Ultimate Reality is Pure Being. But he realised through a new revelation that It was Pure Will also. It is this Cosmic Will, the Power [Shakti] of Brahman, that Sri Ramakrishna knew as the Divine Mother and that Tota had denied so far. Now, from his incapacity to court even self-chosen death, he found that without the sanction of that Divine Will, the Reality of realities, not even a leaf can move in this world. ... By the Master’s grace, his knowledge was completed when he thus came to understand that Brahman is Personal-Impersonal or Being-Will.” (p. 90)

Swami Tapasyananda Ji’s point is that “the Ultimate Reality is Being-Will and not mere Being, as maintained in the classical Vedanta.” (p. 95) Reverting to traditional Sanskrit terminology, we can translate this to mean that Ultimate Reality is not Brahman alone, as held by the Shankaracharya school, but Brahman combined with Shakti, which manifests itself as the Divine Mother. This idea is a central point in what might be called the Ramakrishna Vedanta, the Vedanta taught by Sri Ramakrishna. From it we can conclude that Sri Ramakrishna enhanced the classical Vedanta by infusing into it the concept of Shakti.

Critics may object, “This turns non-dualism into dualism. Now we have not one Reality, Brahman, but two: Brahman and Shakti.” Swami Tapasyananda Ji refutes this by saying, “The Personal and the Impersonal are recognised as the obverse and the reverse of (Continued on page 53...)
A Day in the Life of Sri Ramakrishna: Miracle of Golap-Ma

SWAMI CHIDEKANANDA
(Continued from previous issue . . .)

In the previous article we saw Sri Ramakrishna engage in a long conversation with the Bose brothers, and then leave for Golap-ma’s house. His memorable visit to this humble devotee’s house is presented here.

Golap-ma had been busy the whole day making arrangements to receive Sri Ramakrishna. He had promised to visit her home from Basu Bati, the residence of the Bose brothers. She was a Brahmin widow and lived with her widowed sister and her brothers with their families. In her restless anticipation, she came out every few minutes to see if Sri Ramakrishna was coming. Because of the delay in his coming, she feared that he might not come at all. Unable to bear the thought, she went to check at Basu Bati which was just 260 meters away from her house.

Who was Golap-ma?

Golap Sundari Devi, known as Golap-ma was born into a brahmin family of North Calcutta, probably in the late 1840s. Her parents had given her in marriage to a poor Brahmin who unfortunately died after a few years, leaving her with two small children – a son and a daughter. When her son was still very young, he also died. Then her daughter Chandi became the anchor of her life. Chandi was a charming, well-mannered girl. When she grew up, despite being poor, Golap-ma was able to arrange her marriage to Sourindra Mohan Tagore (1840-1914)¹ a wealthy landlord of Pathuriaghata, Calcutta. Sourindra was also a well-known Bengali musicologist and had founded the Bengali School of Music and the Bengali Academy of Music.

Golap-ma’s heart would swell with pride whenever her daughter visited her humble two-storied home escorted by security guards. But fate had another cruel blow in store for her. Chandi died in June 1885, creating a tremendous void in her mother’s life. Golap-ma was terribly grief-stricken.
It was only around six weeks after this tragedy that she was eagerly waiting to receive Sri Ramakrishna into her home and heart.

Unlike ordinary souls who are enveloped by the five stages of grief, Golap-ma was eager to free herself from her intense suffering. The Lord’s grace intervened in the form of her neighbor Yogin-ma. Eager to assuage the pain of Golap-ma, one day in 1885 Yogin-ma took her to Sri Ramakrishna.

**How did Sri Ramakrishna assuage Golap-ma’s grief?**

Sri Ramakrishna gave Golap-ma’s intense grief a God-ward turn and transformed it into vyakulata or intense yearning for the Lord. In her first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, on June 13, 1885, at Ram Datta’s house, as soon as Golap-ma entered the room, without addressing her directly, Sri Ramakrishna said,

“A man came here the other day. He sat a few minutes and then said, ‘Let me go and see the moonface of my child.’ I couldn’t control myself and said, ‘So you prefer your son’s “moon-face” to God’s “moon-face”! Get out, you fool!’ The truth is that God alone is real and all else is unreal.”

Here Sri Ramakrishna is hinting that spiritual aspirants should give their minds a God-ward turn or ‘Mor firiye dao’ as he would put it in Bengali. Though Golap-ma felt solace in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, nonetheless, grief still scorched her heart when she returned home. Almost every day, she would run like a madwoman from her home to Dakshineswar (9.4 kilometers) to see Sri Ramakrishna in the hope of getting some relief from her pain.

After Golap-ma had unburdened her heart to Sri Ramakrishna by narrating the sad story of her life, he said in an ecstatic mood: “You are fortunate. God helps those who have no one to call their own.” Golap-ma later said: “When I first went to the Master I was tormented with grief for my daughter, Chandi. Yogan took me to him. He touched my head and removed all grief from my heart. It was amazing. In a moment my mind became calm and serene. I immediately laughed like a jnani. I felt that I had come to this world to act in a play. Who is whose mother and who is whose daughter? In my childhood I had played with cloth dolls, and after that I played with flesh-and-blood dolls. This world is nothing but a play with dolls, so why should I cry for my daughter? It is a glorious thing to cry for God. Such was the power of the Master!”

Sri Ramakrishna also kept an eye on her practical needs. He sent her to Holy Mother with the instruction: “You should feed this brahmin girl well. Sorrow is assuaged when the stomach is full.”

Against this backdrop of grief and longing, Golap-ma had spent the entire afternoon anxiously awaiting Sri Ramakrishna’s arrival. When she ran to Basu Bati, she found out there that Sri Ramakrishna had already left. Then where could he have gone?
In the meanwhile, in her absence Sri Ramakrishna had arrived at her house. Entering the old brick house, he passed the cow-shed on his left, which no longer exists. He and the devotees went to the roof and sat there. Some people were standing in rows while some were seated. They were all eager to have a glimpse of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna was seated on a carpet. Mahendranath Gupta [referred to as M.], Narayan, Yogin, Devendra, and others were seated on a mat. A few minutes later the younger Naren and some other devotees arrived. The brahmani’s [wife of a Brahmin] sister came to Sri Ramakrishna, saluted him, and informed that her sister had gone to Nanda Bose’s house to know why Sri Ramakrishna had been delayed. A sound was heard downstairs and she exclaimed, ‘There she comes!’ She went down. But it was not the brahmani.

Sri Ramakrishna sat there smiling, surrounded by devotees.

M. (to Devendra): “What a grand sight! All these people — young and old, men and women — standing in lines, eager to have a glimpse of him and hear his words.” Devendra (to the Master): “M., says that this place is better than Nanda’s. The devotion of these people is amazing.”

Sri Ramakrishna laughed.

Here, M., points out the sharp contrast between Basu Bati and Golap-Ma’s house. Basu Bati was a luxurious palace with holy pictures, yet the atmosphere of sincere devotion was not present—but here the spiritual devotion of simple people gathered at Golap-ma’s humble house was palpable. It reminds us of the famous saying in the Bible, “Blessed are the poor in heart, for they shall see God.”

The brahmani’s sister exclaimed, “Here comes sister!”

Golap-ma came and saluted the Master. She was beside herself with joy. She did not know what to say. In a half-choked voice she said: “This joy is too much for me. Perhaps I shall die of it. Tell me, friends, how shall I be able to live? I did not feel such a thrill even when Chandi, my daughter, used to visit the house accompanied by liveried footmen, with armed guards lining both sides of the street. Oh! Now I have no trace of my grief at her death. I was afraid he [meaning Sri Ramakrishna] would not come. Then I thought that, if that happened, I should throw into the Ganges all the things I had arranged for his reception and entertainment. I should not speak to him any more. If he visited a place, I should go there, look at him from a distance, and then come away.”

“Let me go and tell everybody how happy I am. Let me go and tell Yogin of my good luck.”

Still overwhelmed with joy, she exclaimed, “A labourer won a hundred thousand rupees in
a lottery. The moment he heard the news he died of joy. Yes, he really and truly died. I am afraid the same thing is going to happen to me. Please bless me, friends, or else I shall certainly die.”

Here we see the great miracle of Sri Ramakrishna. Just a few weeks ago, she had been plunged into an abyss of despair when her daughter passed away. But now, she no longer had any trace of that grief, and her happiness at seeing Sri Ramakrishna had exceeded all bounds.

Sri Ramakrishna described to M., the different stages of bhakti: “How can a devotee attain such love? First, the company of holy men. That awakens shraddha, faith in God. Then comes nishtha, singled-minded devotion to the Ideal... He performs only acts that please God. After nishtha comes bhakti, devotion to God; then comes bhava. Next, mahabhava, then prema, and last of all the attainment of God Himself.”

In this visit, Golap-ma attained the Lord himself in Sri Ramakrishna, the final stage of bhakti, or parabhakti.

M., was amazed to see the brahmani’s sincere joy and her ecstatic mood. He was about to take the dust of her feet. “What are you doing?” she exclaimed, and saluted M.

Golap-ma was extremely happy at the sight of the devotees. She said: “I am so happy to see you all here. I have brought the younger Naren; without him, who would there be to make us laugh?”

She was talking like this when her sister came up and said: “Come down, sister! How can I manage things if you stay here? Can I do it all by myself?” But the brahmani was overwhelmed with joy. She could not take her eyes off the Master and the devotees.

**Comparison with Martha and Mary**

Later that night, referring to this condition of the two widowed sisters, M., told Sri Ramakrishna that a similar incident had taken place when Jesus Christ visited the house of his devotees – the two sisters Martha and Mary. At the sight of Jesus, Mary was filled with ecstatic happiness. Left alone to arrange the food to entertain Jesus, Martha complained to Jesus: “Lord, please judge for Yourself—how wrong my sister is! She is sitting in your room and I am doing all these things by myself.” Jesus said: “Your sister indeed is blessed. She has developed the only thing needful in human life: love of God.” When vyakulata or divine restlessness for God intensifies, it transforms into divine love or parabhakti. In this condition, the devotee forgets his duties, like serving the Lord as seen with Golap-ma and Mary. Through Golap-ma’s case, Sri Ramakrishna showed how grief can be turned into ecstatic love for God.

After a while, Golap-ma very respectfully took Sri Ramakrishna to a room inside the house and offered him sweets and other refreshments. The devotees were entertained on the roof.
It was about eight o'clock in the evening. Sri Ramakrishna was ready to leave. A man showed the way with a light. In places it was dark. Sri Ramakrishna stood in front of the cow-shed. M., saluted him here and the devotees gathered around him. From here, they would walk to Yogin-ma’s house.

(To be continued...)

References

1) In music, Shurindra Mohan Tagore (d. 1914) made a comparative study of Eastern and Western music and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Music by Philadelphia University in 1875. He also earned another Ph.D. at Oxford University in 1896. He founded the Banga Sangit Vidyalaya in 1871 and the Bengal Academy of Music in 1881. Shourindra Mohan was honoured by the Shah of Iran with the title of Nawab Shahzada, and the British government made him a Knight Bachelor of the United Kingdom.

2) According to the Ross-Kubler Model, the five stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance https://www.psycom.net/depression.central.grief.html.

3) The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna [hereafter Gospel], p. 787

4) They Lived with God (2016), p. 377

5) Ibid, p. 379

6) Beatitude 6. The Beatitudes are eight blessings recounted by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. [Matthew 5: 8]

7) Gospel, p. 503


9) Gospel, p. 825

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the same coin.” (p. 98) Does the admission that every coin has two sides constitute dualism? No: there’s still just one coin.

To reinforce this point, Sri Ramakrishna offers an analogy. He compares Brahman and Shakti to fire and its burning power. These are not separate entities, but for purposes of discussion we give them different names. Fire may be considered an entity; its burning power is one of its aspects; and they are inseparable. Sri Ramakrishna also gives us the analogy of a snake at rest and in motion. It’s the same snake, but in different states.

Sri Ramakrishna’s interpretation solves a problem in the classical Vedanta. Brahman in its pure nirguna state is completely inactive. It doesn’t do anything. As such, it has little meaning for human beings. When we introduce the idea of Brahman in its saguna state, we get the possibility of meaningful activity; but we also get the question, “What caused Brahman nirguna to develop a saguna aspect?” Sri Ramakrishna answers this question by introducing Shakti. Brahman is inactive, Shakti is active; Brahman is static, Shakti is kinetic; Brahman is inert, Shakti is dynamic. Brahman without Shakti is crippled, like a man with one leg. He can stand but can’t walk. Shakti gives him a second leg, which enables him to walk. By giving Brahman a dynamic aspect, Shakti makes it more meaningful for human beings.

Interpreting Swami Tapasyananda Ji’s thesis, we can conclude that Sri Ramakrishna contributed to Vedantic thought by injecting into it a strong dose of Shaktism. He added a personal aspect to what had hitherto been purely impersonal. Philosophically, he emphasised the oneness of Brahman with Shakti; geographically, he synthesised austere South Indian jnana with warm Bengali devotionalism; overall, he enriched classical Vedanta by giving it a focus for devotion. *

References: 1) Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. Chennai: Ramakrishna Math, Saying #50 2) Ibid., Saying #48
Headquarters

After nearly three months of lockdown due to Coronavirus pandemic, Belur Math campus was opened to devotees and visitors, with all safety measures in place, from 15 June. However, the Math was again closed from 2nd August.

News from Branch Centres

Sri Tathagata Roy, Governor of Meghalaya inaugurated the online learning portal of Shillong centre.

Smt. Padmaja, High Commissioner of India to Fiji, visited the Order’s Fiji ashrama on 22 June.

Four of the degree colleges run by the Order have secured good positions in the national ranking for 2020 announced by the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira (Saradapith) 7th rank; Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Centenary College (Rahara) 11th rank; Ramakrishna Mission Residential College (Narendrapur) 20th rank; Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya College of Arts and Science (Coimbatore) 65th rank.

Values Education and Youth Programmes

Delhi centre conducted 63 online value education workshops for 2834 government and private school teachers across India.

Coronavirus Relief Work

The Order provided cooked food, rice, flour, pulses, cooking oil, salt, sugar, milk, potatoes, onions, garments, sanitizers, soaps and detergent, vitamin tablets etc. to 1,28,642 families across India through 35 ashramas at Aalo, Guwahati, Silchar, Chapra, Muzaffarpur, Vadodara, Ranchi Morabadi, Ranchi Sanatorium, Mysuru, Pune, Imphal, Shillong, New Delhi, Khetri, Chengalpattu, Ootacamund, Agartala, Kanpur, Varanasi (Home of Service), Dehradun, Bagda, Bajepratappur (Bardhaman), Baranagar Math, Barisha, Belgharia, Chandipur, Cossipore, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Narendrapur, Sargachi, Sarisha, Sikra Kulingram, and Tamluk. New Delhi and Khetri centres distributed snacks/ORS/garments to 28,673 migrant workers. Coimbatore (Mission), Ranchi Morabadi and Asansol ashramas gave Homeopathy medicines to 1,02,994 persons. Bagerhat, Chandpur, Dinajpur, and Jessore ashrama centres in Bangladesh served 3433 families.

Cyclone Relief Work

The Order provided tarpaulins, ORS, candles, matchboxes, biscuit packets, cooked food, rice, flour, pulses, cooking oil, salt, sugar, milk powder, potatoes, onions, garments, sanitary napkins, facemasks, soaps, detergent etc. to 62,620 families in West Bengal affected by the cyclone Amphan through 21 ashramas at Baghbazar, Balaram Mandir, Bamunmura, Baranagar Mission, Barasat, Barisha, Belgharia, Contai, Gadadhara Ashrama, Kasundia, Kathamrita Bhavan, Manasadwip, Naora, Narendrapur, Rahara, Rajarhat Bishnupur, Saradapith, Sarisha, Sikra Kulingram, Swamiji’s Ancestral House and Taki. Manasadwip ashrama provided shelter to 1100 persons and gave housing material to 116 families.

Limbdi ashrama provided tarpaulins to 245 families in Limbdi, Gujarat affected by the cyclone Nisarga.
“If the poor cannot come to education, education must go to them.”

- SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

We at the Merino Group are committed to this direction and make it our mission to fulfill our social responsibility. With the SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ARUNODAY VIDYALAYA, at Hapur, we strive to ensure the all-round development of the children belonging to the weakest section of the society.
What is life but growth, i.e. expansion, i.e. love? Therefore all love is life, it is the only law of life; all selfishness is death, and this is true here or hereafter. It is life to do good, it is death not to do good to others.
— Swami Vivekananda