

VEDANTA

and the West

142

SPECIAL NUMBER

MEMORIES OF MAHARAJ

*New Reminiscences
by Disciples and Devotees*



Vedanta Press

FIFTY CENTS

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VEDANTA AND THE WEST



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VEDANTA

and the West

142



VEDANTA SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Vedanta Press

1946 VEDANTA PLACE • HOLLYWOOD 28, CALIFORNIA

First Published March-April, 1960

Six numbers of *Vedanta and the West* are issued yearly. Subscriptions are accepted at \$3.00 for six issues, postage paid, \$5.00 for twelve issues, or \$6.50 for eighteen issues. Published issues are available at fifty cents each through booksellers or by writing the publisher.

BRITISH AGENT: Luzac & Co.,
Ltd., 46 Great Russell St.,
London W.C.1

INDIAN AGENT: Sri Rama-
krishna Math, Mylapore,
Madras 4

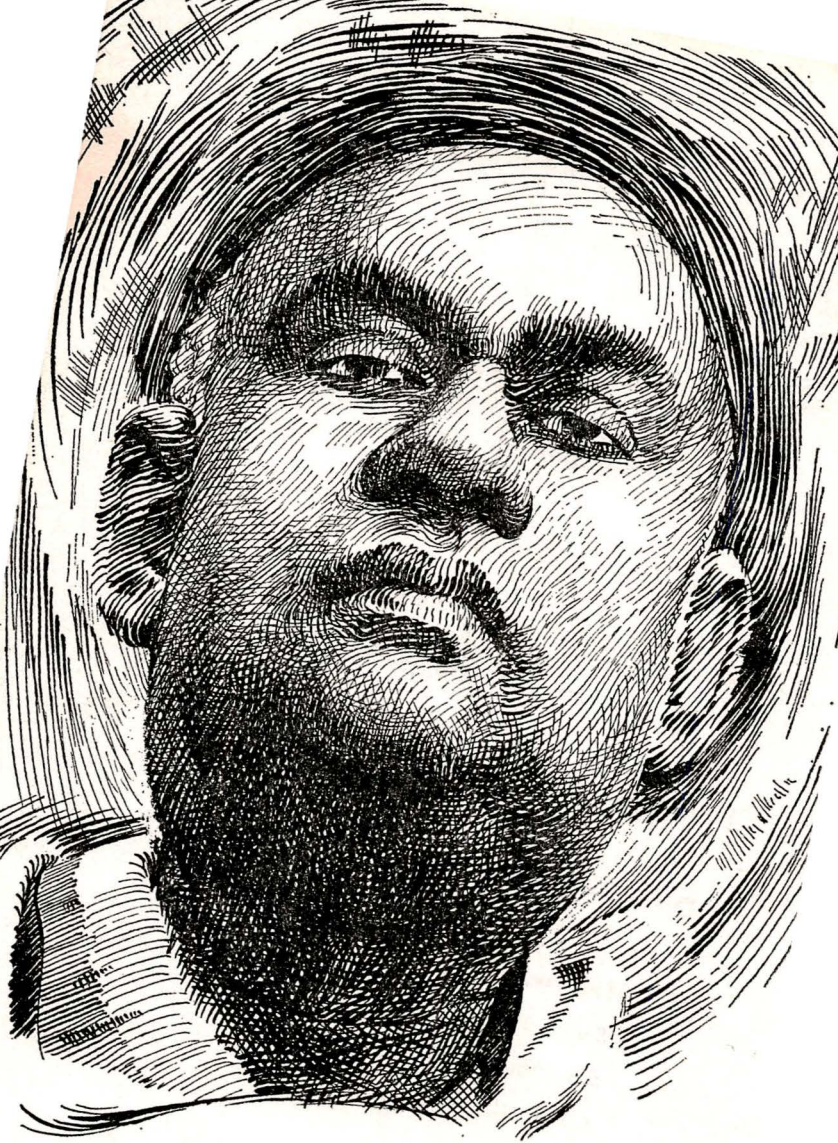
Pen-and-ink portrait of
Swami Brahmananda
by John Markovich

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Printed in the United States of America

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PREFACE

MAHARAJ, as Swami Brahmananda was called by disciples and devotees in later years, was born in 1863 in a village near Calcutta. His mother was a worshiper of Krishna and named him Rakhal, "the shepherd boy." Rakhal was in his teens when he began to visit the Dakshineswar temple garden where Sri Ramakrishna, his future master, lived. At their first meeting, Sri Ramakrishna recognized in the boy the spiritual son promised him by the Divine Mother in mystic vision. After Sri Ramakrishna's death, the monastic order in his name was organized, and Maharaj became the first President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. In this capacity, he took upon himself the spiritual responsibility and training of many disciples and devotees. Maharaj held the office of President until he passed away in 1922.

The present booklet is not intended to serve as an introduction to Maharaj. Rather, it may be said to form an appendix. For readers who wish to acquaint themselves with Swami Brahmananda's life and teachings, *The Eternal Companion* by Swami Prabhavananda is suggested. Additional material about Maharaj was published in *Vedanta and the West* (#109) in an article entitled "Memories of Swami Brahmananda."

In recent years, through the generosity of a number of monks and devotees of the Ramakrishna Order who personally knew Maharaj, further memories have come to light. Most of these have not heretofore been published; some have previously appeared only in Bengali. We are deeply grateful to all who have contributed their own reminiscences or have

drawn our attention to reminiscences by others, and are thereby helping to make this picture of Maharaj as complete as possible.

The memories have been arranged in the sequence in which we thought they would best tell their own story. A few editorial notes have been added in the text in square brackets.

THE EDITORS

SWAMI APARNANANDA'S REMINISCENCES

SWAMI APARNANANDA, head of the Sri Ramakrishna Kutir at Almora in the Himalayas, is a disciple of the Holy Mother. His following notes on Maharaj, heretofore unpublished, were recorded in Bengali. They were translated into English by Swami Prabhavananda, a disciple of Maharaj and the leader of the Vedanta Society of Southern California.

Swami Aparnananda was a young student in 1913, the year he began to visit Belur Math and met Maharaj and Swami Premananda. It was particularly through the holy association of these two disciples of Sri Ramakrishna that the future Swami Aparnananda was inspired to devote himself to a life of renunciation. He received his final monastic vows from Maharaj.

EIGHT or ten days after my first visit to Swami Brahmananda, I went to the Belur Math about four o'clock in the afternoon. Ever since I met him I had been longing to see him again.

As soon as I arrived at the monastery I went to the shrineroom. When I came downstairs, I saw Swami Premananda talking with several devotees on the bank of the Ganges. My friend was not able to accompany me this time because he had to attend to some business, so I came to the monastery alone.

When Swami Premananda saw me he said: "Hello, you are alone today? Couldn't your friend come?"

I prostrated before him and explained the reason for my friend's absence.

After inquiring about our health, the Swami asked: "Have you seen Maharaj? Go and see him! He is the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna and his living embodiment. When you receive the grace and blessings of Maharaj, know that these come directly from the Master. Have firm faith in this." [Ramakrishna was often called *Thakur*—Bengali for Master or Lord.] With folded hands Swami Premananda bowed down, saying: "Hail Maharaj, hail Maharaj!"

With Swami Premananda's permission, the other devotees and I went upstairs into the monastery. We found Maharaj seated on an easy chair near Swami Vivekananda's room, on the veranda facing the Ganges. In front of him, a hubble-bubble stood on a little stool, and occasionally Maharaj took a few puffs. Once in a while he talked to us.

Now many devotees began to gather around him, including Pulin Mitra, a well-known musician and a disciple of Swami Vivekananda. Maharaj said: "Pulin, I have not heard you sing for a long time. Sing something!" A tanpura, a harmonium, and drums were brought from the visitors' room. Swami Chidananda tuned the drums. Pulin tuned the tanpura and began to sing: "Mother, in dense darkness Thy beautiful form flashes; therefore the yogis meditate on Thee in the mountain cave . . ." Then he sang: "There the sun shines not, nor the lightning, nor the beautiful moon . . ." Another song followed: "The abode of bliss, wondrously beautiful, lights the shore beyond the ocean of worldliness . . ."

While listening to the songs Maharaj became deeply absorbed in the thought of God. After the music there was silence, and the devotees quietly watched the meditative figure of Maharaj. The sun was setting. Gradually, Maharaj returned to normal consciousness. We prostrated before him

and took our leave. Some devotees went home, others attended the vesper service at the Math. A few of us were still repeating to ourselves the words: "The abode of bliss, wondrously beautiful, lights the shore beyond the ocean of worldliness." An indelible impression was made on the minds of all who had been present by the blissful meditative figure of Maharaj and that divine abode.

SUNDAY. Two of us went to the Math in the afternoon. First we visited the shrineroom and prostrated before the Lord. When we came downstairs, we saw Swami Premananda seated on a bench on the veranda facing the Ganges. Many young schoolboys and college students were gathered around him, and he was talking with them. We took the dust of his feet, and he said: "Oh, you have come! I have been thinking of you. How are you, my children?"

Swami Premananda continued his conversation with the devotees: "The human birth is a blessed birth, and thrice blessed are those who realize the purpose of this human birth." He began to sing: "O my mind, you have not learnt how to farm. Neglected is the field of your life. Had you cultivated your field, you would have found a golden treasure." He said to us: "Children, cultivate the field of your life and gain the treasure! This time the Lord of the Gita came for our sake to Dakshineswar as Ramakrishna, bringing with him Swami Vivekananda, the embodiment of the karma yoga of the Gita. Such an example of egolessness as the Master was the world has never seen before and may not see again. Ah, at Dakshineswar some people treated him like an ordinary gatekeeper. They humbled him in many ways, and he bore it all patiently. He never blamed others. He endured everything; he smiled and never complained.

"These are lessons for us. Many people on the outside

make remarks against us, but why should we care? Look at Nag Mahashay of Deobhog! He also was an embodiment of humility.

“Work, service—these mean nothing if we cannot transform our lives through them. Work, philanthropy—all these are nonsense! Who can do good to another? But by performing such service one does good to oneself. The heart becomes purified; patience and forbearance grow. Aren’t these the greatest gains?

“Think of Him again and again. Thus keeping recollectedness of God, be his own. Then only will your life become fruitful. The Lord has chosen you all; that is why you come to this place.

“Maharaj is here. His holy company will make you blessed and pure. Come, let us go and have his *darshan* [the benefit of holy association]!”

Swami Premananda got up, saying, “Hail Maharaj, hail Maharaj!” and took us all to his brother-disciple.

Maharaj was seated upstairs on the veranda facing the Ganges. Several devotees were with him. Swami Premananda prostrated before Maharaj and said: “These boys have come for your darshan. Bless them! Extend your grace to them!”

Maharaj smiled and said to Swami Premananda: “Brother Baburam, as long as they have received your affection and blessings, they have received the grace and blessings of the Master.”

Swami Premananda: “No, Maharaj! *You* must bless these boys.”

One by one we prostrated before Maharaj. He placed his hand on each one of us and blessed us. Swami Premananda asked us to sit by Maharaj; then he went downstairs.

Maharaj was seated on an easy chair. His mind was withdrawn, but he forced himself to talk with us occasionally.

Maharaj: "His grace and His blessings are not lacking. But how many are there who set their sail to catch His breeze of grace? How many bend their heads to receive His blessings? People's minds are busy with trivial things; who wants the real treasure? They talk big, but they don't strive to earn anything. They want to get everything without effort. People can manage to do all kinds of worldly work, but when it comes to keeping recollectedness of God they say, 'But where is the time to do it?'

"Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'Gurus can be had by the thousands, but rare is a disciple.' There are plenty of people to give advice, but how many are there to listen to it? If a man has faith in the words of his guru and follows them, then all his doubts and troubles vanish. If a man has faith in the words of his guru, God will meet all his wants. Holding him by the hand, He will lead him on the right path. What worries are there if one has received His grace? From the Lord's infinite storehouse of knowledge will come a continuous supply. He in whom a longing for God has awakened, let him rise and struggle. While sitting, or lying down, or eating, let him pray piteously to His blessed feet: 'O Lord, have mercy on me! Allow me to understand your grace!'

"He is gracious. He reveals His grace to him who seeks it with a sincere heart. As we pray to Him, He gives us dispassion, longing for Him, and right understanding. Out of thousands, perchance one desires for God.

"The Master used to tell a parable about the maid servant in a rich man's house. She talks of her master's home and possessions as hers and she brings up his children as if they were her own, but in her heart of hearts she knows that none of these belong to her. In the same way, we have to live in this world and do our duties; but in our heart of hearts we must realize that nothing belongs to us, nobody belongs to

us. Our only true abode is at the lotus feet of the Lord, and that is where we must go. Shunning all forms of pride and ego, we must take shelter at His feet.

“But how many wish to take refuge in the truth and in the Lord? Everybody thinks that he is infallible. Deluded by egoism, man regards himself as very important. He does not even want to believe in the existence of God. He never seriously considers how little he can understand with his intellect. Mahamaya [the Divine Mother] alone knows in how many ways She has kept man deluded.

“We [the direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna] only know this much: never try to limit God. Infinite are his moods and aspects. He is beyond the reach of mind and intellect. And yet—if one earnestly prays to him—he becomes attainable to the pure mind.

“Nothing can be achieved without His grace. Take refuge in Him, and He will open the gate of infinite knowledge. Do your duties in the world while taking refuge in the Lord. The Master used to say: ‘Children hold on to the pillar and then swing round and round. Do you know where their attention is fixed? It is on the pillar. They know that they will fall if they let go of their hold on it.’ Now then, hold fast to the pillar of God and then swing round it as much as you like.

“First know Him. After God-realization you may live in the world and your feet will not tread the wrong path. The world’s *maya* [its illusory power] will not be able to bind you. Then, no matter which way you follow—whether the way of knowledge, or the way of devotion, or the way of work—you and others will benefit immensely, and your human birth will be blessed.”

Speechlessly all were listening to the words of Maharaj. Their minds were, so to speak, in another realm. All sense of

time was lost. In Maharaj's holy company they were filled with an extraordinary spiritual mood.

It was nearly vesper time. All prostrated before Maharaj and went downstairs to wash themselves in the river before attending the vesper service in the shrineroom. A few, as they returned to their homes, were still thinking of the teachings of Maharaj and of his blissful face.

WE VISITED the Belur Math in the afternoon. First we went to the shrineroom. When we came downstairs we found Swami Premananda conversing with several devotees under a mango tree. We prostrated before him, and he remarked: "You have come! Very good! How are you?"

"We are well, holy sir."

Swami Premananda: "The Master used to say: 'Once a man fed an opium pill to a peacock. Every day thereafter the peacock would return for his dose of the drug.' So the Master has given opium to these boys. Therefore they can't stay home. They take every opportunity to come here. Blessed indeed are those whom he has attracted! 'Whom the Lord chooses, by him is He attained.' Only through His grace are loosened the bondages and delusions caused by maya."

The Swami sang to himself a couple of lines from a song: "What a great spell Mahamaya has cast! Even Brahma and Vishnu are deluded."

"Grace, grace, grace! Nothing can be achieved without grace. This body and its pleasures and enjoyments will not last long. Blessed is he who, renouncing all these, takes refuge in Him." Again Swami Premananda sang several lines from a song: "Blissful alone is he who knows the Blissful Mother. Pilgrimages do not attract him. He cares for nothing but the name of Mother Kali."

The Swami kept silent for a while. Then he asked: "Have you seen Maharaj yet?"

We replied: "No, sir, we have just come down from the shrineroom. After our visit with you we will see Maharaj."

This time again we found Maharaj seated in an easy chair on the upstairs veranda. A few devotees sat on the floor in front of him. One by one we took the dust of his feet and joined the group.

A devotee said: "Maharaj, I cannot control my mind. Many distracting thoughts arise. What shall I do? Will I be able to practice any spiritual disciplines? How can I worship and meditate?"

Maharaj: "Pray to the Lord. Practice with regularity. Gradually, the mind will become inclined to worship and meditate. In the beginning the mind will refuse to come under control, but force it, urge it, entreat it in order to fix it on meditation. Faith and regularity are very important; nobody can succeed in anything without them.

"You have to practice spiritual disciplines in such a way that no matter what your circumstances may be you will follow your regular routine. Once the mind tastes sweetness in the thought of God there is nothing to fear. Seek the association of the holy so that you may acquire that taste. In order to make devotees chant the name of Hari [the Lord], Nityananda tempted them: 'Repeat the name of Hari, and you shall eat fish soup and enjoy the embrace of a young girl.' [Nityananda was Sri Chaitanya's disciple and associate. In the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, the Master explained Nityananda's promise: "Many people, attracted by the fish and the woman, would chant the name of God. After tasting a little of the nectar of God's hallowed name, they would soon realize that the 'fish soup' really meant the tears they shed for love of God, while the 'young woman' signified the earth.

The embrace of the woman meant rolling on the ground in the rapture of divine love.”] He [Nityananda] knew that if the devotees once found sweetness in the Lord’s name, they could not refrain from repeating it. If anybody has tasted the nectar of God’s name, is it possible for him to give up chanting it? The power of his name is such that the effect is realized whether one repeats it with feeling or mechanically. The Master used to say: ‘Suppose a man is walking on the bank of the Ganges. He can bathe in the river willingly, or he may accidentally fall into it, or somebody may push him in. He will have a bath in the Ganges anyway.’

“The power of the Lord’s name is great indeed. Ajamil, who was dying, was thirsty, and called his son Narayan to bring him water. Thus he attained liberation at the moment of death. [Narayan is a name of God. It is a Hindu belief that if a man utters the Lord’s name at the last moment, he achieves salvation.]

“Man’s mind is forever restless. It remains distracted for many reasons. Association with the holy will bring it under control. Live in the society of holy people and follow their advice. If you do, you will be saved from much grief and trouble. If your mind does not become absorbed in God, it will be impossible for you to protect yourself from the many temptations of the world. By His grace, may your mind be directed toward the Reality. Unless one is strong in His strength, one cannot save oneself from the network of maya. Be strong in His strength!

“Life is flowing by like a river. The day that is done does not return. Blessed is he who uses his time fruitfully. Through many good deeds in many past lives you have been born as a human being. Make this human birth blessed by worshiping the Lord, by meditating on him. Shankara said: ‘Human birth, desire for liberation, and association with the

holy—only through God's grace may we obtain these three rarest advantages!' Through the Master's grace you have all these three. Struggle to attain the Lord, and make this human birth blessed! Life is impermanent. No one knows when it will end. Exert yourself to secure that treasure which will give you immortal life. While you are young you can struggle to find God. One must strive hard to realize him. There is no danger of falling if one holds fast to the pillar while whirling round it.

"Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'When you go to a temple in order to visit the deity, you will never see it if you spend your time doling out alms to the beggars. You must push through the crowd, enter the temple, worship the deity, and then you may do whatever you please.'"

There was perfect silence. It was vesper time. We all prostrated before Maharaj and went downstairs.

AFTER about two weeks we went to the monastery in the afternoon. We visited the shrineroom, and when we came downstairs we saw Swami Premananda standing in the rose garden while a couple of brahmacharis were pulling weeds. We prostrated before him, and he inquired about our health.

Ramlal Dada was at the Belur Math that day; he was visiting with Maharaj. Swami Premananda said to us: "Ramlal Dada is the Master's nephew. Have you met him?"

We had never seen Ramlal Dada, so we answered: "No, sir, we have not met him yet."

Swami Premananda said: "Go and have darshan of him."

We took leave of the Swami. As we went upstairs to the veranda facing the Ganges we saw Maharaj, and Sri Ramakrishna's nephew was seated next to him. Many devotees sat on the floor facing them. They were eagerly waiting for

Maharaj and Ramlal Dada to talk. I cannot recall the conversations which took place that day, but an indelible impression was made on my mind by one scene.

Maharaj said to Ramlal Dada: "I haven't heard you sing for a long time. Please sing for us!" Ramlal Dada sang a song about Sri Krishna. Suddenly he stood up and went into an ecstatic mood. Assuming the attitude of a shepherdess, he sang and danced before Maharaj. Maharaj listened, silently absorbed.

The next time we went to the monastery, Swami Premananda said: "Maharaj has gone to live at Balaram Mandir [Balaram's home]. While he was at the Math his radiant presence gave light to us all. Now that he is gone it seems dark. You should go to Balaram Mandir and visit him.

"Maharaj is the shepherd boy of Brindaban, a close associate of Sri Ramakrishna. He has come to earth to perform his part in the Master's divine play. Hail Sri Ramakrishna! Hail Maharaj! As the result of much austerity in many births one receives the grace of such a great soul as Maharaj. You boys are blessed!"

Today Swami Premananda seemed to be especially absorbed in the thought of Maharaj. He made us aware more than ever of Maharaj's great purity and love. We also felt that the Math was empty without him, so after talking with Swami Premananda for a few minutes we returned home.

After a couple of days we went to visit Maharaj at Balaram Mandir in Baghbazar. It had the appearance of a private home, and we hesitated to enter. As we looked up, we saw Maharaj walking on the little veranda facing the street. He asked us to come in. We went upstairs and prostrated before him. He received us affectionately. First he inquired about our health. Then he asked: "How did you know that I am staying here?"

I answered: "We went to the monastery and could not see you there. Swami Premananda said that you were at Balaram Mandir and told us to visit you here."

Maharaj smiled a little and said: "Ah, I understand, Brother Baburam throws your burden on *me*!"

Suddenly, Maharaj noticed that Ramlal Dada was approaching the house. He told a brahmachari: "Run and get a pound of sweetmeats before Dada arrives. Hurry!"

Ramlal Dada entered the house. He had just begun to talk with Maharaj when the brahmachari returned. Maharaj said to the young monk: "Hello, what have you got there?"

"Sweets, Maharaj."

Maharaj took the box of sweetmeats, opened it and said: "Ah, Dada, how nice! These sweets look so fresh! Please have some right away!"

In order to please Maharaj, Dada began to eat the sweets. As soon as he stopped eating, Maharaj urged him to eat some more. And so Ramlal Dada ended up having to eat all the sweets.

Maharaj seemed very happy to have Dada with him. He took him into the drawing room, offered him a seat, and sat down beside him. Gradually devotees gathered, each prostrating before Ramlal Dada and Maharaj as they arrived. Whenever someone prostrated before Maharaj first he would object: "Oh no, first bow down to Dada! He belongs to the family of our guru, and guru and God are one. In Dada's veins flows the blood of the family into which our Lord was born."

I am sure Maharaj said these words in order to inspire the devotees with greater faith in Sri Ramakrishna and his family. (During some of Ramlal Dada's visits to Maharaj we have also observed that the latter would stand with folded hands and offer Dada a seat before he himself would sit

down.) Today Maharaj seemed to be in a particularly exalted mood because Ramlal Dada's presence reminded him of the old days at Dakshineswar.

Dr. Kanjilal, Boshi Sen, Pulin Mitra, and other devotees were seated silently in front of Maharaj and Ramlal Dada. Maharaj said: "Dada, please tell us something about our Master."

Ramlal Dada: "Well, brother, in those days I for one did not recognize his greatness. I used to think: 'He is our uncle. He has received the Divine Mother's special grace, and that is why many people come to him.'"

Then, pointing to Maharaj, Ramlal Dada continued: "Really, brother, it is you who truly recognized that supreme person. Inspired by his ideal of renunciation, you gave up wife, family, and everything. That is why, having touched the philosopher's stone through his grace, you have become an heir to eternal life. And now, with both hands you are distributing to others the bliss of immortality.

"Although we are his blood relatives, we did not realize who he was. But through his grace I have this much faith, that as long as we have been born into his family we have found refuge at his lotus feet. From his lips I have heard that when a man attains illumination, seven generations of his family before and after him become liberated. And the Lord himself was born into our family as a human being! Through his grace and in his holy company we also had many visions and spiritual experiences. Thus he gave us faith and devotion to him.

"In the garden house at Cossipore on that memorable day he touched me as well as others. [This was January 1, 1886, the well-known occasion when Sri Ramakrishna gave unusual spiritual graces to all present.] I feel a thrill whenever I recall the wonderful experience I had as a result of

his touch. [About this experience, Swami Prabhavananda later heard Ramlal Dada say: "That day, by his touch, he gave me a clear vision of my Chosen Ideal."] And the absorption he gave me when I would sing *kirtan* [devotional music] with him is beyond expression. He who knows, knows. The Master used to say [referring to himself and his intimate disciples]: 'The party of minstrels came and went; nobody recognized them.'

"There was a flood of joy and love when he used to sing and dance in the company of Keshab Sen and his party or of Vijay Krishna and others! Well, brother, you monastic disciples alone truly tasted that bliss, and that is why you have been able to renounce everything."

Maharaj was listening to Ramlal Dada with rapt attention. The latter continued: "Ah, what an embodiment of humility Sri Ramakrishna was! We were always ready to carry out his least command, but would he order us? When he wanted me to go to Calcutta on some errand, he would approach me and ask: 'Hello, Ramlal, do you have any business in Calcutta? Do you have any wish to go there?' I used to answer: 'I can go if you would like me to.' Then he would say: 'Go and find out how Naren [Swami Vivekananda] is. I have some sweets. Please take them to him. There is money in that niche; take some to pay your share for a carriage ride to Calcutta.'

"He was a rare soul. He exemplified the virtue of giving honor to all. Whenever he asked us to do the smallest thing, out of consideration he would ask with great hesitancy."

Maharaj: "Well, brother, at the beginning we did not understand the Master either. Often we were disrespectful to him. But he is the ocean of unconditional grace. He has forgiven our many faults and has made us his own by his love and affection."

"One day he asked me to massage him with oil. While I was doing it he said something which made me angry. I threw the bottle of oil on the ground. I decided to run away and went as far as the gate of the temple—but no farther. I could not cross the gate. I felt as if someone were forcibly holding me back. I sat down, unable to move another step. After a while the Master sent for me, and when I returned to his presence, he said: 'Well, could you run away? The Mother has drawn a circle around this place, and you could not go outside that circle.'

"In those days I was very proud and used to lose my temper over trifling things. The Master said to me: 'Anger is demonic. Pride and anger are great obstacles on the spiritual path. You have come here to live a holy life. Give up anger and envy!'

"In him alone we found our mother, our father, our brother, our friend, our everything." Maharaj folded his hands and chanted the verse: "Thou art my mother and father. Thou art my friend and constant companion. Thou art my wisdom and my wealth. Thou art all-in-all, my God of gods."

Maharaj closed his eyes. After a while he said: "There has never come to earth another who was such an ocean of boundless grace. Those who have understood this truth, and those whom he made understand through his grace, they alone can know and understand him. Blessed are they! [He quoted Hanuman's words to Rama's sons:] 'O Kusha and Lava, why are you proud? If I did not let myself be caught, could you ever catch me?'

"Sri Ramakrishna is attached to his devotees. The breeze of his grace is blowing. Take a little trouble to set your sail. Then the touch of that breeze of grace will make your boat of life land at his feet.

"The Master spoke frequently about self-effort and earnestness. Without enthusiasm and self-effort nothing can be achieved in spiritual life. He would say: 'I have cooked and placed the food before you. Now you must use your hand to put the food into your mouth.' This much exertion is needed.

"Pray to the Lord with all your heart! Then alone you will long for him. When one is hungry one enjoys food. When one has no appetite one doesn't care even for delicacies. And that is why people don't taste the nectar of his name.

"Now that a little of your mind goes toward the Lord, apply your mind and practice. As you practice, you will receive help. The Master used to say: 'The Mother supplies from her storehouse of knowledge.' If you want to feel the heat of a fire, it won't do to stay too far away. You have to get close to the fire in order to feel the heat.

"Keep association with the holy. Go to one who knows the path, learn about the path, and walk on the path. Then alone you will reach your destination some day. Then alone will arise faith and devotion."

Ramlal Dada said good-by; he was about to return to Dakshineswar. We prostrated before Maharaj and Ramlal Dada, and meditating on their entrancing words and on the boundless grace of Sri Ramakrishna we left Balaram Mandir. There was one thought in our minds: Although we are weak, if we receive but a grain of grace from Maharaj we shall find eternal peace.

I WENT to Balaram Mandir to visit Maharaj. As I entered the house I saw Swami Turiyananda seated in the room to the right. I had met him before, in Banaras, so I recognized him immediately. I bowed down and inquired where I could

find Maharaj. The Swami told me to go upstairs. Maharaj was seated in the drawing room, surrounded by many devotees. A few swamis and brahmacharis from the Math also were present. I prostrated before Maharaj, and he said: "Hello, I have not seen you for a long time." I explained the reason for my absence and sat down in a corner.

In the course of conversation the subject of our Mission work came up. Maharaj said: "If one works unselfishly, without desiring the fruits of action, work does not create any bondage. Swamiji used to say: 'Work is worship.' Is it possible for everybody to meditate all the time? That is why Swamiji taught selfless service in order to make it easy for people to reach union with God. Know that all work is the Lord's work. Learn to forget yourself while working. The aim of all spiritual practice is to destroy the sense of ego. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'When the ego dies all troubles cease.' As long as we are egotistic, so long is He at a distance. The Master used to give this illustration: 'As long as the manager is in the storeroom, the head of the house does not go there. If anybody asks something of him, he directs that person to the manager.'

"The fact is that very few people really want Him. Most of them are forgetful of God, attracted by the many worldly objects with which Mahamaya tempts them. It is like the case of a mother who gives a pacifier to her baby to keep him quiet while she busies herself with her household tasks. But when the baby throws the sucker away and begins to cry for her then the mother gives up her work, runs to the baby and takes him on her lap.

"Work, devotion, discrimination—each one is a path to reach union with God. With the same wholesouled devotion with which a devotee worships the Lord in the shrine he must serve the Lord in the poor, in the sick, in the lowly. Who are

you to help another? It is only when the Lord gives you the power that you can really serve.

“True it is that in all creatures He dwells, but His greater manifestation is in man. That is why Swamiji encouraged us to serve mankind. One must have faith that the one Brahman is in man, woman, in all creatures; and with that faith one must learn to serve *Shiva* [God] in the form of *jiva* [man]. As you practice this, suddenly one day the veil will be lifted and you will see that it is He who has become everything—man and universe. It is He who pervades the universe in so many forms. You are that all-pervading Shiva; and thus can serve Shiva in the form of jiva.

“Once the Master asked Mani Mallik’s daughter: ‘Whom do you love the most?’ She replied: ‘I have a nephew; I love him the most.’ The Master told her: ‘Very good! Serve your nephew, bathe him and feed him as Baby Krishna.’ She followed the Master’s advice and in course of time she had the vision of Baby Krishna in the nephew.

“Practice any spiritual discipline with faith and devotion; in the end it will lead you to the same goal.”

It was evening. More devotees came to visit Maharaj. I prostrated before him and left.

AFTER about a week I went to the Udbodhan and prostrated before Swami Saradananda. A young Swami was asking his advice about some work. Swami Saradananda gave his opinion and then said: “Go to Balaram Mandir and ask Maharaj about it. Maharaj’s word is the Master’s word. Whatever Maharaj says to us we consider as coming directly from Sri Ramakrishna. The Master and his spiritual son are one and the same.”

We went to Balaram Mandir. Maharaj was seated in the living room surrounded by many devotees. His eyes were

half-closed. After some time Maharaj said: "What is the aim of spiritual practice? To know Him, to attain union with Him. Through His grace 'the knot of the heart which is ignorance is loosed, all doubts are dissolved, all evil effects of deeds are destroyed, when He who is both personal and impersonal is realized.' Take refuge in Him and earnestly pray for His grace. Why did you come here, renouncing hearth and home? While eating, while lying down, while standing, while sitting, pray to Him: 'Lord, give me the power to feel and understand your grace!'

"We are only travelers in this world. Our eternal abode is at the lotus feet of God. Sri Krishna said in the Gita: 'I am the end of the path, the witness, the Lord, the sustainer. I am the place of abode, the beginning, the friend and the refuge. I am the breaking-apart, and the storehouse of life's dissolution. I lie under the seen, of all creatures the seed that is changeless.'

"Unfortunate is he who, instead of taking refuge in God, gets entangled in the world. The blessed feet of the Lord are our eternal home. We must reach them somehow. He alone is the truth. That truth is to be attained. Let not your life pass by in vain. Almost everyone thinks that what he understands is the truth and the way for everybody. Sometimes man becomes so egotistic and thinks himself so important that he does not even accept the existence of God. It is this ego that binds a man in maya. There is no escape until you begin to feel, 'Not I, not I, but Thou, my Lord!'

"Swamiji used to sing this song:

Thou art my Lord,
Thou art my Master,
I am Thy servant,
I am Thy slave.

“Again he would sing: ‘All that exists art Thou.’

“God is love itself, beyond the ken of mind and intellect. Only he knows God on whom His grace descends. Never forget that the ideal is to know Him. Know Him, and the door to infinite wisdom opens. Then is it that one really feels: ‘God is my own; I belong to him.’

“The Master often said, ‘God can be attained if one loves him with the combined force of these three attractions: the chaste wife’s love for her husband, the mother’s love for her child, and the worldly man’s love for worldly possessions.’ What does it mean? It means that when all cravings are renounced and there is an intense longing to attain Him, then alone one’s life is blessed with God-vision by divine grace. Sri Krishna said in the Gita: ‘Lay down all duties in Me, your refuge. Fear no longer, for I will save you from sin and from bondage.’ This is His promise. ‘Give Me your whole heart. Love and adore Me. Worship Me always. Bow to Me only, and you shall find Me!’

“The Master repeatedly prayed: ‘Thou art my refuge, O Lord. I seek no physical pleasures. I do not want worldly happiness. Give me faith, and give me pure love for thy lotus feet. Destroy my sense of ego and make me thine.’

“In this age there is no way other than that of taking shelter at His feet. In the Iron Age, man’s span of life is short. And within this short span of life one has to attain Him. There is no time for severe austerities as in olden days. The mind is weak. That is why man is more attached to worldly pleasures.

“In spite of all weakness, the easiest way to attain God is to take refuge in him. What does this mean? Shall we not do anything? Shall we remain passive? No! We must pray; we must cry unto God that he may awaken in us longing for him and that our cravings for enjoyment may be wiped out.

Pray: 'O Lord of the Universe, reveal your grace to me! I am helpless. I have no shelter but you. You are the only refuge of the weak. Give me strength to remember you always.' If one can really surrender oneself to God, then everything becomes easy; but it is not so easy to do this. Without divine grace it is not possible to take refuge in God. And in order to feel this grace one must associate with holy men, read sacred books, and pray earnestly.

"The mind deludes us in many ways. We must control it and direct it along the right path. What is austerity? It is to direct the mind toward God in order to taste divine bliss. In this age it is not necessary to practice physical austerities, such as standing on your head. The path in this age is to create the desire to chant the Lord's name, to be compassionate toward all beings, and to serve holy men. The sage Narada attained devotion and knowledge of Brahman by serving holy men. Ego is destroyed through service.

"Sri Ramakrishna's message in this age is renunciation of lust and gold. You have joined the monastery in order to become holy men. Renunciation of lust and gold is the ornament of a holy man, and it is the only means of attaining God. As one progresses on the path of spirituality, one is confronted by many kinds of temptations. Cravings—such as for woman and gold, for name and fame—arise again and may lead one farther away from God. Unless you beware of this thief in the form of cravings he will steal all the goodness in you, and you will drown in the bottomless ocean of worldliness. But, on the other hand, there is the ocean of divine grace—if anyone will sincerely call on Him but once. The Master used to say: 'If you move one step toward Him, He comes down ten steps toward you.'

"God is the wish-yielding tree. He fulfills the heart's desire of his devotee. Be sincere; make your mind and lips

the same. There is no injustice in God's kingdom. The Master told us: 'I have done one hundred percent. You do one percent.' What hard austerities the Master practiced in order that our path might be easy! Make him your refuge. Be an heir to immortal bliss in this very life. Make your human birth blessed!"

BELUR MATH. Today is the anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday. About eleven o'clock in the morning, worship began in the shrine. In the courtyard below, under the mango tree, Kali kirtan was sung. Maharaj meditated in the shrine-room for a while and then came to the veranda and sat down. Swami Saradananda was with him. Both listened absorbed to the praises of Mother Kali. The courtyard was crowded with devotees. The following lines of a kirtan were sung: 'O my mind, why wander about in this world any longer? Let us go to that city where day and night the full moon shines blissfully.' Suddenly Maharaj got up and joined the party of singers. They all stood up and surrounded him. Maharaj danced in ecstasy, and the singers also danced to the refrain: 'Let us go to that city.' Swami Saradananda remained by Maharaj's side to protect him from falling down in ecstasy. A current of joy was flowing, and everyone present felt it. After the kirtan was over, Maharaj was still in an exalted mood. Swami Saradananda and Swami Dhirananda led him to his chair. It took Maharaj a long time to return to normal consciousness.

Another day, Maharaj asked Baradananda to sing several songs. After the music, Maharaj said: "Blessed is he in whose heart a current of joy flows continually while he chants the name and sings the praises of the Lord. Keep recollectedness of God and make your life blessed; otherwise,

vain is this human birth. 'O Lord, your children are almost dead—deluded by your maya. Give them your life-giving medicine, and make them immortal.' You have left hearth and home. Now forget physical comforts, and pray: 'Lord, thou art my all in all, my support and my only treasure.'"

SWAMI NIRVANANANDA'S MEMORIES

SWAMI NIRVANANANDA, *a disciple of Maharaj, is the Treasurer of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. He served Maharaj as personal attendant between 1917 and 1922. In 1956, the Swami and Swami Madhavananda came to America for the dedication of the new temple of the Vedanta Society of Southern California at Santa Barbara. On this trip, the two Swamis visited the various Vedanta centers in the West. In Hollywood and St. Louis, Swami Nirvanananda told in Bengali the reminiscences printed below, which have been translated into English partly by Swami Vandanananda, and partly by Swami Satprakashananda. Some memories of Maharaj have been added from an article by Swami Nirvanananda, published in the January 1958 issue of the Vedanta Kesari.*

I MET MAHARAJ for the first time in the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama of Banaras, which is a hospital for the suffering and destitute. The monks and novices of the ashrama serve the patients with devotion as manifestations of God. Inspired by this noble ideal of the Ramakrishna Order, I joined the ashrama with an ardent desire to become a monk. I had corresponded with Maharaj before our first meeting, and I had read about him in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Besides Maharaj, I saw two other disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in Banaras, namely Swami Turiyananda and Swami Shivananda. They impressed me as being the very guardians of spirituality.

In the midst of the busy program of the Sevashrama, the thought would linger in my mind, "When shall I go and see Maharaj?" His eyes always revealed his sympathy and other-worldliness. Sri Ramakrishna had said about him that he had "the vacant look of a hen hatching her eggs." His radiant smiling face and the sweetness of his childlike simplicity attracted me to him more and more.

At the end of my daily routine, whenever the opportunity presented itself I never failed to be near Maharaj and to wait on him, just to be permitted to do some personal service. Graciously, he at times bade me prepare food for him or massage his body. I was indeed blessed, although the opportunities were but for very short spans of time. Through such service, sometimes I felt flashes of joy within myself. I was firmly convinced that it was essential for me to have the company of this blessed soul, without whose light I felt there was no way for me to understand or conceive Brahman, Atman, God, and other entities that exist beyond sense-perception. When Maharaj went elsewhere after having stayed at the Banaras ashrama for some time, I had a strong desire to be with him. The prayers of the heart are always answered by God, and so it was with me.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA, pointing out the young Rakhal, had once said to the devotees: "These boys belong to the class of the ever-perfect; they are born with the knowledge of God." Truly so, Maharaj always wandered in the heavenly world of spiritual moods. When he was a young boy, the Master had said to him one day: "Look, I am not a human being. I am the Divine Mother." And Rakhal saw—and went into his first samadhi. Later, Sri Ramakrishna frequently pointed out this spot where Rakhal experienced transcendental consciousness for the first time.

After many years Maharaj was asked to look at a statue someone had made of Sri Ramakrishna to see whether it was a good likeness. Maharaj asked: "In what form of him has the sculptor made it?" The meaning of his question becomes clear if we keep in mind that the Master appeared to him in many aspects of divinity.

According to Sri Ramakrishna's direction, Swami Vivekananda had delivered the charge of the Order to Maharaj who, on Swamiji's passing away, set himself heart and soul to the great responsibility given to him. Through his uncommon personality and spiritual power the Order progressed day by day. From Maharaj's countenance, no one could guess his leadership and potentiality. He was totally free from any attachment to the fruits of work, such as hope, signs of dejection, pride of prestige, and efforts to exhibit one's power.

Maharaj had the power to change the atmosphere of a place and to make it vibrate with his spirituality. In his company he could make everybody roll with laughter, and then suddenly, when he became silent, the place would be surcharged with a divine presence. Swami Turiyananda once remarked that Maharaj used to create such an atmosphere around himself that everyone present would be filled with some of his spiritual mood. Many people used to come to Maharaj for the purpose of seeking advice about their problems. But once they were near him they felt no necessity to ask for any solution. Problems solved themselves in his presence, and people would forget themselves, their egoism, temporal pleasure and pain, and be filled with intense divine bliss.

Whether in the forest or in the city, Maharaj led a very simple life. Wherever he stayed, monks and devotees flocked around him. Those who came to see him went back over-

whelmed by his piety and his pure and unselfish love toward all. By a glance or a touch or his mere presence, he could raise the minds of others to a high level and change their very lives. This will be apparent from some of the incidents in his life which we will mention here.

DEVENDRANATH BOSE (called Deven Babu—Babu means “Mister”) was a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and friendly with all his direct disciples, particularly with Swami Akhandananda. After the passing away of the Master, Deven Babu became the estate manager of the maharaja of Kashmir Bazar, and for many years he did not come to see the monks.

One day, Swami Akhandananda met Deven Babu by chance and brought him to the Belur Math. Maharaj was at the monastery at the time. On seeing Deven Babu after such a long interval, he was particularly gracious to him. Afterwards, Maharaj said to Swami Akhandananda: “Well, Gangadhar, what has happened to your Deven? He has changed very much—in movements, manners, everything. His face has a worldly expression, and he dresses like a dandy. Has he forgotten the Master and all of us?”

Swami Akhandananda did not know what to say. But the next time he saw Deven Babu, he told him in the course of conversation what Maharaj had said about him.

“I don’t know what has happened to me. I am not happy,” said Deven Babu.

After a few days, Deven Babu came to see Maharaj. I was sitting in front of Maharaj’s room. Deven Babu asked me: “Where is Maharaj?”

I said to him: “Please take a seat. Maharaj is in his room. I shall inform him of your arrival.”

Deven Babu’s great restlessness was clearly visible, and

he was unable to sit still. He was so anxious to see Maharaj that he would not wait for him to come out of his room. He rushed in, just as Maharaj was preparing to meet him. Seeing Deven Babu, Maharaj silently went to him. He placed his hand on Deven Babu's chest, stroked it several times, and said: "What has happened, Deven Babu? Everything will be all right. Think of the Master!"

Immediately there was a complete change in Deven Babu. He bowed down before Maharaj and said: "Maharaj, all my worldliness is wiped out. How far I had fallen! But your grace and blessings have lifted me up. Now I have no more sorrows or troubles."

Maharaj came out to the portico with Deven Babu and asked me to give him *prasad* [food sanctified by having been offered to the Lord]. From that day on Deven Babu used to come quite often to see Maharaj. The experience he had had on that occasion left a lasting effect on him.

Long after the passing away of Maharaj I requested Deven Babu to write an introduction to the original Bengali edition of *The Spiritual Teachings of Swami Brahmananda*. The following portion of what he wrote is especially significant: "Those who came in close contact with the spiritual son of the Master say that Maharaj was endowed with immeasurable spiritual splendor and that his spiritual energy flowed like torrents of rain in a hundred directions. But nobody knew how so much power, so much energy, could remain so quietly in this mortal frame.

"The latent power of an electric wire is known only on touching it. We hear that the body of a realized soul is not made of matter but of spirit. But that truth could not be understood even while coming in touch with this divine man. With what heavenly love he kept us deluded!"

Deven Babu said to me: "Do you remember the occasion

when I went to see Maharaj? When he touched my chest with his hand, I felt a sudden shock. Immediately I remembered my past; love for God and yearning for realization filled me, and all the memories of the Master came alive again in my mind. As a result, the course of my life was altogether changed."

IN BANARAS in 1921, during Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration, the old photograph of the Master was to be exchanged for a new one. Swami Saradananda, Swami Turiyananda, and Swami Subodhananda were present.

After the special worship was finished, there was music and chanting. Maharaj asked someone to sing a certain song about Sri Ramakrishna: "*Esheche nutan manush* [A new man has come; come and see him]." Suddenly, Maharaj got up and began to dance in ecstasy. Swami Turiyananda and Swami Saradananda joined him, and then all the monks and the devotees—even little children—took part in the dancing. Great joy was felt by all present. For the time being, everyone forgot the world.

While they were all in that spiritual mood, a devotee came and whispered to Maharaj and Swami Turiyananda that it was time for dinner. Swami Turiyananda sent the man away and later remarked: "What a fool this man is! Blessed and rare is such an occasion, and he thought that eating was more important!" Then he continued: "Maharaj keeps his spiritual moods and powers hidden most of the time, but today they became manifest. He lifted our consciousness high."

THE FOLLOWING INCIDENT illustrates how Maharaj disciplined those in his charge.

Three young brahmacharis were at one time connected with the revolutionary movement. After joining the monastery they were still under the surveillance of the police. Every third day, the police would come to the Math to check that they were there.

On one occasion these boys went to a place of pilgrimage and did not return to the Math on time, which caused much embarrassment to Maharaj. When they finally arrived, Maharaj took them to task and then expelled them from the monastery. As the brahmacharis were leaving, they met Swami Premananda at the gate. They told him the whole story. Swami Premananda advised them not to leave the compound, but to hide under a tree and to pray. This they did.

While Maharaj was having lunch he asked me to order some delicacies from Calcutta, which I received within a couple of hours. After Maharaj got up from his noonday rest, he inquired whether the special food he had asked for had arrived. I had no idea what it was all about, but I answered: "Yes, Maharaj, I have everything ready."

Then he asked: "Do you know where those three brahmacharis are?"

I replied: "No, Maharaj, I haven't seen them."

Maharaj said: "Go and find them!"

I went into the garden, and in a short time I found the three boys under a tree and asked them to go and see Maharaj. When they came to his room, Maharaj told them to forget all about the episode. Then he added: "We are holy men, and our anger is just like a mark on water. . . . Now eat this food!"

AN EXAMPLE of Maharaj's childlike simplicity and his sense of humor is given in the following story.

At Belur Math one day, Maharaj had a little indigestion, so he told me that he would not eat anything that evening. I reported this to Swami Premananda when he asked about Maharaj's dinner.

Maharaj went to bed. There was a cooler in the room next to his, and many kinds of Bengali sweets were stored in it. At four o'clock in the morning Maharaj felt hungry, went to the cooler, and ate all the sweets. It was quite a quantity.

Later in the morning, as usual, Swami Premananda came to pay his respects to Maharaj. He inquired about his health, and Maharaj complained like a little boy: "Oh, I am hungry, and they haven't given me anything to eat yet!" Hearing this, I ran to the cooler to find something for him to eat—but it was empty.

Swami Premananda asked me: "What happened? Did you leave the cooler open so that a cat may have gotten in and eaten all the food? Were you so careless?"

I answered: "I can't understand it! When I looked just now, the cooler was still closed, and yet the food has been taken; so I can't see how a cat could have entered."

Then Maharaj smiled and said to Swami Premananda: "Yes, Brother Baburam, a big cat came and entered the cooler; in fact it was so big that it was able to open and close it!" And he pointed himself out as the "big cat."

MAHARAJ laid much stress on the significance of the Master's advent. When such an Incarnation comes to earth much power is manifested, and with little effort a spiritual aspirant becomes illumined.

One day Maharaj said to M., the recorder of the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna: "The Master came this time to make a bridge between jiva and Shiva [man and God]. See how easy it has now become to realize the Lord!"

Maharaj used to tell us: "Don't waste this opportunity! Be up and doing! Once you lose this chance you will regret it. Sri Ramakrishna was the epitome of truth. Mold your lives according to this ideal. Those of you who are working in the hospital will also be able to reach the goal and realize the Reality through the practice of pure, unselfish work."

SRI RAMAKRISHNA used to say: "Rakhal is my son—my spiritual son." The fact that this relationship remained intact even after the Master's passing away may be understood from the following incident.

It was in the year 1918. Maharaj was then staying at Balaram Bose's house in the Baghbazar section of Calcutta. I was with him, being his attendant at the time. On this particular day Maharaj had just finished his lunch. Generally he took a rest about this time.

I was sitting on a bench outside his room when a young girl and her brother arrived. The girl asked permission to see Maharaj. I told her that it would not be convenient for him to see her now since he was about to take his rest. On hearing this, the girl became very sad. So I went to Maharaj and told him about her. He said affectionately: "Well, in my old age I can't talk after taking food. Ask her to come in a couple of hours or so."

When I conveyed this message to the girl she began to cry. She mentioned that Swami Saradananda had asked her to come. Then she said pitifully: "Look, I shall only prostrate before him and then go. Please arrange it for me!"

Moved by her plight, I again went to Maharaj. I told him: "Sarat Maharaj has sent this girl. She only wants to bow down and then she will go." After I mentioned Swami Saradananda's name Maharaj did not object any more.

The girl joyfully went to see Maharaj and prostrated before him. I stayed on the veranda while Maharaj talked with her. Later I learned that while prostrating, the girl began to sob, overwhelmed with emotion. Maharaj suddenly went into an ecstatic mood and became silent and motionless. After a while he looked at the girl and said: "Get up, my child; tell me what has happened." But the girl was still weeping. She stood up but was not able to speak for some time. Then, pointing to a picture of Sri Ramakrishna which Maharaj had in his room, she said: "He has asked me to come to you." Maharaj said again: "Tell me what has happened, my child."

Then she told her story. She was married at the age of fourteen. Only two weeks after their marriage her husband died. (In India this was a disastrous situation because a Hindu widow could not remarry nor work to support herself, and had to depend mostly on her parents or other near relatives to care for her.) Her future looked very dark, and in her despair she wept bitterly and incessantly prayed to God: "O Lord, what will become of me? I am so lonely and helpless. What shall I do? Please show me the way!" After a year or so, one night Sri Ramakrishna appeared to her in dream and said: "Don't weep. My son Rakhal is living in Baghbazar. Go to him. He will help you." She did not know anything about Sri Ramakrishna or Rakhal, and she wondered how she could get to Baghbazar which was in another section of Calcutta, far from where she lived. She did not mention her dream to anybody in her father-in-law's house. Her mother was at Tollyganj. She took permission from her father-in-law's household, went to her mother, and told her everything. Her mother knew about Sri Ramakrishna. On learning about him from her, the girl went to Baghbazar with her brother. There she inquired if a holy man lived

nearby. She was told that several holy men were living at the *Udbodhan* publication house of the Ramakrishna Order. Swami Saradananda and several other monks of the Order were staying there at the time. She told him about her vision of Sri Ramakrishna, and the Swami sent her to Balaram Mandir to see Maharaj.

The girl was with Maharaj for more than two hours. Finally he called me. As I entered the room, I noticed that the girl had received initiation. Maharaj asked me to get some food for her and her brother. After this meeting, the girl came often to see Maharaj. And I saw her once or twice at the monastery after Maharaj's passing away in 1922.

In 1942, a nun in ochre-colored robes came to see me at Belur Math. She was accompanied by a young girl disciple. I did not recognize the nun at first; but when she reminded me of her visit with Maharaj at Balaram Mandir twenty-four years before, I at once recalled the incident and asked her where she had been all these years. She answered that, following Maharaj's instructions, she had spent her time in spiritual practices in such places of pilgrimage as Banaras, Brindaban, and Hardwar. Now she was living in Calcutta near Kalighat with a few disciples. Her appearance showed a definite spiritual attainment.

About three years later, the same girl disciple who had accompanied the nun to the Belur Math came to see me. When I inquired about her teacher I was told that she had passed away two years before. During her last days she was ill. One morning she asked for an almanac to find the nearest auspicious day. On that day she asked her disciples to devote their time to prayer and meditation. She herself repeated the names of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Maharaj. While doing so, in full consciousness, she left the body.

TARA TELLS HER STORY

TARA SUNDARI (*"the beautiful Tara"*) was one of the greatest actresses of Bengal during the first quarter of this century. Those who have read the article *"Glimpses of the Holy Mother,"* in # 136 of Vedanta and the West, may recall that Sarada Devi, watching Tara play the title role in *The Life of Ramanuja*, went into samadhi; and when the performance was over and Tara came to pay her respects to the Holy Mother, she embraced and blessed the actress.

In order to understand Tara's memories of Maharaj, which follow this introduction, we should remember that in the Bengal of her time actresses were not accepted socially by "respectable people." They were considered as being necessarily immoral women.

Tara was trained for the stage by Girish Chandra Ghosh, who was one of Sri Ramakrishna's foremost householder-disciples. Girish Chandra composed Puranic, social, historical and religious plays, and he trained actors and actresses to perform them. Not only was he acclaimed as playwright and director, but equally as actor and producer. In fact, he was regarded as the presiding genius of the Bengali theater of his day. In his younger years, Girish Chandra, a brilliant intellectual inclined to atheism, was given to many excesses, including an addiction to alcohol and opium. His association with Sri Ramakrishna, which began in 1884, brought about a complete transformation in his life. He became one of the first to proclaim Sri Ramakrishna a divine incarnation, and through the practice of self-surrender to him he attained the vision of God. The Master encouraged Girish Chandra to

continue his work in the theater, and subsequently Girish brought a number of actors and actresses to meet Sri Ramakrishna and to be blessed by him. After Sri Ramakrishna's death, Girish continued to spend a good deal of time in the company of his brother-disciples, and he influenced a number of his acquaintances and associates to become devotees.

Tara, who acknowledges Girish's influence on her life in both religious and theatrical matters, wrote her reminiscences of Maharaj for the May-June 1923 issue (#1329) of the Udbodhan, a Bengali magazine founded by Swami Vivekananda. Her article has been translated into English by Swami Prabhavananda.

I WAS practically brought up in the theater. Ever since I was a little girl I worked on the stage with Girish Chandra Ghosh and heard from him about Sri Ramakrishna. There was a photograph of Sri Ramakrishna in every theater with which Girish Babu was connected, and the actors and actresses used to bow down to the Master's photograph before they appeared on the stage. I think this has now become a custom in every Bengali theater.

Many a time I wanted to visit the Belur Math. Once I asked Girish Babu if he would let me attend a particular celebration. I recall his answer perfectly. He said: "Not yet. When the Lord wills, you will go." And so, in spite of my wish, I did not then visit the monastery.

My first visit to the Belur Math took place many years later—about six years ago [1916]. I was then depressed and restless; life seemed unbearable to me. I began to seek out places of pilgrimage. In this unhappy state of mind I finally went to the Belur Math. Binodini, the finest actress of Bengal at the time, was with me. When I was seven years old she

introduced me to the theater; and again it was she who introduced me to the monastery.

It was past noon when we came to the Math. Maharaj had finished his midday meal and was about to go to his room to rest. At that moment we arrived and prostrated before him.

Maharaj said: "Hello Binode! Hello Tara! So you have come! You are too late; we have already finished our lunch. You should have let us know that you were coming."

We could see how worried he was about us. He immediately ordered fruit prasad. And arrangements were made to fry *luchis* for us [thin unleavened dough fried in butter]. We went first to the shrine, then had our prasad, and afterwards were shown around the Math by a swami. Maharaj did not have his rest that day.

We were brought up to revere holy men. But along with respect and faith I felt much fear of them. I was impure—a fallen woman. And so when I touched the holy feet of Maharaj I did it with great hesitancy, afraid to offend him. But his sweet words, his solicitude and love dispelled all my fear.

Maharaj asked me: "Why don't you come here often?"

I replied: "I was afraid to come to the Math."

Maharaj said with great earnestness: "Fear? You are coming to Sri Ramakrishna. What fear can there be? We all of us are his children. Don't be afraid! Whenever you wish, come here. Daughter, the Lord does not care about externals; he sees our inmost heart. There should be no fear in approaching him."

Swami Premananda was there at the time. He also was very gracious to us. He remarked: "The Lord welcomes everybody."

I had tea at the monastery in the afternoon and then returned home. When I said good-by to Maharaj he told me:

"Come here often. You were inconvenienced today. Come another time and take the regular prasad."

This was my first visit to Maharaj—and this was the first time in my life that I received genuine love.

A few days later, Maharaj went to the theater to see the play *Ramanuja*. [Tara took the part of Ramanuja, the famous philosopher, as a young boy.] After the performance I took the dust of Maharaj's feet. Maharaj blessed me and said: "Very good! May you grow in devotion!"

The days passed. I was restless as before—burning within. I could find no refuge, no peace anywhere. Everything seemed empty, empty! I started on a pilgrimage to Puri, longing to see Lord Jagannath [the image of the Lord of the Universe]. On my way I stopped at an inn at Bhubaneswar. There I learned that Maharaj was then staying at the Bhubaneswar monastery. So I went to visit him.

He welcomed me with the same solicitude and affection as before. He said: "Oh, you look so tired! Why did you come in this hot sun? Where do you take your meals? From tomorrow on come to the Math for prasad every day. What do you like to eat? Well, daughter, of course you realize that we are monks and can't provide a feast, and delicacies can't be had in this little town."

In this vein Maharaj spoke to me. I was surprised. What kind of a holy man was this? A worldly man would not feel such concern for his sons and daughters. Who was I? Where was my place in society? Down—down below! I had nothing to expect from the world but hatred and indifference. I had no friend, no relative. This big world seemed to me like a stranger's house. Nobody talked to me without a selfish motive; nobody looked at me without a selfish desire. There was none in this world whom I could call my own. Until today!

Swami Brahmananda, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, the all-renouncing sannyasin, revered and respected by all—that is Maharaj. And with what undeserved care and affection he made me his own! I never saw my father; he died before I was born. I thought to myself: “Is this what a father’s affection is like? Or is this something greater?”

I could not hold back my tears. My lifelong sorrow melted as the tears fell from my eyes, and I realized: Here is my refuge. Here is someone to whom I am not a sinner, I am not an outcast.

I am the daughter of Maharaj. He who has none is Maharaj’s own. He is my Maharaj—my father, my heaven, my peace, my God.

What peace I found! Maharaj said many things—I can’t remember them all. But what I remember is my treasure in this life. He said: “Daughter, you know what suffering there is in this world. Don’t think that we have not experienced any suffering. When I came to Sri Ramakrishna I was a young boy. I was practicing spiritual disciplines, but my mind was not always tranquil. I was restless, and there was the attraction of the world. At times I thought that my life was in vain, for I found no peace.

“One day I was thinking along these lines. I decided that I would run away and not even say good-by to the Master—when suddenly I found him standing before me. He said: ‘What are you worrying about?’ He placed his hand on my head and blessed me. Where was suffering now? What bliss, what bliss!”

I burst out: “Father, my suffering is great! I cannot bear any more! I run restlessly here and there. Take away this suffering of mine as Sri Ramakrishna took away yours!”

In a tender, affectionate voice Maharaj said: “Call on Sri Ramakrishna. He was born for this purpose. You have

nothing to fear. Chant his name. For a few days it will be difficult; then he will do everything for you. Have no more fear. You will realize great bliss. You will know what fun life can be."

We had read in books how Sri Chaitanya and Nityananda came to earth to save the fallen ones. Today I have had such an experience for myself—the infinite grace of Maharaj—as if Maharaj had come for sinners like me.

"There is nothing to fear, daughter. What fear can there be for the Lord's children?" What words of hope! What consolation! Maharaj seems to be extending his arms to us, saying: "Come all ye fallen ones! Come all ye who are suffering! Take refuge in the Lord! He *is*! Have no fear!"

May it please the Lord that I will never forget, not even in death, these words of consolation!

SRISH CHANDRA MATILAL RECALLS TWO MEETINGS WITH MAHARAJ

ANOTHER DEVOTEE *who learned about Sri Ramakrishna from Girish Ghosh was Srish Chandra Matilal. Girish Babu introduced this devotee to Maharaj at his own home. Srish Chandra's memories of this meeting, and of his later association with Maharaj, were published in the Udbodhan magazine (May-June 1923, #1329) and have been translated into English by Swami Prabhavananda.*

I DID NOT have the good fortune to see Sri Ramakrishna during his life on earth, nor did I meet Vivekananda. Whatever I have learned of Sri Ramakrishna is what I heard from Girish Chandra and felt in the atmosphere created by his life and association with the Master.

Whenever I listened to Girish tell of Sri Ramakrishna's wonderful grace and love, I used to feel that my life had been wasted. Although I could have seen the Lord on earth, I lost that opportunity through my own ignorance. I used to tell Girish how much I regretted this, and he would say: "Look here! You are more blessed than we. Do you know why? You have become a devotee of the Master just by hearing his name. Don't you remember what Jesus said: 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord' "? For the moment I would find consolation in such words, but some regret continued to lie hidden in a corner of my heart.

Although there is no direct relationship between what I have just said and my memory of the great soul who is the subject of this article, there is an indirect relationship which will become apparent.

My first introduction to Swami Brahmananda was at the house of Girish Chandra. Although I had seen Maharaj before at Belur Math, at Dakshineswar, and at Balaram Mandir, there was no opportunity for closer acquaintance until that day at Girish's home.

As far as I can remember, that afternoon Maharaj and Girish Chandra were talking about Sri Ramakrishna. A number of devotees were present. I arrived with a basket of sweets. Girish remarked: "See how the Lord provides for his own?" He asked me to offer the sweets to Maharaj. I prostrated and placed the basket before him.

Maharaj wanted to know who I was. Girish introduced me and asked a servant to bring a glass of water. Maharaj closed his eyes, offered the sweets and the water to the Master, and then accepted one or two candies. He said: "Oh, these sweets are wonderful! Distribute them to everybody." They were passed to the devotees. Girish said to me: "Blessed you are!" There was some conversation afterwards. It turned dark, and Maharaj left for Balaram Mandir.

After Maharaj had gone, I asked Girish: "Why do I feel so blessed? Why did I receive his grace even before I asked for it?"

Girish replied: "You see, you cannot explain these things. Sri Ramakrishna attracts a devotee and leads him to the right teacher."

Atul, Girish's brother, was present. He remarked: "Sri Ramakrishna said that Rakhal was his spiritual son. Even a son who is no good inherits some of his father's qualities. And in Rakhal many of Sri Ramakrishna's qualities are

manifest. You have not seen the Master, but you can get some idea of him by seeing his son."

Girish added: "Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'You will achieve everything if you come here.' Do you understand what he meant by 'here'? It means to come to him and to his intimate disciples."

Whether I understood everything or not, this I know: When I went home that night, my heart was filled with bliss and with a peace not previously experienced.

A few days later I visited Maharaj for the second time—at Belur Math. Although it was a Sunday, the Math was not crowded. Almost all the monks and devotees, except Maharaj and a few of his attendants, were at a celebration at Salikha. We also watched the celebration, and after prasad was distributed we went by boat to the monastery in the company of Dr. Kanjilal and a few other devotees.

It was afternoon. Maharaj was seated by the tea table on the veranda facing the shrine. As soon as he saw us he welcomed us affectionately. We prostrated and then seated ourselves on a bench facing him. There was some talk about the celebration at Salikha. Maharaj said: "I did not feel very well, so I couldn't go." He began to joke with Pulin Mitra, Dr. Kanjilal, and others.

Within half an hour or so I noticed two Madrasi devotees with flowers in their hands going upstairs to the shrineroom. To my surprise I saw that after a few moments they came downstairs still holding the flowers. I thought to myself: "How strange! The shrine is the Lord's place, and without offering the flowers to him they bring them downstairs again!" The two devotees walked straight toward Maharaj, who glanced at them and suddenly closed his eyes. The next moment he was in samadhi. He looked like the photograph of Sri Ramakrishna. He was motionless, without breath.

Those of us who were present had never seen Maharaj like this before. We did not realize that he was in divine communion and became very worried, thinking he must have fallen ill. Dr. Kanjilal was seated near Maharaj and tried to feel his pulse, but he could not find it. Somebody ran to get water. But the devotees from Madras showed no anxiety. Slowly they approached Maharaj and offered the flowers at his blessed feet.

Within a few minutes Maharaj returned to normal consciousness. In our ignorance we asked him what made him go into that peculiar state. I don't remember that he said anything except: "The Master only knows." We gathered the flowers from his feet and took leave of him.

On the way home, in the boat, some of my companions were conversing. But I could not join them. My foolish heart was suddenly filled with the realization: "There is no difference between Sri Ramakrishna and his spiritual son, Rakhhal, his living image."

Once in a mood of wounded vanity Girish had told Holy Mother, who did not associate freely with Sri Ramakrishna's older disciples: "The Master has become a photograph. and you have become a shy daughter-in-law!" Perhaps I would have felt the way Girish did then if I had not met Swami Brahmananda.

I cannot make public the most sacred teachings that Maharaj gave me. Neither do I have the ability to understand him nor to write much about him. Only one thing I can say: What I have received from him I have received, not because I was deserving, but solely because his grace is unconditional.

A DEVOTEE VISITS MAHARAJ IN EAST BENGAL

YEARS AGO, *when Swami Prabhavananda was writing The Eternal Companion, he asked for reminiscences of Maharaj from many who had known his guru. Later, in response to his request, he received the following memories, written anonymously by a devotee whose home was in Dacca. In 1916, this devotee was working as an office clerk in Mymensingh (which is located in East Bengal, now East Pakistan). There he met Maharaj, who was making a tour of East Bengal with a party including Swami Premananda, Swami Sankarananda (the present President of the Ramakrishna Order), and Swami Madhavananda (the present General Secretary).*

MYMENSINGH, Saturday, January 22, 1916. When I came to the office today I learned that Revered Maharaj had arrived and was staying at the home of Jiten Dutta. I went immediately to visit Maharaj, as I was very anxious to have the blessings of his holy association. I waited for him in the reception room but learned that he was in the private living quarters. I went there and found Maharaj seated on a bed. Revered Swami Premananda was sitting in an easy chair. I prostrated before them and remained standing. Then I asked Maharaj: "Where is Holy Mother now?"

Maharaj: "She is in Jayrambati."

Myself: "When will she be coming to Calcutta?"

Maharaj: "She may come by the end of February. Have you met Holy Mother?"

"No, sir."

Maharaj: "Are you initiated?"

"No, sir." Then I asked him: "When will you be going to the monastery at Dacca?"

Maharaj: "I don't know exactly. These people know. Maybe Monday by the eleven o'clock train. Have you seen the Dacca ashrama? How is it?"

"Yes, sir, I have seen the ashrama. It is situated in a beautiful spot—very quiet. But people say that the house is haunted." The ashrama was then located in North Masundi.

Maharaj smiled at Swami Premananda. Swami Premananda said: "Yes, Maharaj, I know."

Then Maharaj looked at me and said: "I hope we won't be bothered by the spooks!"

"No, sir, what can spooks do to you? . . . Charu Maharaj is living at the Dacca ashrama."

Maharaj: "Have you met him?"

"Yes, sir, he often comes to Narayangunj."

Maharaj: "Isn't Charu Maharaj afraid of ghosts?"

"No, sir."

Maharaj: "What does he teach you?"

"He insists that we visit the ashrama regularly. He believes that this habit will be of great benefit to us."

Maharaj asked me to look at the railway timetable to find out at what times trains left from Mymensingh for Dacca. I gave him the information. Then he told me to go to the reception room. I prostrated and left.

In the meantime Swami Premananda had come to the reception room. He was seated before a crowd of devotees and was talking about spiritual matters. Among other things he discussed Swamiji's ideal of selfless service.

Maharaj came out of his room to go for a stroll. Swami Premananda met him and they began to walk along the bank of the river. Many devotees accompanied them, to which Mr. Dutta objected.

Swami Premananda rebuked Mr. Dutta: "Why do you object? These people want the association of holy men. That is the greatest thing in life. Only he who has good karmas can have the association of sadhus. Holy company is very important. You must not stop these devotees!"

Maharaj to Swami Premananda: "Look, Brother! How beautiful is this open field! How beautiful is the river! How gently the breeze is blowing! This is a grand place! All this is kindling my spiritual consciousness."

Swami Premananda: "Yes, Maharaj, that is natural."

Maharaj: "This is a beautiful spot. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'There is an open field near Hriday's house. That is why I love to stay there.' An open field reminds one of God. Hail Guru, Sri Guru!"

Swami Premananda: "Hari bol, Hari bol!"

Maharaj, addressing his attendant: "Viswa, sing a song to the Lord!" Viswa was hesitating. Maharaj said: "How long do we have to wait?" He asked another brahmachari to sing. The brahmachari chanted a prayer.

Maharaj: "Which direction am I facing?"

The answer came from the crowd: "Northeast."

Maharaj folded his hands and bowed down. Another brahmachari chanted a prayer.

Maharaj: "It is good to meditate mornings and evenings in places like this. The mind becomes purified. The Lord's name is the only truth; everything else is unreal." In a state of ecstasy he continued: "To have faith in Him, to be devoted to Him, to praise His glories—these are the only duties in life."

Now the devotees began to prostrate before Maharaj, but he asked them to stop. Swami Premananda intervened and said humbly: "Maharaj, you are in this wonderful mood. Allow them to prostrate before you and thus make their lives

blessed. Please stand still!" Then Swami Premananda addressed the crowd: "Come and prostrate one by one." After they had finished, Maharaj blessed them all and remarked: "I can see that in the course of time these boys will become men of God."

The devotees now prostrated before Swami Premananda. Afterwards, in an inspired mood, Swami Premananda talked about Swamiji's heroic devotion and his selfless service. Then we all returned to Mr. Dutta's house. It was seven o'clock in the evening.

SUNDAY, January 23, 1916. At half past seven in the morning I arrived at the home of Mr. Dutta with Ram, Shyam, and Kiran. Maharaj saw us and said: "Come in!" We prostrated and sat down. The maharaja of Susunga was present.

Ram offered Maharaj an orange.

Maharaj: "How nice! I see these boys know that one should not come empty-handed when one visits a sadhu." Then, pointing to me, Maharaj said: "I think I have seen you in a monastery somewhere."

Myself: "Yes, Maharaj. It was in 1914 at the Banaras Home of Service."

In the course of conversation Maharaj said to the maharaja of Susunga: "You see, you love music and singing. You must remember that God can also be approached through music. Music is 'sound-Brahman.' This truth is experienced if one meditates." He said these words with such conviction that they created a deep impression in the minds of everyone present.

I said: "Maharaj, my mind is very restless. It becomes difficult to practice japam and meditation. Please tell me—how can I be helped?"

Maharaj: "Wake up early in the morning. Wash yourself,

and choose a firm seat. Command your mind in this way: 'Mind, keep still! Let no distractions enter!' With the strength of the intelligent will, keep the mind under control. Soon it will become concentrated. Then no distractions will arise. A man can train horses and elephants and bring them under control; can't he learn to train his own mind?

"There is no need of many teachings. Now meditate on the words I have spoken to you. Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'One must "ruminate" after one hears the teachings.'"

Some arrangements for music were made. All prostrated before Maharaj and went to the drawing room to listen to the program. Revered Swami Premananda had been meditating in a room nearby. He came out of the room and asked Biren: "Whom was Maharaj instructing?" Biren pointed to me. Swami Premananda looked at me and said: "Oh, you lucky fellow! Blessed you are! Maharaj rarely instructs people. You will understand later. . . ." I prostrated before him and he blessed me.

Biren told Swami Premananda: "Maharaj loves this boy."

Swami Premananda said: "Yes, I know."

I returned home remembering Maharaj's blessings.

THE SAME DAY, in the afternoon. At four o'clock I went again to Mr. Dutta's house to see Maharaj. I prostrated before him and sat down. Within a few minutes he went out for a walk accompanied by several of us devotees.

The palace of the maharaja Sashikanta of Mymensingh was nearby. As we were walking past it, the manager approached Maharaj and begged him to enter the palace with the devotees: "Holy sir, please be kind enough to bless the palace with the dust of your feet. The blessing of someone like you is very rare."

Maharaj: "All right, let us go."

Maharaj was very fond of flowers. After passing through the gate he went into the flower garden. The manager of the palace followed him. The gardener, a European, showed Maharaj many flower beds. The flowers in season were blooming profusely. Maharaj told the gardener the names of all the flowers and described their characteristics in detail. We were all surprised. The gardener also was surprised because he himself did not know the history of the flowers in such detail. We walked in the garden for nearly an hour. The manager was very eager to take Maharaj into the palace, but Maharaj did not wish to go.

Next we went to the new Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama located on Station Road. A large crowd was waiting there because Maharaj was to dedicate the ashrama. At seven in the evening amidst shouts of "Hail Sri Ramakrishna," Maharaj and Swami Premananda entered the ashrama shrine-room. Maharaj himself performed the vesper service and thereby made the devotees very happy.

Afterwards he told Swami Premananda: "Brother Baburam, say a few words."

Swami Premananda, with folded hands: "Maharaj, with you here, what am I to say?"

Maharaj: "No, no, say something!"

Swami Premananda: "All right, I will obey you." He gave a beautiful lecture on Swamiji's teaching of karma yoga, the performance of work as worship. Then there was singing. After the distribution of prasad we returned home filled with joy.

AFTER two or three days Maharaj was to leave for Dacca on the eight-o'clock evening train. I went to see him in the afternoon. When the time of departure approached, he blessed everyone and got into a carriage. Swami Prema-

nanda and Swami Sankarananda went with him. Maharaj and Swami Premananda sat on one side and Swami Sankarananda on the opposite side of the carriage.

Maharaj saw me standing nearby and said to me: "Come with us!"

"Yes, sir," I answered, "I am walking to the railway station."

Maharaj: "No, no! Come in our carriage!"

I was hesitating. Swami Premananda said: "When Maharaj asks you to come, you must obey him. Don't hesitate!"

So I got into the carriage and sat with Swami Sankarananda. I felt nervous lest my feet touch Maharaj's, and at the same time I felt blessed and thought to myself: "How many austerities must I have performed in past lives that I may ride in the same carriage with Maharaj! No, no, it is not my austerities, it is Maharaj's infinite grace."

We reached the station. Maharaj and Swami Premananda went into the first-class waiting room. The time for the train's arrival approached. As arranged, my sister came to prostrate before Maharaj.

He said to her: "Daughter, the train is coming. I don't have much time, but I will give you knowledge in one sentence: Read the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna regularly every day. That is enough. You will find in this book the truth of all religions." My sister felt blessed.

The train came. One by one we prostrated before Maharaj and Swami Premananda. Maharaj blessed us all that we might attain pure devotion and pure knowledge.

A DISCIPLE REMEMBERS

THE FOLLOWING REMINISCENCES *have been supplied by a disciple who wishes to remain anonymous.*

WHEN I was about eight or nine years old, a relation of mine gave me a short life of Sri Ramakrishna. Though there were many passages in it which I did not understand, the book made a great impression on my mind. Later, I read in the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna that the Master repeatedly referred to Naren, Rakhal, and a few others as "eternally free souls." I did not know what those words meant, nevertheless I realized that the young disciples to whom Ramakrishna applied them were highly gifted spiritually, belonging to a class all their own.

As I grew up, I read whatever I could about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and when I came to Calcutta for my college studies I took the earliest opportunity to visit the Udbodhan and the Belur Math. At that time it was difficult to go from Calcutta to Belur, so I went more frequently to the Udbodhan. There I became acquainted with a monk who was gracious enough to take me to Swami Turiyananda, the first disciple of Sri Ramakrishna that I met.

I told Swami Turiyananda that I wished to join the Ramakrishna Order, but he said: "No, not yet. Finish your studies first. When you have begun some work, you must finish it." This was the starting point of many animated arguments for several days.

I used to see Swami Turiyananda almost every day, sometimes both mornings and evenings. I knew that he was a great soul, but I did not then realize that merely to sit at his feet and listen was a rare privilege. So in my foolishness

I argued very freely with him, for which I now feel extremely ashamed. Or would it be that he deliberately gave me the freedom to argue? If he so wished, he could have silenced me at once.

These discussions with Swami Turiyananda had this benefit: I became very much drawn to him. Has it not been said in the Scripture that even a momentary contact with a holy personality produces immense spiritual gain? One day, while I was arguing, the Swami told me: "Why don't you go to Maharaj? But with him such arguing won't do." By this time I had come to know Swami Turiyananda very closely. I thought that was enough for me, so I was not very much in a mood to go to anyone else. Once he told me: "There was a time when I could see the inside of a person as clearly as things in a glass case." For the first time I heard such a statement from someone whom I could not disbelieve.

AT THE BEGINNING of the next college session, circumstances forced me to take up residence in a hostel where two students lived who were disciples of Maharaj. Several of their friends were also his disciples, and a few others had been initiated by the Holy Mother. So we were a group of students with kinship of ideas and ideals, and we met quite often. We would go to visit Maharaj—sometimes at Belur Math, but mostly in Calcutta at Balaram Mandir; and in this way I became personally acquainted with him.

Wherever Maharaj was staying, there would be a crowd to see him, and we would wait patiently for a long time just to prostrate before him once. There were senior monks, junior monks, old devotees, new devotees, and so on. As we were mere boys, we had to wait till all the others had had their turn. But once we came into Maharaj's presence, we

felt more than rewarded for the long period of waiting.

Slowly the idea arose in my mind to get initiation from Maharaj. I had been told that he did not give it easily. There were instances of people who had had to wait many years for initiation, and some never got it at all. Nevertheless, I knew I must have it from him. Since it was difficult to see Maharaj alone in order to make the request, I decided upon a plan. It was summer, and people would be likely to visit Maharaj only in the evening when it was comparatively cool. It was improbable that anyone would come to see him in the early afternoon. So one day, when the sun was blazing hot, I started out for Balaram Mandir. The walk from the street-car stop to the house was quite arduous. When I reached the place, I sat down on a bench, prepared to wait a long time. But within a few minutes Maharaj's door opened, and he came out. He seemed visibly surprised to see me: "Hello, you are here? What is it you want?"

Timidly I replied: "Maharaj, I would like to talk to you."

He asked me to wait. Soon he came to the large hall, a historical spot where in Sri Ramakrishna's day many spiritual incidents had taken place. Maharaj was pacing up and down, and I walked with him. With a palpitating heart I told him of my desire to be initiated by him. What a surprise it was to me when he readily complied with my prayer! This was the first time I discussed a personal matter with him, and he made me feel extremely free. And how affectionate he was! All fear and awe left me. It seemed as if I had known him for a very, very long time.

A similar thing happened when I met him in the same hall several weeks later, and we were again pacing up and down. From his Himalayan heights, Maharaj came down to my level, as it were; and he made me feel that there was nothing I could not talk to him about.

It was on the second occasion that he said to me: "Look, X has asked me to go to the registration office [on some business of the Mission]. These people will not even let me do my japam and meditation." I wondered why Maharaj told me this. No one remotely believed that he needed spiritual practice. Yet he talked about this matter so naturally—seeming to take me into his confidence. And I was so young and new!

Perhaps it was during the first interview that he said very touchingly, as if to unburden his sorrow to me: "My child, many people come—they request and take initiation from me, and then they do nothing and thereby cause me suffering." Hearing these words, I promised myself never to become a source of trouble to Maharaj. (This was many years ago. Now, when I remember the incident, I wonder, can I be sure that I have been able to keep my promise?)

Maharaj agreed to initiate me, but he said: "This is not a good season. Come sometime in October, and I shall fix an auspicious date for your initiation."

There lay the whole trouble. October came, and I wanted to see Maharaj privately—but there were obstacles. Either someone was with him or he would say: "I am not feeling well today,"—and so no serious talk was possible.

Each passing day increased my anxiety to receive initiation. Should Maharaj leave Bengal for some reason or other, it would be a long time before his return. Or if he returned while I was away from Calcutta, I might lose my chance altogether. As before, we went to Maharaj in a group, but I had no opportunity to talk with him alone so that I could remind him to fix a day for the initiation. Inwardly, I sometimes became impatient. A friend cautioned me: "Don't feel like that or you may have to wait for a longer period. X became impatient, and he had to wait for twelve years!"

I think that Maharaj knew my mental agony, because he indicated this even in trifling incidents. One day at Belur Math, some of us students were drawing buckets of water from the Ganges to fill a cistern on the other side of the main monastery building. Maharaj stood on the veranda of his room on the first floor, watching the view of the Ganges. His eyes fell on us. I was carrying a bucket of water. Usually he would not talk to anyone on the lawn below from the upstairs veranda. But he called out to me though I was at a great distance: "Well, what's the matter? Haven't you had your breakfast?" The inquiry as such was not important, but its effect was to calm me immediately. And I felt that it had a far deeper purpose than the words in themselves implied.

During the early period of my contact with Maharaj, one evening, in a very disturbed state of mind I went to see him. He was seated on his bedstead in meditation. Several monks and devotees were also meditating, crowded together on the floor of his small room. I managed to get a seat. After a while, one by one they all left.

Maharaj asked me: "What is it you want?" I said: "When persons like you talk of God, it is hard not to believe in him. But why don't we get spontaneous devotion to God? What to do about that?" I thought my question might annoy Maharaj—but no. He looked at me with such affection and sympathy. That in itself solved half my problem. Then he said: "Religion is a most practical thing. It doesn't matter whether one believes or not. Religion is most practical. It is like science. If one performs spiritual disciplines, the result is bound to come. Although one may be practicing mechanically—if one persists, in time one will get everything."

I was silenced at once. My mind became calm. I remembered Swami Turiyananda telling me that with Maharaj

arguments would not do. Swami Turiyananda was right. I found that with Maharaj no arguments were necessary.

Thus Maharaj first made me realize that spiritual practice is most necessary. Then he continued: "And if you go one step toward God, God will come a hundred thousand steps [one *lakh*] toward you." This was a great surprise to me. In a flash I calculated: God will take a hundred thousand steps to my one! Even if he came only one step toward me while I took one step toward him, that would be a great thing. And God will come a hundred thousand steps! It is like the case of a pauper who suddenly becomes a millionaire! My joy was beyond measure.

Maharaj asked me to go home as it was getting late. Before I took leave of him he assured me that he would give me directions for spiritual practice, and he asked me to see him on a suitable day.

So one day I went to Maharaj very early in the morning, when normally no devotee would visit him. The door of his room was open. As before, he was seated on his bedstead in meditation, and some monks were meditating with him. I entered and quietly took a seat. After the others left, Maharaj asked me why I had come. I said that I was here according to his direction. He continued his meditation for a while and afterwards went to the veranda, asking me to wait. I waited for a long time, till I could wait no longer unless I was prepared to miss my class at the college. But since Maharaj had asked me to stay, I was reluctant to leave. After a great deal of cogitation I got up and peeped into the next room, and I saw Maharaj sitting there reading a newspaper. His eyes fell on me, and he said that he would be coming soon. I mention this because I have often regretted that I got up and went in search of Maharaj when he had asked me to stay. He might have had a reason for keeping me waiting.

When Maharaj came I told him that I sought his guidance because I had no spontaneous belief in and devotion to God. He gave me some preliminary spiritual instructions and asked me to follow them for some days. On this occasion he told me that if one performs spiritual disciplines for two, three, five, or at the utmost twelve years, one was sure to get results.

I took leave of him. Whenever I did so, Maharaj would invariably say, "Come as often as you can," or "Come now and then at your convenience."

Maharaj had given me preliminary directions for meditation, but I still had to wait for the formal and real initiation. So there was continued anxiety within me.

I was alone in my room at the hostel, convalescing from an illness, when two friends came to see me. One of them was to receive initiation from Maharaj the following day. Did I have any chance? Was I going to miss this opportunity? Though still weak, I got up and went with them to Belur Math, but I could not see Maharaj that evening.

The next morning I went to the Math again. Maharaj was on the veranda. I sat down and waited for a chance to talk with him. After a while he noticed me and said: "Why are you waiting here? Go and take your bath in the Ganges!" Was this an indication that he would give me initiation that morning? It seemed so. But one could not be sure. I fell in line with three others who had received definite permission to be initiated. Till the last moment I was in suspense. Then, at last, Maharaj graciously gave me what I was seeking.

From the time Maharaj so readily agreed to give me initiation until the day I actually received it, it seemed to me almost a year—so great was the mental agony and suspense I passed through. But in fact, it was only a period of sixty days. Did Maharaj make me go through this terrible strain

deliberately—as a form of discipline, to intensify my yearning or to test my earnestness? My feeling, corroborated by the experience of my friends, is that each word and action of Maharaj had far deeper meaning and purpose than surface appearance indicated.

WHILE MAHARAJ was staying at Belur Math, I attended Durga Puja (a festival of the Divine Mother) at the monastery. One evening during the three days of worship I saw him attend the vesper service, which begins with the waving of lights before the Deity. Many monks and devotees were present, all standing silently during the ritual. At the end of the worship the image is fanned. Maharaj himself did the fanning for a long time in deep silence and devotion. It was a sight for gods! One such incident sufficed to give one a new insight into image worship.

Maharaj went to South India, and toward the end of 1921 he returned to Bhubaneswar, where a monastery had been built under his personal supervision. In the middle of December I came to Calcutta on my way to Bhubaneswar, where I hoped to stay with Maharaj during the Christmas week. A senior Swami in Calcutta asked me: "Did you get permission from Maharaj? He does not like anyone to come to Bhubaneswar without advance notice." I had not written Maharaj for permission, but I was bent upon seeing him. I thought I would stay outside the ashrama if necessary, but I simply had to go. When I arrived at Bhubaneswar, Maharaj did not show the least sign of disapproval at my coming unannounced. I stayed with him four or five days and had a very happy time. There were several guests, devotees from Cuttack. Maharaj took a personal interest in the comfort of all. I used to accompany him on his morning and evening walks

in the vast, open fields which surround the monastery compound. At other times, especially when Maharaj was silent, it was difficult to approach him without some degree of awe. But during these walks he was very relaxed and he talked freely. Two or three devotees also used to accompany him.

Very early one morning—almost before daybreak—I went to Maharaj's room. He was alone. I was afraid I might disturb him, but he gave no such indication. He was very kind. I asked one or two questions. Then I said: "I hear you told some of our monks in Banaras that if one does spiritual practice for three years one is sure to get some result. I am trying to follow your instructions as best I can. I wonder if I am getting anywhere. Of course I can follow the directions only mechanically. All I can do is try, but if I do not have the necessary concentration, what can I do?" Maharaj did not show the least annoyance, and gave me an answer which silenced my heart and was very valuable for future guidance.

During my stay in Bhubaneswar, Christmas Eve was celebrated in the monastery with a worship of Christ, a reading from the Bible, and devotional songs. Maharaj witnessed the function. His very presence on such an occasion created an unforgettable atmosphere, which would uplift all who attended the ceremony.

I had gone to Bhubaneswar particularly to consult Maharaj about my intention of joining the monastic order. One day I told him this. He listened and made a suggestion. I frankly told him why I could not follow it. He said: "All right, I will be in Calcutta in April. Come and see me there!"

I had told others that I would leave Bhubaneswar on a certain day but I had not informed Maharaj beforehand. not wanting to disturb him simply to say this. I was going to Calcutta via Puri, a very important place of pilgrimage. On

the day of my departure, I went to take leave of Maharaj and at that time mentioned to him my plan of going to Puri. But instead of encouraging me to visit the sacred place, Maharaj said to himself in an undertone: "He is going to Puri!" It seemed he did not like my going away or my going on that particular day. I was surprised. Even now I cannot explain his words. My program was fixed; I could not change it at the last moment. I touched Maharaj's feet and took leave of him. This was the last time I saw him. He passed away in Calcutta in the month of April. In July, I went to Belur Math and joined the Order. . . .

As time goes by, Maharaj looms larger and larger. Now I feel that the very ground on which he stood is sacred.

BRIEF MEMORIES

THE TEACHING *published below was supplied by Swami Satprakashananda, a disciple of Maharaj, and founder-head of the Vedanta Society of St. Louis.*

ONE DAY in Dacca, some devotees came to Maharaj and said: "Holy sir, we are worldly people. We have so many attachments and are confronted by so many obstacles. What are we to do?"

Maharaj answered: "Pray to the Lord! Talk to him! Through his grace mountain-high obstacles are blown away as easily as a heap of ashes."



SHRADDHA LOUIS, *a devotee who lived in India many years, heard the following incidents directly from Swami Gnaneshwarananda, who was a disciple of Maharaj and founded the Vedanta center in Chicago.*

ONE MORNING, Swami Gnaneshwarananda hurried out of his room, leaving behind an unmade bed and general confusion. He met Maharaj on the Maidan [a large, open field] near his room. After paying his respects, he was startled to hear Maharaj say: "Take me to your room; I wish to see the place where you sleep."

Swami Gnaneshwarananda, feeling ashamed, replied:

“Maharaj, can you not come a little later? I was not expecting you and the room is not fit to receive you.”

Maharaj said: “My boy, you must always be expecting me.”

Swami Gnaneshwarananda understood the deep meaning of the incident and words of Maharaj—that one must always be prepared to receive the Lord, the most honored guest.

SWAMI GNANESHWARANANDA told his students that one of the most severe scoldings he ever received from Maharaj occurred over what at the time seemed a trifle.

Maharaj was sitting in the shrine during the worship which Swami Gnaneshwarananda was performing. At one point during the ritual, lights and incense were lighted. Swami Gnaneshwarananda used two or three matches for this purpose. After the worship was over, Maharaj upbraided Swami Gnaneshwarananda again and again for his lack of concentration by his use of two or three matches instead of one.



A MONASTIC DISCIPLE of Maharaj, who wishes to remain anonymous, has supplied the following reminiscences.

IN *The Eternal Companion* it is said that after Sri Ramakrishna's death Maharaj practiced severe spiritual disciplines. Although he had received the highest samadhi through his master's grace, he wanted to make this state a permanent possession through his own efforts. But Maharaj once told me another reason why he underwent such hard austerities.

Having heard about this period in the life of Maharaj and his brother-disciples, and inspired by their example, I thought at one time that I also wanted to practice austerities. When I asked Maharaj for permission to live on alms he became terribly upset, just like a loving mother who does not approve of something her child wants to do. He said: "Why do you have to practice austerities? We have done all that for you!"

MAHARAJ rarely dwelt on spiritual topics. He was religion itself. Just by massaging his feet you got religion.

When spiritual aspirants touched Maharaj's feet he would relax. When worldly people touched him he winced; but this did not mean that he rejected them. It was a purely instinctive reaction. He accepted many such persons and in so doing transformed them into devotees.

AMONG Maharaj's favorite teachings was the following, which he repeated many times: "Keep recollectedness of God! While you are standing, while you are sitting, while you are walking—keep that recollectedness!"

I have heard Maharaj say: "You cannot buy God. His vision comes only through his grace. Does this mean that you should not practice spiritual disciplines? Certainly you must practice, otherwise passions will create havoc in you."

Once he told me: "Contentment with the external conditions—yes, but never be contented with your state of spiritual growth."

Maharaj said one day: "If you can't make a bad man good, why did you become a sadhu?"

On another occasion Maharaj asked a disciple: "Why did

God create us?" He answered the question himself: "So that we may love Him."

MAHARAJ loved music. He always had a band of musicians or a singer with him. I remember that the day he arrived in Madras, Baradananda, one of his attendants, sang: "Receiving your darshan today, all our sorrow has dissolved in joy." That song expressed our feeling perfectly.

I did not hear Maharaj sing much—just occasionally a line or so. But every morning he would chant the various names of the Lord in his sweet voice. Once, while Baradananda was singing, Maharaj asked for drums and played them while his attendant sang.

One day a fine musician was playing musical scales. Maharaj went into a spiritual mood. A devotee complained that no devotional songs were being played. This jarred Maharaj. He turned to the devotee and said: "Don't you realize that sound is Brahman?"

SHORTLY AFTER I had joined the monastery, I followed Maharaj around for a whole day. Finally he went to his room. He lay down and I massaged his feet. I said:

"Please, Maharaj, give me samadhi!"

Maharaj kept silent.

I persisted: "Maharaj, please give me that touch!"

Then he said: "Ah, you are so impatient!"

I REMEMBER an incident which illustrates Maharaj's great sense of humor.

One day a devotee brought a tin of fifty English ciga-

rettes for Maharaj. He generally didn't smoke cigarettes, and we boys finished them up—which Maharaj didn't know. Then Ramlal Dada came to see Maharaj, and Maharaj asked me to bring some of the English cigarettes for Dada. Of course this was impossible. Moreover, there was not enough time to go and buy any. I was very embarrassed and didn't know what to do. Maharaj quickly guessed what had happened and said, smiling: "Usually the expectant mother gets good things to eat in the name of her baby; but here my babies get all kinds of good things in the name of the Mother!"

ONCE I told Maharaj about a Swami who had been stung by a scorpion and seemed to be miraculously cured by the power of a mantram. Maharaj laughed and said: "Come along!" He took me to the garden, pointed to a plant, and told me: "Look, the juice of this plant cures scorpion sting!"

Maharaj did not want his disciples to be credulous or superstitious. By his attitude he taught me to rely upon natural explanations rather than look for supernatural phenomena.

FOR THREE MONTHS in Madras, Maharaj was disciplining me continually. All day long he would scold me.

Once I was supposed to have some stationery designed for Maharaj. I got several ornamental fonts for him to choose from, which he did. I read the proofs of the letter-heads carefully. When the stationery was printed, one of my brother-disciples picked it up, took it to Maharaj, and then came back trembling: "Maharaj says that the 'S' is broken!" I went to Maharaj, and he scolded me vehemently. I opened

the stylebook and showed him that the space in the letter "S" to which he was objecting was really a part of the design. He took the book from my hands but did not even look at it; he threw it on the floor and went on scolding me. Although he did not mention the real reason for his scolding, he somehow gave me to understand that it had nothing to do with the letterheads—the apparent cause of his rebuke. He was removing karmas.

When Maharaj disciplined us, he gave us the power to bear it. We never reacted with resentment. We knew that whatever he did was for our own good.

ABOUT a week before Maharaj left Madras I was arranging flowers in his room. I did not notice that he had come in. Suddenly he whispered into my ear: "Lovest thou me?" A thrill passed through my whole being. When I turned around, he was already leaving the room.

HE WAS our father, mother, and everything. After his passing away I felt no void. As long as Maharaj was in the physical body there was a barrier. Afterwards, the barrier was gone. I know that Maharaj is still living—and helping all of us.



BOSHI SEN, a disciple of Swami Sadananda (who was Swami Vivekananda's first disciple), is the founder of the Vivekananda Laboratory of Almora in the Himalayas, where he is engaged in agricultural research. During the period of his association with Maharaj and other disciples of Sri Rama-

krishna, he worked with the famous Dr. J. C. Bose, whose experiments with plants and minerals were the first to demonstrate the fact that "inanimate" nature responds to external stimuli and that "matter" is therefore alive and conscious. Thus, years ago, Dr. Bose found that, like higher organisms, plants are extremely sensitive to light, heat, drugs, etc., and that metals react to poisons and experience fatigue. Some of these findings, to which Boshi Sen refers in the following memories of Maharaj, were reprinted in #124 of Vedanta and the West from an essay by Aldous Huxley previously published in his book Jestig Pilate.

MORE than fifty years ago I saw Maharaj at the Howrah Railway Station, Calcutta, for the first time. He was returning from Madras with Swami Abhedananda. We students insisted on releasing the horses from his carriage and ourselves pulled it through the streets to its destination. I can still feel his blessing hand on my head as I took the dust of his feet.

The next time I saw Maharaj was in 1910. He had come to visit my guru, Swami Sadananda at the house in Bosepara Lane rented for the latter by Sister Nivedita so that Bibhuti Ghosh, my brother Tabu, and I could nurse Swami Sadananda during what proved to be his last illness. "I have bought some land for a Math at Bhubaneswar," Maharaj announced. When Swami Sadananda, with folded hands, replied. "Maharaj, I want to be the gate-keeper of that Math!" Maharaj said gently, "First get well, my child." Those five little words were so filled with sweetness, tenderness, and love that we almost melted when we heard them.

We three used to be called the "Dogs of Sadananda," and the "Dogs" were given unusual privileges by the older

Swamis of the Ramakrishna Order. After Swami Sadananda gave up his body in February, 1911, I saw Maharaj often, particularly when he came to Calcutta from Belur. He used to stay either at Balaram Mandir or at the Holy Mother's house, both quite close to 8 Bosepara Lane. Nevertheless, as I was then working with Dr. J. C. Bose, the world-renowned scientist, I was not always free to go to him whenever I liked, and for this reason Maharaj gave me the nickname of "season flower."

Any little service, however insignificant, done with real devotion never escaped his recognition. Once I was asked to prepare a chillum of tobacco for him. Three different attendants in turn came to "hustle" me, but I refused to take the chillum to Maharaj until I was satisfied that it was just right. When Maharaj drew his first puff, he gave me an affectionate blow on the back. "One more chillum like this, and I will give you *sannyas* [the blessing of the monastic vows]!" he said.

On another occasion I had brought a big fish from my home town of Vishnupur for Maharaj, but the train was very late and when I reached Balaram Mandir one of his attendants, seeing my fish, contemptuously ordered, "Take that fish away! A devotee has sent so much fish today that we have already given away about twenty pounds." Crestfallen, I went up to Maharaj. His first words were, "Boshi, what have you brought for me from Vishnupur?" Very lamely I replied, "I brought a fish, Maharaj, but they tell me you will not have any use for it because you have already had to give away a lot of fish today." "Vishnupur fish is very good," he said at once, and called out, "See that Boshi's fish is properly cleaned and cooked, and don't let anyone steal any of it!" Of course I went home walking on air.

And there was the incident of the umbrella and the slippers. Dr. Kanjilal was to receive initiation from Maharaj and asked me to buy an umbrella and a pair of slippers for him to offer as his *guru dakshina* [the disciple's gift or "fee" for the spiritual teacher at the time of initiation]. I bought the best umbrella I could find in the whole of Calcutta, and the proprietor of the National Tannery, Sir Nilratan Sircar, agreed to have the slippers made to order from the finest leather obtainable in his factory. After Maharaj had given the initiation, he came to the upper veranda facing the Ganges at Belur Math, where we were all waiting for him. "Twenty-five rupees," he exclaimed. "What! One could buy a piece of jewelry for that amount!" As for Kanjilal's second gift, he liked the slippers very much and from this time on always used them in preference to any others, repeatedly remarking, "Boshi, *your shoes are very comfortable!*"

One day he asked me whether I would be able to shave him. "If you help me, Maharaj, I can," I answered, as it flashed through my mind how I should feel if by accident I ever cut him. So it became my privilege to go to shave him on my way to the Bose Institute. But usually on cloudy days he did not wish to be shaved. One morning when it was drizzling, I went straight to my work, quite certain that Maharaj would not require my services that day. When I saw him at night, however, he rubbed his chin significantly and uttered an exclamation that sounded something like "Ouff!" I learnt my lesson. It was not for me to take any decision upon myself concerning Maharaj. One of the little girls at Balaram's house asked Swami Sankarananda. "Where does Maharaj's barber get such good clothes?" "Why, because he is Big Maharaj's barber," Swami Sankarananda told her. I now acquired another nickname, that of "Big Maharaj's barber."

It was another frequent privilege of mine to massage him. He liked a vigorous massage, and of those who were too gentle he would say, "They massage me as if they were stroking their pet cat." He had a way of pressing my thumb down under his, in a sort of mock trial of strength. One day it suddenly dawned on me what a fool I was to try to pull my hand away when Maharaj was holding it. I instantly ceased the struggle, and he gave me a wonderful smile of understanding. After that he always continued to give that particular pressure whenever I rubbed his palm.

One day he was talking about *sadhana* (spiritual struggle) as I was in the act of massaging him. "Do you think that there is any fixed catalogued price of so much austerity, so much japam, so much charity, etc., for God-realization? None can *force* realization out of Him!" This remark suited me to a T, for I was not practicing any sustained spiritual disciplines at the time. Then he went on, "*But . . .*" ("Why this inconvenient 'but' "? I asked myself.) "*But*, if you don't keep up a regular spiritual struggle, you will not be able to hold It, when It comes."

Once he expressed a desire to see some of Bose's famous experiments showing the sensitivity of plants to external stimuli. When he visited the Institute, he watched the experiments we demonstrated for him with great interest. That evening he was still preoccupied with what he had seen in the laboratory. "There was a time," he told me, "when Thakur [Sri Ramakrishna] could not step on the grass but would jump from one bare spot to another to avoid hurting the grass. At that time we simply didn't believe that grass could be sensitive. From what I saw today, I realize how infallibly true his perceptions were." A little later, he added, "Don't give up your science. You will get everything through this."

In April, 1922, the terrible news came that Maharaj had cholera. I hurried over to Balaram's house to find out if it was true. I just peeped into his room, and though his back was turned, he immediately asked, "Who is it?" I asked whether I could fan him. "Yes, do," he said. . . . With his permission, I was allowed to join the group who nursed him.

Two days before he gave up his body, he was in a wonderfully ecstatic mood, showering unending blessings on all in the room. For the first time we heard from his own lips who and what he was. This unforgettable scene has been described by his biographers and need not be repeated by me. The blessedness we all felt at the time has not diminished in intensity through all these years. He filled each of us to the utmost limit of our capacity.

An hour before he gave up his body, he ceased speaking and seemed to have withdrawn to some distant realm beyond the reach of any of us. I was very gently stroking his palm and wondering whether he still remembered that old playful pressure of his thumb. At the same instant I felt it, light but unmistakable, Maharaj's last bequest to me.

Vedanta and the West

Vedanta teaches that man's real nature is divine; that it is the aim of man's life to unfold and manifest this divinity; and that truth is universal. Vedanta accepts all the religions of the world and reveres the great prophets, teachers, and sons of God, because it recognizes the same divine inspiration in all.

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