Ramlala is the form of Sri Ramachandra as a boy. In the northwestern part of India, people affectionately call little boys *lal* or *lala* and girls *lali*. Hence, the image of the boy Ramachandra is addressed as Ramlala.

A Ramait sadhu who worshipped the Ramlala murti for many years was blessed with the continuous vision of Ramlala. When he came to Dakshineswar, Sri Ramakrishna too had this vision of Ramlala. He fed Him, bathed Him, and played with Him: "I actually saw Ramlala as I see you – now dancing ahead of me, now following me. Sometimes he insisted on being taken on my lap. But then when I picked him up, he wouldn’t want to stay there. He would run around in the sun, plucking flowers among the thorns, or splashing and swimming in the Ganga. ... He’d go right on with his pranks. Sometimes he’d look at me sweetly with his beautiful eyes, or he’d pout and make faces at me. Then I’d get really angry and scold him.”

When Ramlala refused to go anywhere leaving Sri Ramakrishna, the Ramait sadhu was sad. But one day, he had a new revelation of Ramlala, by the strength of which he happily gave the Ramlala murti to Sri Ramakrishna and left Dakshineswar.
THE VEDANTA KESARI
A Cultural and Spiritual Monthly of The Ramakrishna Order

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Editor: Swami Mahamedhananda

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

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

Swamiji started looking for the right channel to propagate the powerful message of Vedanta. He opted for the print medium and decided to bring out a journal, giving it the name *Brahmavadin*. 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. Brahmagadhin 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:
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 realised. 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.
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For the last 106 years, without missing a single issue, the magazine has been carrying the invigorating message of Vedanta and alongside, continuously revamping itself to meet the changing needs of the times.

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

---

_Swami Vivekananda_
ATTENTION

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

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Sloka - 26

O Bestower of good! Even if men can roll up the sky like a sheet of leather, man will not be able to end all sorrow, without knowing You. Knowledge of You cannot be attained without Your grace. So, I who am overcome by sorrow, in which God can I seek refuge other than in you?

Sloka - 27

What is the use of the collection of words which are uncreated by any one (apaurusheya) and whose meaning is hidden (the Vedas), or the Puranas, or the Tantra which are difficult for the human intelligence to understand! What is the use of the Shastras which indulge only in futile disputes! For those whose minds are fixed on You, knowledge is attainable by Your grace alone, O Lord of knowledge.

Sloka - 28

I am the worst among sinners, fickle-minded towards sense-objects, always harming myself (by looking upon my body-mind complex as my self), the very abode of all weaknesses, and ignorant of even the scent of meritorious actions. Even though this is so, it is not proper for you to reject this miserable one who has surrendered himself at Your lotus feet, O Lord, Destroyer of Cupid.
He who was Rama, He who was Krishna, He Himself is now Ramakrishna in this body: not in your Vedantic sense [according to which each soul is potentially divine], but actually so.

Ordinary people do not recognize the advent of an Incarnation of God. He comes in secret. Only a few of His intimate disciples can recognize Him. That Rama was both Brahman Absolute and a perfect Incarnation of God in human form was known only to twelve rishis. The other sages said to Him, ‘Rama, we know You only as Dasaratha’s son.’

The Divine Mother would put me in such a state that sometimes my mind would come down from the Nitya to the Lila, and sometimes go up from the Lila to the Nitya. Sometimes, when the mind descended to the Lila, I would meditate day and night on Sita and Rama. At those times I would constantly behold the forms of Sita and Rama. Ramlala [Sri Rama as the child] was my constant companion. Sometimes I would bathe Him and sometimes feed Him.

I saw Sita in a vision. I found that her entire mind was concentrated on Rama. She was totally indifferent to everything — her hands, her feet, her clothes, her jewels. It seemed that Rama had filled every bit of her life and she could not remain alive without Rama.

I see Rama in all things. You [devotees] are all sitting here, but I see only Rama in everyone of you... Where will he go away from the world? I realise that wherever I live I am always in the Ayodhya of Rama. This whole world is Rama’s Ayodhya.

The darkness of the mind disappears when God is realised. In the Purana it is said that it was as if a hundred suns were shining when Rama entered the court. Why, then, weren’t the courtiers burnt up? It was because the brilliance of Rama was not like that of a material object. As the lotus blooms when the sun rises, so the lotus of the heart of the people assembled in the court burst into blossom.

O Rama! O Rama! I am without devotion and austerity, without knowledge and love; I have not performed any religious rites. O Rama, I have taken refuge in Thee; I have taken shelter at Thy feet. I do not want creature comforts; I do not seek name and fame. O Rama, I do not crave the eight occult powers; I do not care for a hundred occult powers! I am Thy servant. I have taken refuge in Thee. Grant, O Rama, that I may have pure love for Thy Lotus Feet; that I may not be deluded by Thy world-bewitching maya! O Rama, I have taken refuge it Thee.

—Sri Ramakrishna
Swami Saradananda, one of the direct-disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and the first General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Order, writes: “There is a talk the world over that the history of Bharatvarsha is not available because her people did not know how to record their history! O fool! Ram became the king after killing Shyam, then he begot ten children, he ruled for twenty years, i.e., he introduced some rules and regulations, he rewarded some and punished some others, he slept, he quarrelled, he enjoyed, he suffered and he died — is this what you mean by history? How does it benefit or harm the world if such history is preserved or not?

“But if history means the record of the profound realisations of mahapurushas — those who have reshaped the minds of all the people of the land by the sovereign influence of their thought-currents; who have by the love of their great heart taught the meanest of people to become unselfish; whose ideals entering into the hearts of their countrymen remain enshrined there ever-shining like a gemstone murti — then it is verily Bharata which has especially preserved such history.”

One such history of this land is that of Sri Rama, the Maryadapurushottama who has shaped our lives for over 7000 years. Crores of people have Rama as part of their name, and according to a census there are 3626 villages named after Rama.

An embodiment of truth and morality, he was the ideal son, the ideal brother, the ideal husband, the ideal friend, the ideal warrior, and the ideal king. About Rama’s influence on him, Gandhiji writes: “When a child, my nurse taught me to repeat Ramanama whenever I felt afraid or miserable, and it has been second nature with me with growing knowledge and advancing years. ... It has been my saviour.... In the spiritual literature of the world, the Ramayana of Tulsidas takes a foremost place.” The Ramayana, Sri Aurobindo says, “has fashioned much of what is best and sweetest in the national character.” Truly, countless men and women have evolved in the path of spirituality, holding on to the ideal of Rama, Sita, and even Hanuman. Swami Vivekananda therefore declares, “Rama and Sita are the ideals of the Indian nation”, the “worship of Mahavira must be introduced ... Sri Ramachandra must be worshipped in every home. Therein lies your welfare, therein lies the good of the country.”

Over the long passage of time people feel the need of external supports that readily bring to mind the life and ideals of a mahapurusha. These supports are usually in the form of a sacred text of his life and teachings, and places sanctified by his association. Such a text or location also connects people in a bond of brotherhood.

The Rama Janmabhoomi Temple which is now being reconstructed is one such sacred site.

It is unfortunate that some people refuse to respect this land’s deep-rooted connection with Sri Rama, and see in the Rama Janmabhoomi Temple a mere political drama. If only these people could step out of their pet ‘isms’ and fanatic mind-sets, they would understand the devout Hindu’s pain when he sees the shrines of his ideals desecrated as in Ayodhya, Kashi, Mathura and thousands of other places. For millions of devout Hindus, the reconstruction of Sri Rama’s temple in Ayodhya, 500-odd years after its destruction by fanatics, reclaims in a sense the historical, cultural, and spiritual heritage of this land. As the Cover Page tries to depict, Sri Rama is timeless and universal, and when we walk in his path we usher in the golden age. ✯
Ayodhya

The name Ayodhya signifies ‘no war (Yuddha)’ or ‘a place that cannot be won in war’. Nevertheless, the city of Ayodhya has been embroiled in a war of faiths for the last 500-odd years. Even so, this centuries-long span of anguish is a relatively short time-window, a passing and testing phase, in the history of a living civilisation that tracks time since the beginning of creation. The landmark Supreme Court judgment on the Rama Janmabhoomi case in November 2019, has once again emphasised that this city cannot be won over by war. It is indeed the grace of

Temple for Sri Rama in Ayodhya

D.K. HARI & D.K. HEMA HARI

Bharath Gyan, is a not for profit research initiative in Civilization Studies of India by D.K. Hari and Hema Hari, a couple based in Chennai. Through an interdisciplinary approach and the Archaeo-Astronomy technique, they have uncovered the historicity of ancient Indian events and personages along with demystifying many myths and mysteries around ancient Indian knowledge systems and cultural practices. Archaeo-Astronomy technique, especially using Planetarium Software precisely charts the sky in the past or in the future. Given a particular time the software can show the planetary positions at that time, and conversely, given a set of planetary configurations the tool can help identify the date of its occurrence either in the past or in the future. As ancient Indian literature is characterized by the descriptions of many sky observations, these can be used to date the heroes and events in texts like Ramayana and Mahabharata. This article presents in brief the new discoveries about Bhagavan Sri Rama and the significance of the Rama Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya.

Cover page artist: Sri Sudhir Mirage, Mumbai.
Bhagavan Sri Rama that the long wait and struggle has found a peaceful end, auguring a promising new beginning.

Timeline of Indian history

While writing the history of Indian civilisation, the colonial historians traced it only until 325 BCE, i.e., up to the time of Alexander’s invasion of northwestern India. All events prior to this time was termed pre-historic and simply dismissed as mythology.

Now, with the beginning of the rebuilding of the temple for Bhagawan Sri Rama at his birthplace in Ayodhya, the year 2020 has become a milestone in the timeline of Indian history. This year will be remembered as one when Sri Rama, with the identification of his birthplace, came to be acknowledged as a great historical personage and not just a mythological character. This temple for an avatarapurusha also signifies the intertwining of history and the mystical dimensions of life.

One of the important tasks, while compiling knowledge of ancient Indian civilisation, is to trace the historical timeline of ancient India prior to the colonial benchmark of 325 BCE. This pegging of our ancient history as discovered from traditional Indian texts, bridges the chasm between the unknown origins of our ancestors and the deep, widespread influence of their wisdom.

Historical events and people

It is beyond the scope of documentation to prove the blending of divinity and historicity in personages such as Sri Rama and Sri Krishna who figure in the two traditional historical accounts of India – Ramayana and Mahabharata. Their divinity will always be a matter of faith. But their historicity, which is a matter of existence, can be established through words and figures.

Using an integrated and interdisciplinary approach, in tune with modern methods of tracking time and history, Bharath Gyan has placed the historicity of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna and other legendary figures of ancient India in the timeline given above.

Sri Rama is the farthest dateable Indian historical personage. With this it makes a fascinating study to discover the spread of his influence through his descendants, even 7100 years after his time.

Spread of Sri Rama’s Lineage

Tracing the history of Ayodhya and its descendants, we find traces of Sri Rama’s Solar dynasty, all over India and across the world – stretching from Korea in Far East, to Thailand, Indonesia and Cambodia in Southeast Asia, and...
Russia, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey and many other lands to the West.

In fact, going by India’s view of the world in terms of East and West, we find ancient Americas considered as a land to the East of India, approached via the Pacific Ocean. In this ancient America too, we find imprints of Lord Rama.

**Spread within India**

The ancestry of King Shuddhodana, the father of Buddha, has been traced in Buddhist works, to the Ikshvaku lineage, the same Surya Vamsa or Solar dynasty of Sri Rama.1

The Sikhs of the Sodi and Vedi (Bedi) clans are respectively the descendants of Luva and Kusha, the twin sons of Sri Rama. Guru Gobind Singh, the 10th Sikh guru was a Sodi and thus a descendant of Luva.2 Sant Guru Nanak Dev Himself, a Vedi, also traces His lineage to Kusha. This makes the Sikhs joint stakeholders of Ayodhya, Sri Rama, and the temple at Sri Rama Jannabhoomi.

In fact, Sant Guru Nanak Dev was a contemporary of Babar. He is probably the last Indian saint to have visited the temple at Ayodhya before it was demolished. As narrated to Bhai Mardana, his disciple, Sant Guru Nanak Dev was visiting Ayodhya and the birth place of Sri Rama because, as a descendant of Kusha, it was his ancestral home.3

**The spread to the East**

The kings of Thailand consider themselves to be a part of Sri Rama’s lineage. Even now they are anointed with the name of Rama and the present king is known as Rama X. When the Indonesian King signs any proclamation, he does it with the words Paduka Seri i.e., ‘at the feet of Sri Rama’, revealing their connection with Sri Rama. A princess from Ayodhya went to Korea and married the Korean King, giving rise to the Kim dynasty of Korea. The people there acknowledge their descent from Ayodhya and Sri Rama’s lineage.

**The spread to the West**

When the Egyptian Pharaohs took on the name Ramses, i.e., RMS (Ra Ma Sa) in the local language, they were openly claiming their link with the Sun, the Solar dynasty, Sri Rama and Ayodhya. Again, when the Mittani and Hittite kings in the region of Anatolia (Turkey), Sumeria and Mesopotamia signed treaties, they did it under the names found in the lineage of Sri Rama like Dashratha and others. The cliffs in Iraq bear carvings of figures like Sri Rama and names like Rama, disclosing the movement of those connected with Sri Rama and Ayodhya, through those regions as well. In the ancient civilizations of America, Sri Rama and his consort Sita held a special place as an ideal couple and were known as Rama-Sitva. There were festivals celebrated in their honour, as noted by Sir William Jones, a British High Court Judge, linguist and luminary of the 1780s.4

People in all these foreign regions may not belong to the Hindu religion now. Yet, they all are stakeholders of the lineage of Sri Rama, the Surya Vamsa and thereon to Ayodhya, the place of birth of their ancestor. With the placing of Sri Rama’s birth historically at 10 January 5114 BCE, we have an antiquity going back to 7130 years. Thus, Ayodhya with the site of Sri Rama’s birth
as its epicenter, is one of the oldest continuously occupied cities in the world and a world heritage city.

Knowledge of all these facts, uplifts Ayodhya and its temple to Sri Rama as a monument of universal significance. Even though today’s generation across the world is unaware of this history, India is answerable to the future generations of the world when they wake up to lay claim on this legacy which is also their roots.

A monumental personage

Out of the many kings in the entire world, if people across the world chose to venerate Sri Rama and connect with his dynasty the most, it shows that Sri Rama embodies something very special. Before writing the Ramayana, Valmiki met Narada and asked him if there was any person, living or dead, who manifested the sixteen noble traits that a human being can aspire to. Narada then revealed that there indeed was one such person living amidst them in the form of Sri Rama. This then is the uniqueness of Sri Rama – he exemplifies the sixteen noble qualities. And for this he was, and is even today the role model for mankind, the Maryada Purushottama.

Valmiki then wrote the Ramayana as a canvas to bring out the nature of these sixteen qualities in Sri Rama, highlighting them through various challenging events in his life. In world literature and history, Sri Rama is the only one to have exhibited these sixteen qualities. In our modern world which is experiencing dwindling personal and social values and ideals, it is our sacred duty to uphold the personality and life of Sri Rama as a universal role model.

रयामयाय रयामचंद्याय रयामभद्याय ववेधसवे । रघुनयार्याय नयार्याय सी्याययाः ि्यवे नमः –

one of the popular slokas on Sri Rama reveals what he meant to people around him. To father Dasaratha he was ‘Rama’, the radiant son and the delight of his heart; to his mother Kausalya he was ‘Ramabhadra’, her fortune and blessing; to his

### Maryada Purushottama Sri Rama’s 16 Virtues

1) गुणवयान् = endowed with excellent qualities
2) वीय्मवयान्  = with prowess
3) धम्मज्: = knower of righteousness,
4) कृ्ज्:  = who is filled with gratitude
5) सत्यावाक्य: = truthful in his statements,
6) गुरुद्रलजत: = firm in his vows
7) चालिश्लेषु युक्त: = is endowed with good conduct
8) सव्मभू्वेषु पह्: = benefactor of all living beings
9) विद्रान्द: = learned man
10) समर््म: = competent
11) एकप्रियदश्मन: = delightful in appearance to everyone
12) आत्मवयान् = self-restrained
13) जितक्रोध: = who has conquered anger
14) द्ुप्मयान् = is endowed with splendour,
15) अनसूयक: = who is free from envy
16) कसय पिभयप् दवेवया: च संयुगवे = whom even the devatas fear to engage in battle.
step-mother Kaikeyi he was ‘Ramachandra’, the adorable child, lustrous like the moon; to his guru Vasistha he was ‘Vedase’, the learned; to the rishis he was ‘Raghunatha’, the protector of the clan of Raghu; to his wife Sita he was ‘Natha’, her protector and lord of her heart; and to his father-in-law Janaka he was ‘Sitapati’, husband of Sita. As seen earlier, sages Valmiki and Narada saw him as the embodiment of sixteen divine qualities. And to the devotees he is the Lord himself.

Need for a monument

Each society erects monuments to symbolize the ideals, principles and truths manifested by a towering personality who is its role model. For example, Bhagavan Buddha has monuments dedicated to him at Lumbini, his birthplace, and at Bodhgaya, where he attained enlightenment. Buddhists and even people of other faiths from across the world visit these two places to venerate him and be inspired by his teachings. Similarly, it is but natural, to have a monument for Bhagavan Sri Rama at his birthplace, where his descendants, followers, and others from the world over can offer their respects and prayers. This monument is now taking shape in Ayodhya as the Temple of Ram Lala. This temple will restore the glory of Ayodhya as the source of many societies across the world, establish the connect of avatarhood and historicity, inspire countless people to awaken in themselves the noble qualities epitomised by Sri Rama, and act as the focal point of a global legacy – a legacy inherited biologically or as an inspiration.

A chain of events

The millennia long practice of making a pilgrimage to Sri Rama’s Ayodhya was broken when the Ram Janmabhoomi temple was demolished 500 years ago. The efforts to reclaim the land and rebuild the temple began right then. But, it is perhaps to remind us of the travails that Sri Rama himself had to undergo, that the efforts to rebuild his temple prolonged for 500 years, causing anguish to millions of people and also claiming the lives of many men and women.

However, a series of events over the last two centuries, beginning in 1822 with the filing of a case in the court of British India, paved the way for the construction of the temple which began with the laying of the foundation stone on 5 Aug 2020. Persistent efforts of countless people, in various roles, have today resulted in this restoration of the national ideal – the goal of Rama Rajya. Let this be the beginning of a new phase of peace and prosperity in the history of India.*

Note: Literature on the historicity of Sri Rama and Ayodhya includes the trilogy, Historical Rama, Ramayana in Lanka, Ayodhya: War and Peace. These books and other material are available at www.bharathgyan.com. Email: bharathgyan@gmail.com

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Reminiscences of Sargachhi

SWAMI SUHITANANDA

(Continued from previous issue...)

Swami Premeshananda (1884 – 1967) was a disciple of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi. For over two decades he lived at Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Sargachhi, West Bengal. Under his inspiration countless people led a life of spirituality and service, and many young men and women entered into monastic life. His conversations – translated from Bengali and presented below – were noted by his attendant who is now Srimat Swami Suhitananda Ji, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order.

30.12.60 (contd...)

By reason of My proximity, Prakriti produces all this, the moving and the unmoving; the world wheels round and round, O son of Kunti, because of this.” Even though I (Nirguna Brahman) do not act, without My presence, Saguna cannot create. It’s just like someone gets into a carriage and the carriage begins to move. He is not the driver of the carriage, yet, unless he sits in the carriage, it will not move. Do you know how it is? The zamindar resolved in his mind – let there be a tank. The tank was dug by the villagers who took eight annas as labour. The zamindar himself didn’t actively do any work in creating the tank, – he only made the sankalpa, resolution.

The Lord says: “Unaware of My higher state, as the great Lord of beings, fools disregard Me, dwelling in the human form.” When I assume a human body, people look upon Me as an ordinary human being without regarding Me as God with attributes. Such was the case with Haladhari.

30.1.61

Maharaj: Jnana Yoga is truly a unique book. In it everything is explained wonderfully.
The author of *Panchadasi* could not offer any examples. Swamiji has explained it through science, as is done in Chemistry. In *Raja Yoga*, the way ओमप्तयवेकयाषिरं ब्रह्म (Gita 8:13) “Om’, Brahman…” has been explained; we don’t find this in the Gita itself.

But the Gita is a delightful book. Some say its main theme is work, some say it is knowledge, and others say it is yoga. Each chapter of the Gita ends with the words योगशयास्तवे, ‘in the yoga scripture’. Actually, the message established in the Gita is yoga as the method of attaining Self-knowledge. Show me where the Gita speaks of anything other than knowledge. The final aim of dhyana yoga, bhakti yoga, and all others is to teach us how to attain liberation or Self-knowledge. If you can thoroughly read Swamiji’s *Complete Works*, you will become a king. You will find everything in it – even history and geography! But keep your goal fixed; don’t go for fame or oratorship.

Ordinary people believe that there is a place called Vaikuntha Loka, where God resides and Lakshmi massages His feet. But God Himself has said, मात्रम् ज्ञातं न नाश्चतिविक्षिप्तं धनांजयः (Gita 7:7) “There is nothing higher than Myself, O Dhananjaya. All this is strung on Me, as a row of gems on a thread.” नानात्वं क्यतत्सप्त न चैव सुकृतं विभु: (Gita 5:15) “The omnipresent Lord does not accept the sin or virtue of anybody. Knowledge is enveloped by ignorance; because of this, beings get deluded.”

Nowhere does the Gita speak of external renunciation. It only says to set right your inner realm. It does not speak of having to leave one’s home. It just tells us, ‘Remain detached in whatever environment you are situated’ – बाध्यपर्याप्तस्वसत्तत्वात् विनिवृत्त्यात्मिनि यस्मुक्तः। स योगायुक्तस्वसत्तत्वा सुभूषणश्चर्यं शुभायुक्तोऽशुभायुक्तं रुपायुक्तं येषां निवृत्त्यात्मिनि॥ (Gita 5:21) “He whose mind is unattached to the external objects of the senses attains to the bliss that is in the Self; with his mind identified with Brahman through absorption in It, he enjoys undecaying bliss.”

**Question:** What are the similarities between the Bhagavad Gita and Swami Vivekananda’s teachings?

**Maharaj:** You will not find anywhere else the topics discussed in the Bhagavad Gita. It is verily the outcome of research carried out through ages! The Gita was produced by churning the Upanishads! This is a collection of spiritual truths attained by great souls of different periods. For a long time after the Gita, India did not come up with anything new. Great men aroused the world by expounding some aspects of the Gita. But this time there is something totally new. Sri Ramakrishna gave a practical demonstration of the entire Gita; and Swami Vivekananda, explaining the Gita with the help of scientific theory, emphatically preached that it is practicable for everyone.

India has just started rising. What rapid changes are taking place all around! The lower class of society is rising – the old India is breaking into smithereens. A new India will emerge out of this. A hundred years from now, people will be awestruck, reflecting on the happenings of these days!

Swamiji has said that colonial people are excited by passing fads – like the Americans! When Swamiji first went there, they took to monastic life readily; when he went there the second time, he found that those same people turned against him. In contrast, the people of England are more experienced. They do not accept anything readily. But what they accept, they will not give up. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi commented that the people of East Bengal are easily excited. The devotees of Dhaka wanted to take her there. I became very annoyed because they did not have the least bit of seriousness about it.

*(To be continued. . .)*
Before we delve into the topic of a schedule and its relationship with our life, we need to look into the nature of our mind and personality, as it has a deep connection with our life.

**Defining the mind**

In Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutra* there are descriptions of various types of minds. For example, one type of mind cannot concentrate at all, as in the case of birds or monkeys; another type of mind can concentrate at times, but again becomes distracted; there is also the mind that can concentrate for longer periods, but then comes down from that state; and so forth. Vedanta considers the mind in a holistic way and explains it as *Manas* (mind), *Buddhi* (intelligence), *Chitta* (memory) and *Ahamkara* (ego). The mind can be described separately as that which has thoughts, desires and emotions, or it can be viewed collectively as that which has thoughts, desires and emotions; Buddhi is the discriminative faculty, deciding things; Chitta, the memory of past experiences; and Ahamkara is that part of the mind from which ensues ‘I’ and ‘My’ consciousness.

According to Western psychology the mind is divided mainly into two – consciousness and ‘unconsciousness’ (subconsciousness). Again, the subconscious mind is much larger than the conscious mind; the conscious mind is the tip of the iceberg and the subconscious mind is everything below the waterline. Western psychologists, especially Sigmund Freud, have done extensive research on this subject and thrown much light on the contents of the subconscious mind which include innumerable hidden desires, emotion complexes, and tendencies.

Indian psychology too describes the consciousness and subconsciousness mind. But the difference from their Western counterparts is that Indian psychologists have postulated a superconscious state of mind, which most Western psychologists do not subscribe to. This superconscious state of mind signifies the Soul. To realise the nature of the Soul, and to enter into the superconscious state of mind, are synonyms.

With this brief explanation of the views of the psychologists regarding the mind, let us now focus on the mind according to everyone’s experience. While some may doubt the existence of the Soul, no one doubts the existence of their mind. The nature, impressions and experiences of that mind are more or less similar to us all.

**The nature of the mind**

First of all, we must understand that mind and thought are one and the same. We cannot
conceive of mind without thoughts or of thoughts without mind – they are synonymous. One of the first characteristics of the mind is that it is restless; it constantly changes the object of its focus and attention. Swami Vivekananda hence calls the mind as ‘monkey mind.’ The monkey cannot keep still for a single moment. Someone gave such a monkey wine to drink, and made it more restless. Its condition worsened when a scorpion stung it. When the monkey was jumping about in unbearable pain, a ghost entered into it compounding its misery. We can only imagine the intensity of the monkey’s restlessness as a result of all these things.

Then too, although not in Swamiji’s story, suppose someone presented the monkey with a mobile device or a smart phone to see the fun! Now just imagine the state of that monkey’s mind. If we analyse our minds and introspect deeply, shall we not find that our minds too are more or less like the monkey’s mind referred to here?

The mind rarely focuses on the ‘here and now’. It is drawn to the past, thinking of remote past or recent happy or unhappy moments, or it goes to the future conjuring some worries about the future, or dwelling on some future plans. Consequently, the present moment often escapes from us. Moreover, our mind verily identifies itself with the body and the senses, and not the soul. It almost continually thinks of temporal things – family, money, work, and entertainments, and rarely if ever does it think about the Eternal or the Infinite.

This is also how the mind reacts: When we receive something we like, the mind becomes happy, and when we receive something we dislike the mind experiences suffering or sadness. It continually fluctuates between likes and dislikes or between joy and suffering. There are two Sanskrit words ‘sankalpa and vikalpa’, meaning ‘should I do this’ or ‘should I do that’, and the mind is continually oscillating between these two. Most of the thoughts of our mind are either negative or neutral; rarely are they positive. One example of this is, instead of looking at the good qualities of others the common mind mostly finds their negative qualities.

If there is some difficult task to be performed, the mind’s first reaction is, ‘I do not want to do this!’ The mind is also full of negative feelings, such as pride, anger, attachment, greed, worries, fears, and so forth. There are also samskaras or the chronic mental tendencies acquired in previous lives and the present life, and formed by repeated thoughts and deeds; some of these are good, but many are negative.

When with this state of a deluded mind we perform our work, we engage in our human relationships, and so forth, is it any wonder that we commit mistakes and make wrong decisions? Consequently, we suffer and cannot experience sustained happiness or peace. It is a hard fact that we can be away from people we dislike, but we cannot distance ourselves from our own deluded mind, which turns out to be our own enemy. This often creates a feeling of helplessness and anguish in us, and we are at a loss as to how to remedy it.

In such a state we may wonder, does the mind belong to me, or do I belong to the mind? Am I the master of my own mind, or am I its servant? Our present condition would suggest that we are but slaves to our mind, and the mind has become our master. Now we may ask what is the root cause of this undesirable state, and is there any way to change the pitiable condition we find ourselves in.

Once Swami Vivekananda observed, “The Mind is Maya”, the great illusion. Examining this statement a little deeper we conclude Maya and Prakriti (primordial energy) are one, and this Prakriti contains three gunas (attributes or qualities) which are present in all things and all beings of this universe. These gunas are sattva (the quality of calmness and peace), rajas (the quality of restlessness, desire, attachment,
activity and ambition), and tamas (laziness, dullness, ignorance and violence); and the percentages of rajas and tamas in our minds are greater than sattva. This is the chief reason our minds presently behave in the way explained above.

There is also the impact of the environment on our mind. If we compare the countryside to the city, there is a greater scope for mental distractions among the city dwellers. So, the challenge we face is ‘How to control this mind?’

Using time effectively

Individually, some people, who mistakenly contend whims of their mind as ‘freedom of will,’ do not care about controlling the mind at all. Others care but are not willing to do the necessary practice to achieve it. Still others only practice casually and superficially with no tangible effect. The other problem is, the state of mind we aspire for and our actions are in complete opposition. It is an irony that on the one hand we want mental peace and tranquillity, but on the other we often engage in the types of actions which lead us to more restlessness and more stress.

Who is to be held responsible for this state other than ourselves, which, unfortunately, we neither admit to nor realise? If we continue working at cross-purposes, we shall never find peace. This is what we need to realise first to bring a paradigm shift in ourselves. From the positive viewpoint, we have to practise hard in order to control the mind, and from the negative viewpoint, we must take care that our objectives and methods are not contradictory to each other. Otherwise, no one in this world will be able to help us; neither God, nor a guru, nor scriptures, nor our well-wishers.

While striving to control our mind we must also recognise that time is very precious in our life. It is more precious than any of our earthly possessions. We are very careful about spending money, but not that careful about spending the time which is limited by our lifespan. If we spend or lose money, we can work to replace or save it again, but time is irreplaceable. Once it’s gone, it’s gone forever and cannot be retrieved. Yet, time is something most people do not pay much attention to. How to make the best use of time with regard to our life will be discussed later in this article.

Self-Development

Most thinking people are not satisfied with their present state. They want a better state of being and want to develop in body and mind, intellectually, and even spiritually. But for many it stops there and remains a wishful desire, as they are not ready to do the needful to achieve such goals. Another problem is that people expect to achieve greatness overnight, which is well-nigh impossible, since behind all manner of spectacular achievement lies hard and sustained practice or struggle. So, if we want to reach a higher state we must be ready to fulfil the conditions it requires, or in other words, to pay the price of it.

Daily schedule

Is there a way we can fulfil all three of the objectives we have discussed above, namely, how to control the mind, how to use time effectively, and how to achieve self-development? The answer is yes! It lies in making a daily schedule and following it. If we make a basic but model daily schedule and follow it diligently, there is a fair possibility of achieving all three goals. This is a most effective method important not only for spiritual aspirants, but also for everyone aspiring for a higher and better life.

For example, Swami Vivekananda, founder of the Ramakrishna Order, insisted that the sannyasis must follow a schedule from morning to night to lead a disciplined life, and also for gradual, all-round self-development. Now every centre of the Ramakrishna Order of sannyasis follows a set daily schedule, which is more or
less similar. Swami Premeshanandaji, a disciple of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and one of our senior and highly respected swamis who inspired quite a few aspirants to become sannyasis and sannyasinis, made a significant remark about our ashrama schedule. He said, “Our swamis need not go to the Himalayas for doing hard spiritual practices for illumination. They can have the same experience here itself, if they follow our ashrama schedule regularly, with sincerity, understanding and faith.”

Making and following a model schedule

Let us now discuss the key points in following a schedule. First make a model schedule for one day. Time for physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual development should find a place in that schedule. To illustrate this, make some time for prayer – prayer for peace and well-being not only for ourselves and our family, but also for the whole humanity –, meditation, repetition of God’s name, occasional self-analysis, and introspection. Such self-analysis and introspection should be about the life we would like to lead and the one we have been leading until now, and the true purpose of our life and what we have been doing to achieve it. By such spiritual practices we can connect ourselves to our superconscious state of mind, the foundation of our whole being, and thus integrate our body, mind and soul, and become an integrated personality. Make time for studying the scriptures. Study of scriptures like the Bhagavad Gita and The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna explain what is Truth, what is needed to realise the Truth, what are the obstacles to realise Truth, and what is the effect of realising Truth. There are plenty of moral and spiritual advices which give us guidance in our day-to-day life, our work, human relationships, etc. We should also use time in reading inspiring and elevating books to enrich ourselves.

Make time for some physical exercise, whether doing some yoga exercises, swimming, taking a walk, visiting a gym or some combination of these. While in the USA, Swamiji sent a letter to the resident sannyasis at the Alambazar Math urging them to do some daily exercise, and Swamiji himself exercised almost till his last days. Swami Brahmanandaji, one of Swamiji’s distinguished brother-disciples, also followed Swamiji’s instruction using small dumbbells, and wherever he went the dumbbells were carried too!

One of Swami Brahmanandaji’s disciples, Swami Yatiswaranandaji, who authored the religious classic, Meditation and Spiritual Life, would also regularly exercise as advised by his Guru. Once Swami Bhuteshanandaji, another swami who later became the 12th President of the Order, reminisced that he was travelling by train with Swami Yatiswaranandaji. At a fixed time in the morning, on the train itself, Yatiswaranandaji brought out the dumbbells and started his exercises unmindful of the reactions this sight elicited from the other passengers. Following the words of the Guru to the letter makes a disciple great, as it happened in the case of Swami Yatiswaranandaji.

Of course schedule times for meals, sleep, relaxation, hobbies, and for work as well. Make this daily schedule and follow it every day. In making our schedule we should not be too ambitious or set goals too high, e.g., rising much too early for long meditations. Start with a humble and realistic schedule. It is better to make two types of schedule, one to follow on the weekdays when we go to work, and the other to follow during the weekends and holidays when we have more free time. Moreover, we should review how closely we follow the schedule. If we are missing the schedule, we should find out the reasons and the remedies.

As regards our scores of daily duties we should make a separate daily schedule of works
so that we may do them in an organised way. Moreover, as we devote ever greater lengths of time and energy to accomplish these works, we first have to connect them with the purpose of our life. Next, we need to be extra cautious that we do not make ourselves busy without any real business to attend to. This will help us to remain calm amidst the whirlpool of works and to hold on to our main mission in life, as explained above. Thus, we also save valuable time and energy to spend more fruitfully. Otherwise, there is a possibility that we become workaholics, which unfortunately, is a common trait of our modern-day life, leading to various negative consequences.

The following observation of Swami Vivekananda found in his work *Karma Yoga*, regarding people exhibiting the effects of this trait is noteworthy: “Duty becomes a disease with us, it drags us ever forward. It catches hold of us and makes our whole life miserable. It is the bane of human life. This duty, this idea of duty is the midday summer sun which scorches the innermost soul of mankind. Look at those poor slaves to duty. Duty leaves them no time to say prayers, no time to bathe. Duty is ever on them. They go out and work. Duty is on them. They come home and think of the work for the next day. Duty is on them! It is living a slave’s life, at last dropping down in the street and dying in harness, like a horse. This is duty as it is understood. The only true duty is to be unattached and to work as free beings, to give up all work unto God. All our duties are His.”

There is one more pertinent point regarding this daily schedule. First, the time for meditation, study of scripture, and yoga exercises should be allotted in the morning for the following reasons: First of all, after a good night’s sleep we feel refreshed in both body and mind which is conducive to a good meditation. Secondly, in the early morning, nature is calm and the environment is not noisy, hence we can concentrate on these practices and get better results. Thirdly, we will enjoy the benefit of those practices the whole day, during work and other engagements. Finally, there is also less chance of our reducing the time of practice, or skipping it altogether, as there is less chance of being busy at that early hour, except for those busy housewives preparing breakfast / lunch for their family members. For those housewives who have free time during the day, they should schedule their practices accordingly. The thing is, the practice of self-development cannot be skipped for a single day, even though the mind tries to impress upon us that it does not matter much if we skip one day for this or that reason. If we skip one day, we may skip the next day as well. However, in exceptional and genuine cases we may reduce the duration of a particular practice and readjust the timing.

What does it mean to make a schedule? It means to sequence our daily activities and assign time durations for each from start to finish. In making this schedule there are three important points to follow. First is the proper order of activities: what time to wake, go to bed, then for meditation, reading scripture, exercise, and breakfast. Next will be the time to take up our daily activities. Times scheduled for waking and sleeping must be strictly observed. The more important of these two is the time we go to bed, because if we fluctuate the time we go to bed the night before, there is every possibility that our waking time the following morning will fluctuate and our entire daily schedule will be disrupted too!

There are, however, exceptional cases. Mahatma Gandhi would follow his daily schedule no matter how late in the night he worked, as he had a very strong willpower. For us, if we fail to keep our scheduled bedtime because we are involved with something interesting or some other diversion and stay up, then it will affect our schedule the next day.
Hence, please remember our schedule for the day actually starts the night before! Keeping to our schedule requires mental discipline and willpower, because without such discipline and willpower we lose control of the mind and we cannot bring any real change in our life. We shall remain forever where we are.

Some are very particular about keeping time with scheduled appointments of going to work. If the appointment is for 3:05 p.m. most arrive by 3 p.m. and wait till the appointed time comes. This is a very good trait, but do they practice the same on a personal level, while leading their day-to-day life?

Swami Gambhiranandaji was a great sannyasi and scholar, and he was in the habit of going for a walk daily at 4 p.m. with an attendant. One day this attendant arrived a couple of minutes late and Gambhiranandaji pointed out his tardiness, to which the attendant said, ‘Well, Maharaj, it’s only one or two minutes, does it really matter?’ Wanting to emphasise the importance of every single minute, Gambhiranandaji asked if he knew how many miles an aircraft travelled in two minutes. Before Swami Gambhiranandaji became the 11th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission (1985–1988), he served as its General Secretary and then its Vice-President. Despite all the demands on his time, he strictly followed his schedule and found enough time to write many scholarly books.

So far we have discussed following the schedule in its proper order, then being punctual in keeping to the schedule. The third is to concentrate and focus on this moment, the Now.

(To be continued . . )

Sri Ramakrishna’s vision of Mother Sita

One day...I was sitting under the Panchavati—not meditating, merely sitting—when an incomparable, effulgent female figure appeared before me illumining the whole place. It was not that figure alone that I saw then, but also the trees and plants of the Panchavati, the Ganga and all other objects. I saw that the figure was that of a woman; for, there were in her no signs of a goddess, such as the possession of three eyes, etc. But the extraordinary, spirited, and solemn expression of that face, manifesting love, sorrow, compassion, and endurance, was not generally seen even in the figures of goddesses. Looking graciously at me that goddess-woman was advancing from north to south towards me with a slow, grave gait. I wondered who she might be, when a black-faced monkey came suddenly, nobody knew whence, and sat at her feet and someone within my mind exclaimed, ‘Sita, Sita who was all sorrow all her life, Sita the daughter of king Janaka, Sita to whom Rama was her very life!’ Saying ‘Mother’ repeatedly, I was then going to fling myself at her feet, when she came quickly and entered this (showing his own body). Overwhelmed with joy and wonder, I lost all consciousness and fell down.”
An Appeal for Donations

By the Grace of Bhagawan Sri Ramakrishna, 
By the generous donation of devotees.......... 

the Reconstruction Work (begun in 2018) of the Ramakrishna Math at Haripad, Kerala, is progressing well.

This Math started in 1912 has been sanctified by the stay of Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna. Due to long passage of time, the Math buildings had become totally unfit for use.

Under the First Phase, the Monk’s Quarters is being reconstructed and now its brick work, RCC work, and the Retaining Wall on its three sides are complete. The second stage of Monk’s Quarters reconstruction involves electrification, plumbing, painting, doors & windows, floor tiling, fixing poles with nets for the Retaining Wall, buying furniture etc.

The total cost estimated for completing this second stage of Monk’s Quarters Reconstruction is Rs. 68 lakhs.

We request you to come forward and donate generously and help us to complete this restoration work and join us in joyfully inaugurating this new building in this sacred centre.

Once this work is completed, we will take up in the Second Phase, the work of building a Universal Temple of Sri Ramakrishna, Rooms for Welfare & Social activities, Exhibition Rooms and a Library.

Eagerly anticipating your kind help.

With thanks, good wishes and prayers

Yours in the Lord,

Swami Virabhadrananda, Adhyaksha

Details for sending donations

2) Cheque / D.D may be drawn in favour of “Ramakrishna Math, Haripad” See postal Address above.
3) Online Transfer :A/C Number: 30642551603,: State Bank of India. Haripad. RTGS/NEFT/IFSC code: SBIN0010596. (In case of NEFT transfer please email your Name, Amount, Postal Address, PAN NUMBER, phone number & transaction details to srkmathharipad@gmail.com This is for accounting purposes.)

* Donations from Foreign countries: Kindly draw a Cheque / Draft in favour of “Ramakrishna Math” and send it to the General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, Dt. Howrah (West Bengal), Pin -711 202, India. In the covering letter mention that it is a donation for Haripad Centre building fund. And inform all the details of the donation to e-mail: srkmathharipad@gmail.com, viveka.vira@gmail.com

Donations to Ramakrishna Math are Exempt from Income Tax Under Section 80 G.
Sitting on a high wooden stool, Naren commanded, “Bring in the prisoner.” Shibu and Hari dragged in a boy with a fearsome moustache painted below his little nose.

“Your Majesty,” Hari said, “this is Ranjan, the thief...he can enter through the smallest doorways and escape from the strongest cell...what should be his punishment?”

“Hmm,” King Naren leaned forward, “you have troubled my people a lot...I say, off with your head!” Ranjan wriggled free of his captors and shot across the courtyard into the servant quarter. The boys gave chase and Naren clapped, shouting encouragement. Startling the servants out of their afternoon nap, Ranjan scurried from room to room, creating a ruckus until finally, he raced back into the courtyard and headed straight for the front door. But Naren blocked his way, brandishing a toy sword. Shibu and Hari pounced. With all escape routes closed, the thief surrendered.
“We must celebrate this victory, Your Majesty,” Hari grinned.
“Let’s go to the zoo,” chorused Shibu and Ranjan.
“We’ll go by boat,” Naren added. “That will make it a fun outing.”

At the zoo they visited many animal enclosures and stopped to watch some playful tiger cubs. “My stomach hurts,” Shibu groaned suddenly, looking quite pale. The boys decided to return home and on reaching the ghat, they clambered into an empty boat. After they paid the fare, the two burly boatmen began to row the boat.

“I feel...strange,” Shibu muttered. Naren touched his forehead. It was icy cold. “Look, we are almost home,” he pointed to the approaching ghat. Shibu moaned, squirmed and bending over, vomited in the boat.

“Oy,” the boatmen shouted, “you cannot dirty our boat...wash it off right now or else—”

“Hold your tongue,” Ranjan jumped to his feet but Naren shook his head and pulled out a handful of coins from his pocket. “We’ll pay you for your trouble,” he said to the boatmen, “just get us home fast.”

“First clean up this mess,” they yelled, “only then we’ll take you to the landing ghat.” “But that’s not our job,” Naren protested, “besides, it’ll take us ages to do it and our friend needs to see a doctor immediately.” The men glared and dropped the oars, refusing to row the boat.

Shibu burst into tears. “What do we do now?” Ranjan and Hari tugged at Naren’s sleeve. He glanced towards the ghat. In the distance, he noticed a couple of British officers taking a stroll. “I’ll get help,” he whispered to them, and to everyone’s surprise, dived into the river.

Swimming briskly, he reached the ghat in a few minutes and ran up to the officers, catching their hands. In broken English, he explained the entire matter. The officers listened to him in growing anger and when he finished, they rushed to the water’s edge. “Bring the boat here,” they shouted at the boatmen, “or we’ll arrest you for harassing these boys.”

Frightened, the men picked up their oars and rowing swiftly, brought the boys ashore.
“Thank you,” Naren beamed at the officers, his bright eyes glowing with gratitude.
“You are a gutsy lad,” they said, smiling at him warmly, “not everyone would jump into a river to help a friend. Would you like to come with us to the theatre?”

Naren shook his head, “You are very kind but I must go now,” and waving cheerfully, he ran to help Hari and Ranjan carry Shibu home.

First of all, men should be taught to be practical and physically strong. A dozen of such lions will conquer the world, and not millions of sheep can do so. – Swami Vivekananda
focus in this issue:

Talk at Shivaganga and Manamadura

Swami Vivekananda was received by a group of zamindars (landlords) and citizens of Shivaganga and Manamadura, who gave him a very hearty welcome, and hailed him for marking a new era in the annals of India’s spiritual history. In response to this welcome, Swami Vivekananda gave a short but power-packed talk.

In this issue, we present a walkthrough of his talk:

- Swami Vivekananda began this speech by continuing on a theme which he first spoke about at Pamban — how every nation and every race has a unique ideal around which their entire national life is organized, and how in India’s case this ideal was its religion and spirituality. (See Issue 27).

- Subsequently, in his talk at Ramnad, he reminded his audience that India’s foundation is religion and spirituality — the proof of which could be seen simply by talking to any common peasant on this subject. (See Issue 23).

- In this present lecture to the zamindars of Shivaganga and Manamadura, Swami Vivekananda again stresses the point of how India is an unbroken tradition of religion & spirituality, and how this spiritual treasure of India has a key role to play in the world.

Explore further to study the main arguments presented in this lecture >>
India is still living; who says she is dead

The vibrancy or activity of a civilization is not necessarily measured only through military conquests, or through trade, but can be determined through other parameters.

Great periods of every country have been usually described in terms of military conquest, or in terms of extension of trade networks. For example, the golden years of the British Empire are described when it spread all over the world.

However, a different metric of vibrancy or activity should be used to describe India.

India's vibrancy should be measured in terms of the religious and spiritual activity being carried out in India.

By that parameter, India continues to be as vibrant as many other countries in the world, though on a different dimension.

India is still living; who says she is dead?

But the West wants to see us active. If they want to see us active on the field of battle, they will be disappointed — that is not our field — just as we would be disappointed if we hoped to see a military nation active on the field of spirituality.

But let them come here and see that we are equally active, and how the nation is living and is as alive as ever.

We should dispel the idea that we have degenerated at all.

Why then has European materialism swamped India? Or for that matter, why have so many people left the fold of Hinduism, right from the Buddhistic period, to the Islamic and Christian conversions?

THE PROBLEM

The fault for this should not be placed at the door of any foreign/external influences, but on the Hindus themselves. They must attribute this failure to themselves and to their own karma.

As Vedantists, the first duty of Hindus is to look inwards and see whether they are at fault for this state of affairs or the external influence.

Hindus need to ask themselves what did they do for the poor and the less previledged — for centuries?

Seen from this point of view, they can attribute this failure to themselves and to their own karma.

We are weeping for these renegades now, but what did we do for them before?

Let every one of us ask ourselves, what have we learnt; have we taken hold of the torch of truth, and if so, how far did we carry it? We did not help them then. This is the question we should ask ourselves.
**THE DIAGNOSIS**

We can draw an analogy to the human body. Just as the human frame cannot be attacked by any bacilli unless it is itself weak, similarly, if Hinduism has succumbed even partly to external threats, it is because of its weakness.

The primary cause of its weakening has been an excessive focus on the intricate rituals of day-to-day conduct rather than the vast and noble philosophical ideas and the glorious spirituality, that are the real foundations of the religion.

In other words, Hindus have stopped being Vedantists, or Pauranics, or Tantrics, they have simply become 'don't touchists'.

**THE POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCE**

If this goes on for another century, every one of us will be in a lunatic asylum. It is a sure sign of softening of the brain when the mind cannot grasp the higher problems of life; all originality is lost, the mind has lost all its strength, its activity, and its power of thought, and just tries to go round and round the smallest curve it can find.

**What then is the task ahead of us?**

**THE SOLUTION**

We must recognize the extraordinary heritage and treasure that Hindus have.

Furthermore, we must also recognize that the world is in dire need of this treasure, and will, in fact, die if it does not receive the treasure of spirituality lying hidden in India.

**The task ahead of us is to give.**

There are three kind of giving — the giving of food, the giving of secular knowledge and the giving of spiritual knowledge.

Of these three, Indians have already assimilated the ideal of giving of food into its culture. Now the focus must be on the giving of secular and spiritual knowledge.

**OUR TASK AHEAD**

- Giving food (already a part of our culture)
- Giving secular knowledge
- Giving spiritual knowledge

"If we were all brave and had stout hearts, and with absolute sincerity put our shoulders to the wheel, in twenty-five years the whole problem would be solved, and there would be nothing left here to fight about..."
The kind of knowledge Swami Vivekananda wanted us to give freely...

Knowledge that human beings are essentially divine and their goal in life is to manifest this divinity

Knowledge that helps people to go beyond their narrow selfishness and serve other human beings seeing the divinity in all

Knowledge that helps people to stand on their own feet

Knowledge that enables people to build their character & personality and results in man-making

Knowledge that enables people to build solutions to the challenges of life

Training in concentrating their physical, emotional, and thought energies -- which is the means of acquiring knowledge

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA’S TAKEAWAY MESSAGE TO US..

It is a great thing to take up a grand ideal in life and then give up one's whole life to it. For what otherwise is the value of life, this vegetating, little, low life of man? Subordinating it to one high ideal is the only value that life has. This is the great work to be done in India.
Strange sounds awoke Poorva. She half opened her eyes. The velvety bed on which she was lying tempted her to go back to sleep. Someone brushed against her toes. She was now fully awake and a trifle annoyed too. Another person walked past her hurriedly. In his hand was a tray – a golden one! – filled with goodies. She blinked hard and then looked around – she was in a plush room, with a carved wooden ceiling, a big door ... 

The last thing she remembered was lying down on a wooden bench near the road. She had had a vague feeling that someone was slipping a soft pillow under her head ... Could it be that she had been transported here last night? Realizing that she was never going to find out, she chided herself, “Don’t ask stupid questions, Poorva.” On this trip, logic sounded stupid! Once again, she surveyed the room and decided that the place belonged to a king or somebody incredibly rich. Yet another person brushed against her toes. Thoroughly irritated, Poorva sat up.

Outside the room, many people were scurrying hither and thither. Their excitement was infectious and Poorva jumped out of bed. She stood in the corridor, trying to figure out the reason for this flurry of activity, when a group of men and women moved towards one of the rooms. Poorva followed them.

The room was extremely crowded. A few people were standing around in a semi-circle, leaning forward and exclaiming, “How sweet! How cute! Our King and Queen are truly blessed.” Curious, Poorva wriggled her way in through the crowd and found that the object of such excitement was, once again, a mere baby! Totally disappointed, she started walking towards the door, when cries of “Long live the Chera King Dridhavrata of Mahodayapuram! Long live the Queen!” filled the air. The king and queen entered the room.
The king looked fondly at the baby, turned to his queen, and remarked in a soft voice, “Aren’t we lucky that a child is born to us under Lord Rama’s star sign? We’ll name him ‘Kulashekhara’ for he’ll be the crest jewel of our kulam.”

“Kulam means ‘clan’; shekhara means ‘crest jewel’. He’ll also attain fame in the world as an Aazhvaar. Mahodayapuram, over the centuries, will be renamed “Thiruvanchikulam,” a voice whispered into Poorva’s ear. Swami Thaatha was back.

“Thaatha, how are you?” Poorva greeted him in the manner of a long-lost friend.

“I’m very well, thank you,” replied the Swami pleasantly.

“Now which century are we in?” Poorva sounded incredibly blasé to her own ears. The Swami replied with the same casualness, “Eighth century still,” and he added, “I’m going to let you into a secret that nobody here knows.”

“Isn’t that the definition of a secret?” Poorva shot back.

The Swami smiled. “This baby is an incarnation of the Kausthubha gem of Lord Vishnu.”

Then, seeing her bored by the endless adulation being showered on the baby, he said, “Run along, Poorva; look around the palace and entertain yourself. There is not much that is going to happen here …” and he added, his voice dropping to a whisper, “… for the next few years.”

Poorva did not hear the last few words. As he watched her run down the long corridor, the Swami recollected the beginning of the trip and her initial reactions: ‘holidays, holy days’, ‘bhajans all the way’. Smiling to himself, he went over the trip so far – no glitches, and Poorva seemed to be having a good time. The Swami sent up a small prayer of thanks and slipped into deep meditation.

Meanwhile, awed by the grandeur of the palace, Poorva walked along oohing and aahing at every little thing that she set her eyes on. By evening, her legs were aching. She lay down on an empty bed, and the next moment: zzzz …

(To be continued...)

This story book is available through www.lakshmidevnath.com
When God Calls

Surendranath Mitra

RUCHIRA MITRA

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

यमवेवैष वृणु्वे ्वेन लभयः
It is attained by him alone whom It chooses (Kathopanishad. 1.2:23)

It was almost end-1880. Surendranath Mitra was disgusted with life and was contemplating suicide. One day he confided his anxieties to his neighbours. They suggested, “There lives a Paramahamsa at Dakshineswar. Why don’t you visit him, please?”

Surendra laughed at this suggestion. He was about 30, strong, bright and handsome. He had received an English education and held an important post in a British firm in Calcutta (now Kolkata). He prided himself as a logical thinker and an atheist; and he led a bohemian life. So he joked. “I will be a misfit there — like a crane among swans” (pun on Sri Ramakrishna’s title ‘Paramahamsa’, meaning a great swan). He said, “You hold the Paramahamsa in high esteem. Well and good! But why do you want me to visit him?” Finally, he gave in to their persuasion with the remark, “I have seen enough of quacks. I may see him. But, mind you, if he talks nonsense I shall box his ears.”

These neighbours also were western educated and well-established in society, but they were devotees of Sri Ramakrishna: Ramchandra Dutta and Manomohan Mitra. Neither of them could understand Surendra’s problem. But they recollected that their own problems were permanently solved by the holy company of Sri Ramakrishna. So they advised him to meet Sri Ramakrishna. Naturally, they were upset at Surendra’s attitude. Yet they were so confident about Sri Ramakrishna that they accepted their friend’s challenge. Together they started for Dakshineswar.

Entering Sri Ramakrishna’s room, they found him seated on a couch and a few devotees sitting on the floor. As was his wont Sri Ramakrishna was the first to greet the visitors with folded palms. The proud Surendra did not salute Sri Ramakrishna nor did he care even to show any courtesy by greeting him. Quietly he seated himself in one corner of the room while Ramachandra and Manomohan prostrated themselves before the Master and took their seats.

Calmly, Sri Ramakrishna continued his discourse with those present there.

Surendra found the words of the Paramahamsa enchanting! The sweetness and ring of sincerity in Sri Ramakrishna’s voice kept him spellbound. He had never heard anything like this before. Sri Ramakrishna was speaking...
about the monkey kid who depends upon self-effort and the kitten who depends upon its mother. These words struck Surendra to the core. He felt that in a mystical way, Sri Ramakrishna was speaking to him and him alone! He thought: “That is it. I too am behaving like a monkey kid. Self-willed as I am, I try to do things by self-effort. It results in terrible suffering. Why do I not try to surrender myself to God? ... I too shall depend entirely on the Divine Mother and occasionally call ‘Ma, Ma’ (like the kitten of the story)!”

The burden on his heart vanished in this first visit itself. Contrary to his initial militant attitude, he was already a devotee of the man he wanted to punish by twisting the ears!!

When it was time to leave, Surendra saluted Sri Ramakrishna touching the ground with his head. And then the latter gave his finishing touch. In a sweet, endearing tone, Sri Ramakrishna told him, “Come again, won’t you?” On the return journey Surendranath confessed, “Ah! I came to conquer and am returning defeated! I came to twist his ears; now I find my own ears twisted.”

Surendranath was in fact caught in the love-net of the adept fisherman that Sri Ramakrishna was. Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual insight revealed at the very first glance who the newcomer was. He recognised Surendra as his rasaddar whom the Divine Mother had shown him already in a vision — one of those few commissioned by the Divine Mother to bear a great part of his expenses.

Sri Ramakrishna told him in a subsequent meeting: “The devotee of the Divine Mother attains dharma and moksha. He enjoys artha and kama as well. Once I saw you in a vision as the child of the Divine Mother. You have both yoga and bhoga; otherwise your countenance would look dry.”

It is very significant that Surendra’s character stands out as a testimony to the wonderful transformation that Sri Ramakrishna used to bring about in a man. His terrible bohemian habits, including his visits to prostitutes and his strong addiction to alcohol, were overcome in no time as he followed Sri Ramakrishna’s unique advice to offer everything — good and bad — to the Divine Mother before enjoying them.

Intuitively Surendra understood Sri Ramakrishna’s divinity but was not fully convinced about it. One day while worshipping Mother Kali at his home shrine, he thought, “If Sri Ramakrishna appears in my shrine, then only I shall be convinced of his divinity,” and the next moment he saw Sri Ramakrishna standing before him! In 1886 he publicly declared, “Today is Tuesday and also our (Bengali) new year. I did not go to Kalighat. I thought it would be enough if I saw him who is Kali Herself and who has rightly understood Her.”

Surendra understood Sri Ramakrishna’s spiritual attitude and prepared an oil painting depicting the Master’s message of religious harmony. The Master approved of the picture and said, “Yes, it contains everything. This is the ideal of modern times.” Replicas of this historic picture can be found in various centres of the Ramakrishna Order.

Surendra started spending money unstintingly on Sri Ramakrishna’s comfort. In Dakshineswar itself, it was he who started celebrating Sri Ramakrishna’s birthdays every year. When Sri Ramakrishna was brought to Cossipore for treatment, he bore the huge expense of the spacious garden house’s rent as well as day-to-day expenses. He arranged for the heat screen in the garden house to protect Sri Ramakrishna from the terrible summer heat.

He used to spend unflinchingly on the needs of the Master’s monastic disciples too. After Sri Ramakrishna’s passing away, he

(Continued on page 37...)
Voice Without Form: Vivekananda’s Eloquence

PROF. R. RAMACHANDRA

This article discusses Swami Vivekananda’s power of eloquence and his ideas on public speaking.

Swami Vivekananda’s very first address at the Chicago Parliament of Religions established his stature as speaker par excellence. The American poetess Harriet Monroe offers one of the sharpest picture-sketches of his performance before that huge audience:

“Others (delegates)... spoke well.... But the handsome monk in the orange robe gave us in perfect English a masterpiece. His personality, dominant, magnetic, his voice rich as a bronze bell; the controlled fervour of his feeling; the beauty of his message to the Western world he was facing for the first time — these combined to give us a rare and perfect moment of supreme emotion. It was human eloquence at its highest pitch.”

The comment, “human eloquence at its highest pitch” is worth some contemplation. Appropriate language, use of literary techniques such as simile, analogy, anecdote —these are among the qualities displayed by great speakers in history. But the expression, “human eloquence at its highest pitch” should suggest something that surpasses all other features of oratory: prophetic tone and voice. ‘Oratory’ sounds somewhat trite and banal when used with reference to a spiritual teacher like Swami Vivekananda.

Anyone who reads — even superficially — the life of this principal disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, cannot imagine him without his mission. And Vivekananda had sought the participation of his brother-disciples in the spiritual work he was carrying out in the West. Two of them are to be particularly noted in the context of the present essay: Swami Abhedananda and Swami Saradananda. Swami Abhedananda too was a powerful speaker. According to his American disciple Sister Shivani (Mary Le Page), the “Swami was gifted with a deep and resonant voice...He was the most ordinate yet powerful speaker I have ever heard.” In comparison to many renowned public speakers she had heard — including the ‘silver-tongued orator’ William Jennings Bryon and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “the man with the golden voice”, Sister Shivani claims that, “...the texture of Swami’s (Abhedananda’s) voice was different from the voices of these great speakers... it commanded, never implored nor besought. He could be heard at the end of the largest hall yet he never raised his voice.”

The significant part of her observation is this one: “The Swami rarely gestured ... always master of himself, he used none of those histrionic effects often practised by the best of speakers. The flow of that majestic thought held...”

* William Jennings Bryan. Three time Democratic party nominee for President of United States (in 1896, 1900 & 1908); U.S. Secretary of State (1913-15) under Woodrow Wilson.

** President of United States from 1933 until his death in 1945.
the listeners as in a trance by its clarity .... He spoke without notes or script as though impelled by the light of some dynamic power."

Swami Saradananda also was an influential speaker and it is interesting to note what he says about the body-language of public speakers. When someone pointed out that he (Saradananda) did not gesticulate during his speeches, he explained:

“To move one’s hands and use facial gestures in an effort to convince are great arts of oratory, and most speakers use these tools to make their lectures impressive. But Swamiji (Vivekananda) did not like it. He said: ‘During a lecture one should remove one’s ego and stand in front of the master humbly and calmly. He will make you speak whatever he wants and He himself will listen to it. When one speaks surrendering fully, then only that lecture carries the message of God.’”

He confesses that he himself had that “bad habit” (of facial and hand movement) which got corrected by Vivekananda in London.

Both Abhedananda and Saradananda, like the other monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, were under the loving and watchful eyes of Vivekananda after their Master’s samadhi. They in turn, had totally accepted Vivekananda as their leader, even before Sri Ramakrishna gave up his body. Abhedananda writes in his autobiography that when the young disciples were nursing Sri Ramakrishna during his last days at Cossipore, he and Sarat (Saradananda) “became especially attracted to Narendranath” and they “would be with him like his shadow” (italics added). Vivekananda was an inspirational figure to all his brother-disciples, especially to Abhedananda who emulated him thoroughly: “Through discussions with him (Vivekananda) my thirst for knowledge further increased day by day. Moreover in these respects I would imitate Narendranath to such an extent that...I would recite ‘Mohamudgar’, ‘Kaupina Panchaka’, ‘Vivekachudamani’, ‘Ashtavakra Samhita’ in the same way as Narendranath would do.”

Now both Abhedananda and Saradananda in their teens had keenly listened to some famous orators like Keshub Chandra Sen, Surendranth Bannerjee, Aswini Kumar Dutta, Pratap Chandra Mazumdar and Lal Mohan Gosh. Abhedananda particularly made a diligent study of their lectures if we go by his autobiography: “I acquired experience of public-speaking by hearing the exposition of religion and preachings of Rev. Dr McDonald and other missionaries.”

So then, these two brother-disciples had educated themselves in public speaking and it would be wrong to suppose that they were copycat versions of Vivekananda. Their master had ensured their spiritual growth according to their own nature and temperament. Each of them was as strong and independent a personality as Vivekananda himself.
Abhedananda and Saradananda on their own had developed as forceful public speakers. However, Vivekananda’s companionship must have suggested to them the right stance to deliver their message as befitting their apostolic stature.

Even the most casual rendering of Vivekananda’s life compels one to acknowledge the power of his personality. Vivekananda himself knew the impact his own personality made on his listeners. A wondrous thing about him was that he took care not to allow his personality to influence his listeners. Which is why perhaps he maintained a ‘static’ posture while delivering his vibrant messages. He would be impersonal when teaching, allowing the voice its full play. One could say that from his standpoint greatest eloquence was when spirit spoke to the spirit. A fascinating account of the effect of his voice is rendered by Sister Devamata (Laura Glenn) who heard his speech in 1895: “He began to speak; and memory, time, place, people, all melted away. Nothing was left but a voice ringing through the void. It was as if a gate had swung open and I had passed out on a road leading to limitless attainment. The end of it was not visible; but the promise of what it would be shone through the thought and flashed through the personality of the one who gave it. He stood there — prophet of the infinitude.”

Prophet of the “infinitude”! Prophet of the formless, in other words.

In a letter to his brother-disciple Ramakrishnananda, Vivekananda described himself as “a voice without a form”. Stunningly apt! In his brother-disciples, one hears but reverberations of Vivekananda’s voice.

Received in a vision Sri Ramakrishna’s command to take care of his monastic disciples: “What are you doing? My children are roaming the streets — first set that right.” He ran to Narendranath (later known as Swami Vivekananda) and told him about his vision and said, “Brother, fix upon some place where the Master’s picture can be installed, his ashes and things can be preserved, daily worship can be carried on, and where we can go now and then to be free from the worries of the world. I shall pay the same amount as I did at Cossipore.”

Thus, it was only by his initiative and active support that the first Math of the Ramakrishna Order came up at Baranagar. His name is written in golden letters in the origin and history of the Ramakrishna Order.

References are mainly from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*
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.

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

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

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

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Uniqueness of the Ramakrishna Incarnation and Other Essays

Swami Bhuteshananda

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

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

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

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Amongst the great luminous personalities that have graced the land of Bharata, Adi Shankaracharya stands as one of the supreme. Shankaracharya was a traditional preceptor in the Advaita Sampradaya, a `rejuvenator' of Sanatana Dharma, an unparalleled scholar of the Shastras, author of authentic commentaries on Vedantic treatises, a social worker in service of Dharma. All these and more, rolled into one.

Parivraajashramodhartrah, is one of the divine names of Shankaracharya which appears in his Ashtottara Shatanamavali. It describes the glory of the Acharya who reinvigorated the Parivrajaka Ashrama or the Sannyasa Ashrama. The Acharyas in the Dashanami Sampradaya established by Shankaracharya have been instrumental in spreading the teachings of Sanatana Dharma (or what has been known in the modern days as Hinduism) and keeping them alive till the current day.

It is therefore only right that the life of Shankaracharya be put in words by a sannyasi for the masses to read and understand. The Madhaviya-Shankara Digvijaya stands as a testimony to this. This text was authored by Madhava Vidyaranya, the great seer, the 12th Peethadhipati of the Sringeri Sharada Peetham, established by Shankaracharya.

For the modern educated masses of India, who are well acquainted with the English language, Srimat Swami Tapasyanandaji translated the Madhaviya Shankara Digvijaya into English. Swami Tapasyanandaji, a scholarly sannyasi with many translations to his credit was also a Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Order. The book was first published in 1978 by Sri Ramakrishna Math, titled “Sankara Dig Vijaya: The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya”. The second edition of this book has been published in 2016. This second edition has the same textual content as the first edition, however the dimensions of the book and the type-setting of the text have been revised to improve readability. A number of beautiful pictures of various locations, pilgrimage centres and murtis associated with Shankaracharya’s life have been included at appropriate locations in the book. The book has now been published in a hard-bound format that will enhance its longevity.

Shankaracharya’s prime work lay in the establishment of Advaita Siddhanta and Sanatana Dharma throughout India. Through the words and the actions of Shankaracharya, we also learn the values enshrined in the Vedas, the dharma of a shishya towards the Guru, the duties of a householder (grhastrha) and a celibate (brahmachari), and even the duties of a physician and the way of conduct of one who has set out on a pilgrimage. From his debates with several proponents of
other darshanas (philosophical views), we learn about the tenets of the various darshanas of the time of Shankaracharya. The *Shankara Dig Vijaya* gives all these in wonderful detail. Swami Tapasyanandaji gives a verse-by-verse translation of the original *Shankara Dig Vijaya*. The original is well renowned for its use of high poetry and philosophical content, and thus is not easily amenable for translation in any language without substantial loss of its aesthetic form and clarity. Swami Tapasyanandaji’s translation is simple and lucid; the simplicity of the translation captures the aesthetic form of the original, while the lucidity captures the original’s clarity. A good example of this are the verses in the 10th *adhyaya* of the *Dig Vijaya* describing Shankaracharya’s teaching to Sureshwaracharya. Two among these verses and their translation are given below; these verses, voiced by Shankaracharya, require a good understanding of Vedanta which is reflected in the translation -

\[
\text{katho \ tudrava \ pratinadaye} | \text{ sareeyamupamaddhikritaya} | \\
\text{na dhroka \ santmasprikasharo} | \text{sandrupeyo \ na \ ch \ dhrupteshthana} \ | \ (86)
\]

The sentence signifies the oneness of the entity, to which both the words ‘Tvam’ and ‘Tat’ point. Then, is it that this sentence equates an ignorant fool with the Omniscient Being? It is absurd to say that darkness and light are the same. Such a statement contradicts all experience.

\[
\text{su \ visroghatmisati \ tu \ vaachyaye} | \text{soaya \ purushanitiabhva \ visroghahana} | \\
\text{aathva \ vaachyamvisrogha \ padoyu \ t-} \text{dhrupatekbodhpan \ nnu \ ko \ visrogh \ |} \ (87)
\]

Well, the absurdity in this is only as in the sentence, Sah ayam pumaan, ‘He is that man’. There is really no absurdity here, because there is an identity in the person indicated by the two words in the sentence, ‘he’ and ‘man’. Similarly, the word ‘tvam’ or ‘you’ is to be taken as referring not to the direct word meaning but to the indirect implied meaning of it, namely, the Spirit behind the directly perceived imperfect individual personality, and ‘Tat’, the ‘That’, to the Spirit forming the substratum of the mighty universe. The identity asserted is, thus, of the spiritual Essence of both and not of the ignorance of the individual and of the might of the Universal. What harm is there then, in understanding this identity in the indirect sense?

The *Shankara Dig Vijaya* is also a treasure trove of authentic knowledge about several other things. In following the footsteps of Shankaracharya’s journey, we get a glimpse of the grand life of a traditional parivrajaka sannyasi. Through his interactions with his shishyas, we understand the blessed *Guru-shishya sampradaya* that is unique to the Dharma traditions. The life of Shankaracharya is a life of teaching. As we read through his life we see that wherever the Acharya goes, he brings the teachings of Sanatana Dharma to the populace of that region, according to their temperament and ability.

Apart from presenting a traditional account of the life of Shankaracharya, the book offers a passage to the world of Sanatana Dharma, the traditional Shastras and their adherents, the historical landscape of Shankaracharya’s time, and the glorious path of Vedanta. Swami Tapasyanandaji has also included discussions on the extant biographies of Shankaracharya by various authors, the birth date of Shankaracharya, and other such points of contention which will surely interest historians and research scholars looking into the life of one of the most important personalities of Sanatana Dharma. Ultimately, as with the *divya charitras* of all divine personalities born in Bharatavarsha, so too is the life of Shankaracharya which gives peace of mind to all those who dwell on it with faith. The translation by Swami Tapasyanandaji is therefore a very valuable aid to English-knowing sincere spiritual sadhakas across the world.

__________________________
PRASAD KRISHNAN, HYDERABAD
A Day in the Life of Sri Ramakrishna
Sri Ramakrishna visits Yogin-ma’s House

SWAMI CHIDEKANANDA
(Continued from previous issue...)

It was 28 July 1885 and Sri Ramakrishna was in Calcutta (now Kolkata). He visited Nanda Bose to see the paintings of gods and goddesses in his house, and from there went to the widowed devotee Golap-ma’s house, and finally came to the house of another devotee Yogin-ma.

Yogin-ma lived in her parental home at 59/B/1 Baghbazar Street, which was just a few buildings away from Golap-ma’s house.

Who is Yogin-ma?

Referring to Yogin-ma, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi would say, “Yogin is my Jaya [an attendant of the goddess Durga]—my friend, companion, and attendant.” Yogin-ma practised great austerities first at her parental home, and then at Vrindavan, and at Nilambar Babu’s Garden house near Belur Math in the company of Holy Mother. Her purushakara or self-effort and the grace of Sri Ramakrishna and Holy Mother transformed her into a great spiritual figure.

Family life of Yogin-ma

Yogindra Mohini Mitra, known as Yogin-ma for short in Ramakrishna circles, was born on 16 January 1851, at Baghbazar in North Calcutta. Her father Prasanna Kumar Mitra, was a well-known physician and specialist in midwifery who lectured at Calcutta Medical College.

When Yogin-ma was seven, she was married to Ambika Charan Biswas, the adopted son of a rich and prominent family of Khardah, a village twelve miles north of Calcutta. When she reached the age of maturity she went to live with her husband, only to find that he was a drunkard and a libertine. He also squandered away his wealth by lavishly spending on immoral activities. Her hopes of a happy family life shattered, Yogin-ma returned to her parental home with her only daughter Ganu.

Normally, the sad fate of such unfortunate young brides would be either to endure a miserable life living with their husband’s family or to return to their parental home. In either event, they would be unfairly stigmatised by society. However, as we see in the life of Yogin-ma, it is different for sincere spiritual aspirants. In this case, Sri Ramakrishna gave Yogin-ma’s mind a godward turn so that, rather than wallowing in frustration and life-long depression, she could re-direct the energies of her mind towards God-realisation.

Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna

Yogin-ma’s life took an upward turn when she came into contact with Sri Ramakrishna. She met Sri Ramakrishna for the first time at the house of Balaram Basu, her husband’s maternal uncle and a great house-holder.
devotee of Sri Ramakrishna. During that meeting, she was alarmed to see Sri Ramakrishna in an intoxicated state. She was unable to distinguish between his divine intoxication and the worldly intoxication she had seen in her alcoholic husband. However, her misgivings were cleared when she began to visit Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. Her life of misery took a Godward turn. Describing this transformation, she later said: “Gradually I began to feel an attraction for the Master. Just the thought of visiting him would make my mind dance with joy. On the day that I planned to go there I would get up early and finish my household duties as quickly as possible. After arriving at his room, I would forget everything sitting in his presence. The Master used to experience samadhi off and on, and we would look at his face with wonder. …When I returned home after my visit with the Master, I would spend the whole week in an intoxicated mood. …I cannot express the joy I felt. Even while I was engaged in cooking or other household duties, my mind was with the Master. After some days, when I would feel my intoxication diminishing, my mind would again long to see him.”

Once, exasperated by her worldly problems, Yogin-ma set out early in the morning to pour out her sufferings at Sri Ramakrishna’s feet. She walked the whole distance of 9.3 kilometers to Dakshineswar. But amazingly, all her agonies vanished as soon as she met Sri Ramakrishna. After a while she plucked some flowers from the garden and collected them in the apron of her sari. Noticing her as she passed by, Sri Ramakrishna gently asked her, “What are you carrying?” She showed him the flowers and then approaching him offered them at his feet. Touched by this simple act of devotion Sri Ramakrishna’s mind went into an ecstatic state and in that mood, he blessed her placing his feet on her head.

**Sri Ramakrishna’s instructions**

On one occasion, when the Master was returning from Balaram’s house to Dakshineswar, Yogin-ma was on the boat with him. She asked him, “I want to call on God more and put my mind wholly on him, but it is hard to control the mind. What shall I do?” Sri Ramakrishna replied, “Why don’t you surrender to him? Be like a cast-off leaf in the wind. The cast-off leaf lies on the ground and flies away as the wind carries it. Similarly, one should depend on God. Let the mind move as the power of divine consciousness moves it.”

During this time, on 15 November 1882, Balaram Bose brought Yogin-ma’s husband Ambika Charan to his house to meet Sri Ramakrishna and receive his blessings. After he left, Sri Ramakrishna commented: “He is an unfortunate wretch. A householder has his duties to discharge, his debts to pay to his wife and children. If a wife is chaste, then her husband should support her; he should also bring up their children until they are of age.” Yogin-ma did not give up on her husband. She persuaded him to associate with Sri Ramakrishna. So, he met Sri Ramakrishna once again, this time at Dakshineswar. This meeting seemed to make a deep impression on him. Unfortunately, not long after this he was bitten by a rabid dog and became bedridden with rabies. When Sri Ramakrishna heard about it he told Yogin-ma to take care of him. He said
that as a wife she had a duty towards her husband, even if he had been immoral. Accordingly, Yogin-ma brought her husband to her parental home during his last days and carefully nursed him until his death from rabies. Pleased with Yogin-ma’s devotion, Sri Ramakrishna decided to visit her house. As one enters the outer courtyard of Yogin-ma’s house, on the right there is an old Shiva temple built by Yogin-ma’s father when he had first moved into the house. A few steps ahead on the left is the drawing room.

On his arrival, Sri Ramakrishna was seated in this drawing room. The room was used by a concert party. Young men of this group intermittently played on their instruments to entertain Sri Ramakrishna. The people of the locality, young and old, came thronging to see Sri Ramakrishna. Some boys from the neighbourhood stood peeping through the windows.

Seeing those boys climbing the windows, one of the devotees known as the ‘younger Naren’ told them: “Why are you here? Get away! Go home!” But Sri Ramakrishna tenderly forbade him, “Let them stay.” Every now and then he chanted: “Hari Om! Hari Om!”

The floor of the drawing room was covered with a carpet, and a young boy sang songs to Krishna: “O Kesava, bestow Thy grace / Upon Thy luckless servants here! / O Kesava, who dost delight / To roam Vrindavan’s glades and groves! . . .

Sri Ramakrishna commented: “Ah, how sweet the music is! How melodious the violin is! How good the accompaniments are! (pointing to a boy) He and the flutist seem to be a nice pair.”

The orchestra went on playing. After it was over, Sri Ramakrishna said joyfully, “It is very fine indeed.” Pointing to a young man, he said, “He seems to know how to play every instrument.” He said to M., “They are all good people.”

A few minutes later Golap-ma, who had also come to Yogin-ma’s house, asked Sri Ramakrishna to come inside for refreshments. When he asked, “Why not bring them here?”, she replied, “Ganu’s mother (Yogin-ma) requests you to bless the room with the dust of your feet. Then the room will be turned into Varanasi, and anyone dying in it will have no trouble hereafter.” Sri Ramakrishna obliged and went inside.

The power of Sri Ramakrishna visit

This visit by the avatara surcharged the house with spiritual vibrations. And Yogin-ma benefitted from it by the strength of her sincere, steadfast sadhana. In her room, which was sanctified by Sri Ramakrishna, Yogin-ma installed a shrine where she worshipped two small murtis of Bala Gopala or baby Krishna. Every day she performed ritualistic worship with great devotion. Today these murtis are
worshipped in a small shrine room located next to the old Shiva temple on the ground floor. Yogin-ma had many divine visions. Describing them she said, “One day, while meditating at the time of worship, I saw two incomparably handsome boys. They came, smiling and hugging me and stroking my back, and said, ‘Do you know who we are?’ I replied: ‘Yes I know you are the heroic Balarama, and you are Sri Krishna.’” Again, speaking of another spiritual experience at her home, Yogin-ma told, “Once I was in such a high spiritual attitude that wherever I turned my eyes, I would see my Chosen Deity. That state lasted for three days.”

Swami Vivekananda, upon returning to India from the West and learning about Yogin-ma’s experiencing samadhi at her parental home, told her, “Yogin-ma, you will pass away in samadhi. Once a person experiences samadhi, the memory of it is revived at the time of death.”

In fact, Yogin-ma reached such a high state of spirituality that even the Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi sought her judgment and counsel.

Other notable incidents

Yogin-ma celebrated Jagaddhatri Puja at her parental home. If Holy Mother happened to be in Calcutta at that time, she would visit Yogin-ma’s house and attend the puja. Sarala Devi, one of Holy Mother’s attendants, writes: “Today is Jagaddhatri at Udbodhan. Yogin-ma just came and requested the Holy Mother to come to her home and grace the puja. At noon, Holy Mother and all of us went to Yogin-ma’s house. Yogin-ma was fasting without food or water. At 4 p.m., when the puja was over, Yogin-ma ate some prasad.”

Swami Akhandananda describes an interesting incident that occurred on the day Sri Ramakrishna visited Yogin-ma’s house: “Yogin-ma’s brother Hiralal did not like the fact that his sister went to Dakshineswar. We heard that when Yogin-ma invited the Master to her house, Hiralal brought a famous gymnast and very large-sized wrestler named Manmatha… to frighten the Master. However, after Manmatha saw the Master and heard a few words from him, he fell at his feet and said to him, weeping, “My Lord, I am guilty. Please forgive me.” Sri Ramakrishna graciously invited him to visit Dakshineswar. Manmatha did so and his life was totally transformed.

Yogin-ma’s family continues to live in this house blessed by Sri Ramakrishna. On July 28th of every year, they celebrate the anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna’s visit to their house by arranging a special puja, kirtan, feast, etc. Sannyasis and devotees participate in this celebration.

References:
1) Divyagate banganari, Nikkumar Ray, p. 70
2) They Lived with God (2016), 159.
4) First Meetings with Sri Ramakrishna, p. 284
5) They Lived with God (2016), p. 164
6) The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, p. 156
7) They Lived with God (2016), p. 163
9) Ibid, p. 167
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12) Ibid, p. 163

(Concluded.)
The Art of Forming and Reforming Habits

SWAMI BANESHANANDA

(Continued from previous issue...)

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

Ways to Change Our Habits
1) Practice

The scriptures have given solutions to many complex questions or problems. In the Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna asks Sri Krishna: When we try to control our mind, it appears as difficult as controlling the flow of wind. How to reorient the mind? 17 Sri Krishna says that there are only two ways to achieve this — abhyasah, or regular practice of attaining the goal, and vairagyah, or the practice of letting go the things that are not of permanent value. The Yoga Sutras and Vedanta also prescribe the same two ways in which repetition or ‘practice’ is the means. But this prescription seems too simplistic, because even if we have heard it again and again, it has not produced any effect on us. On the other hand, we know that our bad habits have an effect on us. It is not only that they have a bad effect on us, but also that they affect others around us. So we want to change the status quo.

Sri Ramakrishna asked his Vedanta teacher, Totapuri, “Why do you polish your brass water-pot every day?” Totapuri replied, “One has to do it. Otherwise it will rust or gather dirt.” This is called ‘practice’ — the practice of cleaning the pot to remove the dirt, so that it regains its natural radiance. Those who do physical exercises know this. When we stop doing exercises for some time, it is difficult to resume at the level previously achieved. We have to restart from the beginning or at a lower level. In our monastic Order, there is a saying that ‘there is no holiday in spiritual life’. Spiritual life is not for Sundays only; it is our everyday life.

Even to achieve any material success we need to allot time for our practice by letting go of other unrelated things which are consuming our time. This is not something very mystical. Even the whole process of practising our meditation, japa, reading of scriptures (svadhyaya), holy company (satsanga), doing good works for others etc., is initially very mechanical. But the result it produces is really mystical. If we read the lives of great sportspeople or any great person for that matter, we see that the key to their success is practice. They do back-breaking practice every day. This is what is needed if we want to achieve success in changing our habits.
2) Increasing our Willpower

It has been said in the scriptures that to effect any change in our habits for our betterment, or to remove bad habits, we need willpower. It is a common experience that when we want to change any habit we start with great enthusiasm and vigour; but we cannot keep up that force for long and suddenly give up half-way. This is the question asked to Sri Krishna by the helpless Arjuna: “What is that, O Krishna, prompted by which one is forced, as it were, to indulge in wrongdoings even against one’s will?” We clearly know that we lack in something called willpower. Our willpower is our inner immunity system, and the objects of our senses are temptations that eat up our willpower or attack and shatter the immunity inside! How to enhance our willpower? We learn from the scriptures and legions of examples, that a kind of self-discipline needs to be practised to develop or strengthen our willpower. It will be strengthened by taking up some practices, and not by merely intellectually understanding and appreciating the fact that we need to do it.

There is a story about Starbucks. Though the context is very commercial, it may teach us something more general. The owner of Starbucks, Howard Schultz, devised and introduced an innovative concept for training his employees. He said, “We are not in the coffee business serving people, but in the people business serving coffee.” Starbucks’ training is such that when an employee is taken, s/he will be trained keeping in view the need of the customers, i.e., the customers’ need and mental state that lead them to a coffee shop! Schultz’s idea of training not only teaches employees a mere business-skill, but a life-skill as well. All of us want to do good to others. But before that we all need to have our own anger, greed, jealousy, etc., under control in order to be helpful to others who are in need of our mature understanding. Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj once told a gathering of monks who were discussing the idea of how to ‘spread the message’ (bhava-prachar) of Ramakrishna-Vedanta ideals, “We need to first purify our own attitude (bhava-samshuddhih) as to why we want to do good to others, and then preach unto others.” He also told that both these — bhava-prachar, and bhava-samshuddhih — should be practised simultaneously. He also once said that doing good to people should be taken up as an ideal, not as a policy. Unfortunately, these types of life-skills are not taught in our schools, in our families, and in our communities. Our community ethics and duties have failed in this respect.

Willpower is actually a learnable skill. One can learn it by repetition and by habit. It will go on becoming stronger and stronger if we go on doing the same thing again and again. This is similar to how when we train our muscles by exercise — they gradually become stronger and stronger. What do we need in order to build up new habits or to change existing habits? Experimentations with patients who are orthopedically almost incapacitated have shown that we need three things to bring about a change in our life, (i) a goal, (ii) inspiration, and (iii) preparedness to confront obstacles like unwillingness and fear of suffering.

(i) A Goal: Believe it or not, if we have a goal in life, things will automatically change, readjust, and ‘harmoniously’ fall in place, helping us to reach the goal. We will then be
willing to appreciate the need for changes. Otherwise life will be an aggregate of different varieties of ‘time-pass’. What is special about it then if we live for many years, suppose even a hundred years? Our education-systems and training programmes have taught us how to spend ‘time’ enjoying, not how to live ‘life’ meaningfully. Observations carried out by Harvard Professors in the marshmallow experiment with children showed that our curriculum and the training that we receive in the schools don’t help us much. They are merely targeted towards a job-oriented life. This is a kind of a programme which targets something which is lifeless. We have been programmed like robots. No doubt, we are gene-machines. But in modern times, as I have said earlier, we have become what can be called ‘programmed gene-machines’! Is there any difference between the Robots and gene-machines? No. This is sadly our case when we have failed to connect the curricular programmes to life-skills. It is aptly said that ‘CEOs are hired for their intellect and business expertise, and fired for a lack of emotional intelligence.’ That is why we see that great management professors managing problems in big companies are failing at home — many of them actually fail to manage a small family! Why? Because there is no life in all these skills! People trained in these arts are behaving just like ‘programmed gene-machines’ or robots.

Unfortunately, it is the same story in religious institutions too! Pastors or priests are academically trained with accredited degrees to lead prayers and sermons in congregations. But in society and families they lead a life not anyway different than that led by ordinary worldly people! It is also a true fact that sometimes these people enjoy special religious privileges, which they misuse in order to lead a despicable worldly life!

(ii) **Inspiration:** The second significant thing is called ‘inspiration’. If you sincerely have a goal, then the goal will automatically generate inspiration in you. It is reported in the book *The Power of Habits* by Charles Duhigg that there was an orthopedic patient in a facility who would suffer from excruciating pain walking even a few steps. He missed his dear wife, and so he was given a task after his heart — occasionally meeting his wife at the nearby bus stand. What did the task mean for him? It set a goal and an inspiration.

Let us recall the idea of epigenetics. All our behavioural impressions (or *samskaras*, in Sanskrit) are present in our frontal lobe of the brain. In order to effect change in our habits we need to activate some non-genetic variations, three of which are: motivation, our task demand, and our emotional state. All these form part of our inspiration.

(iii) **Preparedness:** What did he, the aforementioned physically handicapped person, need for himself to achieve his goal of meeting his wife? He needed to prepare himself for the walk up to the bus stand. As for his preparedness, he used to take some emergency medicines with him in case there would be any unbearable pain on the way. He did achieve the feat of walking to the bus stop. And many times he did not need those tablets!

This preparedness is much dependent on our ‘willpower’. When we look at the genesis of our habits, we see that for each habit there is a root cause, which created that particular habit. Suppose there is a die-hard habit. We will see that it was based on some strong craving. Old habits die hard, they say. If we have an old habit, we see that it is based on some old craving. Likewise, strong habits are based on strong cravings, and these cravings have a common name called ‘desire’ (or *kama* in Sanskrit). In order to effect any change in our ‘desire’, we need, as I have already indicated, a
strong willpower. The Yoga Sutras say that we are not able to enhance our willpower because of our ‘pleasure pursuit’, which eats up our will power.

What is this pleasure pursuit? We are all running after happiness. This happiness has three names at three levels. When we derive happiness using our physical body, it is called pleasure. When we derive happiness using our mind, it is called joy. And when we derive happiness following our spiritual practices, it is called bliss. Physical pleasure is inferior to mental joy and mental joy is inferior to spiritual bliss. In other words, spiritual bliss is superior to mental joy, and mental joy is superior to physical pleasure. It will not be wise for us to use our physical body in such a way that it takes away our mental joy; and so on.

This ‘pleasure pursuit’ has to be changed or reoriented. In order to do that we need to be aware of our desire or kama which diverts our attention from the real goal. Desire has objects at three levels — physical, mental and spiritual. There are some ways to changing our habits at these levels. That is what I want to discuss now to end this write up. One can take help of one or two or all of them.

a) Rehabilitation Therapy: Discipline applied from the outside.

The first thing is that we can change the habits or start with a new habit by using force. That is what is called rehabilitation in modern language. People are taken to rehabilitation homes and are asked to practise the same thing again and again, i.e., repeating the same thing again and again. But we have seen that after this, in many cases, the rate of success is not very high. Some successes are there, but that does not stay for a long time.

b) By Self-effort: This is the hardest thing, and we all know that. Still, we can try to use our will power for our well-being. The Yoga Sutras mention this process as the way to achieve cessation of modifications of the mind. However, we need to understand that strength does not mean that we cannot ask for help. There is the story of a small boy who was trying to overturn a big stone. After a while, the boy stood up being unable to do it. His father who was observing him asked, “Are you sure that you have employed all the energy available to you?” Upset the boy replied, “How can you suspect me about that? I am out of breath and perspiring!” The father patted on his back and said, “Son, it is not that I don’t see it. But you have not asked for my help which is available to you!” Let us do it ourselves with the help that is available for us.

c) Spiritual Help:

(i) Help from God: This is what the Alcoholic Anonymous tries to propagate. In seven out of twelve points the alcoholics have to practise speaking directly about God. That is why when the professors from Harvard University came to study as to why and how AA was having so much success without their stamp of approval, they found that AA was speaking of God. The Gita advises us to include God as the last of the five conditions of our self-effort: a) one’s body which is the seat of action, b) the ego claiming to be the actor, c) the several instruments of actions like the senses, the mind etc, d) the varied and the distinct types of movements involved, and finally e) the unknown factor called God.
Help from a Guide: We can get help from a guide/teacher/guru. We know it is not easy for us to accept this proposition because ‘we have never learnt how to obey’. This is not the kind of a submissive attitude that makes us weak and dependent. Many fables of success show that great achievements in the world of science, technology, innovation, education etc., stand on the shoulders of teachers/guides/gurus! So this is an undeniable fact about our success in the perceptible material world. How great would be the need in case of our journey into the unknown non-material spheres!

However, the journey begins at the material level. Once a disciple of one of our Swamis approached him and asked, “Swamiji, when I sit for meditation I remember all the works that I forgot to do during the day! It is difficult to focus the mind on the object of my meditation!” The Swamiji told him, “That is not something unique in your case only! Well, for the first ten minutes you think of your work. Any urgent work, any difficult work, any important work you have to do, concentrate on that, and analyse that work to find out what way you can achieve success. Think of the defects of that work or think of the threats that may appear. Use at least ten minutes, and then try to concentrate on God.” That brought huge success for the disciple. The practice of concentration on material things teaches the mind how to concentrate on higher ideals. The mind is the same. And we do not use a different mind for spiritual practices. That is what the Yoga Sutras have said: if you are concentrating on a material object, obviously your success will be quick. That will also inspire the mind to take to a higher kind of concentration, which is called meditation.22 The gist is, if you cannot think of God immediately or instantly, then begin in this way; God will appear in your life in the course of practice. This is like an art.

One needs help and guidance from practising spiritual people who are called teachers, guides or gurus. A guru helps us to come out or take advantage of our defects and overcome our difficulties.

There is a wonderful story about a Judo teacher. One of his students, like all others, aspired to become a champion. He was really working hard and preparing himself. He was excelling in his practices. But then, as ill luck would have it, he met with an accident and lost his left hand. He became depressed. But still he did not give up his life’s goal. He went to his teacher and asked for his advice. The teacher said, “I don’t know how to help you. But there is an old Judo teacher who does not teach much nowadays, but may be able to help you!” The old Judo teacher said, “I will try.” The teacher started training him. But the teacher went on teaching him the same move over and over again! There came the day when there was a competition. In spite of his desire to participate in the tournament, the student did not gather enough confidence. The teacher said, “You go and register your name. Let us try.” Then he went on winning round after round and reached the final. Now he was scared! He told his teacher, “I don't know how I'm winning! But now my strong opponent is going to kill me!” The teacher encouraged him. He went and won. He could not believe that he won. He came back to the teacher and asked, “How is it that I won! I know only one move.” The teacher said, “I taught you the most difficult move which is almost impossible to defend. Your opponent has only one chance to defeat you and that is by grabbing you by your
left hand!” This is how his defect became a boon for him by the help of his guide.

(iii) **Satsanga**: The third thing is called satsanga — coming together of like-minded people for a harmonious and inspirational holy company. I think, this is the best help an ordinary person can take advantage of in order to form and reform habits. It is interesting to note that Alcoholics Anonymous use the same method in the form of the group discussions. People share their experiences so that they have an occasion to appreciate the truth of how all are struggling to transform themselves. That helps. That gives them inspiration to go on with their own individual struggle.

In our spiritual life, when we go to a satsanga, it is not that we are all realised people, that we are emanating light all around us, and that Gods and angels are hovering above us! No; we all assemble there as ordinary people, as simple seekers. We are going to discuss thoughts about God and discuss nice ideas of moral life based on spirituality. In the process, we get inspiration from the fact that all of us are trying to reach the goal. So the idea of satsanga is highlighted in the scriptures.

**Conclusion**

There is a prayer for unity in the Rig Veda, the oldest of the scriptures in the world: “May we all (participants in the prayer) move in harmony, speak in one voice; let our minds be in agreement. In order for such unity to form, we offer a common prayer. May our intentions and aspirations be alike, so that a common objective unifies us all.”

This is a prayer to make us aware of our responsibilities. It acts on our minds to reorient its functions towards the ultimate goal in life, which is the real meaning of our life.

Sri Krishna looked into the structure of our inner struggle and his words help to transform us. He says that it may be easy for one to get rid of the outer gross part of one’s real habits (rasa-varjyam); but the roots of the main habits are lodged deep inside the mind in the form of the impressions (rasa) of physical enjoyments. This means that we may be able to give up gross things which are disturbing us, but the thoughts of enjoyments derived earlier from those things still remain in the mind as impressions, and unfortunately, we will continue to enjoy their company, mentally! Discipline, self-effort and spiritual help are things which can help us to effectively reduce the intensity of those impressions.

There are apparently contradictory statements in the Upanishads like, “The ultimate Reality cannot be realised by the mind” and again “It is with the help of the mind that It can be reached”! But they speak of two different minds — “It cannot be realised by an impure mind”, and again “It can be realised by a pure mind”. We have to get into those habits that make our mind pure. Sri Ramakrishna says, “The pure intellect, pure mind, and pure Atman are one and the same.” This purity can only be reached through our reoriented and well-directed habits. There is no other way more effective than this. *

*(Concluded.)*

**References:**

17) *Gita*, 6.34  
18) *Gita*, 3.36  
19) *Emotional Intelligence* by Daniel Goleman  
20) *Yoga Sutras*, 1.2 & 1.21 (Yogah chittavritti-nirodhah, and tivra-samvegānām āsannah)  
21) *Gita*, 18.14  
22) *Yoga Sutras*, 1.35: vishayavatī vā pravittiruppanā manasah sthitī-nibandhini  
23) Cf. Rig Veda, 191.2-4: samgacchadhvam samvadadhvam ...  
24) *Gita*, 2.59  
25) *Kena Upanishad*, 1.6; yan manasā na manute
**Pariprasna**

*Srimat Swami Tapasyananda Ji (1904 – 1991) was one of the Vice-Presidents of the Ramakrishna Order. His deeply convincing answers to devotees’ questions raised in spiritual retreats and in personal letters have been published in book form as *Spiritual Quest: Questions & Answers*. Pariprasna is a selection from this book.*

**QUESTION:** We get so many details about the Kundalini in the scriptures. Are these only symbols to aid meditation, or have they a factual basis?

**MAHARAJ:** In a matter like this, a verdict can be given only by one who has actual experience in the field. A dependable authority in our times on such points is only Sri Ramakrishna. It is recorded in his life and in his conversations that he had actually experienced the rousing of the latent power called Kundalini and its rise along what are called the Chakras or plexuses. They may be described as centres of consciousness opening into various planes of consciousness. But it may be too naive to identify Ida, Pingala, Sushumna, and the Chakras with the structures in the nervous system known to modern anatomy. It is better to conceive of them as located in the psychic body of man, having certain corresponding nerves and nerve centres in the human body. This has to be conceded because Sri Ramakrishna speaks of the Kundalini residing at certain levels of the spinal column, opening up different phases or planes of Reality.

Thus in the ordinary earthbound state of consciousness, the Kundalini resides in the three lower plexuses and, as a consequence, the individual feels the sensate life as the reality and takes worldly values like food, sex, ambitions, etc., alone as worth pursuing. When it rises to the heart level, a new world of light and joy opens up to him. His sense of reality undergoes a revolution, as a result of which what was earlier very substantial and supremely valuable ceases to be so. The spirit becomes a substantial experience and spiritual values gain predominance in one’s life. In the next higher centres, at the level of the throat, the brows and the brain the consciousness of his spiritual environment becomes more and more intense until at the brain level Satchidananda is realised as the sole Reality. We cannot deny the factual basis of experiences that have a lasting, transforming and enriching effect on consciousness. We have to think of these centres as points in the microcosm at which more and more of the glorious vistas of the Sat Chid Ananda are opened up.

It may be that these centres and the faculties connected with them are only potential in man. Just as his many physical and mental faculties become expressive at different stages of maturity, these also come into presence at his spiritual maturity. Some schools of occultists try, by several practices, to artificially and prematurely stimulate these psychic faculties. This is just like ripening an immature mango by artificial means. It results in more harm than good. Spiritual maturity can come only through the development of a strong moral fibre, by one’s becoming less and less self-centred in one’s outlook, by cultivating deep, strong and steady aspirations for the divine and by systematic practice of meditation.
New centres

Sri Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Bolpur, in Birbhum district, West Bengal, and Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Ajmer, Rajasthan are now new branch centres of the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission respectively. Dhaleswar Ashrama in Agartala, which was till now a sub-centre has been made a full-fledged branch centre of the Ramakrishna Mission. Amarkanan Sri Ramakrishna Sevadal Ashrama in Bankura district of West Bengal has become a sub-centre of the Ramkriripur centre.

Flood Relief

On account of incessant rains in July, many areas in the state of Assam were flooded. Guwahati ashrama distributed food grains and sanitary items to 487 families in Goalpara and Kamrup districts.

Coronavirus Relief

Eleven branch centers of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission in India — Kadapa, Rajamahendravaram, Tirupati, Madurai, Lucknow, Dehradun, Asansol, Advaita Ashrama, Barisha, Darjeeling, Naora, and these five centres in foreign countries — Bagerhat, Chittagong in Bangladesh; and Durban, Phoenix in South Africa continued to provide Coronavirus relief by distributing: 19064 kg rice, 5335 kg flour, 5213 kg pulses, 3387 litres of cooking oil, 643 kg assorted spices, 2588 kg salt, 653 kg sugar/jiggery, 4339 kg potatoes, 1887 kg onions, 2930 soap bars, immunity building homeopathy medicine to 25,469 people, and other assorted vegetables and sanitary items among over 2779 families.

Cyclone Relief

Relief work continued for those affected by Amphan cyclone which left a trail of destruction across West Bengal on 20 May 2020. Belgharia, Sarisha and Sikra Kulingram centres provided 1733 tarpaulins, 1800 saris, 1300 lungis, 12753 kg rice, 1026 flour, 2344 kg pulses, 591 kg soya chunks, 2268 litres cooking oil, 540 kg assorted spices, 1126 kg sugar, 1133 kg salt, 2376 biscuit packets, 4916 soap bars, 400 mosquito nets, etc., among 5368 families.
“If the poor cannot come to education, education must go to them.”

- SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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Have faith in yourselves, great convictions are the mothers of great deeds
— Swami Vivekananda

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