Cover Story

Swami Ramakrishnanananda:
His Contribution to the Philosophical Tradition of the Ramakrishna Order

page 11
सूधे मन सूधे बचन सूधी सब करतूति ।
तुलसी सूधी सकल बिधि रघुबर प्रेम प्रमूति ॥

The one with guileless mind, straight-forward speech, artless in all actions, and simple and unaffected in his ways, such a one, Tulasi says, will earn Rama’s love with ease.

—Goswami Tulasidas
CONTENTS

11 Cover Story

Swami Ramakrishnananda:
His Contribution to the Philosophical
Tradition of the Ramakrishna Order
Swami Swahananda

17 Reminiscences of
Sargachhi
Swami Suhitananda

49 Work and Worship:
The Varanasi Experience
Swami Brahmeshananda

AKK Mahadevi:
The Blazing Sun of Bhakti
Shibani Chakraverty Aich

FEATURES

8 Atmarpanastuti
9 Yugavani
10 Editorial
27 Vivekananda Way
31 Poorva
43 Book Reviews
52 Pariprasna
53 The Order on the March

19 The Art of Forming and
Reforming Habits
Swami Baneshananda

24 A Day in the Life of
Sri Ramakrishna
Swami Chidekananda

45 Saints of India

Shambhu Mallick
You Are My Ideal
Ruchira Mitra
Gitanjali Murari

34 When God Calls

25 Pocket Tales

Editor: Swami Mahamedhananda

Published by Swami Vimurtananda, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai - 600 004 and
Printed by B. Rajkumar, Chennai - 600 014 on behalf of Sri Ramakrishna Math Trust, Chennai - 600 004 and
Website: www.chennaimath.org   E-mail: vk@chennaimath.org   Ph: 6374213070
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 Brahavadocin. 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. Brahavadocin 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 hues one.  
Love, hate — good, bad — and all the dual throng,  
Know slame is slame careless or shielded, not free.  
For fetters, though of gold, are not less strong to bind;  
them off with them Sanyadin hold say one Tat Sat m

(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.

Notice: As postal service to Delhi and Mumbai is stopped due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the hard copy of The Vedanta Kesari July 2020 will not be available for subscribers in these cities. They can access the issue online or through Telegram Channel (see page 7).
To establish the magazine on firm financial footing please contribute ₹ 1,000/- & above to the Permanent Fund.

**Sponsor a Page**
Once a year, please sponsor one or more pages of the magazine. We need around 600 sponsors annually. **Sponsorship for one page in one issue: ₹ 1000/-**

**VK for Students**
To encourage noble conduct, we are offering a complimentary copy of VK to students (class 10-12) when they manifest honesty, selflessness, etc., in their daily school life. Teachers will every month choose a boy & a girl from their class to receive this Character Recognition gift. Please sponsor these gifts.

**Outreach Gift**
To spread the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda-Vedanta, please gift *The Vedanta Kesari* to academic/public libraries & influential personalities of your choice or those selected by us.

4 Gift Subscriptions for 1 year: Rs 600/-

**Patrons**
Become a Patron of *The Vedanta Kesari* & help us to meet the running cost by **contributing every month ₹ 5,000/- & above**

**Permanent Fund**
To establish the magazine on firm financial footing please **contribute ₹ 1,000/- & above** to the Permanent Fund.

---

**Appeal**
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
**PAYMENT DETAILS**

1. You can send subscription payment/donations either by Cheque/DD/DO or Bank Transfer or Online Payment.
2. Cheque/DD/DDO (through Speed Post) in favour of: ‘Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai’
   Postal Address: Sri Ramakrishna Math, # 31, Ramakrishna Math Road, Mylapore, Chennai 600 004.
3. Bank Transfer in India:
   Name of the Bank : United Bank of India
   Name of the Branch : R.K. Math Road, Chennai - 4
   Name of the Account : Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai
   S/B. Account Number : 1511010100001
   Bank Code No. : 600027009
   IFSC : UTBI0SRM842 {here ‘0’ is zero}
   Swift Code : UTBINBBMBS of UBI
4. Donate Online: https://donations.chennaimath.org
5. After any donation please e-mail transaction details to : vk@chennaimath.org
   a) In the e-mail / covering letter please mention purpose of payment: VK Subscription / VK Patron / VK Permanent Fund / VK Sponsor a Page / VK Outreach Gift / VK Sponsor a Page / VK Outreach Gift / VK Sponsor a Page / VK Outreach Gift / VK Sponsor a Page / VK Outreach Gift / VK Sponsor a Page / VK Outreach Gift / VK Sponsor a Page / VK Outreach Gift.
   b) Kindly mention your postal address and contact number.
   c) Please give your PAN Number for donations ₹10,000 and above.
   d) All donations are exempt from Income Tax under section 80G of the [Indian] I.T.Act, 1961.

---

**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.

---

**SUBSCRIPTION DETAILS**

Rates Inclusive of Postage &

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Annual</th>
<th>3 yrs</th>
<th>5 yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>₹ 175</td>
<td>₹ 500</td>
<td>₹ 900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>₹ 1200</td>
<td>₹ 3500</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>₹ 1200</td>
<td>₹ 3500</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>₹ 1200</td>
<td>₹ 3500</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Countries</td>
<td>₹ 2700</td>
<td>₹ 8000</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 5 yrs subscription only in India.

---

**PATRONS**

- Pragati Offset, Hyderabad ₹ 25000
- Dr. Subramaniyabharaithy R., ₹ 10000
- A Devotee, New York, USA ₹ 7462

**PERMANENT FUND DONORS**

- Alejandro Gutierrez, ₹ 26117
  Argentina
- Sri Talwar M N, Uttar Karnataka ₹ 5000
- Bharathi Seshadri, USA ₹ 3759
- A Devotee, Mumbai ₹ 2500
- Sri Jayamala Nagesh, Bengaluru ₹ 2000
- A Devotee, Bengaluru ₹ 1000

---

**REACHING 1778 LIBRARIES....**

Contact details for
Contributors: vk@chennaimath.org
Mob. 6374213070
Subscribers: magazine@chennaimath.org
Phone No. (044) 24621110

- You can subscribe to *The Vedanta Kesari* from any month.
- On your address slip, the number on the left of the first line is your subscription number. Always mention this in your correspondence.
- If you do not receive your copy by the 15th of a month, please intimate us. Complaints reaching us before this or after one month (two months for overseas subscriptions) of posting of the journal are not entertained.
- Only one complaint copy will be sent in a year.
- Subscribers facing irregular postal delivery can choose Registered Parcel by paying additional ₹36/- per issue or opt for digital copy (pdf).
Sloka - 20

I have to submit before You the well established fact that I am Your servant, O Shiva! You also know that I am despairing without any means of escape. There is nothing else that I have to submit before You, O Lord. Out of compassion kindly accept the surrender of this miserable one.

Sloka - 21

O Lord, even Brahma, Vishnu and other gods have to wait long before propitiating You, seeking an opportunity to pray for the fulfilment of their desires. I, who am only like a worm, pray for quick refuge in You, only because of my faith in Your compassion, O Lord of the universe.

Sloka - 22

O Lord, seeing that the paths of karma and jnana are difficult, and being unable to control my mind which is inclined towards sin, suffering in the great bottomless pit that is samsara, O Lord Shiva, I am now free from fear, having surrendered myself into Your supporting hands.
After my vision of the Divine Mother, I prayed to Her, taking a flower in my hands: ‘Mother, here is Thy knowledge and here is Thy ignorance. Take them both, and give me only pure love. Here is Thy holiness and here is Thy unholiness. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy good and here is Thy evil. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love. Here is Thy righteousness, and here is Thy unrighteousness. Take them both, Mother, and give me pure love.’ I mentioned all these, but I could not say: ‘Mother, here is Thy truth and here is Thy falsehood. Take them both.’ I gave up everything at Her feet but could not bring myself to give up truth.

It is said that truthfulness alone constitutes the spiritual discipline of the Kaliyuga. If a man clings tenaciously to truth he ultimately realizes God. Without this regard for truth, one gradually loses everything. If by chance I say that I will go to the pine-grove, I must go there even if there is no further need of it, lest I lose my attachment to truth. Once I went to Ram’s house in Calcutta. I happened to say, ‘I shall not take any luchi.’ When I sat down for the meal I felt hungry. But I had said I would not eat the luchi; so I had to fill my stomach with sweets. (All laugh.)

One who has devotion to truthfulness, realizes the God of truth. Mother prevents his words from turning untrue.

Even those engaged in worldly activities, such as office work or business, should hold to the truth. Truthfulness alone is the spiritual discipline in the Kaliyuga.

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

Truthfulness in speech is the tapasya of the Kaliyuga. It is difficult to practise other austerities in this cycle. By adhering to truth one attains God. Tulsidas said: “Truthfulness, obedience to God, and the regarding of others’ wives as one’s mother, are the greatest virtues. If one does not realize God by practising them, then Tulsi is a liar”

The Marwari devotees generally brought offerings of fruit, candy, and other sweets for the Master. But Sri Ramakrishna could hardly eat them. He would say: “They earn their money by falsehood. I can’t eat their offerings.” He said to the Marwaris: “You see, one can’t strictly adhere to truth in business. There are ups and downs in business. Nanak once said, ‘I was about to eat the food of unholy people, when I found it stained with blood.’ A man should offer only pure things to holy men. He shouldn’t give them food earned by dishonest means. God is realized by following the path of truth.”

—Sri Ramakrishna
In a sense the Covid-19 pandemic is doing us some good. As the virus infections and deaths come closer and touch their friends and family circles, even minds soaked in mundane life are tending to reflect and ask – If life is so uncertain, and if a tiny virus can upset or erase in a moment all our plans and labours, then what is the meaning of life? If they hold on to this question, they will arrive at other fundamental Vedantic questions like: Who am I? Where have I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going? What is my relationship with people around me? What is our collective relationship with the universe? And in seeking answers to these questions they will discover the true purpose of human life.

What indeed is the purpose of man’s existence? We find an answer in Swami Vivekananda’s life mission statement where he says, “My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few words and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.” In other words, there are two purposes to our life, corresponding to the two dimensions of life – inner and outer. The first is the inner life purpose which is to discover our divine identity as the Atman; and the second is the outer life purpose which is to discover the same divinity in the manifest world and serve it.

To achieve these twin life purposes, Swami Vivekananda gave us two tools: renunciation and service. In an interview to Prabuddha Bharata, he declared, “The national ideals of India are renunciation and service. Intensify her in those channels, and the rest will take care of itself.”

Renunciation is the tool to realise the inner life purpose. To renounce means to restrain the outgoing tendencies of the senses and the mind and rise above our identification with them. It is to also sublimate our unripe ego into a ripened ego – an ego which perfectly reflects Pure Consciousness, or which functions as the child or servant of God.

Service is the tool to realise our outer life purpose. To serve is to perform our everyday work as a worshipful service of the Virat. It is to also fulfill the needs of the poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the hungry, the sick, and the afflicted, seeing them as tangible manifestations of God.

Swami Vivekananda encapsulated these twin life purposes in the motto of the Ramakrishna Order: आत्मनो मोक्षार्थ जगद्वितियाँ च, which means ‘For one’s own salvation and the welfare of the world.’ This is the ideal that every sannyasi and devotee of the Ramakrishna Order strives to attain.

The current pandemic conditions are expected to continue for some more months. This is a time when serious spiritual aspirants should struggle to realise their inner and outer life purposes, and stand as beacons of hope for the society at large. Making an unusual proposition Swami Vivekananda says, “If one millionth part of the men and women who live in this world simply sit down and for a few minutes say, “You are all God, O ye men and O ye animals and living beings, you are all the manifestations of the one living Deity!” the whole world will be changed in half an hour.”

Without succumbing to the pandemic hysteria let us, even while taking all necessary precautions and efforts to defeat this virus, assert our divinity and remind others of their divinity.
A sultry day of June in Madras, a sannyasi had just laid down for rest. He, however, felt very uneasy because of excessive heat. He became quite restless, and then all on a sudden he got up and entered the shrine quietly, thinking that the heat was unbearable also to his Lord. So, he began to fan the portrait of his Master and then flowed a stream of soft, moving words from his lips: “My Master! O the beloved of my heart! O my Master, O the beloved of my heart!”

Thus he went on for two hours. As he fanned and hummed these endearing words he forgot all about his surroundings, all about his existence and all about the burning heat, only the living presence of the Master was real to him.

One evening a group of devotees came to the Math to meet him. They understood that he was in the shrine and waited for him. Presently they heard him railing out in loud and angry tones: “You have brought me here, old man, and left me helpless! Are you testing my powers of patience and endurance? I will not go and beg hereafter for my sake or even for yours. If anything comes unasked, I will offer it to you and share the prasada. Or I will bring sea-
sand for offering to you and I shall live upon that."

The devotees, who were waiting outside the shrine, did not quite follow his words. They guessed that he was quarrelling with somebody. But, in fact, he was in a distressed mood unburdening himself to his Master.

Once he took hot milk into the shrine for offering. While testing the warmth of the milk by dipping his finger into it, he happened to burn and blister the finger. He then placed the milk before the portrait and said in a complaining tone, "You want to drink warm milk, and my finger is burnt!"

Such was Swami Ramakrishnananda, a direct disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. The few incidents cited above will amply show how surcharged he was with the feeling of the living presence of the Master. Whoever had seen the Swami performing the worship in the shrine was deeply impressed by his ecstatic devotion. The love for ceremonial worship was in his blood. His father was an expert in this art. His guru had his realisations through it. In fact, he believed that deities actually dwell in the temples and they talk to the devotees too. Once when a devotee was going to take leave after a long conversation, the Swami said, 'Wait, Guru Maharaj is taking tiffin. I shall give you a little prasada.' Though the gentleman did not quite comprehend this attitude, he was sure that the Swami was perfectly sincere. He himself once observed that the eyes and mind of a real devotee got peculiarly transformed and if others had not such eyes and mind it was not the fault of the devotee.

In the Mould

His first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna made a tremendous impression on his mind and his life took a new turn. He began to practice spiritual disciplines with great earnestness. When Sri Ramakrishna fell seriously ill, Shashi gave up his studies to serve him heart and soul. Imperceptibly he was being trained also by the Master who was fully aware of the spiritual potentiality of this young man.

One day when the young Shashi was going out of his room on some urgent business, the Master interrupted him and said pointing his finger to himself, "You see, He whom you seek is this, He is this." That gave him the clue to his life's ideal and with this he solved all his problems and the problems of others. "The guru's work is to give the right direction," said he in later life. His guru also gave him by that one sentence the key to all understanding. The purpose of his life was found, the goal fixed and what remained was only practical testing and demonstration of this truth in life.

A Saga of Service

After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Shashi Maharaj kept a vigil over his relics. He did it with great attention and one-pointed love, observing meticulously all the minute details of service which he was rendering even when the Master was in flesh and blood.

Thus he continued for twelve long years serving the Master in the shrine and looking after the needs of the inmates of the Baranagar and Alambazar Maths [The two places where the Ramakrishna Order was located before shifting to its own premises in Belur]. Love of service was ingrained in him. As a boy he was very dutiful and serviceable to his parents. And even in later life he felt that he could not render enough service to them, for a higher call had come. Though he was very scrupulous regarding the rules of the monastic life, he did not hesitate to take to teaching in a school at Baranagar to maintain the Math and thus serve the Master and brother-monks. This spirit of service was manifest even in his dealings with the people
who came to visit the Math. He was so much imbued with the spirit of service that he preferred to do all the works of the Master with his own hands though his assistants were always eager to help him. He laid down his life working rather too hard for the cause of the Master. He spent the major part of his stay in Madras in an outhouse undergoing many physical inconveniences as well as financial uncertainty. He used to take a good number of classes every week in different parts of the city, over and above private interviews and conversations. He went out for preaching the message of the Master to many distant places including Bombay (Mumbai), Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Burma. He had to go to almost all the parts of South India. Through his inspiration and supervision, the activities in the states of Mysore and Kerala were started. He invited Swami Brahmananda [another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and the first President of Ramakrishna Order] and the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi to Madras and spared no pains to make their stay comfortable. With them he went down to Rameshwaram and other holy places to look to their needs. However, he never went out on any other pilgrimage. Thus he worked for fourteen long years in Madras. As a result, his robust health broke down. This is the price a pioneer pays for his uphill task. His work was unostentatious and potent, and it is flowering now. The seed that he sowed has grown into a mighty tree. The present success is really due to his self-immolation. Even as the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church, so is the self-immolation of Swami Ramakrishnananda for the growth of the Order. Rightly has his life been described as a saga of service.

Personal and Impersonal

As a result of his wonderful constancy of devotion, the ritualistic worship of the Master became established in the Order. He was thus the originator of the ritualistic aspect which is the concrete form of the spirit for which the Ramakrishna Brotherhood stands. Swami Premananda, who himself especially represented the devotional and ritualistic aspect of this Movement, said appreciatively of the Swami, “In fact, he and none of us is the founder of the Math and its shrine. I can proclaim emphatically that he is the creator of all this.” He evolved a detailed system of worship of the Master, culling appropriate mantras from the ancient scriptures. It was he who gave a shape to the vows of Brahmacharya initiation that the young novitiates of the Order are given.

Every great spiritual movement has two sets of interdependent teachings. One represents the aspect of ritual which is centred round a personality and the other represents the aspect of philosophy centred round the principles. The gospel of detached action and love and worship of Sri Krishna, the Four Noble Truths and the God-hood of Gautama Buddha, the Sermon on the Mount and the sonship of Jesus Christ and the teachings about the Unity of God and the Prophethood of Mohammad represent these two aspects. There is an organic relation between the two. Mere worship of a personality without the idea of the impersonal at the background makes the devotee sentimental or fanatical; mere philosophical principles without a scope for concrete expression degenerate into feeble intellectualism and vapid cosmopolitanism.

Mere worship of a personality without the idea of the impersonal at the background makes the devotee sentimental or fanatical; mere philosophical principles without a scope for concrete expression degenerate into feeble intellectualism and vapid cosmopolitanism.
Though Swami Ramakrishnananda represents both the aspects, his especial contribution consists in holding a concrete ideal before the members and devotees of the Order who require a way of life, a programme for practical spirituality, that will help them to imbibe the impersonal ideas the Master embodied in his life. By trying to relate all their activities to the Master they will gradually be able to forget their selfish ends and remember constantly the Master for whom they work. "As the devotee empties himself of himself, he is infilled with God," said the Swami. "Thus there will be a complete shifting of the centre of gravity of their life," as Sister Nivedita puts it, "from their little self to the Higher Self." That is the goal of all religions, of all spiritual disciplines. When a devotee engages himself in the work and worship of the Master throughout the day, he will slowly be full of him and gradually it will dawn on him that the Master in human form is the manifestation of the Divine, an incarnation of God. The worship and contemplation of Sri Ramakrishna, the person, will lead them to understand and appreciate Sri Ramakrishna, the Principle.

**Commissioned**

Swami Ramakrishnananda had a mission in life. When we study his life and his contributions to the Order, it seems to us that his special mission consisted in his holding Sri Ramakrishna before others as an incarnation of God who was a living presence and whose life and personality have opened a new way of salvation.

Swami Vivekananda viewed the Ramakrishna Ideal as the integration of the various methods of God-realisation. The modern age being a complex one, the human character should be the perfect efflorescence of the total man which can face the terrific challenges of the times. Differences in various walks of life arise because of various approaches to problems. Hence, to be able to live in peace and harmony in this contracted world of today, modern man must develop a wider outlook and a richer personality. Likewise, man’s approach to the ultimate problems of life—his approach to God or the Absolute—has also to undergo a necessary orientation. In the traditional way, a particular method was followed: the intellectual would realise through

*As the devotee empties himself of himself, he is infilled with God*
discrimination; the emotional through devotion; the mystic through meditation; and the active through work. Though the practice of all the four is the ideal, a spiritual aspirant can realise the ultimate goal through any of these methods. Moreover, Swamiji showed that they were interrelated as the very nature of man is the combination of these psychological aptitudes. But his most predominant contribution in this field is the gospel of service, of viewing man as God, which is rooted in his and in the Master’s Advaitic realisation of the Divine in all creatures.

The combination of the traditional method of worship emphasized by Swami Ramakrishnananda and the dynamic way of viewing God in man promulgated by Swami Vivekananda is very significant. By this, work and worship, traditionalism and dynamism, personal and impersonal, finite and infinite, human and divine, cult and culture are all perfectly harmonised and blended into a complete ideal that can be emulated with profit by men of different temperaments and endowments.

Swami Ramakrishnananda went out to various places for spreading the message of the Master and it was he who actually founded, organised and infused life and blood into the Ramakrishna Movement in South India. At once an ideal monk, an ecstatic devotee and an astute scholar, the Swami left profound and abiding impressions wherever he went to preach the gospel of the Master. Calm and quiet, austere in habits and grave in appearance, Swami Ramakrishnananda presented in himself a beautiful contrast to the Cyclonic Monk, Swami Vivekananda.

While Swamiji commanded, Shashi Maharaj appealed to reason and heart. Swamiji was a great leader who created a vast upheaval in the whole society, Shashi Maharaj had comparatively a limited field. This was, as it were, a division of labour. Both upheaval and settling down, stirring of emotion and the judicial channelling of it, generating enthusiasm and the sustaining of it, organizing of a movement and the consolidation of it, were essential. And Swami Vivekananda had attempted both. But he did not live long. So while it was the work of the short-lived leader to inspire and organise the enthusiasm of the whole society, it fell to the share of Shashi Maharaj to maintain, increase and direct that enthusiasm to the cherished goal. The formative influence that he exerted on a few individuals speaks volumes about the quality of the work Shashi Maharaj did. And this he did in the most natural way. He was ever full of Sri Ramakrishna and would always talk about him. To him the Master was an incarnation of the age who came in this sophisticated world as an unlettered man yet possessing the highest wisdom by which he changed the lives of many. In an age for which money is the measure of greatness, Sri Ramakrishna stood for non-possession. When individualism and egotism are the law, “he had no egotism at all. He could seldom utter the two words ‘I’ and ‘mine’. As his own ego was totally obliterated the cosmic ‘I’ of God took hold of him and manifested itself through him.” Thus he would speak of him in such inspiring terms and with so much devotion that people came to know of the Master. People were enamoured of, nay dazzled by, Swami Vivekananda for his dynamism, his great intellectual brilliance, his regal bearing, his leonine form, his patriotism and his love for the masses. So they had no time to know Sri Ramakrishna, the power behind this great personality. But Swami Ramakrishnananda was essentially a devotee. His voice would be choked to speak of the Master. Through him the people of the South came to know of Sri Ramakrishna and a few chosen people took him as their life’s ideal. He entered the lives of these devotees and changed them. It was they who
were his active assistants in working out the programme of work given by Swamiji.

**His Orthodoxy and Catholicity**

Swami Ramakrishnananda imbibed the spirit of harmony from his Master and so there was a wonderful blending of orthodoxy and catholicity in him. The orthodoxy of observing all ritualistic details in worship and of following all the rules about food and dress was in his very nature. So Swami Vivekananda, while selecting a suitable monk for the South which is famous for its orthodoxy and for its love of the ancient culture, chose Swami Ramakrishnananda. He told his Madras disciples, “I shall send you one who is more orthodox than your most orthodox men of the South and who is at the same time unique and unsurpassed in his worship and meditation on God.”

Swami Ramakrishnananda of course satisfied the orthodox people by observing all the accepted codes of orthodoxy. But his was not the usual type of orthodoxy. He was orthodox in a deeper sense. His Master was a veritable incarnation of catholicity and Swami Ramakrishnananda was orthodox in pursuance of this catholicity of the Master. Orthodoxy is often synonymous with bigotry, which denies unfamiliar aspects of the manifestation of the Divine. But Swami Ramakrishnananda was always devoted in acknowledging the totality of the manifestation of the Divinity and carried through the implications in the realities of life. He was equally respectful towards all faiths and all incarnations. His book *Sri Krishna the Pastoral and King-maker* shows his deep reverence to this great avatar. His reflections on the Koran show how deeply he entered into the spirit of this holy book. He wrote a classical life of Sri Ramanuja which records his great esteem for the Acharya. His love for Jesus was unique. He was so catholic that he would be seen now and then to kneel down before the altar in the Santhome Church. Incarnations to him were the embodiments of Eternal Religion “which never deteriorates; it is man that deteriorates. And the incarnations come to redeem humanity.” So we must show our veneration to all of them, and that was his orthodoxy of catholicity. That is why, when a speaker insinuated Sri Sankara in course of his talk, Swami Ramakrishnananda protested immediately.

Though he was very catholic in his attitude towards all faiths, he was no eclectic. An eclectic culls truths from various sources and makes it a bouquet. But as it is not rooted in the genius of a particular group, community or culture and as its new anthological scripture has no experiential validity, it cannot produce the desired result. It is good as a comparative study but it fails miserably as a faith with enduring vitality. The orthodoxy on the other hand has depth and intensity but it lacks width of vision and charity. Swami Ramakrishnananda’s catholicity was rooted in the synthesising and harmonising realisations of his Master. This synthetic attitude combines the ardour and intensity of the orthodox with the breadth and generosity of the eclectic. It affirms that all faiths are true and all teachers are great. It sees the unity running through the diverse manifestations. It does not believe in uniformity through standardisation. His catholicity was not rootless, it resulted from his realisation of the unity of existence. As it takes its stand on the realisation of the ultimate principle, it is not afraid of truth from whichever quarter it might come. And this spirit he imbibed because of his deep faith in his guru whom he viewed as the fulfilment of all incarnations.

As Sri Ramakrishna was unique as an incarnation, Swami Ramakrishnananda also was unique as a disciple of such an incarnation. *
6.12.60

**Question:** How is jnana yoga practiced?

**Maharaj:** If desire has to be rooted out from mind, you have to discriminate that you are not the body, nor the mind, nor the intellect. If you do not discriminate thus, then you will exhaust yourself in catering to the needs of body and mind. Warm clothing in winter, revenge for insult – such samskaras will appear automatically. But when you realise that you are beyond the body-mind complex, then you will not be disturbed by winter or summer, honour or insults.

But when you begin the practice of discrimination, you need to do a little selfless service to others; this will expand your individual self. Unless you empathise with the joys and sorrows of others, you will not be able to expand yourself. Engagement in work will put you in the company of people, and you will have to struggle against various pushes and pulls. Despite these disturbances, when you strive to maintain your mental peace, it will develop forbearance in body and mind.

However, to forbear doesn’t mean to become subservient. It is to remain alert about your ideal and to forbear only in those matters which, if you try to remedy them, will just befog your path. But if you do not desire liberation, you should never forbear in such matters. As you face various pushes and pulls, non-attachment will develop, and the thought will arise – *Atah kim, What now?* Remaining in this house, what efforts one makes to save it! But when it is seen that nothing is achieved by any effort, one should get out of this house, saying, ‘Let this devil’s house go!’ Only then is *mukti*, liberation, attained.

**Question:** Once the mind turns within, can we ignore the world?

**Maharaj:** Not at all! You will then bow down to everyone, knowing them to be forms of Narayana.

22.12.60

**Maharaj:** You have joined recently. Let me tell you some things. If you want to lead a monastic life, remember these points and try to follow them as much as you can. We lead a degraded life because of not practising spiritual disciplines. You have to strictly maintain the discipline of spiritual practices, and going to bed by 9 or 10 p.m. and waking up at 3 a.m. You definitely must work this out. Never try to gain
fame through your work; you will be undone. Maintain a low profile and do your work quietly. However, be careful not to neglect your work under the influence of tamoguna. It’s better to work until sattva guna is awakened. If you selflessly work for the welfare of others or work with the spirit of serving the country, it will greatly benefit the country, and you too will progress. This is the ideal life for a naisthik brahmachari, a lifelong celibate. We appreciate and welcome such a life. But the life of a sannyasi is different – he has to transcend this world of name and fame, happiness and sorrow. Many serve their own personal agenda in the name of serving others. This hampers their spiritual progress and also harms the Order; but it will benefit society to some extent. Conduct yourself in such a way that the idea of showmanship never arises in you. Without hurting others, somehow create an environment congenial for spiritual practices. Think before you talk.

Do you know what is meant by sushupti, the state of deep sleep? Understand this well. Earlier I used to think that it is a state in which we are covered by ignorance. But now I have understood that deep sleep keeps both the mind and the vital force active. In deep sleep the mind withdraws and merges in the intellect. In that state the mind has nothing else to observe. The intellect remains inactive, and I identify myself with it. In that state I am not covered by ignorance. I remain as I am; I illuminate the covering.

(A newcomer brahmachari talks too much. Someone commented: ‘He is not fit to be a sadhu.’)

Maharaj: He has joined the Order because he is not pure. With a little friendship, love, and guidance he will be all right. However, in a monastery, misconduct owing to money, women, and name and fame should not be tolerated. It is not proper for those who are ignorant of these matters to have joined the Order. There is no telling when they will slip into immoral conduct.

27.12.60

Maharaj: Spiritual aspirants belong to three categories: 1) those who cannot do without work, 2) those who can work but can also remain without work, 3) those who are not excited at the prospect of work.

1) आरुरुक्ोऽिरारूढः: (Gita 6:3) the sage who tries to attain to Yoga; 2) योगारूढः (Gita 6:3) one who has attained to yoga or whose mind is ready for meditation; and 3) one who through the practice of meditation has attained perfection.

Similarly, people in the world can be categorised into three types: 1) those who need to experience lust and gold; 2) those who can abstain from lust and gold, but are affected when they face them, and 3) men of knowledge who are not at all disturbed. One must be sincere in the path of spiritual practice. Hypocrisy will not yield results.

30.12.60

While taking a walk, Maharaj suddenly stopped at a certain place. He told the attendant: ‘Look! Look at the fencing! What a shabby work! Is it possible to lead a spiritual life by doing work so haphazardly?’

Spiritual life is an art. Everything in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna and his disciples was like a work of art.

There is a story in the Bhagavata. A king wanted to perform the Ashvamedha yajna, the horse sacrifice. A sage approached him and asked, “What will you gain if you perform the Ashvamedha yajna?” The king answered, “What? I will enjoy the bliss of heaven.” The sage replied, “O King, is there any difference between the bliss that boars and sows enjoy when they eat filth or copulate, and the bliss of heaven?”

(To be continued...
The Art of Forming and Reforming Habits

SWAMI BANESHANANDA

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.

Introduction

Some thinker has said that we do not live in this world for many days. We actually live ‘one day’ and repeat ‘the same day’ many times. Very true! From morning till evening, what we do is more or less nothing but following the same programme. We have programmed ourselves in such a convenient way that every day is the same day for us. In his famous book The Art of Loving, Prof Erich Fromm terms such a person ‘a nine to fiver’. In Sanskrit, these types of habits are called Nitya-karmas or daily duties or actions.

Of course, at the end of the week, may be from Friday evening, we try to do something different. We go outdoors, pitch our tents somewhere and enjoy life. We may think that this is a kind of change to or difference in our fixed routine. But again, it is the same change every week! Finally, there are occasions like the repetitive holidays on our yearly calendar — every year the same type of events and holidays repeat themselves. They are called naimittika karmas or occasional duties/activities. All of this instills in us a regular habit or a kind of programming. We may not just be mere ‘gene machines’ but also programmed gene machines.

Acknowledging this fact, Erich Fromm writes: ‘From birth to death, from Monday to Monday, from morning to evening — all activities are routinised, and prefabicated. How should a man caught up in this net of routine not forget that he is a man, a unique individual, one who is given only this one chance of living, with hopes and disappointments, with sorrow and fear, with the longing for love and the dread of the nothing and separateness?’

Our Habits Depend on Our Self-Worth

Actually, our habits reveal to us how much we value ourselves. They mercilessly expose how much self-respect we have. Logically, we should not expect others to value or respect us any more than this. If I can’t value myself, if I can’t respect myself, then how can I expect others to value or respect me? Alas, our habits are honest to the core, often brutally so!

I heard the following incident from one of the attendants of Swami Bhuteshananda, the 12th President of the Ramakrishna Order. At that time, Maharaj was around 94 years old.
About two years prior to that he had undergone a heart-bypass surgery. The breastbone had to be cut open and at that age one never knows how securely the bones will re-join. So the doctors advised him to take care of some minor things, like not getting up from his bed unaided, etc. The doctors also asked him to take an hour’s rest after lunch — between one and two o’clock in the afternoon. One day he got up fifteen minutes before two o’clock and asked his attendant Swami to help him to get out of bed. The attendant Swami said, ‘Maharaj, we have still fifteen minutes to go. According to the doctors’ advice, you need to take one-hour’s rest.’ Maharaj said, ‘No, I am awake now. I want to get up.’ The attendant Swami persisted saying, ‘No, you have to take rest.’ Maharaj said, ‘If you don’t help me, I’ll get up myself.’ Then the attendant Swami said, ‘Maharaj, just enjoy a bit of more rest and comfort’; in Bengali he said, ‘Aar ektu aaraam korun!’ Aaraam means enjoying comfort or rest. Revered Maharaj then replied to this with the Hindi proverb, ‘aaram haaraam hai!’ That means, allowing one’s time to be spent in enjoying ease and comfort is deceiving oneself, and is, therefore, forbidden. Just imagine! At his age he is reminding us that we should be up and doing work. Look at his sense of self-worth! We have our defects and our weaknesses. We have difficulties too. Still, we can and must value ourselves.

Sri Ramakrishna defined the human being as ‘maan hunsh to maanush’ in Bengali. That is, a person (maanush) who is constantly aware of his or her self-worth is maanush. In other words, he asked us to be aware of our infinite possibilities (maan) as spiritual beings and, at the same time, of our limitations (maan) as humans. Evolutionary Biology says that our species has been termed as Homo sapiens from the time we started asking questions about ourselves, like ‘Who am I?’

What Is Our Actual Self-Worth?

There is no denying the truth that we do value ourselves. We want to value ourselves, but we have not been taught or we have never learnt what our actual self-worth or value is. We do not know who we really are. That is the confusion. According to Vedanta, this confusion is due to a mixing up of the real and the unreal.

Vedanta has discovered that we have three layers or bodies encapsulating our being: the physical body (sthula sharira), interior to that — the mental sheath or subtle body (sukshma sharira), and the innermost — the causal body (kaarana sharira). When we identify ourselves with the physical body, we judge values according to the wants of the physical body. We value grosser things such as our physical comfort, physical enjoyment and physical happiness. When we identify ourselves with our mind, we lift our physical awareness to a level higher than the physical one and value literary discussions, ideas, ideals, etc. When we are able to value our spiritual being, we elevate ourselves to one level higher still. This is the foundation of our self-respect.

With amazing precision, the Taittiriya Upanishad extensively narrates such a phenomenon and says that there is a gradation of our awareness. Our understanding of ‘who we are’ is wrongly associated with ‘who we are not’! For example, in the second chapter of the
third part of the Upanishad we read that Bhrigu, the student, approached his father and guru, Varuna, and asked for instructions about Brahman. Throughout the story Varuna stressed one point in unequivocal terms: that food, vital force, eye, ear, mind and speech are not Brahman, but are aids to the knowledge of Brahman. The teacher defined what Brahman is, saying, ‘Crave to know well that from which all these beings take birth, that by which they move and that into which they merge. That is Brahman.’ Maybe it was for the first time in his life that Bhrigu heard this unambiguous definition of Brahman. The teacher asked him to practise concentration and contemplate on this definition. The later narration of how the disciple’s understanding grew deeper and deeper step-by-step is an astounding process for the psychologists to study. At each progressive step the disciple’s own mind advanced counter arguments, supported by his practical experiences, alluding to the existence of something beyond the food, vital force, etc. In the earlier part, one finds more of such counter arguments arising in the disciple’s mind. The initial arguments present the makeup of a child’s mind or the conviction of dyed-in-the-wool materialists – ‘the babies of the world’. For instance, the question is asked, ‘Who am I?’ The answer given is, ‘I am food, i.e., I am an apple, etc.’ The reason? Food fulfills almost all our needs. Without food no one can survive. And so on. This is certainly a wrong self-identification since the value of the ‘I’ is equated with ‘food’.

Again, according to Vedanta, a thorough analysis (differentiation) shows that these three layers (the physical, subtle and causal) are ultimately not real. Yet we have to achieve our goal in and through these levels, because, as the Upanishad says, these are sure and structured aids to achieving the ultimate goal. There is no other or better solution as to how to get out of these levels. When we identify ourselves with these levels, they become our goals. We forget the real goal. Unfortunately, habits are formed according to our identification with any one of these layers or levels, and the pursuit of happiness at and within that particular level makes us forget that there could be something higher and better than this!

Swami Vivekananda tries to logically ascertain it in this way: “Suppose a baby stands up among you when you are trying to demonstrate an astronomical theorem, and says, ‘Does it bring gingerbread?’ ‘No, it does not,’ you answer. ‘Then,’ says the baby, ‘it is useless.’ Babies judge the whole universe from their own standpoint, that of producing gingerbread, and so do the babies of the world. We must not judge of higher things from a low standpoint. Everything must be judged by its own standard and the infinite must be judged by the standard of infinity.”

Let me recall a story. There was a teacher who used to teach his students about how to detach oneself from the physical body and from this world in order to fix the mind on the ultimate goal of life, etc. But the students discovered that this teacher himself was attached to a dog. The students used to make fun of the teacher because they thought he was not true to his words. One day they asked him the teasing question, “Sir, what is the goal of life?” The teacher understood the jibe. He called the dog to his side and, pointing his finger to the moon, asked the dog, “Fetch the moon.” The dog looked up. The teacher asked the students, “Can you tell me where the dog is looking?” The students said, “Obviously he is looking at the moon.” The teacher laughed and said, “No. He is looking at my finger! The finger is the indicator or pointer and the thing which is indicated is difficult for the poor creature to appreciate.” He added, “It is for this reason that I love this dog; it reminds me of such a horrible contingency.”
Coming back to judging everything by its own standard, sadly, considering everything from the gingerbread viewpoint creates further problems. It keeps us far away from the real goal. And this brings, what may be called a very common ‘delusional confidence’ or belief, which is hard for the students of non-dual Vedanta to identify and keep away from. It is much harder for them to accept it and mend their ways as needed. I believe it is the same regrettable story in the case of many religious people. Actually, it is the great spoiler, the ego, which stands in our way. The ego is unwisely fed with very convincing theoretical interpretations of non-dual Vedanta or any spiritual truth for that matter. As a result, with even a small intellectual achievement the ego thinks that it has realised the Truth! At the same time, the spiritual practices that non-dual Vedanta prescribes appear to such people to be limited to intellectual understanding and many great theoretical scholars try to confidently and aggressively interpret it that way. However, Vedanta is very emphatic and clear about spiritual practices, especially the noble practices as part of preparation. These noble practices are: (i) Shravanam, i.e., hearing the great sentences (maha-vakyas) like, ‘Tat tvam asi’, – You are that Brahman, and then deliberating on their purported meaning that finally leads our understanding to the Reality that is non-dual. (ii) Mananam, i.e., contemplating on the meaning of the maha-vakyas and strengthening our conviction about the goal. And (iii) Nididhyasanam, i.e., meditating on the meaning of the maha-vakyas by eliminating contrary thoughts and introducing similar ones until finally the realisation of ‘the fact’, so to say, behind words, ‘the thing’ behind indicators, or the ‘thing-in-itself’, happens!

However, I desperately hope that I should be wrong, when I say that most of the votaries of religions get mislead, because, after reading and intellectually grasping the information which is nothing more than an indicator, they think that they have indeed realised the Truth!! They forget that the scriptures are nothing but pointers to the truth. This is one of the reasons why we say that the Vedas are sacrosanct; because they are in fact the only real pointers to the Truth. In reality, they untiringly try to direct our attention to something else, which is beyond the scriptures. That is why Sri Ramakrishna said that his experiences or realisations had transcended the limit of scriptures.

Since scriptures are the only true pointers to the goal, they are not the ultimate goal themselves. Many so-called scholars fail to separate the indicators from the real goal that the indicators point to. This delusion is why they are themselves misled, and also how they in turn mislead others with their confusion. Particularly for this reason, Sri Krishna warns the students of Vedanta saying, “The toil is harder for those whose minds are fixed on the Unmanifest.”

There is a yardstick to test if we have actually realised the Truth. This can be tested by those who should check if their own realisation is true. Others will also know if a particular person’s claim is genuine. It is seen that most of the people are much attached to the body. They do not give importance to anything if it is not in any way benefitting their own body, their things, their self, their ego etc.
At the same time they say that they have realised Brahman. That is a kind of self-deception. This happens because we mistake the ego for the Self. That is why the Kathopanishad says, “One who has desisted from bad conduct, whose senses are under control, whose mind is concentrated, whose mind is free from anxiety, has attained this Self through knowledge!”

Our Total Self-Worth

This state of Self knowledge is the highest. Before one reaches this state, there are preparatory stages. The lowest is where good and evil come into consideration. Vedanta teaches us how to differentiate between good and bad at the lowest level. Good and bad are nothing but our accumulated habits — good habits and bad habits. Someone has said that the total value or worth of a person is what remains when we deduct good habits from bad habits or bad habits from good habits. Fair enough! For that reason we need to differentiate or discern what is good and what is bad, what is permanent and what is impermanent, and finally, what is real and what is unreal.

Swami Vivekananda has said, “Habit is our second nature; it is first nature also. It is all there of nature. I repeat [something] two or three times; it becomes my nature.” Our first nature is what we are born with; what we have brought with us; the earlier stored-up impressions (samskaras) which have helped us to begin with this life — the hardware in us, so to speak. And the second nature is what we learn in this life, our software.

For example, throughout the process of evolution we have learnt one thing, how to be always afraid of the unknown. In this way we built up our defense mechanism or our survival mechanism. But that is a negative way of forming habits. ‘Fear’ is a negative habit. This may be the reason why many people are found to be uninterested when people are discussing good ideas and good things. But if we are talking ill of others, criticising someone rightly or wrongly, then many people are found to be interested!

In any case, if we want to change our state of affairs and states of being, we need to change our habits.

(To be continued. . .)

References

1) The Art of Loving. Erich Fromm. p. 17
2) Brahma-sutras-Bhashya Introduction by Shankara: satya-anrita-mithuni-karana
3) Taittiriya Upanishad. 3.i.1 ...
4) Taittiriya Upanishad. 2.i.1 ...: annam brahma iti vyajaanaat
5) The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. Vol. 3, Lectures and Discourses, Unity, the Goal of Religion
6) Kathopanishad. 2.1.11: manasa eva idam aaptavyam
7) Chandogya Upanishad. 6.8.7
8) Vedantasarah. 182: advitiya-vastuni taatparya-avadhaaranam
9) Vedantasarah. 192: vijaatiya .. pratyeaya-rahita
10) Prolegomena (32) by Immanuel Kant, Das Ding an sich.’
11) Brihadaranyaka Upanishad. 4.3.22: atra .. vedaaah avedaah [bhavanti], “in realization the scriptures cease to be needed any more.”
12) Gita. 12.5: klesha-adhikatarah-tesham
13) Kathopanishad. 1.2.24
A Day in the Life of Sri Ramakrishna
Discussion with a Wealthy Rationalist

SWAMI CHIDEKANANDA

In the previous article, we accompanied Sri Ramakrishna from Balaram Bose’s house to Basu Bati. After seeing the pictures of gods and goddesses in the mansion, for which purpose he had come, Sri Ramakrishna joined the Basu brothers and his companions for a conversation.

(Continued from previous issue. . .)

I
n every action and interaction of a divine incarnation or knower of Brahman, there are valuable lessons for us to learn and assimilate. But what can we possibly learn from the interaction between the rationalistic, wealthy Bose brothers and a Paramahamsa? It is that in this conversation, Sri Ramakrishna shows himself to be an ideal logician.

Speaking about the importance of logic in public life, Swami Ranganthananda, the 13th President of the Ramakrishna Order, says, “Today we try to impose an idea by the force of the sword and not by an appeal to the intellect and understanding. Most politicians today try to appeal to the feeling and not to the understanding. At its best it no doubt produces the loyalty and deep enthusiasm for a cause; but at its worst it expresses itself in fanaticism and mutual destruction. But the most enduring appeal is that which affects the intellect, the mind of a people, and which, through its inherent truth and beauty, gradually penetrates to the heart, producing deep convictions and rational faiths. This method has been tried by very few in the world, and amongst those who have tried, and tried successfully, one is Shankaracharya.”

The same can be said of Sri Ramakrishna, as we shall see in his discussion with the Bose brothers.

The uniqueness of this discussion

Sri Ramakrishna’s ability to convince spiritual aspirants through his spiritual power is well known. What is less known is his power of logical and rational reasoning, and his ability to come down to the level of his audience and elevate them. In this unique question and answer session at Basu Bati on 28 July 1885, Sri Ramakrishna demonstrates his ability as an ideal logician when imparting spiritual teachings. He employs the Socratic method and all the characteristics of an ideal logician both technically and stylistically. The Socratic method is a form of teaching used especially by Law Professors, who engage their students in “cooperative argumentative dialogue by asking and answering questions to further stimulate critical thinking and to also draw out ideas and underlying presuppositions.” Technically speaking, Sri Ramakrishna shows mastery over the ability to: 1) first listen and understand the other person’s point of view and underlying

(Continued on page 36...)
Naren ran into the stable. “Chandra,” he called out to the syce, “saddle my horse and let’s go for a ride.” Soon he was trotting down an empty road, Chandra jogging beside him. As they crossed a big fairground, they saw a wedding party, the bridegroom and the bride smiling shyly at each other.

“They are just like Rama and Sita,” Naren laughed, waving at the couple.

The syce snorted, “Their love will fly out of the window in two days.”

“What are you saying Chandra? Rama and Sita loved each other all through their life.”

“Those are just fairy tales, little master. In reality, marriage is a curse.”

“A curse?” Naren went pale, terror striking his heart.

“Yes,” the syce sighed heavily. “Ever since I got married, my life has turned into hell…I have lost all my freedom. My wife nags me constantly. Do this, do that, she says…always ordering me around. I have become her slave.” Glancing at Naren, he added, “If you want to remain content and carefree, then don’t ever marry, little master.”

Tears sprang to Naren’s eyes and he quickly turned away. “You offer it to them,” he said and rushed to his room.

Taken aback, Hari went to Naren’s mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi and told her about Naren’s behaviour. “Yes, it is quite strange,” she agreed. “He never misses an opportunity to decorate his Sita-Rama idols and sit in meditation before them. It is hard to get him out of that room sometimes.” After a moment she said, “Let me see what I can do.”

Bhuvaneshwari Devi found Naren lying on his bed and weeping into his pillow. Caressing his head, she asked, “What is troubling you, my child?”

“It is Rama and Sita, ma,” Naren burst out. “They have made me very unhappy.”

“But why?”

“Because they are married,” he wailed, “and Chandra says marriage is a terrible thing ... what am I to do ma? I love them but I cannot worship them anymore.”

Bhuvaneshwari Devi wiped his face with the end of her pallu, “Yes, this is certainly a difficult matter. But I am sure we can find a solution.”

Watching her anxiously, Naren alternated between hope and despair. At last she smiled, “God takes the form and attitude that appeals most to his devotee. That’s why we have so many different Gods and Goddesses. Naren, you like Shiva, don’t you? Shiva is an ascetic, his attitude is that of a sannyasi. Why not worship him instead of Rama and Sita?”

“But of course, ma,” he jumped to his feet, his eyes sparkling, “you always find an answer to all my problems!”

He raced up the flight of stairs to the room on the terrace. In the soft light streaming in through a window, the image of Rama and Sita appeared to glow.

“I’m sorry,” Naren whispered in a choked voice, “very sorry... but I know you understand how I feel.” Grasping the image, he carried it out and leaning over the terrace wall dropped it on the road below. It smashed into a hundred pieces. With tears running down his face, Naren returned to the room.

The next day he bought an image of Shiva and installed it in the same corner in the terrace room.

“Now you are my ideal,” he bowed his head to the God and closing his eyes, began to meditate. *
focus in this issue:

At Paramakudi (Part - 1)

In Swami Vivekananda's acceptance of the kindness and cordiality of the crowd assembled at Paramakudi, two aspects of his personality stand out — (i) his spirit of unselfish service, and (ii) his desire to see his work being carried on by others. In his own words:

... my love for my country, and especially for my countrymen, will be the same whether they receive me with the utmost cordiality or spurn me from the country. For in the Gitâ Shri Krishna says — men should work for work's sake only, and love for love's sake.”

... I am anxiously waiting for the day when mighty minds will arise, gigantic spiritual minds, who will be ready to go forth from India to the ends of the world to teach spirituality and renunciation — those ideas which have come from the forests of India and belong to Indian soil alone.

Key messages from this lecture...

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

Two attempts have been made in the world to found social life: the one was upon religion, and the other was upon social necessity. The one was founded upon spirituality, the other upon materialism...

...built on spirituality
- Founded upon transcendentalism.
- Looks beyond the horizon of this little material world and is bold enough to begin life there, even apart from the other.

...built on materialism
- Founded upon realism.
- Is content to take its stand on the things of the world and expects to find a firm footing there.
Materialism and spiritualism follow each other in wave-like motions

At one time the full flood of materialistic ideas prevails, and everything in this life — prosperity, the education which procures more pleasures, more food — will become glorious at first and then that will degrade and degenerate.

Along with the prosperity will rise to white heat all the inborn jealousies and hatreds of the human race. Competition and merciless cruelty will be the watchword of the day. To quote a very commonplace and not very elegant English proverb, "Everyone for himself, and the devil take the hindmost", becomes the motto of the day.

Then people think that the whole scheme of life is a failure. And the world would be destroyed had not spirituality come to the rescue and lent a helping hand to the sinking world.

Then the world gets new hope and finds a new basis for a new building, and another wave of spirituality comes, which in time again declines.

As a rule, spirituality brings a class of men who lay exclusive claim to the special powers of the world.

The immediate effect of this is a reaction towards materialism, which opens the door to scores of exclusive claims, until the time comes when not only all the spiritual powers of the race, but all its material powers and privileges are centred in the hands of a very few; and these few, standing on the necks of the masses of the people, want to rule them.

Then society has to help itself, and materialism comes to the rescue.
The choice before India

Materialism has helped India in a sense...
- For centuries India’s treasures (her spiritual ideas) have been kept locked up by the priests.
- Half of those treasures are stolen and lost; and the other half which remains is in the hands of men who, like dogs in the manger, do not eat themselves and will not allow others to do so.
- In a sense, materialism has come to the rescue of India. It has thrown open the doors of life to everyone, by destroying the exclusive privileges of caste, by opening up to discussion the inestimable treasures which were hidden away in the hands of a very few who have even lost the use of them.

But the models of material civilization in the West are also decaying...
- The political systems that India is struggling for have been tried in Europe for centuries, and have been found wanting.
- One after another, the institutions, systems, and everything connected with political government have been condemned as useless.
- The material tyranny is tremendous. Wealth and power are in the hands of a few men who do not work but manipulate the work of millions of human beings. By this power they can deluge the whole earth with blood. Religion and all things are under their feet; they rule and stand supreme.
- The Western world is governed by a handful of Shylocks. All those things that you hear about — constitutional government, freedom, liberty, and parliaments — are but jokes.

The West is groaning under the tyranny of the Shylocks, and the East is groaning under the tyranny of the priests; each must keep the other in check.

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.

Each living being has some virtues not easily available to others
- The worst, most demoniacal man has some virtues which the greatest saint has not; and the lowest worm may have certain things which the highest man has not.

People who lead gross lives enjoy a life of as much equilibrium and balance as a highly refined and cultured life
- The poor labourer, who you think has so little enjoyment in life, has not your intellect, cannot understand the Vedanta Philosophy and so forth. ...His life is in the senses, and he enjoys there. His life also is one of equilibrium and balance.

Both the demoniacal man and a saint have some virtues.

Enjoyment of a poor labourer

Enjoyment of an intellectual

Therefore we must not think that we are the saviours of the world.
We can teach the world what it is waiting for

The whole of Western civilisation will crumble to pieces in the next fifty years if there is no spiritual foundation.

It is hopeless and perfectly useless to attempt to govern mankind with the sword. You will find that the very centres from which such ideas as government by force sprang up are the very first centres to degrade and degenerate and crumble to pieces.

Europe, the centre of the manifestation of material energy, will crumble into dust within fifty years if she is not mindful to change her position, to shift her ground and make spirituality the basis of her life.

India’s solution

What will save Europe is the religion of the Upanishads

The next issue will cover the rest of Swami Vivekananda’s talk where he explains how & why the religion of the Upanishads will help the world.
Days passed into months and rolled into years. Poorva saw Madhura Kavi fill up palm leaves by the dozen. She had a strong hunch that Madhura Kavi was himself an Aazhvaar. “Swami Thaatha,” she began, but Madhura Kavi’s singing interrupted her. What a fabulous voice! thought Poorva admiringly.

“Marvellous poetry too!” joined in the Swami. “Listen to this:
‘I chanted his name and found my joy,
Sincerely did I serve at his feet.
I do not know any other God,
I wander singing Kurugoor Nambi’s sweet songs.’

‘Kurugoor Nambi’ — the famous son of Thirukkurugoor — is, of course, Nammaazhvaar.”

“Why is he describing Nammaazhvaar as God?” Poorva spoke rapidly, flabbergasted by Madhura Kavi’s description of his master. “I always thought God had many arms, ornaments and —” She abandoned that comment midway to ask bluntly, “Swami Thaatha, is Madhura Kavi also an Aazhvaar?”

Her forthrightness evoked a smile from the Swami, and he replied, “Yes and no. The title ‘Aazhvaar’ is not generally used with his name. I suppose it could be because all his eleven verses are in praise of Nammaazhvaar whom he calls his teacher, father, mother, and God too! By the way, Poorva, did you notice something unusual?”
Poorva looked blank, and the Swami said, “The student, Madhura Kavi, is much older than his guru, Nammaazhvaar.”

“Oh yeah. How could I not have noticed something that obvious? Gosh, I can be very dumb at times!” Poorva hit herself lightly on the head.

“Well, I’m not going to disagree with that,” the Swami laughed.

A slight smile escaped the corners of Poorva’s lips. She tuned into what he was saying.

“Let me tell you more about Nammaazhvaar. Before that, would you like some vadas and buttermilk?” The Swami held out some golden-brown vadas. They looked appetizing and smelt delicious. The buttermilk came chilled, in palm-leaf containers. As she eagerly reached out for them, it struck her that she hadn’t felt hungry even once, so far, on this trip.

“Oh my God! How long have I been without food? Frankly, this is too weird to understand ...” and, looking at the Swami, she mischievously added, “... like everything else on this trip.” That said, she popped a vadai into her mouth. Halfway through the third one, she heard a soft cough. The Swami had been waiting patiently. “Oh, I’m sorry,” she said, with a guilty smile. “Do you want some?”

“No, thanks. I was only wondering if I could resume the story.”

“Oh ... yes, of course,” she replied, looking abashed.

“Amongst all the Aazhvaars, Nammaazhvaar will be the most revered. The pile of palm leaves you saw near Madhura Kavi contains the songs of this Aazhvaar — 1296 in all. These are divided into four works and are considered to be the essence of the four Vedas.”


“Yes, the Aazhvaar has gone back to God,” said the Swami in a solemn voice.

“He was so young!” Poorva was upset.

“Calm down, Poorva. True, he was only 32 years old, but isn’t God the deciding authority on everything?” His tone and words pacified her and she once again fixed her gaze on the scene ahead. Madhura Kavi was installing, with great love, the image of Nammaazhvaar in a temple.
Time sped by at an unbelievable pace. Poorva observed that Madhura Kavi spent his time decorating his master’s image and singing his songs. On occasion, the offerings included Madhura Kavi’s own songs as well.

One day, Poorva saw Madhura Kavi place the image of Nammaazhvaar in a beautiful palanquin and carry it along the streets of Thirukkurugoor. He was proclaiming with great exuberance: “Here comes Thirukkurugoor Nambi, here comes Vakulaabharanar, here comes Shattakopar; here comes the great poet who has given us the Vedas in Tamil . . .”

“Wow, so many names for a single person!” Even as Poorva marvelled, loud voices grabbed her attention. It appeared as if a quarrel had erupted between the locals and some people who seemed to be visitors from another town.

The voices rang harsh and clear. “A great poet? Indeed, Madhura Kavi, what tall claims you make for your master! We are the celebrated poets of the Madurai Tamil Sangam. Come forward! Prove to us the worth of your master’s poetry, or else we will not allow you to address him by these fancy titles.”

“I accept the challenge,” Madhura Kavi replied with great composure, and Poorva wondered how he was going to speak up for his dead master. That night, before she snuggled into her cosy bed, the Swami cryptically told her that they would be leaving town the next morning.

“Why?” she began, and then stopped. She felt convinced that Swami Thaatha’s decisions could not be anything but wise.

The next morning, Poorva saw Madhura Kavi leave Thirukkurugoore. She turned towards the Swami and he signalled that they too should accompany him. In the saint’s hand was a palm-leaf manuscript.

“If useful eavesdropping is permitted, I suppose that includes sneak peeks too,” said Poorva to herself as she stole a look at the manuscript and haltingly read, “Ka...nn...an Ka... zha...li...nai . . .”

“I wonder what it means and what Madhura Kavi is going to do with it?” Poorva reflected aloud, and the Swami briefly said, “Kazhalinai means ‘pair of feet’.”

(To be continued...)
A
n avatara comes with his chosen band of highly evolved souls who aid him in working out his mission. Naturally, he knows about them even before they arrive to play their role. Sri Ramakrishna often spoke about the people whom the Divine Mother had assigned as his rasaddars or suppliers of material needs. One of these rasaddars was Shambhu Mallick.

Speaking about him Sri Ramakrishna would say: “The Divine Mother showed me in a vision the five rasaddars; first, Mathur Babu, and second, Shambhu Mallick, whom I had not then met. I had a vision of a fair-skinned man with a cap on his head. Many days later, when I first met Shambhu, I recalled that vision; I realised that it was he whom I had seen in that ecstatic state.”

Shambhu Mallick worked in a high post in a British firm, and had a garden house close to Dakshineswar temple. After Sri Ramakrishna’s first and foremost patron Mathuramohan Biswas passed away, Shambhu Mallick became Sri Ramakrishna’s second rasaddar. He soon developed great love and reverence for the Master and gladly took up the responsibility of looking after his needs.

As Shambhu Mallick lived close to the Kali temple, Sri Ramakrishna would often go for a walk to his house and talk about God. Shambhu Mallick also read out the Bible to Sri Ramakrishna who thus came to know of the pure life of Jesus and of the faith he founded. Since Sri Ramakrishna used to come to him on his own, Shambhu Mallick considered himself to be very fortunate and special. Once he happily told the Master, “You come here frequently. Yes, you come because you feel happy talking with me.”

Sri Ramakrishna gave Shambhu Mallick’s example to prove that material prosperity is no hindrance to spiritual life. He said, “That the mere possession of wealth should create attachment is by no means true.” He appreciated the wise manner in which Shambhu Mallick generously used his handsome earning.
Once Sambhu Mallick prayed to Sri Ramakrishna, “Please bless me that I may spend all my money for good purposes, such as building hospitals and dispensaries; making roads, and digging wells.” But Sri Ramakrishna dissuaded him from it. He pointed out that the purpose of all our actions should be the attainment of God. Acts like building hospitals, dispensaries etc., would be helpful only if done in a spirit of detachment, which however is very difficult.

The next reason given by Sri Ramakrishna was much deeper. He told him: “Suppose God appeared before you and said to you, ‘Accept a boon from Me’ would you then ask Him, ‘O God, build me some hospitals and dispensaries’? Or would you not rather pray to Him: ‘O God, may I have pure love at Your Lotus Feet! May I have Your uninterrupted vision!’?” The significance of this is that when Sri Ramakrishna was directly present before him, instead of seeking his ‘uninterrupted vision’ Shambhu Mallick was thinking of engaging in karma yoga – whose final goal is God-realisation anyway! In conclusion Sri Ramakrishna pointed out that “God alone is the doer and we are but His instruments” and if we realise Him, then we can through His grace become His fitting instruments to build hospitals, dispensaries etc.

At Dakshineswar, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi lived in a very small music room. To ease her life, Shambhu Mallick, with some help from Captain Viswanath Upadhyaya, built a thatched house for Sri Sarada Devi at a short distance from the temple. His wife had utmost reverence for Sri Sarada Devi. She was the first person to have worshipped her as a goddess. As Tuesdays are very auspicious for worshipping the Divine Mother, she would invite Sri Sarada Devi to her home on Tuesdays of the Bengali month Jyastha and worship her with sixteen articles.4

Sri Ramakrishna used to give the example of Shambhu Mallick as an epitome of faith in God: “Your faith must be sincere and whole-hearted. Shambhu Mallick used to come on foot from Baghbazar to his garden house at Dakshineswar. One day a friend said to him: ‘It is risky to walk such a long distance, Why don’t you come in a carriage?’ At that Shambhu’s face turned red and he exclaimed: ‘I set out repeating the name of God! What danger can befall me?’ Through faith alone one attains everything.”5

When Shambhu Mallick was in his deathbed, Sri Ramakrishna visited him and found him quite cheerful. He told Sri Ramakrishna, “I have no anxiety about death; I have packed up all my bag and baggage and am quite ready to depart.” When Sri Ramakrishna forbade him from speaking so, Shambhu Mallick insisted, “No, please bless me that I may cast aside all these possessions and go to God.” Mentioning this incident to his disciples, Sri Ramakrishna assured, “God’s devotees have nothing to fear. They are His own. He always stands by them.”6

Shambhu Mallick was the first devotee to call Sri Ramakrishna ‘Guruji’, as he perceived that in Sri Ramakrishna’s divine company and influence he became more and more unselfish, and developed true devotion for God. He served Sri Ramakrishna from 1873 till his end in 1877.

References

1) The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 23 Dec 1885
2) The Great Master p 295
3) The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Sept 19, 1884
4) The Great Master p 307
5) The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna 4 June 1883
6) The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna Sept 19, 1884
motives without bias, 2) reply by using various methods of deductive logical reasoning like use of effective analogies to rebut, and showing the absurdity of a particular position, 3) ability to deflect ‘red-herring fallacy’ and keep the discussion on point, and 4) avoid using ‘appeal to authority fallacy’. From a stylistic standpoint, he also embodies the qualities of an ideal logician like maintaining the presence of mind, composure and gentleness, not raising his voice nor showing impatience, and most importantly affirming the good qualities of the other person.

In sharp contrast to the holier-than-thou attitude of many dualistic religious teachers who tend to primarily employ “appeal to authority fallacy” “talk down” to their listeners from the “bully pulpit” and make them feel like sinners who need to be saved, Sri Ramakrishna uniquely employs the Socratic method for the purpose of stimulating the latent tendencies of the Bose brothers. His discussions with them cover a wide range of topics, including questions about 1) God’s grace, 2) God’s partiality, 3) who is this “I”, and 4) the concept of sin. Sri Ramakrishna also shows by his conduct how even holy people handle potentially embarrassing situations. In this article, we shall explore these aspects with a summary of the conversation.

The Socratic method begins when Sri Ramakrishna encourages the brothers to think of God.

God’s Grace

Nanda: “How little we think of God!”
Master: “One thinks of God through His grace.”

Nanda: “But how can we obtain God’s grace? Has He really the power to bestow grace?”

Master (smiling): “I see. You think as the intellectuals do: one reaps the results of one’s actions. Give up these ideas. The effect of karma wears away if one takes refuge in God.”

Here, we clearly see the Socratic method or “cooperative dialogue based on question and answer designed to stimulate critical thinking”. Sri Ramakrishna also shows presence of mind in being able to quickly assess and categorise Nanda’s thinking and the general thinking of intellectuals at that time, which asks: does not the concept of God’s grace conflict with the law of karma?

In reply, Sri Ramakrishna speaks of his own prayer to the Divine Mother, which had helped him to transcend the law of karma: “Here, Mother, take Thy sin; here, take Thy virtue. I don’t want either of these...Give me only real bhakti.”

Here, Sri Ramakrishna attempts to resolve Nanda’s conflict between God’s grace and the law of karma by saying that the law of karma applies only to those who believe in kartritva (the agency of doership) and bhoktritva (the agency of enjoyership). But if one surrenders and is able...
to offer the fruits, either good or bad, to the Divine Mother, and desires only *shuddhabhakti* or pure bhakti, then God’s grace will come.7

**God’s Partiality**

Nanda is not convinced that the law of karma can be so easily done away with. He presses further:

Nanda: “Can God mitigate his own laws? Then does this not mean that God is partial?”

Master: “What do you mean? He is the Lord of all. He can do everything. He who has made the law can also change it. But you may very well talk that way. Perhaps you want to enjoy the world, and that is why you talk that way.”

Here, Sri Ramakrishna applies deductive reasoning to argue that since the Lord created the law, it is reasonable to infer that He would also have the ability to change it. In addition, like a psychologist, Sri Ramakrishna quickly points out Nanda’s underlying motivation for not being able to accept the idea of God’s grace because of his desire for worldly enjoyment. Sri Ramakrishna then goes on to raise a rhetorical question to show the futility in trying to enjoy anything in this evanescent world: “But what is there to enjoy? The pleasures of ‘woman and gold’?... It is all momentary.”

Sri Ramakrishna does not stop there. He then answers logically from a philosophical standpoint that if “God Himself has become everything—the universe and its living beings... to whom but Himself can He show partiality?”

But Nanda is still not satisfied and poses a counter-question: “If God has indeed become the entire universe, why should He assume so many different forms? Why does He assume both wise and ignorant forms?”

Sri Ramakrishna answers by sweetly singing the famous Bengali song *sakali tomari iccha* “O Mother! It is all Thy sweet will”.

Nanda remains unconvinced and replies: “It may be Her sweet will; but it is death to us!”

Sri Ramakrishna then strikes back like an expert logician: “But who are you? It is the Divine Mother who has become all this. It is only as long as you do not know Her that you say, ‘I’, ‘I’.”

**Who is this ‘I’?**

Sri Ramakrishna then applies the Socratic method to stimulate the Bose Brothers to critically enquire into their real selves through Vedantic reasoning:

“Try to find out what this ‘I’ is. Is this ‘I’ the bones or flesh or blood or intestines? Seeking the ‘I’, you discover ‘Thou’. In other words, nothing exists inside you but the power of God. There is no ‘I’, but only ‘He’.”

Unlike traditional logicians, who employ the Socratic method, to solely stimulate the critical thinking of their students, Sri Ramakrishna takes it to the next level and attempts to stimulate the hidden divine *samskaras* of the Bose brothers by affirming their good qualities: “You have so much wealth, but you have no egotism. It is not possible to rid oneself altogether of the ego; so, as long as it is there, let the rascal remain as the servant of God.”

It is important to understand that Sri Ramakrishna is not engaging in flattery here. Like a psychologist who is able to peer into the unconscious mind of his patient, Sri Ramakrishna sees and affirms their hidden virtues, and encourages them to further cultivate and manifest these qualities.

Up to this point, the Socratic discussion between Sri Ramakrishna and Nanda Bose has proceeded uninterruptedly and developed a strong momentum. Unfortunately, at this time, Pasupati Bose, Nanda’s brother, wishes to take the discussion in another direction. He wants to
know Sri Ramakrishna’s opinion about popular religious movements of that time like Theosophy and Spiritualism. In debate, this is known as invoking a ‘red herring fallacy’. It is an irrelevant topic introduced in an argument to divert the attention of listeners or readers from the original issue.⁸

Like an expert logician, Sri Ramakrishna deftly deflects the red herring fallacy with an effective analogy which quickly brings the focus back to spiritual practice and God realisation: “My dear sir, I don’t know about these things. Why bother about them so much? You have come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Enjoy them. What is the use of your calculating how many mango-trees there are, how many millions of branches, how many billions of leaves? I have come to the orchard to eat mangoes. Let me enjoy them.”

Sri Ramakrishna further invokes another analogy to compare those modern religious movements to a patient suffering from delirium. As long as the patient is in delirium, he speaks nonsense and the attending doctor will not listen to what he says. But the moment the patient becomes normal, the doctor pays attention. Sri Ramakrishna implies that like the doctor we should not pay importance to religious teachings which do not focus on god-realisation.

Rather than becoming annoyed at his question not being answered, Sri Ramakrishna’s effective analogy brings Pasupati back on track. Pasupati then asks, “Will our delirium last forever?”

Sri Ramakrishna: “Why should you think so? Fix your mind on God, and spiritual consciousness will be awakened in you.”

Pasupati humorously replies: “But our union with God is only momentary. It doesn’t last any longer than a pipeful of tobacco.” (All laugh.)

**Concept of Sin**

Sri Ramakrishna: “What if that is so? Union with God even for one moment surely gives a man liberation. ... Give up all such notions as: ‘Shall we be cured of our delirium?’; ‘What will happen to us?’, ‘We are sinners!’ (To Nanda) One must have this kind of faith: ‘What? Once I have uttered the name of Rama, can I be a sinner any more?’”

Here, Sri Ramakrishna is countering the Christian idea of sin, which had wrongly influenced the then educated Bengalis. He gives them encouragement to cultivate their faith in the power of God’s name, and not to focus on past sins.

Interestingly, after much discussion, the master of the house still has not yet shown any sign of serving Sri Ramakrishna with refreshments, as is the normal custom when a holy person or guest visits a householder.⁹ Rather than becoming annoyed, in a childlike manner Sri Ramakrishna playfully pokes Nanda, “You see, you should offer me something to eat. That is why the other day I said to Jadu’s mother: ‘Look here, give me something to eat.’ Otherwise it brings harm to the householder.”¹⁰

After having some sweets, Sri Ramakrishna walks to the south veranda to wash his hands. When he returns to the room, he is offered betel-leaf on a tray. However, other guests have already been served betel-leaf from the same tray; hence Sri Ramakrishna does not accept any.¹¹

Nanda then becomes irritated and confronts the Master. He says it is not proper for Sri Ramakrishna to refuse the betel-leaf on the plate. Without becoming perturbed in the least, Sri Ramakrishna downplays the incident and says, “Before I eat anything, I offer it to God. It is a notion of mine.” Nanda immediately counters, “But the betel-leaf would have gone to God all the same.” Thakur replies, “There is the path of jnana, and there is also the path of
bhakti. According to the jnani, everything can be eaten by applying the knowledge of Brahman, but the follower of bhakti keeps a little distinction."

Even then Nanda still remains dissatisfied, "But I still maintain that you did not act rightly." Normally any person—what to speak of an incarnation—would take offense at such words. But Sri Ramakrishna did not possess the slightest trace of the holier-than-thou attitude. He quickly defuses the anger of Nanda by saying, "It is just a notion of mine. What you say is also right. That too is supported by the scriptures."

It is interesting to note that for all of his wonderful logical reasoning abilities which were described above, this is perhaps his most impressive ability as a logician — Sri Ramakrishna's unique ability to acknowledge, defuse, and keep the discussion on track even in matters of opinion which generally tend to be sensitive and surcharged with excessive emotion. This is an important lesson for spiritual aspirants: avoid confrontations, and don't get into futile arguments over matters of opinion.

Again, after this incident and right before he is about to leave, Sri Ramakrishna once again affirms the good tendencies of the Bose brothers: "Though you are a householder, still you have kept your mind on God. Is that a small thing? ... According to the Gita, a man who is honoured and respected by many people possesses a special power of God. You have divine power." Here Sri Ramakrishna sets an ideal before the sannyasis on how to interact with others: First be a gentleman and then be a spiritual teacher.

An effective logician understands that after engaging in Socratic discussion, the ending is most critical. Hence, Sri Ramakrishna once again affirms and attempts to stimulate the Bose brothers' hidden divine tendencies before leaving. The devotees follow Sri Ramakrishna as he leaves. Pasupati accompanies them to the door.

Sri Ramakrishna now set out to visit the home of the poor Brahmin widow, Golap-Ma. She was anxiously awaiting his arrival. In the next article, we will discuss this visit.

(to be continued...)

References

1) A person who believes in reason as the main arbiter of truth is called a rationalist.
2) *Eternal Values for a Changing Society.* Swami Ranganathananda. 1: 87-8
4) Red herring is a kind of fallacy that is an irrelevant topic introduced in an argument to divert the attention of listeners or readers from the original issue. https://literarydevices.net/red-herring/
5) When writers or speakers use appeal to authority, they are claiming that something must be true because it is believed by someone who is said to be an ‘authority’ on the subject. Whether the person is actually an authority or not, the logic is unsound. Instead of presenting actual evidence, the argument just relies on the credibility of the ‘authority.’ https://www.softschools.com/examples/fallacies/appeal_to_authority_examples/430/
6) Though each of these topics is rich in subtlety, it will be beyond the scope of this article to discuss these philosophical aspects.
7) For a detailed discussion on this problem of evil, please see *Infinite Paths to Infinite Reality,* p. 288, Ayon Maharaj.
8) https://literarydevices.net/red-herring/
9) The concept of *Athiti devo Bhava or let the Guest be your God* is normally practiced by Hindu households.
10) The mother of Jadu Mallick, a devotee of Thakur who lived in Calcutta.
11) It is the custom in India that if a sadhu visits a home, he should first receive any food offering before householders. It is considered impolite for the householders to begin eating before the sadhus are finished.
AN APPEAL TO DEVOTEES AND WELL-WISHERS

Dear Friends, Namaste. We pray for you and your family.

Sri Ramakrishna Math, Chennai has been rendering service for over 120 years to the society in the fields of Health, Education, Publication of Spiritual & Inspirational books and magazines both in English & Tamil, cultural activities, relief work etc. In order to execute the projects on hand, we appeal to you for contribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service activities in brief</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Your support needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of Vivekananda Centenary Girls Hr. Sec. School for underprivileged (900 students)</td>
<td>Monthly Rs.7,20,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.8000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per student Rs.800/-</td>
<td>For 10 Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of Sri Ramakrishna Math National School for under privileged children (350 students)</td>
<td>Monthly Rs.2,80,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.8000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per student Rs.800/-</td>
<td>For 10 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rehabilitation Service to Leprosy afflicted persons – 120 beneficiaries</td>
<td>Monthly Rs.1,20,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.10,000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per beneficiary Rs.1000/-</td>
<td>For 10 beneficiaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Service to 600 - 800 poor patients daily</td>
<td>Monthly Rs.5,40,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.9,000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per patient Rs.900/-</td>
<td>For 10 patients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing Assistants Training for poor rural girls – 30 students per batch of 1 year</td>
<td>Per batch Rs.7,50,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.25,000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per student</td>
<td>For student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural development – Education, Women Welfare &amp; Medical Help, Alcohol de-addiction – 100 beneficiaries</td>
<td>Monthly Rs.1,00,000/-</td>
<td>Rs.5000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Per beneficiary Rs.1000/-</td>
<td>For 5 people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Ramakrishna Daily puja, Neivedyam and Arathi</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.10,000/- Per day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Annadhanam for 200 devotees</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.10,000/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadhu Seva per day for 50 members</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rs.5,000/-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Donations for both Thanjavur & Chennai Math may please be sent by cheque / DD favouring “Sri Ramakrishna Math”. For Online donation please visit https://donations.chennaimath.org Transfer directly & intimate us along with PAN details through email. Donations are exempted from Income Tax under Section 80G.

May the blessings of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna be on you is my earnest prayer to Him.

Sri Ramakrishna Math
31, Sri Ramakrishna Math Road,
email : mail@chennaimath.org
website : www.chennaimath.org
For more details : 98409 87307

Yours in the Service of the Humanity,
Swami Gautamananda
Adhyaksha
Urgent Need
For a General Physician

The Dispensary at Mayavati, Uttarakhand, urgently needs a General Physician (Male). One with a spiritual bent of mind will be preferred. The Dispensary provides an ideal setting for a spiritually oriented doctor where he will be able to serve God in patients, and also be benefited by the sublime ambience of the Himalayas. If he wishes, he can stay with his family. The dispensary will pay the candidate reasonably and will provide him free boarding.

Anyone interested should write to us at mayavati@rkmm.org

Advaita Ashrama
(A branch of Ramakrishna Math)
P.O. Mayavati, Via Lohaghat
District Champawat, Uttarakhand – 262524
Phone: 05965-234-233
Dear Devotees & Friends,

Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Belur Math declared 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 ideal 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
Trika Philosophy (Kashmir Saivism)
by C.L. Kaul

Kashmir Saivism (Trika), also known as Pratyabhijna system commences like the Saiva Siddhanta with the triple doctrine of pati, pasu and pasa, then proceeds as Sakti-visistadvaita and finally culminates in Advatic absolutism denoting Lord Siva as the highest reality. The author of this book under review, C.L. Kaul deserves high appreciation for his astoundingly deep scholarship which is revealed in the presentation of his findings of Kashmir Saivism. From the Introduction to the Conclusion all the minute details and with 23 annexes are so presented that even a novice can have a comprehensive understanding leading to encyclopaedic wisdom.

In the Preface he lists out eight salient features of his magnum opus, and six methodological devices have been notified which add glory to this work.

In the Introductory chapter historical, philosophical and mystical accounts of this system have been exquisitely elucidated in the realms of spirituality, religion, rituals, guru, sadhana, tantra, tattvas, impurities, liberation, yoga, etc. The second chapter is focused on the historical perspective extensively. The revelations of the exemplars of ecstatic wisdom by Durvasa, Vasugupta and others form the scripture of this system, which include master-disciple tradition, sources of manuscript, etc.

The third chapter is devoted to comprehensively presenting the various Indian philosophical schools with the purvapaksha-siddhanta model. The vast learning and critical evaluation of the author are seen here when he compares and contrasts the doctrines of other systems with that of Trika. Under the caption ‘Saiva Literature’ the fourth chapter enlists and describes all the available literary sources to authentically substantiate Trika doctrines. Chapter five gives a vivid picture of the means for self-realisation, upayas — the techniques emphatically insisted upon by sannyasis and scholars as the best way to resolve all the puzzles in the world and to minimise the maladies of mankind.

The sixth chapter deals with varieties of yoga to highlight the collective wisdom of the masters of Trika, and identifies the Siva-Sakti sthalas and other spiritual centres that existed in the past and exist now for adoration and appeasing spiritual quest. Associated with this, chapter seven is concerned with Saiva and Sakta mystics and other luminaries whose revelations, writings, and commentaries with significant themes make this philosophy a citadel of realisation. Excellent photographs of holy places, relics, shrines, and mystics really fill the readers’ mind with joy. Twenty-three annexures serve as prospects of elucidation and exemplification for further study.

Undoubtedly this work is an excellent revelation of a living religious thought which can ‘spiritualise humanity and humanise spirituality’. The work will enable true aspirants to experiment with the truths and experience the reality with perfect clarity.

__________________________
R. GOPALAKRISHNAN, CHENNAI
Quotes of Vivekananda
Published by Rama-krishna Sarada Mission,
Dakshineswar, Kolkata-700 076.
Booklet, published on the occasion of the
150th birth anniversary celebration of Swami Vivekananda. 2015,
pp.not given, Rs.5.

This beautifully illustrated booklet contains 33 well-known as well
as less famous sayings of Swami Vivekananda which inspires us to courageous
action.

Beautifully produced with well-chosen and
evocative pictures of natural scenery depicting
the infinite qualities of oceans and mountains
the words and pictures are in harmony with each
other. Priced at Rs 5/-, it is a good introduction and illustration of Swamiji’s ideas of true religion — indomitable fearlessness and service to human beings based on heartfelt involvement.

Pebbles of Positivism, Positive Psychology and
Spirituality Contents and Approaches
by Prof. (Dr.) Nilanjana Sanyal.
Published by Secretary, RMIC.,
Gol Park, Kolkata-700 029.
rmicsale@gmail.com. 2017,
hardback, pp. 303+xv, Rs.200.

In the chapter on Silence, Prof. Nilanjana
Sanyal writes, ‘To be peaceful, to be
calm and quiet, to keep at bay the sharp
splashes of materialism, to reach to the fringes
of fulfillment and well-being, silence needs to be
practised.’ A page later, she quotes the words of
Kirkkegaard, the Danish Existential philosopher:
‘If I were a doctor and you asked for my advice, I
should reply: “Create Silence.”’ Taking us further
through the words of people as diverse as Huxley,
Martin Seligman and the modern day spiritual
master Eckhart Tolle, she then quotes Swami
Vivekananda’s words on the same topic — ‘Do
not spend your energy in talking, but meditate in
silence. Accumulate power in silence and become
a dynamo of spirituality.’

Likewise, in the chapter on Authenticity, in
what is one of my favourite passages in the book,
she writes, ‘To be authentic can be thought as a
way of being autonomous. Choosing resolutely,
committing oneself to a certain course of action...
The inauthentic person, in contrast, merely
occupies a role, and may do so irresolutely,
without commitment.’ She goes on to quote Albert
Camus, Heidegger, Stephen Hawking, Carl Rogers
among many others and their take on the topic.
Carl Rogers’s work also features prominently in
the second half of the book where she discusses
about client-centered therapy.

‘Pebbles of Positivism, Positive Psychology
and Spirituality: Contents and Approaches’ is a
book that follows a similar path while covering
topics related to positive psychology and well-
being; topics like Authenticity, Forgiveness,
Gratitude, Wisdom and so on. The scope of the
work is breathtakingly broad. The tone, academic.
The author’s wide knowledge of the topics and
her rich academic background is evident in every
page of the work. And though the book itself
might appeal mostly to readers who already have
a strong interest in the topic, regular readers
too can gain from it, provided they read through
it unhurried, chewing on the words and slowly
assimilating the wisdom.

Towards the end of the book, she contrasts
western psychology which deals with general,
objective principles of mental pathology and
wellbeing, to Indian psychology, which is a
subjective discipline that seeks to explore the true
nature of one’s own being. Academic psychology
which was, in her words, ‘imported lock-stock-
barrel from the West’, has come a long way to
finding its roots in the native wisdom of our
country. This book itself is an important work that
has arisen out of that confluence.

____________________________ DR.HARIHARAN, COIMBATORE
In the spiritual history of India, Akka Mahadevi is the woman saint who dared to walk naked in the 12th century, covered only with her long tresses. She was a picture of asceticism, intense dispassion and complete renunciation. Beneath this majestic and awe-inspiring persona lay a tender heart throbbing with passionate love for Lord Shiva in the form of Chennamallikarjuna (Lord white as jasmine). Her vacanas, poems of personal devotion to the Lord, reveal a unique amalgam of prema bhakti (ecstatic love), jnana (supreme wisdom) and vairagya (absolute detachment). Along with scaling the heights of spirituality, her undaunted courage and temerity to live life on her own terms in the face of incessant adversities and opposition is an example for womankind.

In the present study of Akka Mahadevi’s life and her vacanas, it is imperative to understand the tenets of Lingayatism since she was born in a Lingayat family. Her vacanas suggest that her formative years were deeply rooted in its ideologies.

On the other hand, it is also important to remember that every individual soul undertakes its own spiritual journey. The path is unique for every striving soul. Therefore, no religion or sect can proclaim mass liberation based on its tenets. In this respect Akka Mahadevi was a saint and mystic in her own right. A saint or a mystic has experiential knowledge of the Supreme Truth. She or he has no religion, caste or creed; the only religion that can be attributed to a mystic saint is the religion of pure love.

Although a saint finally goes beyond all differences, a study of their socio-religious
background helps to get an insight into their spiritual journey. For example, if a person undertakes a perilous journey and successfully reaches the destination, it becomes easy to understand the journey by tracing the route that the person had taken. Similarly, in the spiritual journey, the ideologies and practices of the practising faith serve as guideposts to the soul. However, ultimate spiritual success depends on a person’s physical, mental, emotional and spiritual maturity.

Scholars have different opinions on the way Lingayatism should be defined. Some consider it as an offshoot of Saivism, while others regard it as an independent religion. However, given the scope and aim of the present study, the focus here will be to understand the socio-religious ideals of Lingayatism. It can be said that the great saint, philosopher, and statesman Basavanna in Karnataka resurrected Lingayatism in 12th CE. It was a time when Hinduism was at its ebb with ritualism and caste rigidities at their peak. The emphasis on the ritualistic aspect of the Vedas naturally empowered the Brahmin caste. Without the priestly caste, it was not possible for people to worship the Lord. It led to the practice of untouchability and the inhuman exploitation of the Sudras. After touching a Sudra, one was not just expected to take bath but also fast in order to atone for the sin! Under such apathetic circumstances, Basavanna issued a clarion call for reformist Lingayatism.

It was an attempt to bridge the gap between the secular and the spiritual by the realisation of spiritual ideals and their implementation in the society. The Lingayats accepted and upheld the message of *jnana kanda* (pertaining to the knowledge of the Self) from the Vedas but rejected the *karma kanda* (ritualistic aspect). Basavanna achieved this through a powerful concept called *Ishtalinga*. The *Ishtalinga* is similar to the *Sivalinga* but its worship does not require any mediator priest. The guru gives it at the age of eight to a Lingayat child during the *diksha* (initiation) ceremony. Every Lingayat, irrespective of gender, wears it on the body and worships it. This worship is completely personalised; the person needs only devotion and faith in the Lord to be able to perform it.

The *Ishtalinga* is the emblem of the Supreme Reality that the Upanishads term as the *Para Brahman*. By worshipping this external symbol one gets gradually elevated to the state of Divine Consciousness (Real Siva). Lingayatism propounds that the goal of life is to seek the Siva within. Thus, primarily, it accepts that the *Jiva* (individual soul) is *Siva* (Supreme soul) in essence. Under the spell of ignorance, they ‘appear’ different to the deluded, but once ignorance is dispelled with the help of *sadhana* (spiritual practices) and *jnana* (knowledge), only Siva remains.

Lingayatism stands on three pillars: Guru, Linga and Jangama. They command equal reverence, as it is understood that in essence (tattva) they are the same. They represent the same Supreme Consciousness. A brief description of the three terms is as follows:

Guru is the spiritual guide who initiates the aspirant into the Lingayat faith with *diksha*. This is of paramount importance as during *diksha*, the guru, through his grace gives the aspirant the *Ishtalinga* to be worn on the body. The *Ishtalinga* being a symbol of Divine Consciousness, is a reminder to the aspirant of the spiritual goal of life. Also, the guru imparts
the principles of Lingayatism on this occasion. So it is like a second birth — a spiritual birth. The guru’s guidance becomes imperative for the spiritual maturity of the aspirant.

Linga represents the Supreme Lord or Divine Consciousness. The aspirant is expected to treat it as Siva Himself. Just as Siva resides in the heart of a person in the form of Chaitanya (Consciousness), Siva is present in the Ishtalinga. The guru gives this Ishtalinga to the aspirant, who is expected to worship it regularly, keeping it on the palm of the hand.

Jangama can be best defined as one who has overcome janana (birth), gamana (life), and marana (death). The specialty of the Jangama is that he does not stay in a particular place. Rather, he moves from place to place, preaching the ideals of Lingayatism and guiding spiritual aspirants.

Akka Mahadevi’s life has been divinised and presented through many legends in oral literature. Although various biographers have attempted to record the facts of her life, little can be said with absolute certainty. In an attempt to understand her spiritual voyage, these legends provide valuable lessons to a spiritual seeker.

It is widely accepted that Akka Mahadevi was born in the first half of the 12th century in Udutadi, a village in Shimoga district, Karnataka State. Her parents, Nirmal and Sumati, were devout Lingayats. One legend says that they were childless for many years and undertook severe austerities praying to the Lord for a child. Pleased with their ardent devotion and piety, the Lord blessed them with a girl, whom they named Mahadevi.

Another popular legend proclaims that she was rudrakannika, an aspect of Goddess Parvati (consort of Lord Shiva). She had to take birth as an ordinary mortal in order to redeem a curse. Both the legends implicitly suggest that Akka Mahadevi was not an ordinary girl but a God-gifted child. This is substantiated with lore from her childhood days. It is said that, from her childhood, Akka Mahadevi exhibited an extraordinary devotional temperament. Unlike girls of her age, who enjoy playing and being in company, she preferred a solitary life spent in prayers and worship.

Modern-day readers may attribute Akka Mahadevi’s devotional temperament to social conditioning. Having been raised in a devout family, it is possible that she imbibed the devotional temperament from her parents. However, a study of her vacanas suggests that her in-depth devotion is not an outcome of mere conditioning. Every Lingayat child is taught the concept of sarana-sati, linga-pati [devotee assumes the bhava (mood) of a wife towards the Linga (Lord)]. Their marriage suggests the union of the Jivatma (individual soul) and the Paramatma (Universal Consciousness), who are essentially one. This state is attained at the peak of devotion in which the devotee becomes a sarana (egoless surrender). Akka Mahadevi lived this concept all her life in its literal sense. She believed herself to be betrothed to Lord Shiva in the form of Chennamallikarjuna.

At the age of eight, Akka Mahadevi was initiated by her guru, Sri Gurulingadeva, and given the Ishtalinga. Some scholars are of the opinion that the name Gurulingadeva is symbolic and the Lord Himself was her guru. However, in many of her vacanas Akka Mahadevi pays high tribute to her guru, emphasizing his role in her spiritual progress.

Lingayatism stands on three pillars: Guru, Linga and Jangama. They command equal reverence, as it is understood that in essence (tattva) they are the same.
In her vacanas she mentions that she was fortunate to receive the blessings of her guru soon after her birth:

“As soon as I was born
The guru put the insignia of holy ashes
And made me belong to the Linga
And thus I was fulfilled.”

Akka Mahadevi’s inherent spiritual temperament was nurtured with the blessings of her guru. Although Diksha is considered to be the spiritual birth of an individual, in the case of an evolved spiritual aspirant like Akka Mahadevi, it can be said that it was merely an initiation of the completion of her spiritual journey.

Her intense love and reverence for her guru found expression in many of her vacanas. The spirit of surrender to the guru is of utmost significance in one’s spiritual progress. This noble spirit of surrender is expressed externally by worshipping the guru’s feet in Lingayatism. The water used to wash the guru’s feet, known as padodaka, is also called karunadaka (giver of compassion). It is believed that the guru showers compassion on the disciple through the medium of water.

Akka Mahadevi voices reverence for padodaka in her vacanas:

“The water from washing the guru’s feet
Is a holy bath for me.”

“Seeing the guru’s feet
I am fulfilled.”

Along with spiritual guidance from her guru, Akka Mahadevi also received formal education at home. Her knowledge of certain mythologies associated with Lord Shiva indicates that she either heard or studied them along with the vacana literature of her times. The greatness of Lord Shiva made an indelible impression on the young mind of Akka Mahadevi. While the mahatmya (greatness) aspect of the Lord evoked reverence in her, His physical beauty captivated her heart. The lore of the anthropomorphic Lord Shiva that highlights His prowess and majesty finds expression in the early vacanas of Akka Mahadevi. She narrates:

“Does He excuse those who are His?
He flayed and tore Bhringi to pieces,
Who was very close to Him.”

“Who has beheaded the God of Love,
Put out the eyes of Death?”

She grew up to be a young maiden of ravishing beauty. Like a diamond unaware of its own value, she remained indifferent to her physical beauty. Her mind, soaked in love and longing for Lord Chennamallikarjuna, could not dwell on anything else. Steadfastness and one-pointed love for the Divine that a devotee strives to attain through various spiritual disciplines, was easily attained by Akka Mahadevi through the strength of her intense devotion. In a heart where only the Lord dwells, in the mind that only contemplates the Lord, the seeds of true devotion sprout. The devotee forgets oneself in the remembrance of the Lord. Akka Mahadevi sings:

“Night and day
In your worship
I forget myself
O Lord white as jasmine.”

(To be continued...)
Work and worship is an important creed of the Ramakrishna Mission. By work we mean all lawful, righteous activity. When it is done unselfishly, it leads to purification of mind, chitta-shuddhi. The second approach of the traditional Hindu sannyasis is to renounce all works enjoined by their station and stage of life and lead a life solely of meditation, study of scriptures, preaching etc. The third approach to work is to combine it with worship. We are advised by all spiritual masters to combine the two. There is, however, one more situation: There might come a time in the life of a spiritual aspirant when for him the difference between work and worship is obliterated. Says Sister Nivedita in her masterly Introduction to *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*: “No distinction henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray, To conquer is to renounce. Life itself is Religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and avoid. ... To him there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality...”

In this article we wish to discuss the issue of work and worship. Worship, in the context of this article means all types of traditional spiritual practices like japa or chanting of a mantra, meditation, prayer, study of scriptures, discrimination, and ritualistic worship.

This combination of work and worship can again be done in three ways. In the first, worship is done before undertaking work, till one gains a permanent spiritual status and gets established in God. Once this is achieved, one devotes to the work of serving God in human forms. Sri Ramakrishna, for example, encouraged his disciples to do spiritual practices before entering the world, i.e., the phase of life dominated by work. He would say, ‘become butter first and then float in the waters of the world.’ His direct monastic disciples, including Swami Vivekananda, ‘tied the knowledge of non-duality in the knot of their cloth and lived in the world’.

Many spiritual aspirants follow the second approach of engaging in work before, and taking up spiritual practice later. Inspired by the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda of ‘worship of God in man,’ ‘shiva jnane jiva seva’ several young men at Varanasi under the leadership of Charuchandra Das (later Swami Shubhananda), Kedarnath Maulik (later Swami Achalananda) and Jaminiranjan Majumdar, had formed a “Poor Men’s Relief Association” to serve the pilgrims who come in large number in the holy city. Swami
Vivekananda, during his last visit to the city in February 1902 was delighted to see their dedicated work. He wrote an appeal for the institution, which later came to be known as the Ramakrishna Mission Home of Service or the Sevashrama. He also asked Swami Brahmananda, the then President of the Ramakrishna Mission, to keep an eye on the young institution and guide it. Swami Shubhananda was the head of this institution for many years. We learn from *The Eternal Companion* that when Swami Brahmananda saw that Swami Shubhananda’s work was becoming more important to him than his spiritual life, he relieved him of his post, inspired him with the ideal of realising God, and sent him away to live a life of exclusive meditation.

2 This is just an example. As a matter of fact there are a large number of spiritual aspirants, both lay and monastic, who retire after engaging in work, selfish or unselfish, for many years, and then settle down in places like Varanasi, Vrindaban etc., where there are old age homes for them to live, and try to devote the rest of their life to spiritual practices.

Apart from this general practice, there are some spiritually advanced men in whom there comes a time when they want to devote themselves solely to meditation and prayer. At that time work falls off by itself. This takes place when the mind awakens spiritually.3

The third approach of combining work and worship from the very beginning is the ideal for most of the spiritual aspirants. Says Swami Brahmananda: “Work and worship must go hand in hand.”4 He repeatedly emphasized, “Yes, you must work, but I insist that you devote yourself to spiritual practices and meditation. Even though I may not ask you to work, your nature will force you to work. It is difficult to engage the mind in contemplation of God, but you are sannyasis, therefore work must not be the sole purpose of your life.”5 This can be done variously, as we learn from the history of the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Varanasi.

A very simple, practical method is to remember God always. Swami Brahmananda had instructed during a conversation at Varanasi: “Before you begin the work, remember the Lord and offer your salutations to Him. Do the same at intervals in the course of the work, and also after you finish it.”6

Apart from this daily practice, spiritual practice in solitude from time to time is also important. During Swami Brahmananda’s tenure as the President, in 1916, a small centre was started at Kishanpur, Dehradun which was later made a retreat branch centre of Varanasi Sevashrama. It was meant for the retired aged ailing monks for recouping their health, as well as for spiritual practice of the monastic members working in the Sevashrama. Swami Turiyananda had named the new retreat project as ‘Ramakrishna Sadhan Kutir’. The monks were encouraged to lead short periods there in spiritual practice and study of scripture from time to time.7

A very important means of sublimating work into worship is to have constant holy company. It was indeed a blessing of the Varanasi Sevashrama that Swami Brahmananda visited Varanasi almost every year. He always emphasised that spiritual practices like Japa and meditation must be done regularly by every worker. He would personally inquire into the spiritual welfare of each worker and give specific spiritual guidance. Once a number of young monks at Varanasi Sevashrama formed rival groups and started to quarrel. Swami Saradananda came to investigate and finally decided that some members were unfit for monastic life and must be expelled. However, Swami Brahmananda dissuaded him and
personally came to Varanasi. He began to instruct the monks in spiritual practice and gradually the whole atmosphere of the place improved. No one was expelled. Swami Turiyananada also spent the last three years of his life at Varanasi. Although sick, he, as was natural for him, lead an austere life and was a source of inspiration for the sannyasis not only to devote to spiritual practices but also to do the service of patients in the right spirit. Often scriptures were read in his presence and he would explain them.

Later Swami Atmananda, an austere contemplative disciple of Swami Vivekananda, was sent to live at Varanasi Sevashrama so that he may inspire the workers to lead a God-centred life of combining work with conventional spiritual practices like Japa, meditation, and study of scriptures. Swami Achalananda, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Mission, lived for many years at Varanasi Sevashrama. He constantly laboured to provide spiritual direction to the apparently secular services. He would not even speak the word ‘patient’. Instead he would always ask, “How many ‘Narayanas’ have been admitted today? How many ‘Narayanas’ have been discharged?” He would be annoyed if any one used the word ‘patient’. Here the hospital is the temple of ‘patient god’; the kitchen where their food is cooked is the ‘Narayan Bhandar’; the food offered to the patients is the holy offering, ‘bhog’; and the workers, including the monks partake of the ‘prasad’ or the consecrated food of the ‘Rogi Narayanaya’ the ‘patient god’.

It is significant that Swami Brahmananda started the practice of singing the Rama-Namasamkirtan on Ekadashi days at the Sevashrama, a Mission centre. He also introduced yearly Durga Puja at the adjacent Advaita Ashrama. At Varanasi, there is the added advantage that Ramakrishna Advaita Ashrama, a Math centre, essentially devoted to the activities related to worship, and the Home of Service, Sevashrama, are side by side. The sannyasis of both the centres had the rare privilege of the holy company of many monks, specially a number of the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

Thus, here we find an example, an ideal, of harmonious combination of work and worship: the service of the ‘Rogi Narayanaya’, together with constant remembrance of God, japa and meditation, holy company, occasional living in solitude, singing of devotional songs. This rare balance was possible because this Sevashrama was one of the earliest work-centres of the Ramakrishna Mission and hence had the blessed good fortune of the guidance of spiritual giants like Swami Brahmananda, and Swami Turiyananda. Many centres of the Ramakrishna Mission started at a later date may not have this blessing. But they have an example before them to emulate.

References

1) The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. 1: 6
3) The Eternal Companion, p.204
4) Ibid., p.201
5) Ibid., p.57
6) Ibid., p.206
8) The Eternal Companion, p.60
**Meditation**

**QUESTION:** In perfect meditation, there should be no body-consciousness. But if we have a personal deity with a form to meditate upon, are we not likely to be fixed in body-consciousness? Can we have a personal God in any other form than a bodily form?

**MAHARAJ:** In meditation what is to be achieved is the obliteration of our body-consciousness through absorption in the object of meditation. If there is real concentration, this obliteration happens automatically. Even when our mind is intensely absorbed in an external object or in reading a book, we forget ourselves, and our consciousness gets fused with the object that occupies the field of our attention. There is therefore nothing incompatible between practising meditation on the deity with a personal form and overcoming the sense of our body-consciousness during meditation. Trouble arises because the practitioner is doing more of reflection on himself than concentration on the deity.

Personal God does not necessarily mean a being with a human body. It means Saguna Brahman—Supreme Being with attributes. He is without form and with form. Personality is the highest category within the knowledge of man and so, when God is apprehended in terms of the highest known to us, we call Him personal. We do not thereby mean that he is an individual. He is a presence that is Sat, Chid, and Ananda, that knows us and responds to us, that loves and can be loved. An individual can be only himself and none else, but the personal God can manifest himself as any individuality. Such individual manifestations to devotees by the Personal God, we call Murtis (forms of God) and Incarnations of God. The creation we perceive is nothing but countless individual forms, each having its speciality distinguishable from every other. He who is the source of all these diverse forms,—why could He not be possessed of an archetypal seed form which can express itself as any Ishta Devata the devotee meditates upon?

Sri Ramakrishna conceives these divine forms as the regions of the ocean of Satchidananda congealed like ice into solidified forms under the cooling influence of devotion. An ideal divine form helps meditation, if the intellectual conflict which some have got in regard to it is overcome by deep thinking. Those who are averse to form can think of Him as a presence pervading everything and commune with Him as Sat, Chit and Ananda in the recesses of their own beings.

*
Headquarters
Belur Math campus remained closed for devotees and visitors all through May on account of the coronavirus pandemic and the nationwide lockdown imposed by the government.

Cyclone Amphan, the fiercest storm of the century to strike the state of West Bengal, left Belur Math almost unscathed except uprooting some old trees on 20 May. Fortunately, the old mango tree situated near Swamiji’s Room remains safe and intact.

News of Branch Centres
Ranchi Morabadi centre launched a mobile phone app named Vivek Krishi to serve as a handbook of agriculture for farmers.

Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal, visited Gadadhar Ashrama, Kolkata.

Relief Work

Corona virus Relief
145 branch centres spread over 26 states / union territories in India, and also five centres in other countries continued their Corona virus relief service.

Cyclone Relief
The severe cyclone Amphan made landfall over the West Bengal coast on 20 May and left a trail of destruction in many parts of the state and some areas of Bangladesh. The cyclone rendered thousands of people homeless, uprooted trees and electric poles and caused inundation of several areas. 12 centres in West Bengal and one centre in Bangladesh carried out relief operations and gave food grains and grocery items to 6801 families and cooked food to 1,69,173 people.

Distress Relief
One centre each in India, Bangladesh and Zambia distributed 1200 blankets, 10,000 sweaters, 1050 saris, 8286 shirts, 8620 cloth pieces for shirt, and 7286 trousers.
Covid 19 Relief work

Hatamuniguda

Ooty

Imphal

Muzafarpur

Lusaka, Zambia

Sylhet, Bangladesh

Amphan Cyclone Relief work

Barasat

Taki

Bagerhat, Bangladesh

Saradapith

Naora
“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.
It is the cheerful mind that is persevering. It is the strong mind that hews its way through a thousand difficulties.

— Swami Vivekananda